

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)  
**DIJ Social Science Study Group**



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**From Solidaristic to Neoliberal Values?  
Responses to Income Inequality in Japan, Germany,  
Sweden, and the US**

In this paper we investigate the impact of neoliberal changes on social solidarity, with our working hypothesis being that the former reduces the latter. If individuals show waning solidarity in the aftermath of welfare retrenchment and privatization, we argue that neoliberal values have spread beyond political and economic institutions and into the general public. Historically, popular support for government redistribution is understood to reflect a widely shared commitment to social solidarity, especially in European welfare states which use substantial public resources to reduce income inequality. However, income inequality has steadily increased since the 1980s despite redistribution, arguably as a product of neoliberal shifts in politics and economics. Has solidarity failed to combat this increase? Have social attitudes also shifted toward neoliberal values, e.g. visible as less support for public redistribution?

To answer these questions, we compare how attitudes towards the responsibility of the government to reduce income inequality changed in Japan, Germany, Sweden, and the United States between 1999 and 2009. Given the unique historical features of these four societies we derive specific hypotheses about how shifts toward neoliberalism from 1990 onwards might have had both similar and society-specific impacts on social solidarity. We test our hypotheses using data from the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) 'Social Inequality Module' waves III & IV.

**Nate Breznau** is a Postdoc at the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS). His research relates to public opinion, social welfare policy and comparative welfare states.

**Carola Hommerich** is a Senior Research Fellow at the DIJ. Her research interests relate to the interrelations of objective inequalities and their subjective evaluation.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by S. Heinrich, P. Holdgrün and C. Hommerich.  
All are welcome to attend, but registration ([heinrich@dijtokyo.org](mailto:heinrich@dijtokyo.org)) is appreciated.

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