European Political Science Review (2026), **18**, 473–494
doi:10.1017/S1755773926100460

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Who deserves? Ideological gaps in citizens' deservingness perceptions

Elisa Deiss-Helbig[1], Isabelle Guinaudeau[2,3] and Theres Matthieß[4]

[1]Department of Politics and Public Administration, Zukunftskolleg, University of Konstanz, Germany, [2]Centre Marc Bloch, Germany, [3]Centre d'études européennes (Sciences Po), France and [4]Institute for Democracy Research, University of Göttingen, Germany
Corresponding author: Elisa Deiss-Helbig; Email: elisa.deiss-helbig@uni-konstanz.de

(Received 25 April 2025; revised 10 December 2025; accepted 06 March 2026; first published online 02 June 2026)

Abstract
Which social groups do citizens view as deserving of beneficial policy? Research on welfare deservingness has long emphasized relatively homogeneous deservingness perceptions, raising concerns that groups widely seen as undeserving could be systematically disadvantaged in policymaking. More recent findings point to variation in deservingness perceptions across geography, time, and individuals. Building on these insights and on studies that examine specific groups in isolation, we claim that ideology systematically shapes divides in how social groups are perceived. Because left-wing and right-wing individuals prioritize different considerations—groups' needs on the left, merit, reciprocity, and identity on the right—we expect them to differ in the level of deservingness attributed to most groups. Drawing on survey data collected among 5,541 German and 6,020 French citizens, we provide unique evidence on perceived deservingness for a broad range of politically salient target groups by adopting a cross-group perspective in two different contexts. Crossed random effects models depict the expected ideological divides for most groups. These divides create incentives for political parties to compete over "who gets what" and, thereby, to represent diverse interests including those of groups perceived as less deserving on average.

Keywords: Deservingness perceptions; ideology; social groups; survey

Introduction

In an era of scarcity and polarization, the question of who deserves support from the state has become topical (Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015). Group-related considerations increasingly shape campaigns, policy support, and voting behavior (Huber, 2022; Stuckelberger and Tresch, 2022; Thau, 2019), incentivizing policymakers to anticipate voters' reactions when distributing policy benefits (Ellis and Faricy, 2020). A growing body of research shows that deservingness perceptions—that is, perceptions of the extent to which groups have a legitimate claim to beneficial policies (Appelbaum, 2001; Petersen et al., 2011)—affect electoral choices (Attewell, 2022a), voters' responses to parties' group appeals (Dassonneville et al., 2025), policy preferences (Goerres et al., 2021; Kreitzer et al., 2022; Limberg, 2020), and policy acceptance (Cavaillé and Trump, 2015; Magni, 2024). While representatives may gain electorally by appealing to groups perceived as deserving, they also risk backlash when addressing groups viewed as undeserving. The electoral and policy consequences of deservingness perceptions thus have far-reaching implications for political representation. Understanding these substantive

© The Author(s), 2026. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of European Consortium for Political Research. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

implications requires analyzing the distribution and determinants of deservingness perceptions. Who is seen as deserving, and why?

As of yet, most insights come from welfare state research in which scholars examine perceptions of the most typical groups of welfare recipients. The crucial insight gained from this literature is that there tends to be a societal consensus regarding the level of deservingness of groups, demarcating those widely perceived to be deserving from others seen as undeserving, such as the unemployed or immigrants (Coughlin, 1980; van Oorschot, 2000). In one of the most influential contributions, van Oorschot (2006, p. 24), for example, observes: "All over modern, Western welfare states, in various decades, the public was found to be most in favor of social protection for old people, closely followed by protection for sick and disabled people, while the public supports schemes for needy families with children less, schemes for unemployed people less still, and supports social assistance schemes least of all." Explanations point to social constructions (Schneider and Ingram, 1993, 2019), stereotypes (Fiske et al., 2002) and universal heuristics (Meuleman et al., 2020; Petersen et al., 2011; van Oorschot, 2000). These insights raise concerns that policymakers, in anticipating public preferences, may disadvantage disliked minorities (Kreitzer et al., 2022; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019). If gaps in perceived deservingness extend beyond welfare recipients, they could create powerful incentives to prioritize groups widely seen as deserving (Kreitzer and Smith, 2018), reinforcing inequalities—especially if policy feeds back into social perceptions (Mettler and Soss, 2004; Schneider and Ingram, 1993).

However, these concerns warrant caution in view of three recent strands of research. The first has started to question the homogeneity of deservingness perceptions, pointing to geographical, temporal, and individual variations in the ranking of single groups (Attewell, 2022b; Bullock, 1999; Buss, 2019; Jensen and Petersen, 2017; Laenen and Meuleman, 2017; van Oorschot and Roosma, 2017). Taking these results into account gives rise to different implications from those just outlined: policymakers' incentives derive at least as much from average support as from the level of cohesion and, if there are divisions, from which constituents judge the respective target group as deserving or not. Groups whose deservingness is contentious in the broader public may still give representatives incentives to allocate benefits if these groups are strongly supported within their own electorate (Huber, 2022). Second, a rapidly expanding literature on political polarization documents deepening ideological and affective divides among both elites and citizens (Iyengar et al., 2019). These divides structure how people interpret social differences, making it increasingly likely that citizens' deservingness perceptions reflect diverging partisan views about effort, need, and entitlement (Mason, 2018). A third research strand developed on targeting in electoral programs (Horn et al., 2021; Huber, 2022; Thau, 2019) and policy (Koski and Manson, 2024; Kreitzer et al., 2022) highlights that the "needy" groups typically examined in the deservingness literature are not the exclusive target of public policy. Government policies affect a much wider range of groups, including some with higher levels of status and material conditions, such as entrepreneurs, employers, employees, and even the rich. Apart from a small number of exceptions (Koski and Manson, 2024; Kreitzer and Smith, 2018), studies of the deservingness of groups beyond traditional welfare recipients focus on single specific groups[1] and therefore cannot identify whether the observed patterns reflect broader determinants that generalize across groups.

We argue that deservingness perceptions are neither merely consensual nor idiosyncratic to specific groups, but systematically patterned by ideological orientations in ways that bear important implications in times of growing polarization. Our contribution is to advance the study of deservingness perceptions conceptually and empirically. Conceptually, we propose that left-wing and right-wing citizens' divergent views on the origins of inequality, deservingness criteria, and group-related cues shape their judgments about which groups deserve policy benefits. This

[1]For example Black and Davidai (2020) or Sachweh and Eicher (2025) on wealthy people, Hilmar (2024) on small businesses, or De Coninck and Matthijs (2020) on immigrants— and policy domains, such as taxation (Sachweh and Eicher, 2025) or commerce (Hilmar, 2024; Witko and Heinrich, 2024).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

perspective shifts the focus from isolated target groups to a broader, cross-group framework that treats ideological orientations as an organizing structure for understanding variation in deservingness evaluations. Empirically, we extend existing research beyond fragmented single-group studies by examining ideological divisions toward a diverse set of groups that are representative of those involved in the distributional conflicts of advanced capitalist democracies. This comparative mapping allows us to assess whether ideological cleavages generalize or remain group-specific, to identify which groups are politically consensual and which are contested, and to gauge the potential for partisan competition over "who gets what".

We test this argument based on multilevel analyses of how different ideological segments perceive the deservingness of various groups. We then examine the perceptions of their deservingness in two different institutional settings—one majoritarian system, France, and one consensual system, Germany. Using multilevel analyses of survey data from Germany (5,541 respondents, 2021) and France (6,020 respondents, 2022), we show that deservingness perceptions are far from homogeneous and vary by ideological orientation, particularly for groups with lower average deservingness ratings.

Awareness of ideological divides over deservingness paves the way for connecting deservingness research and electoral studies. Party competition will help in understanding deservingness perceptions while these perceptions have the potential to shed light on changing voter-party linkages. Our findings also have important implications for representation and political divides in advanced capitalist democracies. Electoral incentives to respond to the deservingness perceptions of their respective constituencies encourage officials to promote policies matching their voters' ideological views of social groups. While concerns persist about biases favoring certain groups, these divisions create opportunities for political contestation and broader representation, even for groups with contentious public images.

Ideology and the perceived deservingness of social groups

Studies of deservingness have long focused on aggregate comparisons across groups and countries, concluding that deservingness attributions are similar within and across societies (Arts and Gelissen, 2001; Bean and Papadakis, 1998; Coughlin, 1980; van Oorschot, 2000). This similarity is typically attributed to dominant constructions and policy feedback (Schneider and Ingram, 1993), social stereotypes (Fiske et al., 2002), evolutionary psychology (Petersen, 2012; Petersen et al., 2011), and ethnocentrism (Magni, 2024; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019). Scholars interpret deservingness gaps based on criteria such as neediness, control, attitude, identity, and reciprocity (Appelbaum, 2001; Cook, 1979; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019; van Oorschot, 2000). The extent to which groups are perceived to comply with these criteria is reflected in significantly different levels of average deservingness (Kootstra, 2016; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019). These gaps raise concerns about entrenching inequality by directing benefits on groups perceived as deserving while placing burdens on those perceived as undeserving (Kreitzer and Smith, 2018; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019; Schneider and Ingram, 1993).

Yet, high or low average deservingness may obscure substantial variability. Several scholars challenge the notion of homogeneous perceptions, pointing instead to variations across geography, time, and individuals (Bell and Lui, 2023; Kreitzer and Smith, 2018; Laenen and Meuleman, 2017). Research shows, for example, that perceptions of welfare recipients vary by socio-structural factors such as education or social class (Attewell, 2022b; Bullock, 1999; Buss, 2019). Building on these insights, we argue that political ideology acts as a general organizing principle for how individuals evaluate the deservingness of social groups.

Erikson and Tedin (2003, p. 64) define ideology as a "[shared] set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved". While the substance of left-wing and right-wing ideologies varies across time and countries (Bauer et al., 2017; Inglehart, 1990), scholars tend to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

converge on two core oppositions: advocating *versus* resisting social change and rejecting *versus* accepting inequality (Jost et al., 2009). Historically, these are left-right divisions centered on class conflict, with right-wing parties favoring employers and the affluent, and left-wing parties representing lower-income employees (Lipset, 1960; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018). In post-industrial societies, cultural issues—immigration, gender equality, generational justice—have gained prominence. The left advocates for marginalized groups, while the (far) right emphasizes national cohesion and welfare chauvinism (Abou-Chadi et al., 2022; Bornschier, 2010; Franklin, 1992; Kriesi et al., 2008). This has led to a tripolar ideological space: a left pole (interventionist, culturally liberal, universalist), a center-right pole (fiscally conservative), and a far-right pole (sociocultural and nativist) (Oesch and Rennwald, 2018). These ideological beliefs act as cognitive shortcuts in information processing, opinion-formation, and decision-making. They therefore shape a multitude of political attitudes, including attitudes toward specific groups such as asylum seekers (Bansak et al., 2016), welfare policies and redistribution (Feldman and Zaller, 1992; Häusermann and Kriesi, 2015; Zucker and Weiner, 1993), and political actors (van der Eijk et al., 2005; Wagner and Kritzinger, 2012), often without the person being aware of it (Jost et al., 2009). It is thus likely that ideology also structures how people assess which groups deserve state support.

Existing research offers several indications in this direction, although these insights remain dispersed: ideological divides have been observed in studies focusing on single groups or specific policy areas, such as unemployment (Buss, 2019; Jensen and Petersen, 2017) or affirmative action (Bell, 2021). Related work in the neighboring field of public administration similarly finds ideological differences in tolerance for administrative burdens among both citizens (Halling et al., 2023) and bureaucrats (Baekgaard et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2020). However, we still lack a systematic understanding of which types of groups are viewed as deserving or undeserving on the left, the center-right, and the far right. Understanding these ideological patterns is substantively important. In increasingly polarized contexts (Iyengar et al., 2019; Mason, 2018), policymakers respond not only to aggregate public opinion but also to the preferences of their own constituencies (De Sio and Weber, 2014; Riker, 1996). Even when the public is divided overall, elites may find it electorally rational to support groups that are valued within their camp (Huber, 2022). This applies beyond welfare recipients to groups such as the wealthy, employers, and rural residents (Huber, 2022; Stuckelberger and Tresch, 2022; Thau, 2019).

Against this backdrop, we develop a theoretical account outlining how deservingness perceptions vary along ideological lines across a broad range of groups. Drawing on existing literatures, we identify three mechanisms through which political ideology is expected to correlate with deservingness perceptions: (1) cognitive perceptions of social groups, (2) differences in how deservingness criteria are weighted,[2] and (3) elite cues.

First, an individual's political ideology influences their **cognitive perceptions** of social groups, shaping stereotypes and judgments about compliance with deservingness criteria such as personal responsibility and control. Right-leaning individuals tend to attribute poverty, unemployment, or minority status to individual choices, whereas left-leaning individuals emphasize structural causes (Bullock, 1999; Weiner et al., 2011; Zucker and Weiner, 1993). Numerous studies on welfare deservingness suggest that whether or not a person is considered to be responsible for their own situation is then a crucial heuristic for informing deservingness judgments and support for redistribution (Alesina and Angeletos, 2005; Swaan, 1988; van Oorschot, 2000; Witko and Heinrich, 2024). Thus, ideological differences in attributions of responsibility likely translate into differing perceptions of group deservingness.

Second, ideology is related to attitudes toward (in)equality, moral values, and fairness conceptions (Cavaillé, 2023), influencing how **deservingness criteria** are weighted (Bullock, 1999; Furnham, 1982; Laenen and Roosma, 2022). Given their egalitarian attitudes, we expect left-wing

[2]Our goal is not to measure individuals' ranking of these criteria but to highlight their role in shaping ideological differences in deservingness judgments.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

citizens to focus on a group's neediness (Attewell, 2022a; Jeene et al., 2014) and therefore grant more deservingness to dependent, underprivileged or minority groups (such as the poor, the unemployed, immigrants, women, and young people) and less to groups with more resources (such as the rich or employers). Right-wing individuals, by contrast, are expected to condition deservingness to the groups not being responsible for requiring support (in contrast to "free riders"), having contributed (Cavaillé, 2023; Magni, 2024), and being native born rather than immigrants (Magni, 2020, 2024; Mewes and Mau, 2013). They may even be willing to support policies for groups that are not particularly needy but meet these criteria (Cavaillé, 2023; Haidt, 2012). There is evidence that framing a group as high achieving increases conservatives' support for affirmative action policies (Bell, 2021), consistent with their stronger emphasis on reciprocity. This pattern mirrors findings on administrative burdens, where conservatives show greater acceptance of burdens that restrict access to welfare benefits (Baekgaard et al., 2021; Halling et al., 2023) or financial aid (Bell et al., 2020). Against this backdrop, we expect conservative people to be more likely to favor members of high-status groups and hold more negative attitudes toward low-status groups (Duckitt, 2006). Along the same lines, while left-leaning people are more likely to see the need for policies supporting young people given their neediness at the beginning of starting their adult lives, right-leaning people might have the perspective that young people have not (yet) contributed much to society—in the same way as the unemployed (Bell, 2021). Moreover, while minority groups (such as women) are likely to be approached on the left as a historically discriminated group deserving of government support, compensatory measures will probably be seen by right-leaning citizens as clashing with meritocratic values.

Building on the argument that differing attitudes toward (in)equality and moral values lead to varied perceptions of deservingness, we anticipate that far-right voters will oppose left-wing universalism, but for different reasons than center-right voters. While the latter values market liberalism and rewards enterprise and job creation, far-right ideology prioritizes national identity and cohesion, favoring those seen as the "losers" of modernization and globalization (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Kriesi et al., 2008) We expect individuals in this ideological segment to condition deservingness upon descent, excluding immigrants (Abou-Chadi et al., 2022; Magni, 2020, 2024; Mewes and Mau, 2013), while being more indifferent to groups' socioeconomic status. Furthermore, people on the far right could sympathize with categories perceived as losers in structural transformation, such as rural populations (Bornschier et al., 2021; Cramer, 2016; Zollinger, 2024) and accordingly attribute high levels of deservingness to them.

Third, ideology may correlate with deservingness perceptions via **elite cues**. Parties strategically frame certain groups as deserving, reinforcing partisan divides in an increasingly polarized environment. For example, the US Democratic Party frequently criticizes the wealthy (Rhodes and Johnson, 2017), while the British Labour Party disproportionately appeals to workers (Thau, 2019). These cues shape voter perceptions, aligning partisan and ideological divides in deservingness judgments.

This leads us to the following expectations:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Left-leaning individuals are more likely than right-leaning individuals to perceive needy or dependent groups, such as the poor, the unemployed, immigrants, and minorities as deserving.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Right-leaning individuals are more likely than left-leaning individuals to perceive high-status groups, such as employers and the affluent as deserving.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Far-right-leaning individuals are more likely than center-right and left-leaning individuals to perceive modernization losers (rural residents) as deserving and immigrants and other minorities as less deserving.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

While the perceived deservingness of most groups may divide along ideological or partisan lines, single other groups may benefit from consistently positive framing. Pensioners, for instance, are seen as needy (due to old age), contributive (having worked their whole lives), and socially non-deviant, making them widely perceived as deserving (Petersen et al., 2011; Schneider and Ingram, 1993, 2019; van Oorschot, 2000, 2006). Parents, a broad category of people who require support to raise children and contribute to demographic renewal, and the middle class, which is both needy (relative to the wealthy) and economically productive, may also enjoy broad cross-ideological support. The same applies for employees, for whom no clear ideological pattern is expected, leading them to be widely regarded as deserving across ideological segments. Traditionally, the advancement and protection of employee rights have been a core left-wing policy. This traditional alignment stems from the 'work vs. capital' cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Consequently, employees have historically been a left-wing electoral stronghold (Oesch and Rennwald, 2018). However, this traditional pattern has changed in recent years, transforming the employee group into a contested demographic. In particular, there is a growing trend of far-right parties actively seeking to attract support from employees and union workers (Mosimann et al., 2019). These shifts on the supply side of party competition have likewise influenced voting behavior (Spies, 2013), contributing to the blurring of traditional class- and occupation-based voting patterns (Houtman et al., 2008). This political versatility ties directly back to deservingness criteria: employees are a group that can be seen favorably from multiple ideological perspectives. For the political right, they represent hard-working individuals (Wagner, 2022; Zollinger, 2024), aligning with the deservingness criteria of reciprocity and attitude; for the political left, employees embody groups that are structurally exposed to market risks and power asymmetries *vis-à-vis* employers, aligning with concerns about not only contribution through work, but also neediness (exposure to risks) and lack of control over structural disadvantages.

Therefore, we expect:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): *Groups like employees, pensioners, parents, or the middle class, which can be favorably framed in terms of neediness, contribution, and identity, are perceived as highly deserving across all ideological segments.*

We do not investigate the causal direction between ideology and deservingness perceptions. Instead, consistent with established practices (Appelbaum, 2001; Jeene et al., 2014; Zucker and Weiner, 1993) and with research treating ideology as relatively stable predispositions rooted in deeper psychological or personality traits (Jost et al., 2013), we examine how ideological divides correlate with deservingness evaluations. We acknowledge that deservingness perceptions may also inform broader ideological orientations and that both constructs may overlap conceptually—for example in beliefs about merit or responsibility (Weiner et al., 2011). We therefore avoid causal claims and focus on documenting systematic associations between ideological positions and patterns of deservingness evaluations.

Empirical strategy

We investigate individual variations in perceptions of social groups' deservingness based on two original online surveys (CAWI) conducted in Germany during the two weeks leading up to the federal elections in September 2021 and in France during the three weeks leading up to the first round of the presidential election in April 2022. In both countries, the respondents were recruited and incentivized[3] by the polling institute Psyma from their proprietary online panel, based on quota sampling (age, gender, region, education, and socio-professional category in France). The sample

[3]Factors that determine the amount of the incentive are survey length and incidence. Panel members are shown the incentive amount prior to participating in a survey.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

consists of 5,541 German citizens and 6,020 French citizens of eligible voting age (18 and older). Online Appendix Tables A1 and A2 provide sample and population characteristics.

Case selection

France and Germany

To enhance the generalizability of our findings, we study the deservingness of various social groups across two different contexts—representative of the majoritarian and consensual types of political systems. France and Germany share many characteristics, such as their prosperous economies and Bismarckian welfare systems. Nevertheless, they differ strongly in several domains that are highly relevant for our research question. First, they diverge significantly in their institutional arrangements. The French Fifth Republic stands out with a strong majoritarian logic, while Germany falls into consensual systems involving proportional rule and multiple veto points. These institutional differences translate into markedly different patterns of party competition and shape both the intensity and structure of ideological conflict (Dalton, 2021; Emanuele and Marino, 2024). Such divergences are likely relevant for ideological divides, the variability of deservingness perceptions, and the relationship between them. Proportional, multiparty systems and coalition constraints associated with them could leave more latitude for the representation of diverse interests and the articulation of competing representations of social groups. By contrast, majoritarian electoral systems as in France tend to reduce the number of parties and to induce them to cultivate a broader social base, which could lead to more homogeneous deservingness perceptions than in proportional systems. However, the effects could also be opposite if majoritarian systems fold social groups into zero-sum two-party competition, which could produce a stronger polarization than in countries with broad multiparty coalitions.

Moreover, historical trajectories of issue politicization further differentiate the two contexts. France has experienced a long-standing and recurrent politicization of immigration since the 1980s—driven largely by the rise of the Front National/Rassemblement National—which has embedded immigration-related group cues deeply into the ideological space (Ivaldi, 2018; Mayer, 2013). In contrast, immigration was politicized only much more recently in Germany, with the rise of the far-right AfD (Mudde, 2022). As a result, ideological divides over the deservingness of immigrants and other minority groups are likely structured by different discursive legacies in each country. A further contrast concerns the experience of social policy retrenchment. Germany's far-reaching 'Agenda 2010' labor market reforms were implemented by a left-wing government and reframed deservingness around activation, responsibility, and contribution—narratives that continue to structure public discourse (Bandelow and Hornung, 2019). France did not undergo a comparable left-led reform episode, leading to a less consolidated discourse of activation and thus potentially different ideological heuristics for evaluating groups such as the unemployed or the poor.

Together, these institutional, partisan, and discursive contrasts create substantially different environments in which deservingness cues are produced, diffused, and interpreted. If similar ideological divides over deservingness perceptions emerge across such divergent settings, this would provide stronger evidence that these divides reflect generalizable ideological mechanisms rather than country-specific dynamics (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

Target groups

We have chosen twelve target populations for analysis that are both commonly addressed in public policy and pertinent to test our hypotheses:

- Employees
- Employers
- Immigrants
- Middle class
- Parents
- Pensioners
- Poor people
- Rich people
- Rural populations
- Unemployed people
- Women
- Young people

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Group selection was informed by election pledge data from governing parties' manifestos since the mid-1990s.[4] Given that pledges are frequently fulfilled (Thomson et al., 2017), they are relevant to actual policymaking and therefore useful material to detect the actual target populations of public policy. Eleven of our twelve selected groups are among the most commonly addressed in election pledges (see Figures B1 and B2 in the Appendix), ensuring alignment with political actors' priorities.[5] Employers and entrepreneurs receive the most attention (over 15% of pledges in France, 12% in Germany), with both positive and negative targeting. Parents, young people, and employees also rank highly. In France, rural populations are frequently targeted (mostly positively), while in Germany, immigrants receive significant attention (mostly positively).

Beyond empirical justification, theoretical considerations guided our group selection. This framework allows us to test our hypotheses on ideological assessments of deservingness based on disadvantaged status, merit, and contributions. It encompasses high-achieving class-based groups, such as employers and wealthy individuals, as well as dependent class-based groups, including the poor and the unemployed. We also include minority and underprivileged groups such as women, immigrants, and young people. This is essential for testing H1 and H2. Additionally, we include the rural population, as a group that is affected by modernization (H3). Finally, we incorporate groups such as employees, pensioners, parents, and the middle class, which are likely to elicit more uniform deservingness perceptions due to the generally positive criteria discussed in the literature (H4).

Measurement

Deservingness perceptions

Our dependent variable, deservingness perceptions, has been operationalized in various ways (Meuleman et al., 2017). Our approach differs from measures of group affinity (Bornschier et al., 2021; Robison and Moskowitz, 2019; Wilcox et al., 1989), which, although related, capture a distinct construct from deservingness. Likewise, we do not equate deservingness with policy support (Bell, 2021; Jeene et al., 2014; Kootstra, 2016), as such attitudes may be shaped by policy design rather than group-related considerations. Given that political debates increasingly center on social group representations, we focus on a *more abstract attitude related to people's disposition to support beneficial policy* ***for a given group***. This is in the tradition pioneered by van Oorschot (2000), who does not measure deservingness as support for a specific targeted scheme but based on an item from the European Values Study asking respondents about the extent to which they "feel concerned" about the living conditions for various groups. However, this item was developed in the specific context of welfare research implicitly placing the emphasis on the criterion of neediness, which we expect to be weighted against other criteria to a different extent. Our measure of deservingness perceptions is based on the following question[6]: "To what extent do you think the government should take the needs of the following groups more or less into consideration? Please use the scale from −5 to +5, where −5 means that the needs of the group should be considered much less and +5 much more." This operationalization is similar to Jensen and Petersen (2017), who use vignettes to assess deservingness by asking respondents to judge whether hypothetical individuals "deserve to be helped by the government" (p. 74). However, rather than assessing absolute deservingness, we measure whether respondents believe government attention to a group should *increase or decrease*. This distinction is crucial, as individuals may recognize a group's legitimacy but feel it already receives sufficient support.

[4]A working paper on target populations in French and German campaign pledges was presented at the EPSA Conference 2024 (Deiss-Helbig et al., 2024).

[5]Exceptions include rural populations in Germany and the middle class in both countries, which remain theoretically relevant.

[6]The order of groups was randomized to avoid response bias.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For the analyses that follow, we make use of a recoded scale ranging from much less (1) to much more (11). High values indicate that the government should pay more attention to the needs of the respective group, meaning that this group is perceived as (highly) deserving.

Ideology

The independent variable, ideology, is assessed based on two items. First, we draw on the traditional indicator of respondents' self-placement on a left–right continuum, measured as a metric variable, to assess H1 and H2. Respondents were asked, "In politics, one sometimes speaks of 'left' and 'right'. On this scale, where 0 represents left and 10 represents right, where would you place yourself?" The mean score is 5.9 (SD = 2.1) in Germany and 6.7 (SD = 2.8) in France.

Second, we complement this measure with an account of ideology based on vote-choice. This approach is underpinned by the rich evidence of a growing multidimensionality of the ideological space in many countries (Converse, 1964; Feldman and Johnston, 2014; Kitschelt, 1994). Socioeconomic attitudes toward redistribution and state intervention do not necessarily correlate with attitudes toward minority groups such as women or immigrants, thus the sociocultural dimension of ideology (Kitschelt, 1994). As a result, some voters may struggle to position themselves meaningfully on a single left–right axis. While a two-dimensional ideological measurement would be ideal, measuring the sociocultural dimension is challenging, as it often involves attitudes toward specific groups, such as LGBTQIA+ rights or attitudes toward immigrants or refugees (Lancaster, 2022; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018)—the dependent variable in our study. To address this, we identify ideological positioning based on declared voting intention, distinguishing between left, center-right, and far-right voters. This classification aligns with prior studies (Bornschier et al., 2021; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018) and fits our theoretical framework, particularly for testing H3, which requires identifying far-right voters.[7] The item wording reads as follows: In Germany, respondents were asked, "Which party would you vote for if the Bundestag elections were held next Sunday, or would you abstain?" In France, they were asked, "If the first round of the presidential election were held next Sunday, which candidate would you most likely vote for?" Table C2 in the Appendix details the ideological classification of parties and candidates.

Control variables

To account for potential confounding effects and isolate the correlation of main interest (ideological effects on deservingness perceptions), we include several controls. First, we account for group membership, as self-interest may bias deservingness judgments to the benefit of one's ingroup (Jensen and Petersen, 2017). Moreover, group membership might bias deservingness perceptions because citizens are more aware of the needs of that group, as has been shown for poor people (Appelbaum, 2001; Singh, 1989), and/or identify with that group, which may potentially bias their perceptions (Bell and Lui, 2023; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Group membership is determined based on respondents' occupation, income, birthplace, parenthood, age, and gender.[8]

We also control for gender, as women generally attribute higher deservingness to disadvantaged groups (Gugushvili and van Oorschot, 2021), and education level, which correlates with more sympathetic attitudes toward welfare recipients (McArthur, 2023).[9]

[7]We assume no substantial differences in deservingness perceptions between far-left and center-left voters or between center-right and liberal voters. Additional analyses confirm that any differences are minor and isolated (see Figures F1–F4 in the Appendix).

[8]See Table C4 in the Appendix for more information.

[9]See Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix for the categories and distribution of modalities.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Statistical specification

We analyze a stacked dataset with twelve observations per respondent (one for each target population). We estimate crossed random effects models (run separately for each country) to reflect the structure of our data, with observations cross-classified by both respondents and target groups (Gelman and Hill, 2006). Each respondent evaluates all twelve groups, and each group is evaluated by all respondents, creating interdependencies that violate the independence assumption of simpler models. Our models thus include random intercepts for both respondents and groups, thereby clustering standard errors appropriately and modeling unobserved heterogeneity at both levels.

The appropriateness of a crossed random effects specification is supported by the null model's variance structure: likelihood-ratio tests show that including random intercepts for both respondents and groups significantly improves model fit (Germany: $\chi^2(2) = 16047.98$, $p < 0.001$; France: $\chi^2(2) = 29805.71$, $p < 0.001$, see Model 1 in Appendix Tables D1 and D3). As a first step, we added fixed effects for ideology, measured both as a continuous left–right self-placement (see Tables D1 and D3) and as a categorical variable based on voting intention (left, center-right, far-right, see Tables D2 and D4).[10] This further improved model fit (Germany: $\chi^2(5) = 250.23$, $p < 0.001$; France: $\chi^2(5) = 493.95$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that deservingness perceptions, on average, vary along ideological lines. To test whether the effect of ideology varies across groups as hypothesized, we then added a random slope for ideology by group. This again improved model fit considerably (Germany: $\chi^2(2) = 343.11$, $p < 0.001$; France: $\chi^2(2) = 2016.55$, $p < 0.001$). This final model—Model 3 in Appendix Tables D1–D4—is used for the predictions and random effects visualized in the main text.

The final model is specified as follows:

$$
\begin{aligned}
y_{ig} &= \beta_{0,ig} + \beta_{1g}x_{1ig} + \beta_2 x_{2ig} + \beta_3 x_{3ig} + \beta_4 x_{4ig} + \epsilon_{ig} \\
\text{with} \quad \beta_{0,ig} &= \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01g} + \gamma_{02i} \\
\beta_{1g} &= \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11g}
\end{aligned}
$$

y_{ig} observed deservingness rating by respondent i for group g.
$\beta_{0,ig}$ intercept that varies across groups and individuals.
β_{1g} slope of ideology that varies across groups.
x_{1ig}, $x_{2ig,}$ x_{3ig}, x_{4ig} observed values for ideology, group membership, gender, and education of respondent i and group g.
$\beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ fixed effects for the control variables.
ϵ_{ig} residual error term, assumed to be normally distributed.
The intercept $\beta_{0,ig}$ is composed of:
γ_{00}: the fixed (grand mean) intercept,
γ_{01g}: group-level random intercept for group g,
γ_{02i}: individual-level random intercept for respondent i.

Findings

Who deserves? The variability of deservingness perceptions

Figure 1 displays the distribution of deservingness perceptions by group and country. As expected, the violin plots show substantial variation.

Echoing prior work on welfare deservingness (van Oorschot, 2000, 2006), we observe disparities in median deservingness across certain groups. In particular, the pensioners and the poor score highest in both countries. The mean for pensioners is 8.02 in Germany and 9.21 in

[10]Sample sizes vary depending on the availability of the variables capturing ideology.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

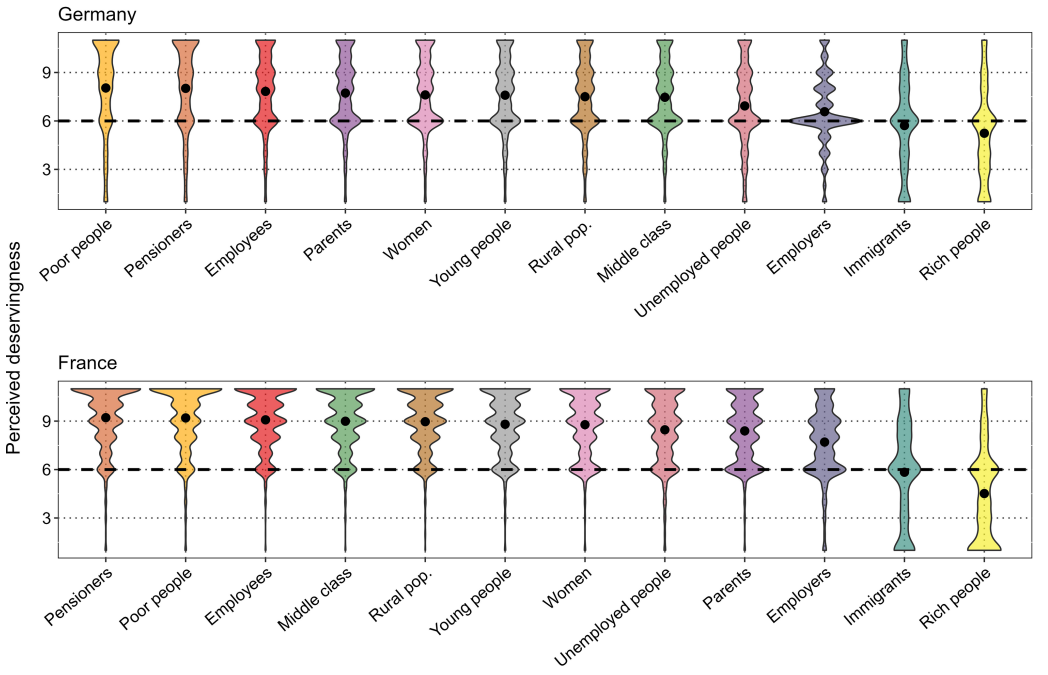


Figure 1. Distribution of deservingness perceptions in Germany and France.
Note: The distributions of deservingness perceptions for twelve groups (1 = much less, . . . 6 = not less, not more, . . . 11 = much more) are shown. Dots represent the average deservingness level for each group (mean). Colored areas represent a kernel density estimation showing the distribution shape of the data. Wider sections of the violin plot represent a higher probability that members of the population will take on the given value; the skinnier sections represent a lower probability. Dashed lines indicate the status quo meaning neither more, nor less should be done for this group. Means and number of observations (n) for each group's perceived deservingness are displayed in Table C5 in the Appendix.

France, and 8.04 (Germany) and 9.2 (France) for the poor, on a scale from 1—meaning that the needs of the group should be considered much less by the government—to 11—meaning that, according to a vast majority of respondents, the needs of the group should be considered much more. In contrast, immigrants, the unemployed (again in line with past findings, see e.g., Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019; van Oorschot, 2006), but also rich people, and employers are rated notably lower. The gap between pensioners (the second-highest rated group) and rich people (lowest) is 2.8 in Germany and 4.7 in France. The other groups fall within a narrower band, with scores ranging from 7.5 to 7.8 in Germany and 8.1 to 9.1 in France.

Crucially, Figure 1 also reveals wide variance around group medians. Standard deviations range from 2.09 (employers) to 2.78 (rich people) in Germany, and from 1.82 (employees) to 3.08 (immigrants) in France (see Table C5 in the Appendix). This supports our theoretical expectation: ideological divides may push many groups into the category of groups with moderate average levels of deservingness—though with notable variations around these averages.

A null multilevel model with only fixed intercepts and individual/group-level random effects shows how much variance stems from individual versus group differences. In Germany, 23% of the variance is due to individual differences, and 11% to group differences; in France, these figures are 21% and 29%, respectively.[11] These results confirm the importance of individual-level

[11]Due to varying levels of missing data, the number of observations differs slightly across models. Additional ICCs for models with voting intention as an independent variable (see Tables C1–C4 in the Appendix) show only minor deviations.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

variation—especially in Germany—while also highlighting stronger contrasts across groups in France.

Our data demonstrates that deservingness perceptions are clearly heterogeneous. This matters for representation: polarization may shape policymakers' incentives as much as average levels do. A higher or lower average level of deservingness is likely to have very different implications depending on whether citizens' views are polarized or rather homogeneous (Huber, 2022). More precisely, incentives to enact beneficial policy for a given group will depend on *who* supports/opposes benefits for this group. Ideological variations could induce policymakers to be attentive to deservingness perceptions in their ideological segment. Policymakers may focus on the views of their ideological base. In what follows, we examine in detail whether and how ideology correlates with the perceived deservingness of different groups.

Ideological divides over deservingness perceptions

In the main text, we focus on discussing the random slope of ideology across groups, which is central to our hypotheses: left-leaning respondents are expected to prioritize needy groups (H1), right-leaning respondents to favor high-status groups (H2), and far-right respondents to support modernization losers and view immigrants and minorities as less deserving (H3). Fixed effects are, however, reported in the Appendix (Tables D1–D4) and indicate that left-leaning citizens generally assign higher levels of deservingness overall (see Figure D1 and Tables D1–D4 in the Appendix). Moreover, controls for group membership show respondents favor their own groups. The results also support earlier findings that women assign higher deservingness levels than men (Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003; Gugushvili and van Oorschot, 2021), but unlike prior research (Attewell, 2022a; McArthur, 2023), we find no significant education effect—likely due to our inclusion of a more diverse range of target groups beyond the needy.

Figure 2 displays the group-specific random slopes for ideology, measured via the left—right self-placement, for Germany (left panel) and for France (right panel). These slopes indicate how the effect of ideology on perceived deservingness varies across groups. Values near zero indicate a weak relationship between ideology and perceived deservingness of a given group. Positive values suggest that as an individual leans more to the right politically, they perceive a group as more deserving (or at least less undeserving); negative values suggest the opposite.

As expected, most needy groups and minorities—immigrants, the poor, the unemployed, women, and young people—are perceived as more deserving by left-leaning respondents, consistent with H1. This pattern is strikingly similar across countries, though the ideological divide over immigrants is notably wider in France than in Germany. Supporting H2, right-leaning respondents are more likely to attribute deservingness to high-status groups such as rich people and employers, who emphasize merit and economic contribution rather than need. In line with H4, the deservingness of pensioners and parents appears largely unaffected by ideology, likely due to their favorable framing in terms of need, contribution, and identity. Unexpectedly, the middle class is slightly more supported by right-leaning—especially far-right—respondents, challenging our assumption that this group would be ideologically neutral (we return to this below).

Figure 3 displays the random effects of our second measure of ideology by target population for Germany (upper two panels) and France (lower two panels). Findings are in line with those based on ideological self-placement with regard to H1 and H2, but allow to add some nuance. Compared to left-wing voters, supporters of center-right as well as far-right parties attribute higher levels of deservingness to the rich and employers. Yet the bonus in deservingness is stronger among center-right citizens than far-right-leaning citizens for rich people (0.79 compared to 0.53 in Germany, 1.56 compared to 0.77 in France) as well as employers in Germany (0.49 vs. 0.39). This corroborates our previous finding that citizens on the right spectrum tend to consider high-status groups as deserving beneficial policy.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

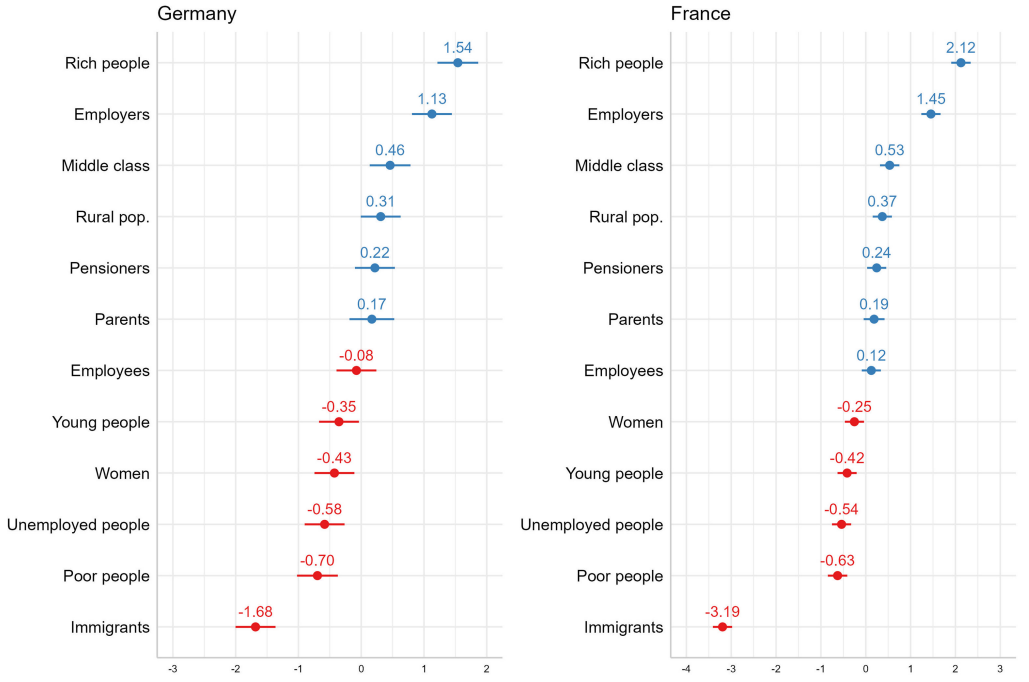


Figure 2. Random effects of left–right self-placement by target population.
Note: Estimates on the x-axis show how strongly left–right ideology predicts the perceived deservingness of each group. They are the group-specific random slopes for left–right self-placement from our mixed-effects linear models, where positive values indicate that right-leaning respondents view the group as more deserving, and negative values indicate the opposite. The full models are reported in the Appendix in Table D1 (Germany, column 3) and Table D3 (France, column 3). The horizontal lines show the 95% confidence intervals. The measure of ideology as left–right self-placement is range standardized from −0.5 to 0.5.

In contrast, voters of left-wing parties tend to see marginalized groups as more deserving. With regard to socioeconomic groups such as the poor or the unemployed, the gap is stronger with the center-right. The difference between left-wing and far-right voters is not even significant in Germany for the poor, in contrast to the unemployed.[12] This is consistent with research showing that socioeconomic conflict involving class-based groups continues to structure the opposition between the left and center-right, while the opposition to the far-right is driven by cultural conflicts involving the 'hard-working' and rural populations, on the one hand, and minorities on the other hand (Bornschier et al., 2021; Kurer, 2020; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018).

Our third hypothesis, H3, precisely taps into these particularities on the far-right. The two panels showing the results for far-right-leaning individuals provide partial support for our expectations. Rural residents, who are often framed as modernization losers, are perceived as more deserving by far-right citizens compared to left-leaning citizens, while the latter and center-right-leaning individuals do not significantly differ in their perception of rural residents' deservingness. This contributes to existing research linking rural context to heightened far-right appeal (Dvořák et al., 2024; Huijsmans and Rodden, 2025).

With regard to minorities, we find the expected deservingness gap between the left and far-right. This gap is particularly pronounced regarding immigrants: in Germany, far-right respondents rate their deservingness on average 1.5 points lower than left-wing respondents do; in

[12]The deservingness gap of unemployed people between supporters of the far-right and of left parties echos previous work showing that far-right voters support cuts in benefits to those perceived as lazy free riders (Busemeyer et al., 2022).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

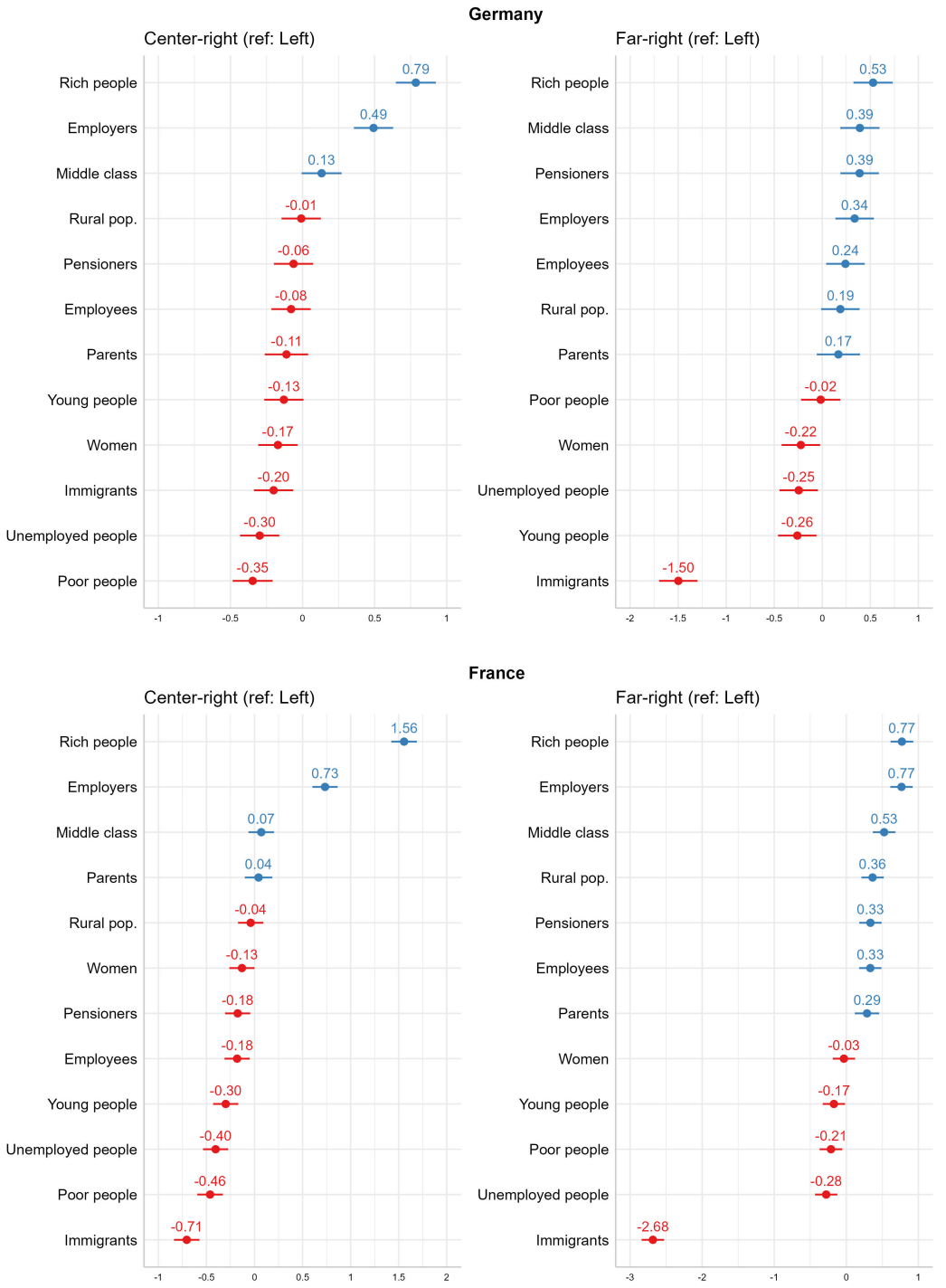


Figure 3. Voting intention: Random effects by target population.
Note: Estimates on the x-axis show how strongly left–right ideology predicts the perceived deservingness of each group. They are the group-specific random slopes for left–right self-placement from our mixed-effects linear models, where positive values indicate that right-leaning respondents view the group as more deserving, and negative values indicate the opposite. The full models are reported in the Appendix in Table D1 (Germany, column 3) and Table D3 (France, column 3). The horizontal lines show the 95% confidence intervals.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

France, the gap widens to 2.7 points. Immigrants also enjoy lower levels of deservingness among the center-right, but the widest gap, as expected, pits the voters of mainstream parties against those supporting far-right parties. The strong effect of far-right voting intention (as well as of ideology measured via left–right self-placement) on the perceived deservingness of immigrants aligns with previous findings highlighting the importance of anti-immigration attitudes for far-right voting (Rydgren, 2008; Stockemer et al., 2021), but also, on the supply-side, the salience of immigration in far-right party agendas (Mudde, 2007). The more pronounced ideological gap in France reflects the country's stronger polarization over immigration (Tiberj, 2024), largely driven by anti-immigration attitudes in the far-right electorate (Stockemer and Barisione, 2016). We see some difference along the expected lines for the youth as well, who are seen as less deserving on the far-right, although in France their level of deservingness is even lower on the center-right. By contrast, ideological contrasts in the perceived deservingness of women are more limited than expected. In France, deservingness ratings for women do not vary significantly by ideology, and in Germany, we find only a modest gap between voters on the left and those on the center-right or far-right.

Lastly, we did not expect any ideological gap with regard to groups that lend themselves to a favorable framing in terms of neediness, contribution, and identity. We had identified employees, pensioners, parents, and the middle class as such groups. Contrary to our expectations, the middle class enjoys higher levels of deservingness among right-wing citizens. Unexpectedly, the same holds for pensioners in both countries, who enjoy higher levels of deservingness among far-right voters. Regarding employees, we observe a similar pattern: they are more likely to be perceived as deserving by far-right citizens than by those on the left. This effect is tentatively observed in Germany and more strongly in France. The comparatively high deservingness of those who are seen as having 'worked their whole life'—including employees, the middle class, and employers—corroborate the importance of 'hard work' (Wagner, 2022; Zollinger, 2024) as a potential cue used by far-right persons in gauging deservingness. Parents emerge as one of the only groups for which deservingness representations seem very homogeneous, although there is a slight bonus for them on the far-right in France as compared to other respondents. Overall, these findings suggest that ideology is correlated with deservingness beyond the most contentious target groups.

Implications: Room for political competition and balanced representation

The finding that deservingness perceptions diverge along ideological lines for some groups suggests that there may be room for partisan conflict over the distribution of policy benefits and burdens. To see their interests reflected in policy outcomes, groups may not need to be viewed as deserving by the entire electorate. It may suffice if particular constituencies perceive them as deserving and pressure their parties to represent the group. We explore this potential (results reported in Appendix E) by focusing on three groups—immigrants, the rich, and employers—who are, on average, perceived as the least deserving in both countries (see Figure 1). In short, our results (discussed in more detail in the Appendix) suggest that while there appears to be no electoral incentive for policymakers across the ideological spectrum to allocate additional policy benefits to the rich, such incentives exist for employers on the political right in Germany (and across the spectrum in France), and—though interestingly only in France—for immigrants on the left. These patterns illustrate how ideological divides in perceived deservingness can translate into differentiated partisan incentives for group representation.

These insights shed light on deservingness perceptions beyond the specific realm of welfare policy and contribute to our understanding of how electoral incentives might shape substantive representation. Ideological divides over deservingness leave room for competition between political parties representing distinct interests and related policies. In this regard, our findings also connect to the growing literature on political polarization. As ideological and partisan identities increasingly structure how citizens assess social groups and their moral worth (Robison and Moskowitz, 2019; Zollinger, 2024), polarization extends beyond policy preferences to encompass

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

divergent judgments about who deserves government support (Iyengar et al., 2019; Mason, 2018). This polarization over deservingness reinforces partisan alignment while offering parties distinct reservoirs of symbolic representation. Because parties cater to the preferences of their ideological constituencies, some of them will be incited to advocate for groups despite of their lower deservingness within the general public. Elections encourage incentives to broaden the focus of representation based on ideological linkages (Häusermann et al., 2013). In this sense, our findings present good news for the prospects of balanced representation in a democratic regime in which policymakers are constrained by public opinion. Accordingly, even the groups deemed the least deserving on average, such as immigrants, have prospects for representation given the possibility that left-wing citizens support their claims.

As a matter of fact, left-wing or liberal parties do endorse proposals favoring immigrants. For example, the parties forming the previous German coalition—the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens, and the liberal FDP—all pledged to facilitate naturalization in the campaign for the 2021 general elections. This pledge was included in their coalition agreement and fulfilled in June 2024. Parts of this reform, however, were subsequently reversed by the coalition government of the conservative CDU/CSU and SPD (formed after the national election in 2025 with the SPD now as the junior partner), most notably the accelerated 'fast-track' naturalization after three years, while other elements such as the introduction of dual citizenship remain in place. This development reinforces the implications of our findings. The translation of favorable attitudes into policy outcomes crucially depends on the prevailing political constellation: while the former coalition was responsive to the preferences of left-leaning voters, the current government is more constrained by segments of the electorate skeptical of extending rights to immigrants.

Conclusion

Who deserves what—and how much? This question becomes topical in times marked by scarcity, political polarization, and mounting concerns regarding material and political inequalities. Growing attention has been devoted to deservingness perceptions as a driver of policy outputs and outcomes. Research on welfare deservingness indicates that the public often ranks target groups similarly across different societies and suggests that policymakers aiming for reelection tend to focus policy benefits on those groups considered most deserving. This could generate political inequalities to the detriment of those on the bottom of the deservingness hierarchy. Yet, recent studies reveal substantial variation in deservingness perceptions across geography, time, and individuals, underscoring the need for a more nuanced understanding. Building on related literatures and evidence from studies focusing on single groups, we argue that ideological orientations are systematically associated with how citizens evaluate a wide range of social groups, consistent with mechanisms involving beliefs about inequality, the weighting of deservingness criteria, and group-related elite cues. The central contribution of our study is to provide a systematic analysis of ideological divides in deservingness perceptions from a cross-national, cross-group perspective that encompasses a broader set of politically salient groups than previous work. This broader perspective is crucial for understanding the substantive implications of ideological divides in deservingness perceptions for political representation.

Our findings confirm the expected ideological divides in the perceived deservingness of most of the twelve groups examined. These divides are not limited to class-based groups traditionally central to left–right opposition, such as the poor or unemployed, but also extend to several minority groups such as women and immigrants. Surprisingly, they even—at least slightly—affect groups typically considered ideologically uncontested such as the middle class and pensioners, who might be expected to garner support across all ideological segments. These findings are highly similar in the majoritarian context of France and in the more consensual context of Germany. Given that our measure of deservingness treats each group independently and allows respondents

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to attribute high levels of deservingness to as many groups as desired, our findings provide a lower bound for ideological gaps in the attribution of deservingness. Measures accounting for distributive tradeoffs are likely to observe stronger differences.

Our theoretical argument and empirical findings pave the way for an intriguing research agenda on the politics of deservingness perceptions. This agenda concerns both their determinants and consequences. First, while we discussed the plausibility of the mechanisms assumed to produce societal consensus on the deservingness level of social groups, we tested only the implication in terms of ideological variation. We leave it to further studies to measure how individuals perceive single groups in terms of criteria such as neediness, contribution, or identity, how far each of these criteria shape the deservingness level attributed to groups, and whether this varies depending on ideology. Second, the perception and salience of deservingness criteria might not only be susceptible to ideology, but also to framing and priming in political and media discourses (Culpepper et al., 2024). Our study is focused on two countries at a specific point in time. Future studies should consider the influence of media frames and party cues on deservingness perceptions in various contexts. Third, a comprehensive mapping of the distribution of the deservingness representations of target populations is needed. This will allow groups to be characterized both in terms of their average level of deservingness and in terms of their ideological variability and to demarcate groups that are more or less politicized in the sense that people with different ideologies diverge in the deservingness attributed to the group. This, in turn, would allow scholarship to investigate why the deservingness of some groups—such as immigrants in France and Germany—becomes deeply politicized, while others, such as women, remain comparatively consensual. Finally, our study points to a striking blind spot with regard to the empirical implications of (divided) deservingness perceptions. Elected policymakers may have fewer incentives to respond to average representations than to those prevailing in their constituency, particularly in a context of growing polarization. To what extent political actors do so, and how such responsiveness shapes policy outputs, remains an open empirical question.

Supplementary material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460.

Data availability statement. The data that support the findings of this study are openly available at GRO.data (Göttingen Research Online Data): Deiss-Helbig, Elisa; Guinaudeau, Isabelle; Matthieß, Theres, 2026, "Replication Data for: Who Deserves? Ideological Gaps in Citizens' Deservingness Perceptions", https://doi.org/10.25625/ZCZHR0, GRO.data, V1.

Acknowledgments. We would like to thank the participants of the publication seminar of the Institute of Political Science of the University of Zurich, in particular Bilyana Petrova, Simon Bornschier, Reto Bürgisser, Magdalena Breyer, Delia Zollinger, Reto Mitteregger, Karsten Donnay, Andrea De Angelis, Valerie Sticher, Philip Kerler, Catarina Pereira, Fabrizio Gilardi, Thomas Widmer, Jon Slapin. We are also grateful to Christian Breunig and to the participants to the workshop *Deservingness perceptions as driver and effect of public policies. Recent advances in research on deservingness*, Centre d'Études Européennes, 3 April 2023, for very helpful remarks. We address special thanks to David Attewell, Silja Häusermann, and Benjamin Guinaudeau for their hugely useful feedback and for drawing our attention to important references.

Funding statement. This work was supported by a grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) [466129675] and the University of Konstanz (Publishing Fund for language editing).

Competing interests. The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical statement. We conducted our survey in compliance with APSA's Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research. The survey was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Stuttgart.

References

Abou-Chadi, Tarik. "Niche Party Success and Mainstream Party Policy Shifts – How Green and Radical Right Parties Differ in Their Impact". *British Journal of Political Science* **46** (2016): 417–436. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123414000155.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Abou-Chadi, Tarik, Denis Cohen, and Markus Wagner. "The Centre-Right versus the Radical Right: The Role of Migration Issues and Economic Grievances". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **48** (2022): 366–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1853903.

Alesina, Alberto and George-Marios Angeletos. "Fairness and Redistribution". *American Economic Review* **95** (2005): 960–980. https://doi.org/10.1257/0002828054825655.

Appelbaum, Lauren D. "The Influence of Perceived Deservingness on Policy Decisions regarding Aid for the Poor". *Political Psychology* **22** (2001): 419–442. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00248.

Arts, Wil and John Gelissen. "Welfare States, Solidarity and Justice Principles: Does the Type Really Matter?" *Acta Sociologica* **44** (2001): 283–299. https://doi.org/10.1177/000169930104400401.

Attewell, David. "Deservingness Perceptions, Welfare State Support and Vote Choice in Western Europe". *West European Politics* **44** (2022a): 611–634. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2020.1715704.

Attewell, David. "Redistribution Attitudes and Vote Choice Across the Educational Divide". *European Journal of Political Research* **61** (2022b): 1080–1101. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12486.

Baekgaard, Martin, Donald P. Moynihan, and Mette Kjærgaard Thomsen. "Why Do Policymakers Support Administrative Burdens? The Roles of Deservingness, Political Ideology, and Personal Experience". *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* **31** (2021): 184–200. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muaa033.

Bandelow, Nils C. and Johanna Hornung. "One Discourse to Rule Them All? Narrating the Agenda for Labor Market Policies in France and Germany". *Policy and Society* **38** (2019): 408–428. https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2019.1641379.

Bansak, Kirk, Jens Hainmueller, and Dominik Hangartner. "How Economic, Humanitarian, and Religious Concerns Shape European Attitudes Toward Asylum Seekers". *Science* **354** (2016): 217–222. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aag2147.

Bauer, Paul C., Pablo Barberá, Kathrin Ackermann, and Aaron Venetz. "Is the Left-Right Scale a Valid Measure of Ideology? Individual-Level Variation in Associations with 'Left' and 'Right' and Left-Right Self-Placement". *Political Behavior* **39** (2017): 553–583. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-016-9368-2.

Bean, Clive and Elim Papadakis. "A Comparison of Mass Attitudes towards the Welfare State in Different Institutional Regimes, 1985–1990". *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* **10** (1998): 211–236. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/10.3.211.

Bell, Elizabeth. "Deserving to Whom? Investigating Heterogeneity in the Impact of Social Constructions of Target Populations on Support for Affirmative Action". *Policy Studies Journal* **49** (2021): 268–299. https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12347.

Bell, Elizabeth and Edith Lui. "Integrating Identity in Policy Design Theory". *Policy & Politics* **51** (2023): 2–27. https://doi.org/10.1332/030557321X16587888968118.

Bell, Elizabeth, Ani Ter-Mkrtchyan, Wesley Wehde, and Kylie Smith. "Just or Unjust? How Ideological Beliefs Shape Street-Level Bureaucrats' Perceptions of Administrative Burden". *Public Administration Review* **81** (2020): 610–624. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13311.

Black, Juliana F. and Shai Davidai. "Do Rich People "Deserve" to Be Rich? Charitable Giving, Internal Attributions of Wealth, and Judgments of Economic Deservingness". *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* **90** (2020): 104011. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2020.104011.

Blekesaune, Morten and Jill Quadagno. "Public Attitudes Toward Welfare State Policies: A Comparative Analysis of 24 Nations". *European Sociological Review* **19** (2003): 415–427.

Bornschier, Simon. *Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right: The New Cultural Conflict in Western Europe*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple UP, 2010.

Bornschier, Simon, Silja Häusermann, Delia Zollinger, and Céline Colombo. "How 'Us' and 'Them' Relates to Voting Behavior—Social Structure, Social Identities, and Electoral Choice". *Comparative Political Studies* **54** (2021): 2087–2122. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414021997504.

Bullock, Heather E. "Attributions for Poverty: A Comparison of Middle-Class and Welfare Recipient Attitudes". *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* **29** (1999): 2059–2082. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1999.tb02295.x.

Busemeyer, Marius R., Philip Rathgeb, and Alexander H. J. Sahm. "Authoritarian Values and the Welfare State: The Social Policy Preferences of Radical Right Voters". *West European Politics* **45** (2022): 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1886497.

Buss, Christopher. "Public Opinion towards Targeted Labour Market Policies: A Vignette Study on the Perceived Deservingness of the Unemployed". *Journal of European Social Policy* **29** (2019): 228–240. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928718757684.

Cavaillé, Charlotte. *Fair Enough? Support for Redistribution in the Age of Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2023.

Cavaillé, Charlotte and Kris-Stella Trump. "The Two Facets of Social Policy Preferences". *The Journal of Politics* **77** (2015): 146–160. https://doi.org/10.1086/678312.

Converse, Philip E. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics". In: *Ideology and Discontent*. Ed. by David E. Apter. New York: The Free Press, 1964. pp. 206–261.

Cook, Fay L. *Who Should Be Helped? Public Support for Social Services*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Coughlin, Richard M. *Ideology, Public Opinion and Welfare Policy: Attitudes towards Taxes and Spending in Industrialized Societies*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1980.

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment—Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Culpepper, Pepper D., Rachel Shandler, Jihyun-Hee Jung, and Taehee Lee. "'The Economy is Rigged': Inequality Narratives, Fairness, and Support for Redistribution in Six Countries". *Comparative Political Studies* **58** (2024): 714–745. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241252072.

Dalton, Russell J. "Modeling Ideological Polarization in Democratic Party Systems". *Electoral Studies* **72** (2021): 102346. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102346.

Dassonneville, Ruth, Rune Stubager, and Mads Thau. "How Group Appeals Shape Candidate Support: The Role of Group Membership, Identity Strength, and Deservingness Perceptions". *European Journal of Political Research* (2025): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1475676525100170.

De Coninck, David and Koen Matthijs. "Who is Allowed to Stay? Settlement Deservingness Preferences Towards Migrants in Four European Countries". *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* **77** (2020): 25–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.05.004.

De Sio, Lorenzo and Till Weber. "Issue Yield: A Model of Party Strategy in Multidimensional Space". *American Political Science Review* **108** (2014): 870–885. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000379.

Deiss-Helbig, Elisa, Isabelle Guinaudeau, Theres Matthieß, and Robin Rentrop. Do Policy Pledges Have the Potential to Rebalance Representation? Input Representation in France and Germany (1995–2022), 2024. [Paper Presentation]. https://www.elisadeisshelbig.com/publications.

Duckitt, John. "Differential Effects of Right Wing Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation on Outgroup Attitudes and Their Mediation by Threat from and Competitiveness to Outgroups". *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* **32** (2006): 684–696. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167205284282.

Dvořák, Tomáš, Jan Zouhar, and Oliver Treib. "Regional Peripheralization as Contextual Source of Populist Attitudes in Germany and Czech Republic". *Political Studies* **72** (2024): 112–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217221091981.

Ellis, Christopher and Christopher Faricy. "Race, 'Deservingness', and Social Spending Attitudes: The Role of Policy Delivery Mechanism". *Political Behavior* **42** (2020): 819–843. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-018-09521-w.

Emanuele, Vincenzo and Bruno Marino. "Party System Ideological Polarization in Western Europe: Data, Trends, Drivers, and Links with Other Key Party System Properties (1945–2021)". *Political Research Exchange* **6** (2024): 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/2474736X.2024.2399095.

Erikson, Robert S. and Kent L. Tedin. *American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content, and Impact*. New York: Longman, 2003.

Feldman, Stanley and Christopher Johnston. "Understanding the Determinants of Political Ideology: Implications of Structural Complexity". *Political Psychology* **35** (2014): 337–358. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12055.

Feldman, Stanley and John Zaller. "The Political Culture of Ambivalence: Ideological Responses to the Welfare State". *American Journal of Political Science* **36** (1992): 268–307. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111433.

Fiske, Susan T., Amy J.C. Cuddy, Peter Glick, and Jun Xu. "A Model of (Often Mixed) Stereotype Content: Competence and Warmth Respectively Follow From Perceived Status and Competition". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* **82** (2002): 878–902. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.878.

Franklin, Mark N. "The Decline of Cleavage Politics". In: *Electoral Change: Responses to Evolving Social and Attitudinal Structures in Western Countries*. Ed. by Mark N. Franklin, Thomas Mackie, and Valen Henry. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. pp. 383–405.

Furnham, Adrian. "Why Are the Poor Always with Us? Explanations for Poverty in Great Britain". *British Journal of Social Psychology* **21** (1982): 311–322. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1982.tb00553.x.

Gelman, Andrew and Jennifer Hill. *Data Analysis Using Regression and Multilevel/Hierarchical Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

Goerres, Achim, Rune Karlsen, and Staffan Kumlin. "What Makes People Worry about the Welfare State? A Three-Country Experiment". *British Journal of Political Science* **50** (2021): 1519–1537. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000224.

Gugushvili, Dimitri and Wim van Oorschot. "Perceived Welfare Deservingness of the Unemployed in Eastern versus Western Europe: Similar Levels but Different Degrees of Polarization?" *Problems of Post-Communism* **68** (2021): 42–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1727751.

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Pantheon, 2012.

Halling, Aske, Pamela Herd, and Donald Moynihan. "How Difficult Should It Be? Evidence of Burden Tolerance from a Nationally Representative Sample". *Public Management Review* **25** (2023): 2053–2072. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2056910.

Häusermann, Silja and Hanspeter Kriesi. "What do Voters Want? Dimensions and Configurations in individual-level Preferences and Party Choice". In: *The Politics of Advanced Capitalism*. Ed. by Pablo Beramendi, Silja Häusermann, Herbert Kitschelt, and Hanspeter Kriesi. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015. pp. 28–100.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Häusermann, Silja, Georg Picot, and Dominik Geering. "Review Article: Rethinking Party Politics and the Welfare State—Recent Advances in the Literature". *British Journal of Political Science* **43** (2013): 221–240. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123412000336.

Hilmar, Till. "Who Deserves Economic Relief? Examining Twitter/X Debates about Covid-19 Economic Relief for Small Businesses and the Self-Employed in Germany". *Journal of Social Policy* **54** (2024): 1153–1169. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279424000096.

Horn, Alexander, Anthony Kevins, Carsten Jensen, and Kees van Kersbergen. "Political Parties and Social Groups: New Perspectives and Data on Group and Policy Appeals". *Party Politics* **27** (2021): 983–995. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068820907998.

Houtman, Dick, Peter Achterberg, and Anton Derks. *Farewell to the Leftist Working Class*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

Huber, Lena Maria. "Beyond Policy: The Use of Social Group Appeals in Party Communication". *Political Communication* **39** (2022): 293–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2021.1998264.

Huijsmans, Twan and Jonathan Rodden. "The Great Global Divider? A Comparison of Urban-Rural Partisan Polarization in Western Democracies". *Comparative Political Studies* **58** (2025): 261–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241237458.

Inglehart, Ronald. *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. New York: Princeton UP, 1990.

Ivaldi, Gilles. "Contesting the EU in Times of Crisis: The Front National and Politics of Euroscepticism in France". *Politics* **38** (2018): 278–294. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395718766787.

Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood. "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States". *Annual Review of Political Science* **22** (2019): 129–146. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034.

Jeene, Marjolein, Wim van Oorschot, and Wilfred Uunk. "The Dynamics of Welfare Opinions in Changing Economic, Institutional and Political Contexts: An Empirical Analysis of Dutch Deservingness Opinions, 1975–2006". *Social Indicators Research* **115** (2014): 731–749. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0230-6.

Jensen, Carsten and Michael B. Petersen. "The Deservingness Heuristic and the Politics of Health Care". *American Journal of Political Science* **61** (2017): 68–83. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12251.

Jost, John T., Christopher M. Federico, and Jaime L. Napier. "Political Ideology: Its Structure, Functions, and Elective Affinities". *Annual Review of Psychology* **60** (2009): 307–37. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163600.

Jost, John T., Christopher M. Federico, and Jaime L. Napier. "Political Ideologies and their Social Psychological Functions". In: *The Oxford handbook of Political Ideologies*. Ed. by Michael Freeden and Marc Stears. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013. pp. 232–250.

Kitschelt, Herbert. *The Transformation of European Social Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994.

Kootstra, Anouk. "Deserving and Undeserving Welfare Claimants in Britain and the Netherlands: Examining the Role of Ethnicity and Migration Status Using a Vignette Experiment". *European Sociological Review* **32** (2016): 325–338. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcw010.

Koski, Chris and Paul Manson. "Policy Design Receptivity and Target Populations: A Social Construction Framework Approach to Climate Change Policy". *Policy Studies Journal* **52** (2024): 211–233. https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12520.

Kreitzer, Rebecca J., Elizabeth A. Maltby, and Candis Watts Smith. "Fifty Shades of Deservingness: An Analysis of State-Level Variation and Effect of Social Constructions on Policy Outcomes". *Journal of Public Policy* **42** (2022): 436–464. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X21000222.

Kreitzer, Rebecca J. and Candis Watts Smith. "Reproducible and Replicable: An Empirical Assessment of the Social Construction of Politically Relevant Target Groups". *PS: Political Science & Politics* **51** (2018): 768–774. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096518000987.

Kriesi, Hanspeter, Edgar Grande, Romain Lachat, Martin Dolezal, Simon Bornschier, and Timotheos Frey. *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.

Kurer, Thomas. "The Declining Middle: Occupational Change, Social Status, and the Populist Right". *Comparative Political Studies* **53** (2020): 1798–1835. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020912283.

Laenen, Tijs and Bart Meuleman. "A Universal Rank Order of Deservingness? Geographical, Temporal and Social-Structural Comparisons". In: *The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare and Welfare Deservingness. Attitudes to Welfare Deservingness*. Ed. by Wim van Oorschot, Femke Roosma, Bart Meuleman, and Tim Reeskens. Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017. pp. 37–54.

Laenen, Tijs and Femke Roosma. "Who Should Get What and Why? Insights from Welfare Deservingness Theory". In: *Solidarity and Social Justice in Contemporary Societies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Inequalities*. Ed. by Mara A. Yerkes and Michelle Bal. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022. pp. 65–75.

Lancaster, Caroline M. "Value Shift: Immigration Attitudes and the Sociocultural Divide". *British Journal of Political Science* **52** (2022): 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000526.

Limberg, Julian. "What's Fair? Preferences for Tax Progressivity in the Wake of the Financial Crisis". *Journal of Public Policy* **40** (2020): 171–193. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X18000430.

Lipset, Martin S. *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Lipset, Martin S. and Stein Rokkan. *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. New York: The Free Press, 1967.

Magni, Gabriele. "Economic Inequality, Immigrants and Selective Solidarity: From Perceived Lack of Opportunity to In-group Favoritism". *British Journal of Political Science* **51** (2020): 1357–1380. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000046.

Magni, Gabriele. "Boundaries of Solidarity: Immigrants, Economic Contribution, and Welfare Attitudes". *American Journal of Political Science* **68** (2024): 72–92. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12707.

Mason, Lilliana. *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Mayer, Nonna. "From Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen: Electoral Change on the Far Right". *Parliamentary Affairs* **66** (2013): 160–178. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gss071.

McArthur, Daniel. "Why Are the Highly Educated More Sympathetic Towards Welfare Recipients?" *European Journal of Political Research* **62** (2023): 70–94. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12496.

Mettler, Suzanne and Joe Soss. "The Consequences of Public Policy for Democratic Citizenship: Bridging Policy Studies and Mass Politics". *Perspectives on Politics* **2** (2004): 55–73. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592704000623.

Meuleman, Bart, Femke Roosma, and Koen Abts. "Welfare Deservingness Opinions From Heuristic to Measurable Concept: The CARIN Deservingness Principles Scale". *Social Science Research* **85** (2020): 102352. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2019.102352.

Meuleman, Bart, Femke Roosma, and Wim van Oorschot. "Evaluating the Fruitfulness of Deservingness Theory". In: *The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare and Welfare Deservingness. Attitudes to Welfare Deservingness*. Ed. by Wim van Oorschot, Femke Roosma, Bart Meuleman, and Tim Reeskens. Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017. pp. 335–351.

Mewes, Jan and Steffen Mau. "Globalization, Socio-Economic Status and Welfare Chauvinism: European Perspectives on Attitudes toward the Exclusion of Immigrants". *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* **54** (2013): 228–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715213494395.

Mosimann, Nadja, Line Rennwald, and Adrian Zimmermann. "The Radical Right, the Labour Movement and the Competition for the Workers' Vote". *Economic and Industrial Democracy* **40** (2019): 65–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X18780317.

Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007.

Mudde, Cas. "Did the 'Refugee Crisis' Transform European Politics?" In: *Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland: Wahlverhalten in Zeiten politischer Polarisierung*. Ed. by Heinz Ulrich Brinkmann and Karl-Heinz Reuband. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2022. pp. 37–54. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-33787-2_3.

Oesch, Daniel and Line Rennwald. "Electoral Competition in Europe's New Tripolar Political Space: Class Voting for the Left, Centre-Right and Radical Right". *European Journal of Political Research* **57** (2018): 783–807. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12259.

Petersen, Michael B. "Social Welfare as Small-Scale Help: Evolutionary Psychology and the Deservingness Heuristic". *American Journal of Political Science* **56** (2012): 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00545.x.

Petersen, Michael B., Rune Slothuus, Rune Stubager, and Lise Togeby. "Deservingness versus Values in Public Opinion on Welfare: The Automaticity of the Deservingness Heuristic". *European Journal of Political Research* **50** (2011): 24–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2010.01923.x.

Reeskens, Tim and Tom van der Meer. "The Inevitable Deservingness Gap: A Study into the Insurmountable Immigrant Penalty in Perceived Welfare Deservingness". *Journal of European Social Policy* **29** (2019): 166–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928718768335.

Rhodes, Jesse H. and Kaylee T. Johnson. "Welcoming Their Hatred: Class Populism in Democratic Rhetoric in American Presidential Campaigns, 1932–2012". *Presidential Studies Quarterly* **47** (2017): 92–121.

Riker, William H. *The Strategy of Rhetoric. Campaigning for the American Constitution*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1996.

Robison, Joshua and Rachel L. Moskowitz. "The Group Basis of Partisan Affective Polarization". *The Journal of Politics* **81** (2019): 1075–1079. https://doi.org/10.1086/703069.

Rydgren, Jens. "Immigration Sceptics, Xenophobes or Racists? Radical Right-Wing voting in Six West European Countries". *European Journal of Political Research* **47** (2008): 737–765. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2008.00784.x.

Sachweh, Patrick and Debora Eicher. "Deserving More? A Vignette Study on the Role of Self-Interest and Deservingness Opinions for Popular Support for Wealth Taxation in Germany". *Journal of Social Policy* **54** (2025): 141–159. https://doi.org/10.1017/S004727942200099X.

Schneider, Anne L. and Helen M. Ingram. "Social Construction of Target Populations: Implications for Politics and Policy". *American Political Science Review* **87** (1993): 334–347. https://doi.org/10.2307/2939044.

Schneider, Anne L. and Helen M. Ingram. "Social Constructions, Anticipatory Feedback Strategies, and Deceptive Public Policy". *Policy Studies Journal* **47** (2019): 206–236. https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12281.

Seawright, Jason and John Gerring. "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options". *Political Research Quarterly* **61** (2008): 294–308. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077.

Singh, A.K. "Attribution Research on Poverty: A Review". *Psychologia* **32** (1989): 143–148.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Spies, Dennis. "Explaining Working-Class Support for Extreme Right Parties: A Party Competition Approach". *Acta Politica* **48** (2013): 296–325. https://doi.org/10.1057/ap.2012.37.

Stockemer, Daniel and Mauro Barisione. "The 'New' Discourse of the Front National under Marine Le Pen: A Slight Change with a Big Impact". *European Journal of Political Communication* **32** (2016): 100–115. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323116680132.

Stockemer, Daniel, Daphne Halikiopoulou, and Tim Vlandas. "'Birds of a Feather'? Assessing the Prevalence of Anti-Immigration Attitudes among the Far Right Electorate". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* **47** (2021): 3409–3436. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1770063.

Stuckelberger, Simon and Anke Tresch. "Group Appeals of Parties in Times of Economic and Identity Conflicts and Realignment". *Political Studies* **72** (2022): 463–485. https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217221123147.

Swaan, Abram de. *In Care of the State: Health Care, Education, and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.

Tajfel, Henri and John Turner. "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict". *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Ed. by Stephen Worchel and William G. Austin. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing, 1979. pp. 33–37.

Thau, Mads. "How Political Parties Use Group-Based Appeals: Evidence from Britain 1964–2015". *Political Studies* **67** (2019): 63–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717744495.

Thomson, Robert, Terry Royed, Elin Naurin, Joaquin Artés, Rory Costello, Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik, Mark Ferguson, Petia Kostadinova, Catherine Moury, François Petry, and Katrin Praprotnik. "The Fulfillment of Parties' Election Pledges: A Comparative Study on the Impact of Power Sharing". *American Journal of Political Science* **61** (2017): 527–542. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12313.

Tiberj, Vincent. *La droitisation Française, Mythe et Réalités*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2024.

van der Eijk, Cees, Hermann Schmitt, and Tanja Binder. "Left-Right Orientations and Party Choice". In: *The European Voter: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*. Ed. by Jacques Thomassen. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2025. pp. 167–191.

van Oorschot, Wim. "Who Should Get What, and Why? On Deservingness Criteria and the Conditionality of Solidarity among the Public". *Policy and Politics* **28** (2000): 33–49. https://doi.org/10.1332/0305573002500811.

van Oorschot, Wim. "Making the Difference in Social Europe: Deservingness Perceptions Among Citizens of European Welfare States". *Journal of European Social Policy* **16** (2006): 23–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928706059829.

van Oorschot, Wim and Femke Roosma. "The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare and Welfare Deservingness". In: *The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare and Welfare Deservingness. Attitudes to Welfare Deservingness*. Ed. by Wim van Oorschot, Femke Roosma, Bart Meuleman, and Tim Reeskens. Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017. pp. 3–33.

Wagner, Markus and Sylvia Kritzinger. "Ideological Dimensions and Vote Choice: Age Group Differences in Austria". *Electoral Studies* **31** (2012): 285–296. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2011.11.008.

Wagner, Paulus. "Varieties of Laborism Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Working-Class Visions of the Political Economy". *Totalitarianism and Democracy* **19** (2022): 127–154. https://doi.org/10.13109/tode.2022.19.1.127.

Weiner, Bernard, Danny Osborne, and Udo Rudolph. "An Attributional Analysis of Reactions to Poverty: The Political Ideology of the Giver and the Perceived Morality of the Receiver". *Personality and Social Psychology Review* **15** (2011): 199–213. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868310387615.

Wilcox, Clyde, Lee Sigelman, and Elizabeth Cook. "Some Like It Hot: Individual Differences in Responses to Group Feeling Thermometers". *Public Opinion Quarterly* **53** (1989): 246. https://doi.org/10.1086/269505.

Witko, Christopher and Tobias Heinrich. "Deserving Government Assistance? Public Support for Aid to Struggling Firms and Workers". *Political Behavior* **47** (2024): 19–40. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-024-09939-5.

Zollinger, Delia. "Cleavage Identities in Voters' Own Words: Harnessing Open-Ended Survey Responses". *American Journal of Political Science* **68** (2024): 139–159. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12743.

Zucker, Gail Sahar and Bernard Weiner. "Conservatism and Perceptions of Poverty: An Attributional Analysis". *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* **23** (1993): 925–943. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1993.tb01014.x.

Cite this article: Deiss-Helbig E, Guinaudeau I, and Matthieß T (2026). Who deserves? Ideological gaps in citizens' deservingness perceptions. *European Political Science Review* **18**, 473–494. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773926100460 Published online by Cambridge University Press