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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Political Psychology

A cross-cultural test of competing hypotheses about system justification using data from 42 nations

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Abstract

System justification theory (SJT) is a thriving field of research, wherein the primary questions revolve around why individuals and groups are motivated to see the systems they depend on as just, fair, and legitimate. This article seeks to answer how accurate the postulates of SJT are when compared to competing self-interest claims of social identity and social dominance theory. We addressed the ongoing debates among proponents of each theory by identifying who, when, and why individuals decide to system-justify. We used data comprised of 24,009 participants nested within 42 countries. Multilevel models largely supported the competing claims of social dominance and social identity theories over SJT. The most robust findings were: (1) greater objective socioeconomic status (SES) was associated with greater system justification; (2) the consistent positive relationship between subjective SES and system justification was partially mediated by life satisfaction; and (3) both ends of the political spectrum were willing to system-justify more when the political party they favored was in power. The results presented are used to discuss both the current state and the future directions for system justification research.

KEYWORDS
political psychology, social dominance theory, social identity theory, social psychology, system justification theory

INTRODUCTION

System justification theory (SJT) proposes that individuals are motivated to see the systems in which they belong (societal, political, economic), and the corresponding status quo, as just, fair, and legitimate (Jost & Banaji, 1994). In stark contrast to many of the already developed self-interest-based intergroup relational theories, SJT (Jost, 2019, 2020; Jost et al., 2002, 2013, 2023; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003) argues that the motive to system-justify can sometimes be at odds with other self- and group-interest-justifying motivations, such as ego- and group-justifications [for the disadvantaged]. To this end, SJT posits that individuals have a desire not only to hold favorable attitudes about themselves (ego-justification) and the group to which they belong (group-justification) but also to hold positive attitudes about the overarching social structure in which they are embedded, and to which they may find themselves obligated (system-justification, Jost, 2019).

SJT was developed to build on and integrate existing intergroup relations theoretical frameworks, including social identity theory, self-categorization theory (SIT & SCT, Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), and social dominance theory (SDT, Sidanius & Pratto, 2001), while also incorporating cognitive dissonance theory and just-world theorizing (Jost et al., 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). SJT puts forth various postulates identifying circumstances when individuals would be most likely motivated to system-justify. Uniquely, SJT differentiates itself from the ego/group-interest claims of SIT and SDT proposing that system-justifying motivations may not always align with personal or group interests, particularly for the disadvantaged. Jost (2020) explains that for modern-day dominance hierarchies, this leads to a majority of individuals/groups (near the bottom) having to consciously, and at times unconsciously, seek stronger justifying narratives that inadvertently perpetuate their own subjugation—"including narratives about the legitimacy of hierarchy, inequality, and exploitation" (p. 3).

Comparatively, SIT and its extension SCT were proposed as an alternative to individualistic and reductionistic theories of intergroup relations (Turner et al., 1987). SIT emphasizes the psychological motivations and consequences of group membership in a social system, while SCT explains how and why individuals identify and act as part of a group, as opposed to focusing on individual and group-level characteristics. SIT's premise is that individuals support systems if they are perceived to be permeable, stable, and ultimately support their ego/group interests (Caricati & Owuamalam, 2020). SDT claims that social systems are structured as group-based hierarchies with a dominant group at the top and a negative reference group at the bottom. SDT argues that dominant group members recognize their material interests faster and more clearly than subordinate group members, (re)producing dominance hierarchies that align with their ego and group interests. SDT aligns with some of SIT's postulates that self- and group interests are prioritized over the system-justifying motive.[1] Both contrast with the more counter-intuitive claims of SJT that are the focus of this study (Pratto et al., 2013; Pratto & Stewart, 2012).

Our study aims to test the accuracy of four hypotheses made by SJT focusing on the influences of individual and societal differences in status, political ideology, economic inequality, and civil liberties on system justification. We will compare these hypotheses to counterclaims made by the competing intergroup theories of SIT/SCT and SDT. By doing so, we can extend our understanding of system-justifying motivations and explore where support for the status quo is strongest (Friesen et al., 2019; Jost & Burgess, 2000). Our study will investigate these competing hypotheses using a large, diverse dataset, aiming to descriptively map out how and when system justification

[1]But they differ with respect to the importance and stability of Social Dominance Orientation, a stable measure of individual differences according to SDT (Pratto et al., 2006), versus an epiphenomenal aspect of social identity according to SIT/SCT (Schmitt et al., 2003).

varies across cultures. This cross-cultural test will be the first of its kind to investigate the proposed associations between these three intergroup theories and system justification.

RATIONALE FOR HYPOTHESES

Status, freedom, and culture

Central to SJT's counter-intuitive claims stands the status-legitimacy hypothesis (Brandt, 2013; Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003), which argues that members of low-status and disadvantaged groups are more likely to perceive their social systems as legitimate and fair compared to high-status and advantaged counterparts under certain circumstances. To this end, Jost et al. (2004) state "people who are the most disadvantaged by the status quo … are the most likely to support, defend, and justify existing social systems, authorities, and outcomes" (p. 13). This argument builds on cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957): the more disadvantaged people are by a system, the harsher their experience of being disadvantaged contrasts with their motivation to believe that the system is just, and the more they, therefore, engage in system justification (Jost et al., 2004; Valdes, 2022). However, this cognitive dissonance-based mechanism of system justification has been a point of contention based on theoretical objections of Owuamalam et al. (2016).

Jost, Pelham, et al. (2003) argue that three specific social conditions will predispose disadvantaged individuals to most likely experience cognitive dissonance (the authors refer to these factors as the *liberal choice producing dissonance model*). According to Jost, these three factors are: (1) high levels of inequality, (2) belief in meritocracy, and (3) a democratic social and political system with high civil liberties that would make low-status disadvantaged individuals feel more responsible for their disadvantageous position (see Jost, 2019, 2020 for exceptions). The liberal choice producing dissonance model and its status-legitimacy hypothesis have sparked considerable debate within the system justification literature over the years due to mixed results. Some studies have found supporting evidence (Henry & Saul, 2006; Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003), others have found contradictory evidence (Brandt et al., 2020; Owuamalam & Spears, 2020), and some have reported a combination of the two (Brandt, 2013; Buchel et al., 2020; Kesberg et al., 2024).[2]

Li, Yang, et al. (2020) posited that a contributing factor to the empirical inconsistencies surrounding the status-legitimacy hypothesis was a failure to separate status into an objective and subjective measure. Objective indicators of status include educational level and income (Kraus et al., 2009). Subjective socioeconomic status (SES) is measured by an individual's self-perceived status compared to others (Anderson et al., 2012). These have been found to relate to system justification differently in that subjective SES has a positive relationship and objective SES sometimes has a negative relationship (Li, Yang, et al., 2020).

The most robust finding contradicting the liberal choice producing dissonance model is that greater subjective SES is consistently positively associated with greater system justification (Brandt et al., 2020; Davidai, 2018; Li, Yang, et al., 2020; Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Liu, et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2016; Zimmerman & Reyna, 2013). We theorize that this is due to the social comparisons that are embedded within subjective SES influencing one's psychological well-being about their positionality, in turn influencing one's perception of system legitimacy. On the other hand, status-legitimacy effects (i.e., a negative relationship between SES and system justification) have almost exclusively occurred when an objective measure of SES was used (Henry & Saul, 2006; Jost, 2020; Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003; Li, Yang, et al., 2020; Sengupta

[2]See Jost (2019, 2020) and Jost et al. (2023) for rebuttals.

et al., 2015; Whyte & Maocan, 2010), albeit inconsistently. This highlights how measuring SES in either objective or subjective terms can complexify status-legitimacy effects.

While the liberal choice producing dissonance model attempts to explain the societal factors that are likely to induce status-legitimacy effects through the process of cognitive dissonance, its premise focuses on a form of dissonance largely experienced by Westernized independent selves but not for those with interdependent selves (Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Kitayama et al., 2004; Kokkoris & Kühnen, 2013). There have been several research programs that have found evidence of status-legitimacy effects in countries that contradicted Jost's (2015) societal theorizing for SJT. For example, status-legitimacy effects have been found in countries that do not subscribe to a capitalist discourse on meritocracy, have few civil liberties, are authoritarian, [post]-socialistic, and collectivistic (Cichocka & Jost, 2014; Kim et al., 2022; Li, Yang, et al., 2020; Whyte & Maocan, 2010; Zhang et al., 2022).

An alternative perspective to understanding the system-justifying motivation for the disadvantaged within non-Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD, Henrich et al., 2010) societies, is the self-interest acquiescence model, which the present authors use to argue that [low objective SES] individuals will submit to/accept a powerful system that has a history of benefitting its citizens and providing them with no apparent cognitive alternatives. Objective self-interest may sometimes push people from majority world societies to support, legitimize, and justify their home country's system if it has a recent history of reducing extreme poverty, as is the case for China, India, and Vietnam, for example (Asai et al., 2019). Consistent with our Self-Interest Acquiescence postulates, Owuamalam et al. (2023) argue that cultural group norms relating to social identity help to explain the relationship between objective SES and system justification. They state that cultural norms in non-WEIRD collectivistic nations (compared to individualistic ones) create a sense of obligation for objectively low SES individuals who strongly identify with their national ingroup to accept the hierarchical arrangement and therefore acquiesce in favor of the status quo (see Owuamalam et al., 2018, 2019; Rubin et al., 2023 for further group-level disadvantage arguments).

Political ideology

Within intergroup relations, political ideology has been critical in categorizing and understanding individual and group-based differences in values and behaviors (Jussim et al., 2016). Interest within the psychological literature on the moral and psychological differences between the left and right dates back to Adorno et al. (1950) and is the basis for SJT's argument that political ideologies are a form of *motivated social cognition* (Jost, 2021). SJT posits that the left–right ideological distinction is influential in assessing who is more likely to support dominance-based hierarchies versus criticize the societal status quo. From SJT's perspective, the left has been associated with system criticism and embracing social change, while the right rejects such things. The system-justifying motivation is believed to coincide with those who hold more conservative social, political, and economic values (Jost, 2021).

Conversely, SDT argues that there is a dynamic relationship between one's political ideological beliefs and a willingness to support the status quo (Sidanius & Pratto, 2004). Simply put, SDT posits the left is capable of supporting the system but only if that system coincides with their political/social group interests. Liu et al. (2008) showed that Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) increased among supporters of a previously subordinate (and more progressive) opposition group after winning a national election, whereas supporters of the formerly dominant party did not experience a significant decrease in SDO, suggesting support for the self-interest hypothesis of SDT and SIT for the previous subordinate group gaining power but dissonance processes for the previously high-status group trying to come to terms with losing power.

Friesen et al. (2019) note that in many countries, there are frequent shifts of governmental power between rival political parties, sometimes punctuated by violent overthrows. This type of situation makes the ideologies of both the system and those that are motivated to either legitimize it or challenge it highly dynamic (Liu et al., 2014; Martorana et al., 2005; Szabó & Lönnqvist, 2021). Moreover, recent research has identified that the relationship between [political] ideology and system justification is dependent on perceptions about the ideological beliefs of the status quo (leftwing- vs. rightwing political status quo). This implies that those who are willing to system justify at one point in time may not at another (Beattie et al., 2022; Langer et al., 2020). This dynamic position is consistent with previous researchers who argue that both left- and right-leaning individuals will advocate for social change but in directions that coincide with their individual and group interests (Liekefett & Becker, 2022).

Societal inequality

While extreme poverty has been declining globally in recent decades (Hasell, 2022), economic inequality—broadly defined as the wealth gap between the richest and poorest parts of a national population—has been on the rise (Farhat, 2020; Messerli et al., 2019; OECD, 2020). SJT argues that inequality can produce or exacerbate the system justification motivation (Jost et al., 2004; Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003) for the [dis]advantaged, while simultaneously increasing the conflict between ego/group motivations for the disadvantaged. Therefore, the motive to system justify is assumed to be strongest in contexts, in which "inequality in the system is made especially salient" (Jost et al., 2015, p. 322). According to Brandt et al. (2020), inequality creates an impression for the disadvantaged that their place in society is not within their control. In order to combat this impression, Jost (2020) claims that "when people feel extremely dependent on a given social system—and therefore experience their world as unpredictable and uncontrollable—they should be more strongly motivated to defend and justify it" (p. 141).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) would disagree with the mechanisms put forward by SJT and argue that inequality is likely to be perceived as unfair when boundaries between wealth groups are impermeable, the social system is unstable, and the wealth gap reflects illegitimate differences. Therefore, SIT's social identity model of system attitudes (Owuamalam et al., 2018, 2019, 2023) posits individuals will support and justify an [un]equal social system because they hope to maintain their (advantaged) status or improve upon their (disadvantaged) status through social mobility. Similarly, SDT argues that individuals from unequal systems have a desire to maintain a hierarchy that favors their own group. SDT posits that there is an ideological asymmetry between status groups, where high-status individuals/groups would be more likely to support unequal systems since it aligns with self/group interests when compared to low-status individuals/groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 2004).

HYPOTHESES

Individual-level—Objective and subjective SES

H1A

According to the status-legitimacy hypothesis and its liberal choice producing dissonance model postulates (Brandt, 2013; Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003), SJT predicts that the disadvantaged will system-justify to a greater extent than the advantaged in a society due to experiencing psychological conflict (i.e., dissonance) that they wish to implicitly or explicitly combat.

Therefore, H1A hypothesizes that objectively low SES individuals are more likely to system-justify than objectively high SES individuals.

H1B

Conversely, SDT and SIT predict that objectively high SES individuals are far less likely to reject the status quo and system-justify more than the objectively low SES because justifying a system is more in line with high-status individuals' personal and group interests (Sidanius & Pratto, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, H1B counter-hypothesizes that objectively high SES individuals will be more likely to system-justify more than objectively low SES individuals.

H1C

Finally, for subjective SES, we postulate that the positive relationship between subjective SES and system justification seen consistently throughout the literature is due to the psychological process of self/ingroup interests and social comparisons (Valdes et al., 2023) and not status-legitimacy effects. We believe perceiving oneself (subjective SES) as higher [than others] on a social hierarchy may enhance one's feeling of perceived life satisfaction and well-being, which then acts as a rationalization for the individual to view the system as legitimate, just, and fair. Therefore, we hypothesize that the relationship between subjective SES and system justification will be mediated by life satisfaction.

Individual-level—Political ideology

H2A

SJT predicts that the system-justifying motive aligns more with conservative values and that individuals who hold more conservative social, economic, and political beliefs will be more likely to system-justify (Jost, 2021). Therefore, H2A hypothesizes that those who are more conservative (right-leaning) would system-justify more than those who are more liberal (left-leaning).

H2B

Conversely, SDT and SIT argue that the system-justifying motive from a political ideological standpoint is a dynamic construct, influenced by who is in power at the time when an individual is asked to legitimize/justify a system (Liekefett & Becker, 2022; Liu et al., 2008; Martorana et al., 2005; Szabó & Lönnqvist, 2021). Therefore, the relationship between system justification and political ideology is ultimately tied to self/group interests. According to this perspective, liberals will system-justify more when liberals (left-leaning) are in control of the system and conservatives (right-leaning) will system-justify more when conservatives are running the system. Therefore, H3B hypothesizes that both conservatives and liberals will system-justify more in a country only when the political party in power aligns with their interests. Specifically, the relationship between political ideology and system justification is positive in societies where a right-leaning party is in power but negative in those where a left-leaning party is in power.

Country-level—Economic (in)equality

H3A

According to SJT when low-status individuals/groups are exposed to unequal environments, they come to realize that they are unlikely to have substantial influence over economic redistribution (Henry & Saul, 2006). As a result, they seek rationalizations that attribute economic inequalities to fair and justifiable reasons. This process leads them to develop a sense of dependence on a system that is permeable and likely to be their primary avenue for transcending their disadvantageous position. To this end, Jost (2020) claims that "when people feel extremely dependent on a given social system—and therefore experience their world as unpredictable and uncontrollable—they should be more strongly motivated to defend and justify it" (p. 141). Therefore, H3A hypothesizes that societies with greater levels of inequality will possess greater levels of system justification when compared to countries that are more equal.

H3B

Conversely, SIT postulates that inequality is likely to be perceived as unfair when (1) boundaries between wealth groups are impermeable, (2) the social system is unstable, and (3) the wealth gap reflects illegitimate differences. This framework of SIT has been expanded to include the social identity model of system attitudes (Owuamalam et al., 2018, 2019, 2023) which argues that the willingness to system-justify is almost always coinciding with self/group interests for both disadvantaged and advantaged individuals. The social identity model of system attitudes claims that individuals will support and justify an [un]equal social system because they hope to maintain (advantaged) or improve (disadvantaged) their status through existing channels in the long run. Therefore, both the disadvantaged and advantaged will system-justify only if the system is considered to be permeable and stable (e.g., hope for future ingroup status according to the social identity model of system attitudes). Therefore, H3B hypothesizes that the relationship between system justification and inequality will be moderated by a country's level of social mobility. According to the social identity model of system attitudes (and consistent with SIT), the relationship between inequality and system justification will be more positive for nations with higher levels of social mobility and vice versa for those with lesser levels of social mobility.

Country-level—Freedom/civil liberties

H4A

Jost, Pelham, et al. (2003) theorize that in societies with more civil liberties, protesting against the status quo when it is not serving your interests is not as risky as it would be in societies with less civil liberties. According to the liberal choice producing dissonance model (Valdes et al., 2023), dissonance would most likely be elicited when individuals feel that they have a say in how the system is constituted. In countries with high civil liberties, the act of not protesting can be even more dissonance-producing because individuals have the freedom to reject the status quo and thus more personal responsibility. Jost and Hunyady (2005) argue that people aim to reduce psychological conflict, and the system-justifying motive acts as a method to reduce ideological and psychological conflict in countries with high civil liberties. Therefore, H4A hypothesizes that there will be greater levels of system justification in countries with greater civil liberties.

H4B

Conversely, Brandt (2013) found that individuals from societies whose governments tended to be more restrictive and possessed low levels of civil liberties were more likely to system-justify. This coincides with the self-interest acquiesce model (Valdes et al., 2023), which postulates that individuals will submit/accept a powerful system, especially when there are no apparent alternatives. Therefore, H4B counter-hypothesizes that societies with more authoritarian and restrictive governments that provide their citizens with few civil liberties will possess greater levels of system justification when compared to societies with greater civil liberties.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

As we are using an existing data source, the sample size was determined prior to the conceptualization of this study. The rationale for the sample size via power analysis and specific details on the sampling process can be found in Romano et al. (2021). Researchers recruited 24,009 participants from 42 nations using stratified quota sampling for age and gender with the intention for each nation to be demographically representative ($M_{age} = 36.5$ years, $SD_{age} = 12.3$; 50% female, Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, China, Columbia, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Turkey, Venezuela, United Kingdom, and United States). Each country contained between 427 to 1126 participants (an average of 571.6 per country). See Table S1 for demographics per country.

Participants were recruited through the Harris Panel, a global panel curated by the international polling firm Nielsen, that encompasses >10 million individuals. Participants were invited by email or were given access to the survey link through the local panel provider portal, where surveys were completed from December 6, 2018 to January 24, 2019. Surveys were given in the dominant language of each country, except for three African countries by the recommendations of local collaborators, where it was advised that English would be most appropriate. Non-English translations of the survey were performed by a coalition of different researchers through the committee method (Brislin, 1980) or back-translation (Behlin & Law, 2000).

Preregistration

In order to restrict researcher degrees of freedom and improve transparency and study planning using secondary data (van den Akker et al., 2021), hypotheses, design, methods, analysis plan, inference criteria, and data exclusion were preregistered at https://osf.io/dr5sg. Doing so prevented authors from making data-driven research decisions and hypothesizing after the results were known (HARKing, Rubin, 2017).

Instruments

System justification scale

In accordance with the recommendations of previous research investigating the interpretability and generalizability of the general system justification scale cross-culturally (Vesper

et al., 2022), the present research used a brief version of the system justification scale (Kay & Jost, 2003), in which items that tapped national attachment, and two reverse-coded items were excluded. The brief system justification scale included the four items: "In general, I find society to be fair," "In general (my country's) political system operates as it should," "Everyone in my country has a fair shot at wealth and happiness," and "(My country's) society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve;" where each country name was inserted into the parentheses. Responses were given on a range of 1 (*Disagree completely*) to 7 (*Agree completely*). A mean system justification score was calculated for each participant, which formed a highly reliable scale ($\alpha = .85$). This brief measure has been consistently used in several recent cross-cultural research domains that have been interested in understanding system-justifying beliefs across cultures (Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Khan, et al., 2018; Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Liu, et al., 2018).

Subjective SES

Subjective SES was assessed using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective SES (Adler et al., 2000): "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being people who are the most well off in society, and 1 being the people who are the least well off, where would you describe your position?" This validated indicator of perceived status has been used in both large-scale cross-cultural and single-country tests of status-legitimacy effects (Brandt, 2013; Brandt et al., 2020; Davidai, 2018; Li, Yang, et al., 2020; Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Liu, et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2016; Zimmerman & Reyna, 2013).

Objective SES

Objective SES was assessed with the following two empirically distinct items[3]: "What is your highest level of education you have completed?" where responses ranged from 1 (*Elementary school*) to 6 (*Graduate school or higher*), and "If you don't mind us asking, what is your approximate household income (before tax)? Please complete whichever box you find easiest to answer" where participants entered a value in one or more of the following: daily income, weekly income, monthly income, and annual income (see preregistration for more details on data cleaning and preparation). A variety of previous research has used both education and income (as well as a combination of the two) as objective indicators of status when assessing the diverse relationship between objective SES and system justification (Brandt, 2013; Henry & Saul, 2006; Jost, 2020; Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003; Li, Yang, et al., 2020; Sengupta et al., 2015; Valdes et al., 2023; Whyte & Maocan, 2010).

Political ideology

Political ideology was assessed with the following single item: "On political issues, where would you place yourself on a scale of 1–11, where 1 = strong conservative (*right-leaning*) and 11 = strong liberal (*left-leaning*)?" A single item of political ideology has been used quite consistently in the system justification literature and has been found to correlate strongly with other related indicators of political ideological beliefs (i.e., social and economic, Jost, 2021; Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003).

[3]We found that income and education have a small significant positive correlation ($r = .02$, $p < .01$) across the 42 countries, indicating that the two constructs are distinct (see Table S3).

Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction was assessed with the following two items (Diener et al., 1985): "All things considered, how satisfied are you these days with your life as a whole?" and "All things considered, how satisfied are you these days with your standard of living?" Responses were given on a scale from 1 (*Completely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*Completely satisfied*). A mean life satisfaction score was calculated for each participant, which formed a highly reliable scale ($\alpha = .84$). These indicators of life satisfaction have been used previously in large-scale and single country assessing the palliative effects of system justification on quality of life (Harding & Sibley, 2013; Li, Wu, & Kou, 2020; Rankin et al., 2009; Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Khan, et al., 2018).

Inequality

A nation's level of (in)equality at the time of data collection in 2018 was assessed using the World Bank's GINI index/coefficient, a measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income inequality or wealth inequality within a nation. Scores range from 0 (0%) indicating perfect equality, where everyone receives an equal share, to 100 (100%) indicating perfect inequality, where only one recipient or group of recipients receives the share (World Bank, 2018a). The GINI index has been used in a range of previous research interested in understanding simple main effects as well as cultural moderation via inequality on system justification (Brandt, 2013; Brandt et al., 2020; Napier & Jost, 2008; Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Liu, et al., 2018).

Social mobility

A nation's level of social mobility at the time of data collection in 2018 was assessed using the World Economic Forum's Global Social Mobility Index (WEF, 2018), a measure of the movement in aggregated personal circumstances either upwards or downwards in comparison to current and previous generations within a given nation. In other words, it assesses a nation's ability to provide opportunities for citizens to improve their social and economic status compared to previous generations. It looks at policies, practices, and institutions, enabling effective comparisons throughout regions and generations. The scores are broken down into determinants of social mobility within a nation: health, education, technology access, work opportunities, working conditions, fair wages, and lastly, social protection and inclusive institutions. Scores range from 0 (*no social mobility*) to 100 (*high social mobility*). To our knowledge, this is the first assessment within the system justification literature to use national-level objective social mobility instead of individual-level perceived social mobility.

Civil liberties

A nation's level of civil liberties at the time of data collection in 2018 was assessed using the Freedom House's Freedom in the World report where scores range from 1 (*Not free*) to 100 (*Free*). Freedom House rates people's access to political rights and civil liberties in 210 countries and territories through its annual Freedom in the World Report (Freedom House, 2018). Several research programs have used civil liberties when assessing the impact, a country's level

of freedom has on system justification for both simple main effects and cultural moderation (Brandt, 2013; Brandt et al., 2020; Caricati, 2017).

Political party in power

A nation's political party in power at the time of data collection in 2018 was assessed using the World Bank's database of political institutions, which is a measure of each country's presidential election from 1975 to 2020. Scores were 0 (*right*), 1 (*center*), and 2 (*left*). Right indicates a conservative political party, while left indicates a liberal political party. Center indicates a neutral political party (World Bank, 2018b). Among the 42 nations, 19 of them had a left-leaning political party in power, 15 had a right-leaning political party in power, and 8 had a political party in power that was in the center at the time of data collection. Previous research has used similar methods to assess the political makeup of those in power in a given country at different points in time (Badaan et al., 2018; Beattie et al., 2022; Langer et al., 2020; Szabó & Lönnqvist, 2021) and its influence on who is willing to rationalize, justify, and legitimize that nation's status quo.

Demographic variables

Age was assessed using the single item, "What is your age?" Gender was assessed using the single item, "What is your gender?" with two responses (*1* = *male*, *2* = *female*).

Data analysis

We use multilevel models to test hypotheses 1A–4B with participants nested within 42 countries. Directly observed predictor, mediating, moderating, and outcome variables are analyzed, controlling for age and gender in each model. Random variations in slopes for age and gender are allowed across countries in all models. Our approach examines individual variables within each country and how country-level features moderate these relationships. Cases were excluded that did not have valid data for all variables for a given analysis.

RESULTS

Exploratory preliminary analyses

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations at both individual and country levels are presented in Tables S2 and S3, respectively. Subjective SES and life satisfaction were both significantly positively correlated with system justification across all countries at the individual level. Objective SES (education and income) and political orientation had significant, yet diverse relationships with system justification, indicating cultural context influenced the linkage. At the country level, objective social mobility and the political party in power were significantly positively correlated with system justification. Conversely, inequality had a significant negative correlation with system justification. The relationship between a country's level of civil liberties and system justification was found to be nonsignificant.

In accordance with our preregistration, prior to performing multilevel models, both individual (level-1) and country-level predictors (level-2) were grand-mean centered. Appropriate centering of individual-level predictors is crucial for the interpretation of the results and

should be linked to substantive research questions (Gelman & Hill, 2006). It is worth noting that centering of our level-2 predictors/moderators (e.g., inequality, social mobility, civil liberties, and political party in power) is far less complex than the centering decisions at level-1, as it is only necessary to choose between the raw metric and grand-mean centering; group-mean centering is not a viable strategy because everyone of a given country shares the same value on the level-2 predictor/moderator, which would ultimately remove any cultural variation from these estimates.

Because all our questions are focused on individual (level-1) and cross-cultural differences (level-2) regarding the legitimacy of the status quo, grand-mean centering was more appropriate than group-mean centering. Furthermore, as Enders and Tofighi (2007) highlight when researchers are interested in examining a predictor's influence at two levels (individual and country), "it is necessary to decompose the predictor into a within- and a between-level component" (p. 130). They argue that the use of grand-mean centering is easiest for this intention since the centered scores under the grand-mean contain both within- and between-cluster variation, resulting in a regression slope that has a mixture of level-1 and level-2 association between X and Y (see Enders & Tofighi, 2007 for a more detailed account).

Confirmatory multilevel analyses

Multilevel linear regressions to test hypotheses H1A–H4B were performed using the lme4 (Bates et al., 2014) package within R statistical software (R Core Team, 2022). Models are shown in Tables 1–4. All tables presented below use the following Greek notation: level-1 residual variance (error variance) denoted with σ^2, level-two residual variance (variance of random intercepts) with τ_{00}, variance of level-1 residuals (variance of random slopes) with τ_{11}, and the correlation between the random intercept and slope with ρ_{01} (Snijders, 2005). Multilevel modelers recommend not ignoring the hierarchical structure within data by using OLS regressions even when ICCs for independent variables are low, as this would severely bias the estimates (Gelman & Hill, 2006).

Due to the preregistered nature of multilevel confirmatory hypothesis testing, we followed the recommendations of Barr et al. (2013). They suggest avoiding adhering to norms of non-confirmatory standards of multilevel modeling since the focus of confirmatory hypothesis testing is on the maximal random effects structure justified by the theoretical basis and preregistered design. This strategy allowed us to focus our analytical resources on directly testing our preregistered models. If modifications were necessary for a given preregistered multilevel model (i.e., nonconvergence), these were dealt with by progressively simplifying the random effects structure until convergence was reached. Any modifications to a model were reported in its respective subsection below.

Objective SES (H1A–H1B)

Table 1 presents the results of our multilevel model in which we included the introduction of level-1 predictors: objective SES (income and education) and covariates (age and gender). We allowed income and education to have random intercepts and slopes across countries for the linear effects, while simultaneously allowing our covariates age and gender to vary randomly across countries. The fixed effects of income ($\beta = .06$, $SE = .03$, $t = 2.20$, $p = .03$) and education ($\beta = .06$, $SE = .02$, $t = 3.32$, $p = .001$) were found to be positive and significant. These results indicate that greater levels of income and education are positively associated with system justification, providing support for H1B (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 Hypotheses 1A–B (random effects multilevel model predicting system justification using income and education).

	H1A and H1B		
Predictors	**Estimates**	**CI**	***p***
(Intercept)	3.56***	3.39 to 3.73	<.001
Income	.06*	.01 to .11	.028
Education	.06***	.02 to .09	.001
Gender	−.25***	−.30 to −.19	<.001
Age	.03	−.01 to .06	.089
Random effects			
σ^2	1.65		
$\tau_{00\ Country}$	.27		
$\tau_{11\ Country.Income}$	.02		
$\tau_{11\ Country.Education}$	.01		
$\tau_{11\ Country.Gender}$	.02		
$\tau_{11\ Country.Age}$	.01		
ρ_{01}	.41		
	.60		
	.24		
	−.07		
ICC	.17		
$N_{Country}$	42		
Observations	18,848		
Marginal R^2/Conditional R^2	.012/.180		

*$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$.

Subjective SES (H1C)

A multilevel mediation model was conducted using the mediation package (Tingley et al., 2014) to examine the mediating role of life satisfaction on the relationship between subjective SES and system justification across 42 countries. The analysis consisted of three paths: (a) the association between subjective SES and life satisfaction, (b) the association between life satisfaction and system justification, and (c′) the indirect effect of subjective SES on system justification through life satisfaction.

First, a multilevel regression model was run to examine the association between subjective SES and life satisfaction, while controlling for age and gender (path a). We also allowed subjective SES, age, and gender to vary randomly across all countries. The results indicated that subjective SES was positively associated with life satisfaction ($\beta = .39$, $SE = .02$, $t = 23.04$, $p < .001$). Second, a multilevel regression model was run to examine the association between life satisfaction and system justification, once again controlling for age and gender and allowing subjective SES, age, and gender to vary randomly across all countries (path b). The results indicated that life satisfaction was positively associated with system justification ($\beta = .43$, $SE = .01$, $t = 54.59$, $p < .001$). Third, the mediation package in R was used to test the indirect effect of subjective SES on system justification through life satisfaction with 1000 simulated samples (paths c and c′). The results indicated that subjective SES had a significant positive total effect on system justification when not accounting for life satisfaction (Total Effect = .43,

TABLE 2 Hypotheses 2A–B predicting system justification using political orientation and political party in power.

	H2A			H2B		
Predictors	**Estimates**	**CI**	***p***	**Estimates**	**CI**	***p***
(Intercept)	3.56***	3.38 to 3.73	<.001	3.52***	3.23 to 3.81	<.001
Political orientation	.01	−.04 to .06	.698	−.08*	−.15 to −.01	.044
Age	.02	−.01 to .06	.130	.02	−.01 to .06	.140
Gender	−.23***	−.29 to −.18	<.001	−.23***	−.29 to −.18	<.001
Political party in power: Center				.03	−.44 to .50	.890
Political party in power: Left				.06	−.31 to .43	.755
Political orientation: Center Political Party				.06	−.07 to .18	.374
Political orientation: Left Political Party				.16**	.06 to .26	.002
Random effects						
σ^2	1.63			1.63		
τ_{00}	$.31_{\text{Country}}$			$.30_{\text{Country}}$		
τ_{11}	$.02_{\text{Country.Political Orientation}}$			$.02_{\text{Country.Political Orientation}}$		
	$.01_{\text{Country.Age}}$			$.01_{\text{Country.Age}}$		
	$.02_{\text{Country.Gender}}$			$.02_{\text{Country.Gender}}$		
ρ_{01}	.40			.40		
	.23			.22		
	−.19			−.19		
ICC	.19			.18		
N	42_{Country}			42_{Country}		
Observations	23,833			23,833		
Marginal R^2/Conditional R^2	.007/.191			.010/.191		

Note: Greater scores of political orientation indicate higher liberalism (left-leaning).
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

95% CI = [.39, .46], $p < .001$), which was then reduced via the net effect of subjective SES on system justification by subtracting life satisfactions mediator effect (ADE = .30, 95% CI = [.27, .34], $p < .001$). Lastly, the average causal mediation effect was positive, indicating a significant indirect effect of subjective SES on system justification through life satisfaction (ACME = .12, 95% CI = [.11, .13], $p < .001$), providing support for H1C. The proportion of the effect of subjective SES on system justification that was mediated by life satisfaction was approximately 28% (Prop. Mediated = .28, 95% CI = [.25, .32], $p < .001$) (See Figure 1).

Political orientation (H2A–H2B)

Table 2 presents the results of multilevel models testing the relationship between political orientation and system justification (H2A) and the moderating role of a country's political

TABLE 3 Hypotheses 3A–B predicting system justification using inequality (GINI) and social mobility.

	H3A			H3B		
Predictors	**Estimates**	**CI**	***p***	**Estimates**	**CI**	***p***
(Intercept)	3.56***	3.39 to 3.74	<.001	3.36***	3.08 to 3.64	<.001
GINI	−.14	−.30 to .03	.098	−.07	−.31 to .18	.598
Age	.02	−.01 to .06	.164	.02	−.01 to .06	.157
Gender	−.24***	−.29 to −.18	<.001	−.24***	−.29 to −.18	<.001
Social mobility: Medium				.03	−.38 to .44	.897
Social mobility: High				.56*	.02 to 1.10	.041
GINI: Social mobility medium				.22	−.17 to .60	.267
GINI: Social mobility high				.15	−.45 to .75	.620
Random effects						
σ^2	1.65			1.65		
τ_{00}	$.35_{Country}$			$.26_{Country}$		
τ_{11}	$.01_{Country.Age}$			$.01_{Country.Age}$		
	$.02_{Country.Gender}$			$.02_{Country.Gender}$		
ρ_{01}	.37			.35		
	−.16			−.10		
ICC	.18			.15		
N	$42_{Country}$			$42_{Country}$		
Observations	23,885			23,885		
Marginal R^2/Conditional R^2	.017/.194			.040/.188		

*$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$.

party in power (H2B). Model H2A includes political orientation and covariates, age, and gender as level-1 predictors with random intercepts and slopes for political orientation, age, and gender across countries. We found that the effect of political orientation on system justification was not statistically significant ($\beta = .01$, $SE = .03$, $t = .40$, $p = .69$), providing no support for H2A.

In model H2B, we then tested the moderating role of a country's political party in power on the relationship between political orientation and system justification. Results indicated that in countries where a right-leaning party is in power (reference category), the estimated effect of political orientation on system justification was negative and significant ($\beta = -.08$, $SE = .03$, $t = -1.88$, $p = .04$). Conversely, in countries with a left-leaning party in power, the estimated effect of political orientation (simple slope) on system justification was positive and significant ($\beta = .08$, $SE = .03$, $t = 2.50$, 95% CI = [.02, .15], $p = .03$). Taken together, these findings provide support for H2B.[4] A significant interaction effect was found between political orientation and left-leaning governments ($\beta = .16$, $SE = .05$, $t = 3.10$, $p < .001$). Simple slopes are depicted in Figure 2.

[4]During preregistration, our inference criteria for H2B was reversely coded. A positive fixed effect would imply that when right-leaning parties are in power, those who are more liberal would exhibit greater system justification, which was the opposite of what we were theorizing.

TABLE 4 Hypotheses 4A–B predicting system justification using a countries level of freedom.

	H4A and H4B		
Predictors	**Estimates**	**CI**	***p***
(Intercept)	3.56***	3.38 to 3.74	<.001
Freedom	.09	−.07 to .25	.294
Age	.02	−.01 to .06	.158
Gender	−.24***	−.29 to −.18	<.001
Random effects			
σ^2	1.65		
$\tau_{00\ Country}$	.32		
$\tau_{11\ Country.Age}$	.01		
$\tau_{11\ Country.Gender}$	.02		
ρ_{01}	.31		
	−.08		
ICC	.18		
$N_{Country}$	42		
Observations	23,885		
Marginal R^2/Conditional R^2	.011/.187		

***$p < .001$.

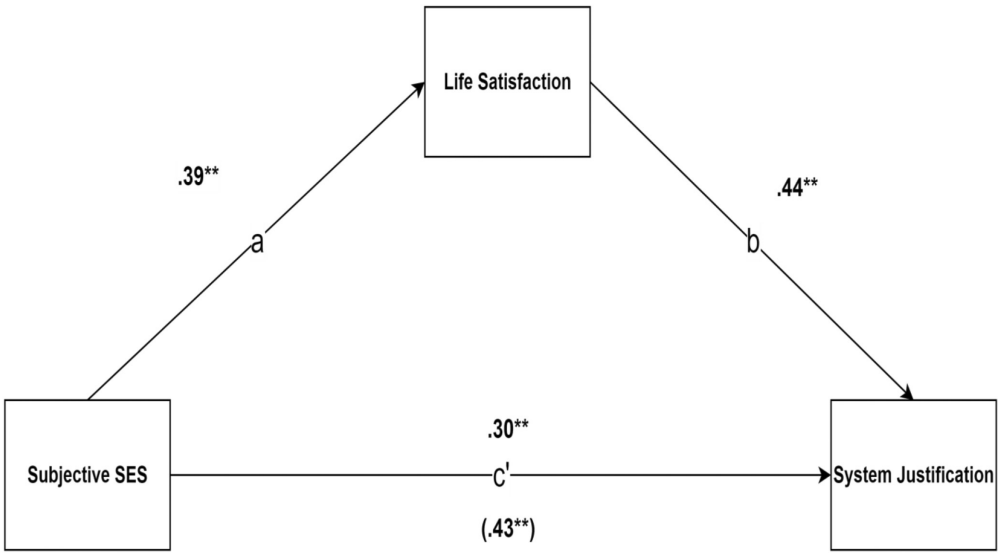

FIGURE 1 Multilevel mediation of subjective SES and system justification through life satisfaction. All coefficients have been standardized.

Inequality (H3A–H3B)

Table 3 presents the results of multilevel models testing the relationship between a country's level of inequality and system justification (H3A), and then the moderating role of a country's level of social mobility (H3B, Figure 3). Model H3A included a random intercept across

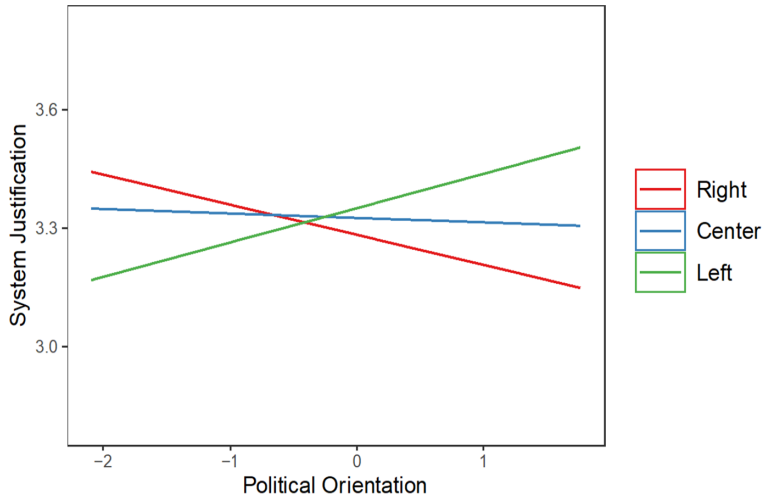

FIGURE 2 System justification by political orientation and the political party in power (H2B).

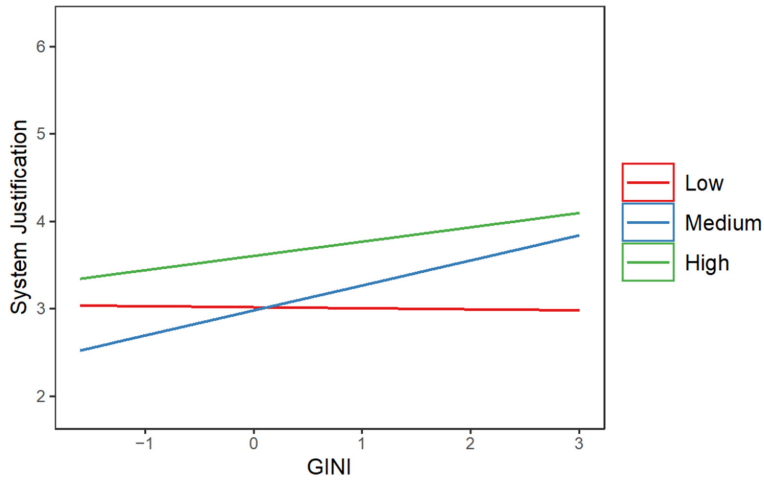

FIGURE 3 System justification by a country's level of (in)equality (GINI) and social mobility (low, medium, and high).

countries, level-one covariates (age and gender), and a level-two predictor, national inequality using the GINI coefficient. National inequality was seen to have a negative albeit nonsignificant ($\beta = -.14$, $SE = .08$, $t = -1.65$, $p = .098$) relationship with system justification, providing no support for H3A.

In model H3B, we introduced a level-2 moderator, a country's social mobility level (low, medium, high), and set the reference level to low national levels of social mobility, with an interaction term between inequality and social mobility. Inequality ($\beta = -.07$, $SE = .13$, $t = -.53$, $p = .59$), and medium (in comparison to low) levels of social mobility ($\beta = .03$, $SE = .21$, $t = .13$, $p = .86$) were not related to system justification. However, high (in comparison to low) levels of social mobility were significantly associated with greater levels of system justification ($\beta = .56$, $SE = .28$, $t = 2.04$, $p = .04$). The interaction between inequality and having medium social mobility (rather than low) were not significant ($\beta = .22$, $p = .27$).

The interaction between inequality and high (rather than low) social mobility was likewise not significant ($\beta = .15$, $p = .62$). Our preregistered inferential criteria for H3B inadvertently did not account for the nominal nature of the social mobility variable, but these findings clearly do not support H3B.

Civil liberties (H4A–H4B)

Table 4 presents our multilevel model testing H4A and H4B. The model included a random intercept across countries, level two predictor (civil liberties), and level one covariates (age and gender), which were also allowed to vary randomly across countries. We found a positive, albeit nonsignificant relationship between a country's level of civil liberties and system justification ($\beta = .09$, $SE = .08$, $t = 1.05$, $p = .29$), therefore providing no support for either H4A or H4B.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to test SJT, SIT, and SDT's competing claims. These theories address questions about the circumstances that influence who is more likely to system-justify in a given society. In general, SDT and SIT assert that individuals tend to endorse systems that coincide with their ego/group interests, while SJT suggests that individuals may sometimes have conflicting motivations between their ego/group interest and their desire to system-justify. We set out to test the theoretical constructs behind these competing claims of system-justifying motivations.

We first tested the status-legitimacy hypothesis to see if low-objective SES individuals were greater system-justifiers than those with high-objective SES, due to cognitive dissonance processes hypothesized by SJT (Jost et al., 2004). This SJT postulate is the cornerstone that differentiates the system-justifying motive from that of the ego- and group-justifying motives of SDT and SIT. Our findings ultimately contradicted SJT (H1A) and supported SIT/SDT (H1B), in that objective SES positively predicted system justification. Results supported the general belief that individuals with greater objective SES have more reason to justify, rationalize, and legitimize the status quo because of personal/group interests. Although the fixed (i.e., average) effects showed no evidence of a negative effect of objective SES on system justification (meaning that the preregistered inferential criteria were not met), there was nevertheless variability to the demonstrated main effect across countries. Negative relationships between objective SES and system justification were found in some countries (see Table S2). The country-level diversity regarding this effect only occurred in non-WEIRD nations (e.g., Peru, Panama, Venezuela, Pakistan, Morocco, South Africa, and Kenya) which is consistent with the theorization of the self-interest acquiescence model (Valdes et al., 2023), recent research from the social identity model of system attitudes (Owuamalam et al., 2023), and SJT's status-legitimacy hypothesis (Brandt, 2013; Jost, 2020).

The most robust relationship was found for subjective SES (H1C)—it significantly and positively predicted system justification across all countries, before introducing the life satisfaction mediator. This finding is consistent with previous research that explored the relationship between perceived status and system justification in cross-cultural samples (Brandt et al., 2020; Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Liu, et al., 2018). Additionally, we found that the positive relationship between subjective SES and the motive to system-justify is likely due to the palliative effects of perceiving oneself as higher on a status hierarchy through the partial mediation of life satisfaction. This finding coincides with previous research: that endorsing system-justifying beliefs is influenced by a sense of increased psychological well-being (Vargas-Salfate, Paez,

Khan, et al., 2018). Our mediator of life satisfaction is a proxy for psychological well-being, but there could be other indicators worth further investigation. While these results are consistent with our theorizing that higher subjective SES leads to higher life satisfaction and, in turn, to more system justification, the cross-sectional design means we cannot make confident causal inferences.

One of the grounding claims of SJT is that the motive to system-justify coincides with those who hold more conservative political and social ideologies (Jost, 2021; Jost & Banaji, 1994). We directly test this tenet of SJT cross-culturally, in which fixed effects of multilevel analysis indicated that political orientation was a statistically insignificant predictor of system justification, providing no support for H2A. In hopes of further elucidating the relationship between political orientation and system justification, alongside previous researchers (Liekefett & Becker, 2022; Martorana et al., 2005; Szabó & Lönnqvist, 2021), H2B theorized that this relationship could be influenced by the political party in power. Consistent with previous research on the dynamism of legitimacy, political ideology, and prevalence of political polarization globally, we found support for H2B. Both right- and left-leaning individuals' system-justified to a greater extent when the political party in power in their country coincided with their own political ideology leanings. This finding supports the theorization of SDT/SIT that systemic and political legitimacy, or lack thereof, is ultimately tied to self and group interests and is consistent with recent research that has identified that the relationship between political ideology and system justification is dependent on the congruence between ideological beliefs of the status quo (left-leaning- vs. right-leaning political status quo) and the ideological beliefs of those willing to system justify (Beattie et al., 2022; Langer et al., 2020; Owuamalam et al., 2019; Szabó & Lönnqvist, 2021). While this contradicts SJT's H2A, we believe it provides evidence for the more general claim that political ideology is a form of motivated social cognition (Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003). Systemic/social values (i.e., traditional resistance to social change vs. embracing of progressive values) propagated by politicians/political parties that align with one's political identity can motivate individuals to provide political system legitimacy.

While testing the relationship between inequality and system justification, we found that a country's level of inequality was not a significant predictor of system justification. The claim of H3A that more unequal countries would have greater levels of system justification than their unequal counterparts was not supported. We then tested the arguments of the social identity model of system attitudes (Owuamalam et al., 2018, 2019, 2023) that [dis]advantaged individuals will system-justify when the system is considered permeable in the long run. Our results once again provided no support for the claims of the social identity model of system attitudes (H3B). While our fixed effects did not support either of the postulates of SJT or SIT's social identity model of system attitudes (i.e., our preregistered inference criteria were not met), there was once again variability across countries. In countries with medium social mobility levels, increasing inequality led to higher levels of system justification, aligning with SJT's claim that inequality is positively related to system justification (see Figure 3). On the other hand, the country-level bivariate correlational relationship indicated a statistically significant negative association between system justification and inequality, indicating that system justification was greater in countries with greater equality (see Table S3).

Lastly, we tested whether there was a relationship at the country level between a country's level of civil liberties and system justification. As this relates to SJT, the disagreement based upon empirical evidence between Jost, Pelham, et al. (2003) and Brandt (2013) stimulated the theoretical contributions by Valdes et al. (2023) in crafting two societal models aimed at explaining why individuals from either democratic/pluralistic (liberal choice producing dissonance model) or authoritarian (self-interest acquiesce model) nations would system-justify. Among the 42 countries, we found a positive, albeit nonsignificant, relationship between civil liberties and system justification. There was insufficient support for both the claims of SJT's liberal choice producing dissonance model (H4A) and the self-interest acquiesce model (H4B).

The multilevel modeling technique used to analyze data across a range of countries allowed us to identify the economic, political, and social circumstances that influence system justification cross-culturally. These analyses found that the postulates of SIT and SDT garnered a greater amount of support compared to the claims of SJT. We also identified a novel mediational relationship regarding the palliative effects that can be attributed to subjective SES, life satisfaction, and system justification. We believe this is due to the psycho-social comparison process that may be instinctual and is likely to be bidirectional.

Although our omnibus tests of significance yielded no significant moderators of these effects across cultures, this research takes a fundamental step forward, increasing the maturity of SJT, so future work can make country-specific predictions with social context in mind (Cikara et al., 2022; Yarkoni, 2022). To this end, country-level differences and cultural group norms (Owuamalam et al., 2023) clearly merit future investigation, as our random effects provide evidence of country-specific system-justifying motivational variation.

Strengths, limitations and future directions

We advanced the study of system justification by testing the competing claims of SJT, SIT, and SDT using large-scale cross-cultural data providing a high level of statistical power. This approach is rare in the literature and represents a critical theoretical expansion for intergroup relations and system justification. Previous research on system justification has largely relied on WEIRD samples (Henrich et al., 2010), neglecting cross-cultural variation. Lastly, an important strength is the use of large-scale archival data. This enhanced the statistical power and precision of our estimates. The pre-existing nature of the data also limited our capacity to (consciously or unconsciously) make decisions that might favor one theory over another regarding SJT, SIT/SCT, and SDT.

Moving forward, researchers should consider bidirectional effects of SJT's palliative impact through subjective SES. While our findings suggest that social comparisons based on subjective SES led to enhanced life satisfaction, which then influences greater perceptions of system justification, it is plausible that the reverse is also true. Perceiving society as just and fair may enhance life satisfaction, in turn, potentially creating a rationale/motivation to perceive that one's place on a subjective SES hierarchy is higher than others. Such investigations would provide valuable longitudinal applications and theory development for SJT. Future research should also investigate how election outcomes influence normative and nonnormative collective action strategies to garner political system [il]legitimacy.

There are a few limitations of this research worth noting. First, we only used one item to assess political ideology across 42 countries. Although this may limit the complexity and variation of political ideology around the globe (e.g., the possibility to distinguish between the social versus economic dimensions), previous cross-cultural research finds evidence for the recurrence of a continuum from left to right across cultures (Jost, 2021; Sorrentino et al., 2005). Second, it is possible that the timing of data collection mirrored particular politicized events (natural disasters, elections, etc.), influencing participant's willingness to system-justify. Lastly, we have been able to examine the degree to which the data collected is [in]consistent with theories that make causal assertions, even if the data do not permit conclusive causal inferences. We used a brief version of the general system justification scale in which the two reverse-coded items were excluded. This exclusion may have inadvertently induced acquiescence bias in these scores. That being said, previous cross-cultural research has relied on the usage of the same 4-item brief system justification scale (Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Khan, et al., 2018; Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Liu, et al., 2018), due to interpretability, generalizability, and measurement equivalence issues (Vesper et al., 2022). Furthermore, the use of a detailed preregistration with clear and rigid inferential criteria means that the

theories were subjected to a severe test. Future research could leverage longitudinal designs to mitigate this limitation.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data, research materials, code, and preregistration with analysis plan that support the findings of this study are available can be located at the following links: Preregistration—https://osf.io/dr5sg; Data—https://osf.io/6s5ua.

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