

Adolescents' Conceptions of Wealth and Societal Fairness Amid Extreme Inequality: An Argentine Sample

Alicia Barreiro

Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales; Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas; and Universidad de Buenos Aires

William F. Arsenio

Yeshiva University

Cecilia Wainryb

University of Utah

This study examined how Argentine adolescents' judgments about the fairness of their society are related to their perceptions of actual and ideal societal wealth distribution, just world beliefs, and trust in political institutions. Six hundred ninety-nine Argentine adolescents from three age groups (12–14 years, 15–16 years, and 17–18 years) in high schools from diverse SES communities were presented with five images depicting more or less egalitarian patterns of national wealth distribution. Participants chose the images that best represented actual and ideal wealth distribution in Argentina, and also rated their level of political trust, general and personal beliefs in a just world (BJW), and views regarding the fairness of Argentine society. Findings revealed that there was a significant gap between adolescents' conception of current wealth distribution and their more egalitarian choices for ideal wealth distribution. In addition, adolescents who judged that the distribution of actual economic resources was more egalitarian had more positive views of the fairness of Argentine society, as well as higher levels of political trust and BJW. Moreover, regression analyses revealed that adolescents' views of the overall fairness of society were independently predicted by both their economic judgments and their noneconomic judgments (political trust and both general and personal BJW), and these effects were not moderated by adolescents' age group or school SES. Notwithstanding the lack of moderated effects (i.e., relations *among* variables), older adolescents and those from higher SES schools had more negative views of overall fairness of society, the egalitarian nature of existing wealth distribution, political trust, and BJW.

Keywords: adolescents' conceptions of societal fairness, conceptions of wealth distribution, developing countries, economic inequality

Economic inequality in Argentina and Latin America as a region is among the highest in the world (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015). For example, using the standard 20–20 ratio of economic inequality, the richest 20% of Argentines earn 17.8 times as much as the poorest 20%, compared with 20–20 ratios of 8.4 for the United States, and about 4 for Japan and several Scandinavian countries (United Nations

Development Program, 2015). More than 29% of Argentine live below the poverty line (vs. 13.5% for the U.S.; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016) and 87% of adults report being worried about becoming victims of crime (Observatorio de la Deuda Social Argentina, 2016).

Underlying these grim Argentine statistics is a long history of political and economic struggles that includes cycles of democratically elected populist governments and military dictatorships, culminating in a nearly decade-long period (1976–1983) of state terrorism (also known as the “Dirty War”) during which 30,000 people were hunted down and “disappeared” (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas, 1984/2013). Democracy has become more stable in Argentina since 1983, but populist governments characterized by charismatic leaders who appeal to and identify with “the people” (presented as monolithic and without internal conflicts) and who propagate Manichean and “anti-elite” positions (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) have reigned continuously from 2003 to 2016. Today's Argentine adolescents have grown up in the shadow of the dictatorship and in the midst of populist rhetoric.

The present study was designed to assess how Argentine adolescents from different age groups and social class backgrounds think about the fairness of their society. Adolescents' conceptions

Alicia Barreiro, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales de América Latina, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales; Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas; and Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de Buenos Aires. William F. Arsenio, Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology, Yeshiva University. Cecilia Wainryb, Psychology Department, University of Utah.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Alicia Barreiro, Instituto de Investigaciones, Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de Buenos Aires, Gral. Juan Lavalle 2353, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, Argentina. E-mail: abarreiro@psi.uba.ar

of the overall fairness of their society have important societal and individual implications. Some research in developed countries has shown that teens with more positive views of society report higher levels of community connectedness and place more importance on active civic engagement (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gally, 2007) and academic planning (Arsenio & Willems, 2017; but see Godfrey, Santos, & Burson, 2017, on negative consequences of positive societal views). To date, however, little is known about how adolescents from developing countries—characterized by much deeper inequalities—think about the overall fairness of their society and the relevant economic and noneconomic correlates of these views. More specifically, Argentine adolescents may have to grapple with a seeming contradiction between the populist discourse that argues for the redistribution of wealth from the “elites” to the “people,” and the high levels of poverty and inequality of their society. It is in this context that their views of societal fairness are investigated in this study.

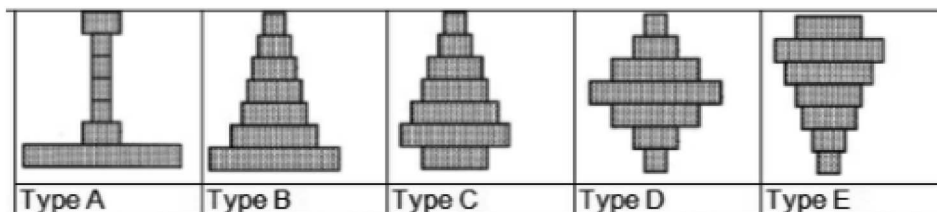
Economic Conceptions

One important goal of this research is to examine how Argentine adolescents perceive the distribution of economic resources in their society. Moral and political philosophers have a longstanding interest in questions regarding the fair distribution of societal resources (e.g., Aristotle, 384-322/1998; Rawls, 1971). More recently, psychologists’ interest in individuals’ thinking about distributive justice (Arsenio, 2015) has been extended to address similar concerns about societal-level distributions of resources and goods. In one influential study, Norton and Ariely (2011) asked a nationally representative sample of Americans how societal wealth is currently divided, followed by judgments about how, ideally, wealth should be divided. Overall, adults judged that the richest 20% of Americans own 59% of all U.S. wealth (vs. an actual 84%), while judging that, ideally, the top should own about 1/3 of all wealth. Similar patterns have been observed in studies involving Australian adults (Norton, Neal, Govan, Ariely, & Holland, 2014) and U.S. adolescents (Arsenio & Willems, 2017; Flanagan & Kornbluh, 2017); that is, underestimations of actual wealth inequality, and preferences for more ideal distributions than those that are believed to exist. Guided by these findings, we expected that (H1) Argentine adolescents would also underestimate actual inequality in their country and ideally prefer more

egalitarian resource distributions than what they perceived to exist (H2).

Although conceptions of actual and ideal resource distribution are interesting in their own right, there is a more general interest in whether these economic judgments are related to broader views of societal fairness and the policies that might inform that fairness. As Arsenio and Willems (2017) put it, “if adolescents underestimate current wealth inequality or perceive minimal gaps in how wealth is and ought to be divided, then adolescents may have more positive views of societal fairness and fewer concerns with poverty and inequality” (p. 464). To date, however, evidence on the links between economic judgments and other forms of societal reasoning and preferences has been mixed. Norton et al. (2014), for example, found few links between Australian adults’ economic judgments and their policy preferences, and Arsenio and Willems (2017) found no connections between American adolescents’ economic judgments and conceptions of legal or societal fairness (see also Bartels, 2005).

One possible explanation for the last finding involves the methodological complexity of how economic judgments were assessed, including concepts of population quintiles and how to apportion resources across these quintiles (Eriksson & Simpson, 2012; and see Arsenio, 2018, for a review). In contrast, Flanagan and Kornbluh (2017) recently used a wealth measure (Evans & Kelley, 2017; Evans, Kelley, & Kolosi, 1992; ISSP, 2009) that is both simpler and that predicts international preferences for economic redistribution (Niehues, 2014). Specifically, Flanagan and Kornbluh (2017) asked adolescents to judge how U.S. economic resources both are and ought to be distributed by selecting from five images depicting increasingly egalitarian resource distributions (see Figure 1). Overall, adolescents preferred a much more egalitarian distribution of resources than the one they believed exists (see, also, Arsenio & Willems, 2017; ISSP, 2009). In addition, however, adolescents who selected more egalitarian images for *current* U.S. resource distribution judged American society to be fairer, and adolescents who preferred a more egalitarian *ideal* distribution perceived greater levels of societal injustice. Extrapolating from Flanagan and Kornbluh’s finding (and using a similar wealth measure) we expected (H3) that Argentine adolescents who viewed actual wealth distribution as more egalitarian would have more positive views of the fairness of their society, and



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Figure 1. Measure used to assess adolescents’ judgment of actual and ideal wealth distribution. Reprinted from “Communism, capitalism, and images of class: Effects of reference groups, reality, and regime in 43 nations and 110,000 individuals: 1987–2009,” by M. Evans & J. Kelley, 2017, *Cross-Cultural Research*, 51, p. 319. Copyright 2016 by Sage. Reprinted with permission.

adolescents with more negative societal views would ideally prefer more egalitarian resource distributions.

Noneconomic Conceptions

Another central study focus is on how adolescents' noneconomic and economic societal judgments are related to each other and to more general conceptions of overall societal fairness. Three noneconomic measures were selected for inclusion in this study: (a) general and (b) personal belief in a just world (BJW), and (c) political trust. Overall, it was expected that more positive BJW and greater political trust would be related to more egalitarian judgments regarding the distribution of societal resources and a more positive view of societal fairness in Argentina (H4).

1 and 2: Belief in a Just World

According to the just-world hypothesis, people usually get what they deserve and deserve what they get (Lerner & Clayton, 2011). Research suggests that BJW can be a double-edged sword in that they sometimes help individuals cope with their own victimization, but at the cost of denying social injustice and blaming victims for their predicaments (Furnham, 2003). Yet, some studies involving adolescents found that higher BJW were associated with fewer school-related problems and anxiety-related complaints (e.g., Peter & Dalbert, 2010). Moreover, these connections were stronger for personal than for general BJW. Consequently, we included these two measures both because of their relevance for adolescents' functioning, and because BJW may be related to and yet distinct from views of Argentine fairness. For example, adolescents could believe their own personal circumstances and the world at large are relatively just, but that Argentina as a particular country is unfair.

3: Political Trust

This involves the degree to which people believe that the government is just and acting in the best interests of the democratic majority rather than a small political or economic elite. Recent research from 18 Latin American countries has shown that higher levels of national income inequality are associated with lower levels of political trust (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015). These findings, as the authors note, are especially problematic given the high levels of inequality in Latin America and the more general evidence that political trust is essential for promoting stable democracies (Uslaner, 2011). Although Argentine adults have generally low levels of political trust (Latinobarómetro, 2016), it is less clear how adolescents who have grown up in the recent period of democratically elected governments view their political institutions. Consequently, we included a measure of political trust in an effort to capture this generations' emerging trust in their political institutions and how that trust relates to conceptions of societal fairness and other economic and noneconomic societal judgments.

Age and SES-Related Influences

Although research on adolescents' conceptions of the societal resources and fairness is limited, reviews on a range of related

societal issues—from homelessness to civil rights—have shown that adolescents' thinking often varies as a function of age and social class (Flanagan et al., 2014; Helwig, Ruck, & Peterson-Badali, 2014). For example, results from several studies suggest that older adolescents may have a more complex and sometimes more accurate understanding of societal issues than their younger peers (e.g., Flanagan, 2013; Helwig et al., 2014). Consequently, we expected that older adolescents (16–18 years) would have a better understanding of Argentine inequality than younger age groups, and as a result (H5) would judge societal resources as divided in a less egalitarian manner and would have more negative views of societal fairness and other noneconomic contributors to that fairness (i.e., BJW and political trust).

Predictions involving the potentially important effects of socioeconomic status are less clear, however, as the extant empirical evidence is quite mixed. Flanagan and Kornbluh (2017) reported that lower SES adolescents judged that the U.S. is and will remain less egalitarian, compared with their high-SES peers (but see also Flanagan et al., 2014). By contrast, studies drawing on system justification theory have found that lower income adults and members of discriminated racial/ethnic groups hold more positive views of societal fairness, as they “embrace the status quo because in some sense they want to perceive the system as legitimate and stable” (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003, p. 15, emphasis in original). Given these mixed U.S. findings and the lack of relevant research in Argentina, no specific hypotheses are offered about how SES would affect adolescents' societal judgments in this study.

The Present Study

In summary, the present study was designed to examine Argentine adolescents' conceptions regarding the overall fairness of their society, and associations with judgments regarding the distribution of societal economic resources and several noneconomic factors known to influence personal and societal behaviors. To our knowledge, this is first study to examine these connections in a group of adolescents from a region with one of the highest levels of inequality in the world, that is, Latin America (Zmerli & Castillo, 2015).

Guided in part by previous studies, but also by unique aspects of recent Argentine history, we expected that Argentine adolescents would underestimate actual inequality in their country and ideally prefer more egalitarian resource distributions than what they believe exists. In addition, it was expected that Argentine adolescents who viewed societal resource distribution as more egalitarian would have more positive views of the fairness of their society, and that more positive BJW and levels of political trust would be related to both more egalitarian resource judgments and greater perceived societal fairness. We also expected that, given the greater complexity and sophistication of older youths' societal understanding (e.g., Smetana & Villalobos, 2009), older adolescents would have more negative views about existing Argentine resource distribution, lower levels of political trust and just world beliefs, and more negative views of the fairness of Argentina as a society than their younger peers. Finally, we were interested in whether SES would affect adolescents' societal cognitions. Although it seems plausible that lower SES adolescents would have

more negative views of societal and economic fairness than their peers, previous findings are mixed, in part, because system justifying tendencies may help reduce distress in more economically disadvantaged groups. Consequently, although SES is of clear interest in this study, no specific directional hypotheses were offered.

Method

Participants

Participants were 699 adolescents (58% female) in three age groups: 12–14 years ($M = 13.16$, $SD = 0.75$; $N = 276$), 15–16 years ($M = 15.41$, $SD = 0.49$; $N = 220$), and 17–18 years ($M = 17.40$, $SD = 0.49$; $N = 203$). Data were collected in six schools in a major urban area in Buenos Aires, Argentina. A combination of factors (including the broad availability of free higher education along with turbulent economic downturns and financial crises) makes “parent education” an unreliable indicator of SES in Argentina as parents may have completed higher education but find themselves economically dispossessed; instead, the type of school youth attended (ranging from entirely free to extremely expensive) provides a more reliable indicator of a family’s SES.

Information provided by school principals, combined with relevant population statistics, indicated that the schools differed in SES. Low-SES schools (35% of participants) drew their students from marginal settlements (*villa miseria*) where 16% of inhabitants are indigent (i.e., according to Argentina guidelines, average monthly income is insufficient to cover food needs, 3365 Argentine pesos, or roughly US\$259) and 56% were poor (i.e., income is insufficient to cover essential services such as food, clothing, education, and health, 7033 Argentine pesos, or roughly US\$541). Most parents in low SES schools had completed elementary (21%) or high school (60%) education. Middle-SES schools (45% of participants) drew students from middle income families (average monthly income = 13,547 Argentine pesos, roughly US\$1,042); most parents had completed high school (42%) or college (50%). In high-SES schools (20% of participants) the average monthly income was more than 20,000 Argentine pesos (roughly US\$1,530), and most parents had completed high school (20%) or college (77%). Whereas low-SES schools were tuition free, middle-SES and high-SES schools imposed monthly fees of approximately 2800 and 6000 Argentine pesos (US\$215 and US\$461, respectively). This research was conducted according to APA ethical guidelines; parental permission and participant assent was obtained for all participants. The study (IRB# UBACTY 20020130100256BA, “Empirical research on social domain knowledge and its theoretical and methodological implications”) was approved by the IRB at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Measures and Scoring

Actual and ideal wealth distribution judgments. Judgments of actual and ideal wealth distribution were assessed via five diagrams (see Figure 1) depicting different patterns of wealth distributions (Evans, & Kelley, 2017) ordered from the *most unequal* (1) to the *most equal* (5). To elicit judgments of actual wealth distribution, participants were told:

Not all countries are the same. Some countries might have a few rich people at the top, with a lot of poor people at the bottom, and not too many people in the middle. Other countries might have a lot of pretty rich people, only a few poor people, and many people in the middle. Please look at the drawings below and pick which country looks the most like Argentina.

To assess judgments of ideal wealth distribution, the same five diagrams were presented and participants were told “The last time you looked at the drawings you picked the one that looks most like Argentina is today. This time we would like you pick the drawings that best shows how you think Argentina should look.” Judgments were scored on a 1 = *most unequal* to 5 = *most equal* scale. This scale and the following two scales were translated from English to Spanish by the first author, and back-translated by the third author.

Fairness of actual wealth distribution. After choosing the image that best depicts the actual wealth distribution in Argentina, participants were asked to rate on a 5-point scale (1 = *very unjust*, 5 = *very just*), “How just is it for Argentina to be that way?”

Political trust. This 4-item scale was adapted from a measure used by the American National Election Study (ANES, 2012), a U.S. national survey organization that has been collecting data on individual trust in government since 1958. It is composed of four items (e.g., “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Argentina to do what is right?”) and scores ranged from 1 to 12 ($\alpha = .75$). Higher scores indicate higher levels of trust in government.

General BJW. This Spanish adaptation (Barreiro, Etchezarhar, & Prado-Gascó, 2018) of the original scale (Dalbert, 1999) includes six items that refer to the belief that, in general, the world is a just place (e.g., “I believe that, by and large, people get what they deserve”). Answers ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .61$). Higher scores reflect higher levels of general BJW.

Personal BJW. This Spanish adaptation (Barreiro et al., 2018) of the original scale (Dalbert, 1999), includes seven items that refer to the belief that what happens in the respondent’s life is just (e.g., “I am usually treated fairly”). Answers ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .77$). Higher scores reflect higher levels of personal BJW.

Belief in Argentina as a just society. This three-item scale was adapted from the Beliefs in America as a Just Society Scale (Flanagan et al., 2007), assessing the belief that, regardless of their background, all people are given an equal opportunity to get ahead in Argentina through hard work (e.g., “Basically people get fair treatment in Argentina, no matter who they are.”). Answers were scored on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale ($\alpha = .84$). Higher scores show stronger endorsement of Argentina as a just society. This scale was translated from English to Spanish by the first author, and back-translated by the third author.

Gender and age. This information was collected by self-report questions.

Procedure

Participants completed all measures described above during a single classroom administration at a time approved by teachers and school principals. The study was presented as research on youth’s conceptions about topics related to Argentine society. All partic-

ipants were informed that their answers were anonymous, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that refusal to participate would have no effect on any subsequent academic evaluations.

Results

Analytic Strategy

The study hypotheses were addressed using two different types of analyses. MANOVAs were used to assess potential age group and school SES-related differences within individual wealth- and nonwealth related variables. Connections between study variables were assessed using correlational analyses, and a final regression examined the strength of the study variables in predicting adolescents' view of societal fairness. Preliminary analyses revealed that there were very few significant main or interaction effects involving gender, and thus gender is not discussed any further.

Wealth-Related Judgments

Subsequent analyses examined hypothesized age group and school SES differences in adolescents' judgments regarding actual wealth distribution and the fairness of that distribution, judgments about ideal wealth distribution, and, finally, potential discrepancies in judgments for ideal and actual wealth.

A 3 (age group) \times 3 (school SES) MANOVA revealed significant multivariate effects for age group (Wilks $\lambda = .980$, $F(4, 1332) = 2.29$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$) and school SES (Wilks $\lambda = .961$, $F(4, 1332) = 4.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). Subsequently, univariate main effects were examined for each of the four wealth measures using individual 3 (age group) \times 3 (school SES) ANOVAs. The group error rate was .05/4 ($p < .0125$) to control for multiple analyses, and follow-up tests (LSD) examine specific differences for school SES and age group effects.

Actual wealth distribution. The mean rating for actual wealth distribution was 2.64 ($SD = 1.04$, see Figure 2). However, ratings differed (see Table 1) as a function of adolescents' school SES. Adolescents from lower SES schools rated wealth distribution as more egalitarian than adolescents from middle or higher SES, and middle SES teens rated wealth distribution as more egalitarian than higher SES teens (i.e., all means differed significantly).

Fairness of actual wealth. Collectively, adolescents rated the distribution of actual wealth as unfair ($F[1, 667] = 333.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .33$, $M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.02$, on scale ranging from 1 [very unfair] to 5 [very fair], with 3 as the midpoint [neither fair nor unfair]). No other significant effects were found.

Ideal wealth distribution. The mean rating for ideal wealth distribution was 4.17 ($SD = .84$; see Figure 2), but ratings differed as a function of SES and age. Adolescents from higher and middle SES schools preferred a more egalitarian wealth distribution than adolescents from lower SES schools, but middle and higher SES adolescents did not differ. In addition, middle and older age groups preferred a more egalitarian wealth distribution than younger adolescents.

Discrepancy between ideal and actual wealth distribution. We also examined potential discrepancies in how adolescents would ideally like to see wealth distributed versus how they

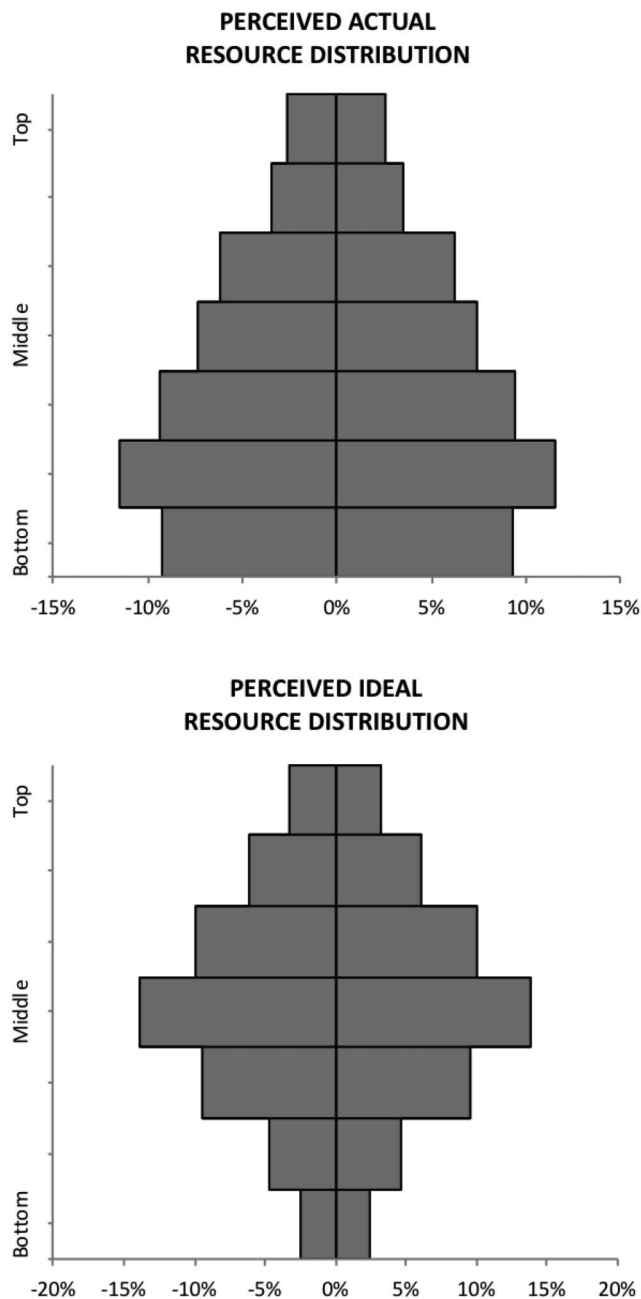


Figure 2. Adolescents' mean judgments of actual and ideal resource distribution.

believe it to be distributed. Wealth discrepancy scores (ideal wealth–actual wealth) were significantly greater than 0 ($F[1, 667] = 879.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .57$); as expected, adolescents preferred a more equal distribution than the one they believed to exist ($[M_{\text{ideal}} = 4.17 - M_{\text{actual}} = 2.64] = M_{\text{discrepancy}} = 1.53$). Wealth discrepancy scores differed as a function of adolescents' school SES and age group. Higher and middle SES adolescents saw a bigger gap between ideal and actual wealth distribution than lower SES adolescents. Also, middle and older age groups saw a

Table 1
ANOVAS of Study Variables Based on Adolescents' Age Group and School SES

Group	Actual wealth		Ideal wealth		Ideal-actual discrepancy		Fairness of actual wealth		General BJW		Personal BJW		Political trust		Fairness of Argentina	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age group																
Younger ^a	2.68	1.10	4.05	0.97	1.37	1.36	-0.82	1.24	18.44	3.80	23.26	4.70	6.34	1.88	-0.33	1.24
Middle	2.60	1.01	4.25	0.74	1.65	1.17	-0.85	1.04	16.71	4.37	22.42	4.75	5.85	1.71	-0.83	1.22
Older	2.64	0.99	4.23	0.72	1.59	1.20	-0.77	1.04	17.52	4.09	22.16	4.63	5.80	1.91	-0.69	1.18
	$F(2, 689) = 1.49$		$F(2, 689) = 4.40^+$		$F(2, 689) = 5.76^*$		$F(2, 689) = .67$		$F(2, 689) = 9.53^{**}$		$F(2, 689) = 2.86$		$F(2, 689) = 5.53^*$		$F(2, 689) = 15.98^{**}$	
	$\eta_p^2 = .01$		$\eta_p^2 = .02$		$\eta_p^2 = .02$		$\eta_p^2 = .03$		$\eta_p^2 = .02$		$\eta_p^2 = .02$		$\eta_p^2 = .02$		$\eta_p^2 = .04$	
School SES																
Low	2.80	1.06	4.05	0.91	1.25	1.32	-0.69	1.07	17.92	3.90	21.96	4.68	6.33	1.79	-0.25	1.32
Middle	2.63	1.08	4.21	0.82	1.58	1.24	-0.86	0.99	17.85	4.20	22.70	4.59	5.87	1.82	-0.74	1.18
High	2.40	0.86	4.26	0.70	1.86	1.08	-0.90	0.98	16.59	4.23	23.89	4.85	5.80	1.85	-0.86	1.06
	$F(2, 689) = 6.40^*$		$F(2, 689) = 5.20^*$		$F(2, 689) = 11.76^{**}$		$F(2, 689) = 2.13$		$F(2, 689) = 4.51^+$		$F(2, 689) = 7.40^{**}$		$F(2, 689) = 5.46^*$		$F(2, 689) = 19.04^{**}$	
	$\eta_p^2 = .02$		$\eta_p^2 = .02$		$\eta_p^2 = .04$		$\eta_p^2 = .01$		$\eta_p^2 = .01$		$\eta_p^2 = .02$		$\eta_p^2 = .02$		$\eta_p^2 = .05$	

^a The three age groups were younger - 12 to 14 years old; middle - 15 to 16 years old; and older - 17 to 18 years old.
+ $p < .013$ (controlled for group error rate). * $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

bigger gap between ideal and actual wealth distribution than younger adolescents.

Nonwealth related judgments: General and personal BJW, political trust, and fairness of Argentina as a society. A 3 (age group) \times 3 (school SES) MANOVA revealed multivariate main effects for age group (Wilks $\lambda = .937$, $F(8, 1312) = 5.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$) and school SES (Wilks $\lambda = .885$, $F(18, 1312) = 10.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$). Given the significance of the overall MANOVA, univariate main effects were examined for each of the four nonwealth related measures using individual 3 (age group) \times 3 (school SES) ANOVAs. The group error rate was set at .05/4 ($p < .0125$) to control for multiple analyses, and follow-up tests (LSD) were used to examine specific differences for school SES and age group effects.

General BJW. There was a main effect for age group: younger adolescents had more positive general BJW than middle and older age groups. In addition, adolescents from lower and middle SES schools had higher general BJW than higher SES peers.

Personal BJW. A single main effect emerged for school SES. Adolescents from high-SES schools had higher personal BJW than peers from middle or lower SES schools.

Political trust. Political trust differed as a function of SES and age. Adolescents from high and middle SES schools had less trust in political institutions than adolescents from low SES schools. In addition, middle and older age group adolescents had less political trust than younger adolescents.

Fairness of Argentina as a society. Overall, adolescents rated Argentina as an unfair society ($F[1, 667] = 158.99$, $p < .001$, $M = 2.41$ on a 5-point scale, $SD = 1.24$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$). In addition, there were significant effects for school SES and age. Adolescents from middle and higher SES schools had more negative views of Argentina than those from lower SES schools. Additionally, younger adolescents had less negative views of societal fairness than their older peers.

Connections Among Study Variables

The analyses above addressed group differences within individual variables; subsequent sections address the correlational connections among study variables, as well as the strength of economic and noneconomic variables in predicting how adolescents viewed overall fairness.

Connections among wealth-related variables. Adolescents who thought wealth was divided more equitably also judged that distribution to be fairer. In addition, adolescents who rated wealth as more equitable preferred a more egalitarian ideal distribution (see Table 2).

Connections among BJW and political trust. Adolescents with higher levels of general BJW also had higher levels of personal BJW. Higher levels of political trust were related to higher levels of both general and personal BJW.

Connections between wealth-related judgments and other variables. Judgments of more egalitarian wealth distribution were related to higher general BJW and higher levels of political trust. In contrast, judgments that wealth was distributed more fairly were related to both higher personal and general BJW, and more political trust. Greater judgments of ideal wealth distribution were

Table 2
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 699)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M	SD	Range
1. General BJW	—	.355***	.238***	.137***	.116**	-.020	.293***	17.63	4.13	5 to 30
2. Personal BJW	.360***	—	.150***	.070	.085*	-.020	.206***	22.68	4.71	6 to 35
3. Political trust	.216***	.159***	—	.293***	.251***	-.051	.346***	6.03	1.85	4 to 12
4. Actual wealth judg.	.120**	.085*	.281***	—	.336***	.109**	.232***	2.64	1.04	1 to 5
5. Actual wealth fair. ^a	.111**	.100**	.247***	.329***	—	-.035	.204***	-0.82	1.02	-2 to 2
6. Ideal wealth judg.	.012	-.015	-.031	.133***	-.031	—	-.047	4.17	0.84	1 to 5
7. Societal fairness	.261***	.223***	.312***	.204***	.190***	-.012	—	-0.59	1.24	-2 to 2

Note. Correlations above the diagonal are zero-order; below the diagonal are partial controlling for age and School SES.

^a Adolescents' rating of the fairness of the actual wealth judgment that they made.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

not associated with any other variables (except, as noted above, with more egalitarian judgments of actual wealth).

Connections between societal fairness and other study variables. Finally, adolescents' judgments of greater Argentine societal fairness were related to greater personal and general BJW, more political trust, more egalitarian views of wealth distribution, and the fairness of that wealth distribution. It should also be noted that controlling for adolescents' age and school SES (correlations below the diagonal in Table 2) did not alter any of the significant correlations noted above except for some very marginal increases in several correlations.

Regression analyses predicting judgments of societal fairness. Regression analyses were conducted to provide a more detailed account of the influence of wealth and nonwealth related judgments on adolescents' conceptions of the overall fairness of Argentina as a society. Prior to conducting these regressions, separate analyses were conducted to examine whether age group or school SES moderated the association between any of the individual variables and judgments of Argentine societal fairness. No evidence of moderation was found.

In the first regression (see Table 3), variables were entered in three blocks, with age group and school SES in block 1, wealth-related judgments (actual wealth distribution, fairness of wealth distribution, and ideal wealth distribution) in block 2, and non-wealth-related judgments in block 3 (general and personal BJW, and political trust). This order was based on the expectation that, after accounting for any age group or school SES effects (block 1), more general wealth-related societal judgments (block 2) provide a basic context for other nonwealth focused societal judgments (block 3).

As can be seen in Table 3, all three blocks added significantly to the prediction of adolescents' conceptions of the fairness of Argentina as a society, with the total accounting for 23% of the variance. Adolescents' younger age group and lower school SES were significant unique predictors at Step 1 and remained so for Steps 2 and 3: younger adolescents and those from lower SES schools had more positive views of the fairness of Argentina. At Steps 2 and 3, more egalitarian views of how actual wealth was distributed and more positive views of that wealth distribution were both independent predictors of societal fairness. Finally, at

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Predicting Adolescents' Judgments of Societal Fairness

Measure	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Step 1 ($R^2_{\text{change}} = .08, F_{\text{change}} = 14.01^{***}$)						
Student demographics						
Younger age group	.17	3.75***	.16	3.69***	.11	2.76**
Middle age group	-.04	1.00	-.04	-0.94	-.03	-0.85
Lower SES schools	.23	4.53***	.18	3.70***	.17	3.62***
Middle SES schools	.01	0.01	-.02	-0.37	-.01	-0.29
Step 2 ($R^2_{\text{change}} = .05, F_{\text{change}} = 14.12^{***}$)						
Economic variables						
Actual wealth distrib.			.13	3.34***	.09	2.45*
Ideal wealth distrib.			-.02	-0.47	-.01	-0.16
Fairness of actual wealth			.16	4.14***	.07	2.00*
Step 3 ($R^2_{\text{change}} = .10, F_{\text{change}} = 27.90^{***}$)						
Noneconomic variables						
General BJW					.14	3.89***
Personal BJW					.11	3.06**
Political trust system fairness					.21	5.56***

Note. For total model, $F(7, 689) = 19.74, p < .001, R^2 = .23$. R^2 and F_{change} are shown for each step, β and t are for each predictor at that step.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Step 3 all four nonwealth related judgments (higher levels of trust, and general and personal BJW) each uniquely predicted more positive views of Argentina as a society. Overall, all of adolescents' wealth and nonwealth related judgments, except for those involving ideal wealth, were related to conceptions about the fairness of Argentina.

In a final regression (not shown) with all of the same variables, the order of the wealth and nonwealth related blocks were reversed (i.e., with nonwealth variables at Step 2 and wealth variables at Step 3). Both blocks continued to make significant contributions to predicting judgments of the fairness of Argentina. Across the two regressions, then, neither wealth nor nonwealth variables as a group fully accounted for the influence of the other block when it was entered into the regression. Consequently, there was little evidence that wealth judgments provided an essential context for nonwealth judgments (or vice versa, i.e., that nonwealth judgments provided an essential context for wealth judgments).

Discussion

The present study extends the emerging literature on U.S. adolescents' conceptions of the overall fairness of their society and the economic and noneconomic contributors to those views (e.g., Arsenio & Willems, 2017; Flanagan & Kornbluh, 2017) by focusing on Argentine adolescents who live surrounded by high inequality (Observatorio de la Deuda Social Argentina, 2016) in an economy larger than that of many Western European countries (World Bank, 2017). Despite clear national economic and political differences, Argentine teens, like their U.S. peers, appear to underestimate national wealth inequality while also preferring a more egalitarian distribution than what they believe to exist. However, unlike in some studies involving U.S. adolescents (Arsenio & Willems, 2017; and adults (Bartels, 2005), the economic conceptions of Argentine adolescents are significantly related to their conceptions of societal fairness, and overlap partially with conceptions of other noneconomic contributors to societal fairness (but see Flanagan & Kornbluh, 2017, and below).

Wealth Judgments

As expected (H2), Argentine adolescents preferred a more egalitarian distribution of wealth than the distribution they believe currently exists. This gap between ideal and actual judgments fits with a pattern observed internationally in more than 30 countries (ISSP, 2009), and in both U.S. adults (e.g., Norton & Ariely, 2011) and adolescents (Arsenio & Willems, 2017; Flanagan & Kornbluh, 2017). Although this preference for a more ideal resource distribution is widespread (Arsenio, 2018), it is currently unclear whether the *magnitude* of the gap between preferred ideal and perceived actual ratings is also important. For example, the greater gap in Argentine adolescents' wealth ratings ($M = 1.53$; i.e., M ideal = 4.17 – M perceived actual = 2.64) than the gap observed by Flanagan and Kornbluh (2017) for U.S. adolescents' ($M = 1.14$; M ideal = 4.15 – M perceived actual = 3.00) might reflect Argentine adolescents' heightened dissatisfaction with their more extreme levels of national inequality. Examining the extent and potential meaning of international differences in the gaps between ideal and perceived actual resource distributions will be an important direction for future research.

There is also some indirect support for the expectation (H1) that Argentine adolescents would *underestimate* the actual level of inequality in their country. To our knowledge, data for graphing national economic data into summary pyramid form (see Figure 1) are not currently available for Argentina (Niehues, 2014). Yet, Argentine adolescents' *estimate* for their national economic distribution was more egalitarian than the *actual* distribution of income in the U.S. (Niehues, 2014). Given this fact, and the documented more extreme 20/20 income ratio (top 20%/bottom 20%) of 17.8 in Argentina compared with 8.4 in the U.S. (United Nations Development Program, 2015), it seems reasonable to assert that Argentine adolescents, like their adolescent peers (Arsenio & Willems, 2017) and adults (Norton & Ariely, 2011) in the U.S., are underestimating the actual level of economic inequality in Argentina.

Societal Fairness, Wealth Judgments, and Noneconomic Measures

Another important finding is that, as expected (H3), participants' judgments about the fairness of their society were related to their conceptions about how existing societal resources are distributed and to their other, noneconomic judgments. Adolescents who thought the existing economic resources were relatively more egalitarian not only judged that Argentine society is fairer, but had higher levels of political trust, more positive general and personal BJW, and judged the existing economic distribution as fairer. Although theoretically expected, these findings linking societal fairness with economic and other judgments are less common than might be assumed. For example, Norton et al. (2014) found that Australian adults' economic judgments were mostly unrelated to policy preferences, and Arsenio and Willems (2017) found no connections between economic and noneconomic societal judgments in U.S. adolescents (see, also, Bartels, 2005; Kuziemko, Norton, Saez, & Stantcheva, 2015).

The present findings were, however, quite similar to Flanagan and Kornbluh's (2017) results when they asked U.S. adolescents to assess existing, ideal, and likely future distributions of societal resources. Overall, U.S. adolescents who viewed current resource distribution as less equitable judged that U.S. society is less fair and government is less likely to be responsive to needs of its citizens; findings that closely parallel what we found for Argentine youth. In a related vein, Niehues (2014) found that higher national levels of *perceived* economic inequality (using the Evans et al., 1992 measure) in 30 participating countries were related to increased preferences for policies targeting economic inequality, whereas *objective* economic measures were unrelated to policy preferences. Collectively, studies using the Evans et al. (1992) and revised Evans and Kelley (2017) wealth measures (including this one) have typically found links between economic perceptions and other societal fairness and policy judgments, whereas studies using the Norton and Ariely (2011) measure have not. This difference is consistent with Eriksson and Simpson's (2012) findings that Norton and Ariely's (2011) quintile measure for wealth is too cognitively demanding and, consequently, underestimates the full extent of individuals' economic understanding.

Argentine adolescents' noneconomic conceptions were also related to their judgments of economic and overall societal fairness. As expected (H4), participants with more positive BJW and greater political trust judged that the distribution of economic resources is

more egalitarian and fairer, and that Argentine society overall is fairer (eight of nine correlations were significant). Results from the final step of the regression analyses indicate that general and personal BJW, and political trust, as well as most economic judgments, were all unique, independent predictors of adolescents' views of societal fairness. Yet, there was also clear overlap between most of the noneconomic and economic judgments. Higher levels of political trust and general GWB, in particular, were related to judgments of more egalitarian and fairer wealth distribution. One possible explanation for these findings is that adolescents' emerging understanding of how equitably and fairly societal wealth is distributed might affect their subsequent trust in political institutions and even their perceptions of whether the world in general is fair. However, given the correlational nature of this study, other causal explanations are equally plausible (e.g., non-economic conceptions leading to economic judgments), underscoring the need for longitudinal research to clarify the underlying causal pathways involved.

Although our results indicate that Argentine adolescents who view society as fairer have more positive views of the government, existing wealth distribution, and higher BJW, the likely developmental consequences of these positive conceptions of societal fairness are far from certain. Some studies, for example, have found that conceptions of greater societal fairness are related to increased community connectedness (Flanagan et al., 2014), increased perceptions of governmental responsiveness (Flanagan & Kornbluh, 2017), and more academic plans for the future (Arsenio & Willems, 2017). Yet other research (Godfrey et al., 2017) indicates that adolescents' greater beliefs in societal fairness were linked with *immediate* benefits, including higher self-esteem and reduced behavioral problems, but then predicted *worsening trajectories* of these outcomes over the next couple of years (see also Harding & Sibley, 2013). To date, it is still unclear whether positive views of society, especially in the context of high levels of underlying inequality, play a mostly palliative role (Jost et al., 2003)—reducing distress but at the cost of reinforcing the status quo—or whether these positive views sometimes promote relatively adaptive efforts to cope with effects of inequality.

School SES and Age-Related Differences

In addition to the findings involving the connection *among* variables, the study yielded age and SES differences *within* individual variables. In general, and as expected (H5), older Argentine adolescents had more negative conceptions of their society, though the magnitude of the age differences was relatively small (with all age-related $\eta_{ps}^2 < .04$). Specifically, older adolescents had more negative views about the overall fairness of their society, less political trust, and lower general BJW. Contrary to expectations, however, youths' judgments regarding the actual economic distributions or its fairness did not differ by age, even as older adolescents did ideally prefer a more egalitarian economic distribution.

These age-related findings are consistent with developmental studies showing increasingly accurate and more complex understandings regarding a number of societal issues across the adolescent years (e.g., Flanagan, 2013; Smetana & Villalobos, 2009). As Argentine adolescents approach adulthood, their increasing cognitive abilities and concerns with immediate life choices are likely to interact with their fuller understanding of the depth of their na-

tion's inequality. As a result, older adolescents are likely to develop more negative societal views than their younger peers. Surprisingly, however, studies with U.S. adolescents (Arsenio & Willems, 2017; Flanagan & Kornbluh, 2017) have not found this pattern of increasingly negative societal conceptions in older adolescents. Whether this is attributable to differences in national economic inequality—high in the U.S. but significantly higher in Argentina (United Nations Development Program, 2015)—or some other factor is not yet clear.

Our findings also include a consistent pattern of SES differences; adolescents from lower SES schools had more positive societal views. Specifically, compared with their higher SES peers, adolescents from lower SES schools: (a) judged that existing economic resources in Argentina were divided in a more egalitarian manner, (b) preferred a less egalitarian ideal resource distribution, (c) had higher levels of political trust and general BJW, and (d) had more positive views of the fairness of Argentina as a society. As with age-related findings, these differences were modest in magnitude (all $\eta_{ps}^2 < .05$).

These SES-related differences fit with predictions based on system justification theory. As Jost et al. (2003) have argued, lower SES individuals and groups sometimes have relatively more favorable views of societal fairness due to a motivated desire or need to view the existing system as legitimate and stable; this, in turn, works to reduce personal distress. For example, Flanagan et al. (2014) found that, compared with their higher SES peers, U.S. adolescents from lower SES communities were more likely to explain economic outcomes as a consequence of personal effort than larger societal factors (see also Arsenio & Willems, 2017; Bullock & Limbert, 2003, for related findings). Thus, system justification may increase a sense of personal control while simultaneously obscuring structural factors that undermine the exercise of that sense of self-efficacy.

Although similar processes might be involved in the present findings, there may also be additional influences unique to very recent Argentine history. The adolescents in this study grew up during a 12-year period in which Argentina's populist government endorsed a strong redistributive rhetoric, while also expanding social welfare spending, cutting unemployment from 20% to under 10%, and the national poverty rate from almost 50% to under 30% (Devereux, 2015). Consequently, lower SES Argentine adolescents' societal views may go beyond the general tendency to justify the status quo. Indeed, in spite of the continued inequality and poverty, youth's views of their society may also have been informed by the relative economic improvements, which in turn gave further credibility to the empowering populist and redistributive political discourse. Notably, it was low-SES youth who expressed the highest trust in the government—a populist government, for as long as they knew one. Given the potential embeddedness of youth's economic views within specific and ever-changing societal and political systems, it is quite likely that the views of Argentine youth about their economic system and its social justice implications will change in the next decade.

Limitations

A number of study limitations need to be acknowledged, beginning with the correlational nature of the present study. Longitudinal research is needed to provide a better understanding of the

causal pathways linking judgments of societal fairness and its economic and noneconomic correlates. For example, does adolescents' daily exposure to economic inequality lead to subsequent judgments regarding societal fairness, political trust, BJW, or do judgments of societal fairness come first—or even simultaneously? Longitudinal research would also help address whether positive views of societal fairness primarily serve a palliative system-justifying role, or, given Argentina's recent history, whether positive societal views are partially justified.

Future research should also explore adolescents' underlying reasoning for their various judgments. For example, when Arsenio and Willems (2017) assessed adolescents' explanations for their views of societal fairness, economic fairness emerged as important but not as the primary concern. Whether this would be true for Argentine adolescents, who experience greater economic inequality, is not currently known. More generally, a growing body of social-cognitive research has shown that the utility of examining adolescents' reasoning regarding societal events (Arsenio, 2015; Smetana & Villalobos, 2009). Finally, more comparable studies with adolescents are needed both in other Latin American countries and worldwide. Little is known, for example, about differences in how adolescents from more and less economically egalitarian countries think about economic and noneconomic aspects of societal fairness.

Conclusions

Despite these limitations, the present study makes important contributions to our understanding of several major economic and noneconomic correlates of adolescents' perceptions of the fairness of their society. Despite higher levels of inequality in Argentina than in the U.S., Argentine youth, like their U.S. peers, appear to underestimate actual resource inequality while still preferring a much more egalitarian ideal resource distribution. In addition, however, Argentine adolescents who viewed societal resources as being more equitably distributed also perceived their society as fairer, trusted political institutions more, and had stronger beliefs that the world—both in general and for them personally—is fairer. In contrast, related research involving U.S. adolescents has found more mixed evidence regarding the links between views of societal fairness and other economic and noneconomic judgments (e.g., Arsenio & Willems, 2017; Flanagan & Kornbluh, 2017). The present findings strengthen the claim that, at least in more unequal countries, adolescents' views of societal fairness are clearly connected to their views of other economic and noneconomic factors.

The implications of these findings are, at the moment, unclear. On one hand, the relatively strong connections among adolescents' conceptions of societal and economic fairness suggests that recent improvements in Argentine economic circumstance (e.g., reduced poverty rates) have not affected adolescents' attention to the different factors that can contribute to perceived societal fairness. Argentine adolescents and their parents have experienced so many economic and political upheavals in recent decades that it seems unlikely that their concerns about economic and societal fairness will diminish anytime soon. In this view, Argentine youth's current understanding of how economic, political, and societal forces interact could subsequently lead to an upward spiral in levels of civic engagement and improvements in social institutions.

This optimistic picture, however, needs to be qualified by other emerging studies described above. Although adolescents' conceptions of greater societal fairness are initially linked with positive outcomes (e.g., increased academic plans [Arsenio & Willems, 2017], and community connectedness [Flanagan et al., 2014]), recent longitudinal research (Godfrey et al., 2017) suggests that, over time, greater perceptions of societal fairness may lead to increased behavior problems and declines in self-esteem (see also Harding & Sibley, 2013). Moreover, the relatively positive societal views of lower SES youth in this study compared with their middle and upper SES peers could reflect either recent economic improvements in Argentina or, alternatively, could stem from higher levels of system justification (Jost, 2017) typically found in lower SES adult samples. Determining the ultimate consequences of adolescents' views of societal fairness in Argentina, as in the U.S., will require more fine-grained longitudinal research. The present study, we believe, highlights some of the specific patterns that are likely to prove especially fruitful for future research projects.

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