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Fördernetzwerk  
Interdisziplinäre  
Sozialpolitikforschung



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für europäische sozialforschung

# Workshop on Perceptions and Policy Preferences

Friday, 7 May 2021

09:15 - 17:15



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## ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Western societies in Europe and North America have been witnessing an increase in inequality over the last decades that has been reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, reactions to (a surge in) inequality can be counterintuitive. Parties promoting social justice are not necessarily successful, social inequality does not always lead to more support for redistribution, and the conflict between the rich and the poor over the distribution of income and wealth within society is not as strong as theory suggests. Recent research has worked on this puzzle, finding that (mis-)perceptions of socio-economic facts can explain a mismatch between theoretical predictions and empirical findings. Using mostly survey experiments, studies revealed that correcting (mis-) perceptions of the extent of inequality, of the degree of social mobility, or of the share of migrants may affect preferences. However, we still lack knowledge on the mechanisms that shape the formation and adjustment of redistributive and social policy preferences.

This interdisciplinary workshop includes contributions that examine how perceptions of socio-economic factors shape redistributive or other policy attitudes, preferably relying on longitudinal and/or experimental studies. The workshop consists of two keynote speeches and three flash talk sessions. Each session consists of four short presentations (10 minutes each) and a longer final discussion. In addition to that, there will be time for personal interaction at a virtual coffee break in the online platform *gather.town*.

### KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

- Emanuele Ciani (OECD)
- Jonathan Mijs (Harvard University, Erasmus University Rotterdam)

### ORGANIZERS

This workshop is conducted within two research projects that are funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs ([SOECBIAS](#), [IMES](#)). The organizing team consists of Miriam Beblo, Elisabeth Bublitz, Julian Jäger, Henning Lohmann, Elias Naumann, and Hequn Wang.

### CONTACT

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## WORKSHOP AGENDA

<b>Opening and Welcome</b>	Miriam Beblo, Elisabeth Bublitz, Julian Jäger, Henning Lohmann, Elias Naumann, Hequn Wang	09:15 - 09:30
<b>Keynote I</b>	<i>Learning about inequality and preferences for redistribution: A meta-analysis</i> <b>Emanuele Ciani</b> , OECD	09:30 - 10:20
Chair: Elisabeth Bublitz, University of Hamburg		
<b>Flash-Talk Session 1</b>	<i>A Distorting Mirror: Partisan preferences and misperceptions of economic inequality</i> <b>Elisa Volpi</b> , University of Geneva (Co-author: Nathalie Giger)	10:25 - 11:35
Chair: Miriam Beblo, University of Hamburg		
	<i>Taxing Wealth: Perceived Inequality, Biased Political Demand and the Media</i> <b>Ursula Dallinger</b> , University of Trier	
	<i>Where do I stand in the EU? European Comparisons and Perceptions</i> <b>Julian Jäger</b> , University of Hamburg (Co-authors: Miriam Beblo, Elisabeth Bublitz, Henning Lohmann, Hequn Wang)	
	<i>Neighborhoods, Perceived Inequality, and Preferences for Redistribution: Evidence from Barcelona</i> <b>Gerard Domènech Arumí</b> , Boston University	
<b>Flash-Talk Session 2</b>	<i>Polarized or United? Solidarity and Fairness Views of Liberals and Conservatives during COVID-19</i> <b>Maj-Britt Sterba</b> , University of Jena (Co-author: Sören Harrs)	11:50 - 13:00
Chair: Henning Lohmann, University of Hamburg		
	<i>What Does Make People Nice: A Common Identity, a Common Interest, a Large Shock?</i> <b>Mathias Dolls</b> , ifo Institute (Co-authors: Cevat Giray Aksoy, Antonio Cabrales, Ruben Durante, Lisa Windsteiger)	
	<i>Framing of Economic News and Policy Support During a Pandemic: Evidence from an Information Experiment</i> <b>Patrick Bareinz</b> , University of Jena (Co-author: Fabian Könings)	
	<i>Locked Down or Locked In? Institutionalized Public Preferences and Pandemic Policy Feedback in 32 Countries</i> <b>Hung H. V. Nguyen</b> , University of Bremen (Co-authors: Nate Breznau, Lisa Heukamp)	
<b>Lunch Break</b>	<i>Virtual coffee break (13:50 - 14:50)</i>	13:00 - 14:50

<b>Keynote II</b>	<i>The Social Life of Inequality: Why Unequal Countries Stay That Way</i>	14:50 - 15:40
Chair: Elias Naumann, University of Mannheim	<b>Jonathan Mijs</b> , Erasmus-University Rotterdam, Harvard University	
<b>Flash-Talk Session 3</b>	<i>Financial Support for Refugees in Germany: Determining Deservingness Perceptions using a Survey Experiment</i>	15:50 - 17:00
Chair: Hequn Wang, University of Hamburg	<b>Verena Seibel</b> , Utrecht University (Co-author: Daniel Degen)	
	<i>Explaining the democratic malaise: Testing perceived responsiveness as a mechanism for the inequality-trust link</i>	
	<b>Simon Bienstman</b> , Goethe University Frankfurt (Co-authors: Markus Gangl, Svenja Hense)	
	<i>Perceptions of Inequality and Social Mobility</i>	
	<b>Alice Krozer</b> , El Colegio de México (Co-authors: Raymundo M. Campos-Vazquez, Aurora A. Ramírez-Álvarez, Rodolfo de la Torre, Roberto Vélez-Grajales)	
	<i>Determinants of perceptions of social mobility Experimental evidence from providing information</i>	
	<b>Anna Schwarz</b> , Vienna University of Business and Economics (Co-author: Philipp Warum)	
<b>Wrap-up</b>	Elias Naumann	17:00 - 17:15

## KEYNOTES: ABSTRACTS

### ***Learning about inequality and preferences for redistribution: A meta-analysis***

Emanuele Ciani, OECD

A growing body of literature studies the effect of providing information about inequality on preferences for redistribution. We provide a meta-analysis combining the results from 84 information treatments coming from 35 studies in Economics, Psychology, Political Science and Sociology. We focus on in-survey experiments where a randomly selected group of respondents receive either information about the overall extent of inequality, or about their position in the income distribution. The results show that providing information on inequality has a large impact on perceptions and concerns with inequality, but a rather small effect on demand for redistribution. Inspecting the heterogeneity across treatments and outcomes helps explaining the limited effect on demand for redistribution, but the evidence is not yet conclusive about the potential explanations. We further show that correcting respondents' misperceptions about their own position in the income distribution has small effects, whose sign is nevertheless consistent with theoretical expectations.

### ***The Social Life of Inequality: Why Unequal Countries Stay That Way***

Jonathan Mijs, Erasmus- University Rotterdam, Harvard University

This keynote offers a diagnosis for the current political moment marking societies across the west, where historically high levels of inequality have been met with very limited public consternation. In fact, research suggests that residents of more economically unequal societies tend to be less worried about inequality than people in more egalitarian countries. Understanding why requires that we take a closer look at the "social life of inequality." How have decades of growing inequality shaped and reshaped the social landscape: our social networks, neighborhoods, schools and workplaces? I argue that inequality increases the distance between rich and poor, who increasingly live their lives in separate neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces and befriend, date, and marry people exclusively from within their own socio-economic circles. This disconnect means that neither rich nor poor can see the full extent of inequality in their everyday life or appreciate the non-meritocratic causes of economic "success" and "failure." From this diagnosis follow four suggestions for the study of perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes about inequality: (1) A need to firm up the theoretical grounds from which we start data collection, specifically our conceptualizations of belief formation and belief change; (2) Widening the empirical scope to include case studies and comparative research on non-Western settings; (3) More attention to how beliefs and processes of belief formation and belief change are socially situated, locally and in social interaction; (4) Consideration of alternative methodologies to study belief formation in action.

## FLASH-TALK SESSIONS: ABSTRACTS

### SESSION 1: PERCEPTION OF INEQUALITY & REDISTRIBUTIVE PREFERENCES

#### ***A Distorting Mirror: Partisan preferences and misperceptions of economic inequality***

Elisa Volpi, University of Geneva

(Co-author: Nathalie Giger)

Economic inequality is one of the most debated issues in contemporary times, yet little political action has been taken to tackle increasing levels of economic disparities. Some scholars have argued that one explanation might be people's distorted perception of their economic situation and of income inequality. The origins of this mis-perception are still unclear. In particular, the role of ideology and partisan identification remains under-explored and the little research exclusively focuses on the United States. However, if distortions in perceptions of inequality have an ideological leaning, this could have severe consequences for how these views get translated in the political system. Taking advantage of a new survey on inequality perceptions, we are able to evaluate how partisanship affects citizens' inequality evaluations across 13 Western countries. We test how party identification influences people's perception of their economic situations and their ability to assess the overall level of inequality. We then put this partisan bias in relation with demands for redistribution and vote choice. The contribution of this study is double-fold: firstly, we shed new light on the phenomenon of inequality by looking at its psychological roots and secondly, we examine one of its potential explanation comparatively.

#### ***Taxing Wealth: Perceived Inequality, Biased Political Demand and the Media***

Ursula Dallinger, University of Trier

According to a recent discussion in social sciences the attitudes of citizens on distribution policies are guided by inaccurate, biased perception of economic inequality. The presentation examines, whether this is confirmed regarding wealth taxes. Is the perceived tax burden of wealthy households – measured as the estimated tax rate on top incomes – biased and does this have consequences for public support of wealth taxation? I draw on Germany, where the re-introduction of a wealth tax is currently debated in the political arena. Based on data from an online survey the effects of possibly biased perceptions on the one hand and media framing of a wealth tax on the other are tested. We see that top income taxes are overestimated, which reduces political support of re-introducing taxes on wealth. Taxing the rich is not a matter of objective inequality, but of tensions between images of privileges of the rich on the one hand and the thread that capital and jobs will be withdrawn from the

country. The mass media are the channel by which political parties and interest groups get access to public opinion and deliver their images. The struggle for dominance is conducted by typical frames made available by the media, who's influence on political support for wealth taxation is tested by online experiments. Even if attitudes are in favour of taxing the rich, the menace of job losses is an equally strong frame. By making available the liberal script of hampered growth and job loss by the media the majority for a wealth tax even of conservative voters will be effectively impeded.

### ***Where do I stand in the EU? European Comparisons and Perceptions***

Julian Jäger, University of Hamburg

(Co-authors: Miriam Beblo, Elisabeth Bublitz, Henning Lohmann, Hequn Wang)

Where do EU citizens locate themselves within the income distribution of the EU? In a survey experiment, we collect data from 6000 participants in four EU Member States: Germany, Italy, Poland, and Sweden. We analyze to what extent individuals' *perceived* income positions align with their *actual* positions at EU level and how this relates to the national income position. Respondents in Germany and Sweden rank their country richer than the EU average, whereas Italian and Polish respondents rank their country poorer. Consistent with this country ranking, two thirds of German and Swedish respondents assess their EU income position to be *higher* than their national one. Similarly, more than two thirds of Polish and Italian respondents estimate their EU income position to be *lower* than their national one. Deviations between perceived and actual EU income positions follow a very similar pattern as deviations at the national level. Respondents in lower income deciles overestimate and respondents in higher deciles underestimate their national and EU income positions. The EU income position is meaningful enough to be remembered. In a follow-up survey in Germany, respondents perceive their income position at EU level significantly more accurately, after having been informed in the main survey about their actual income position. The findings provide strong evidence that respondents are aware of differences in income levels between EU citizens and that their EU income position matters to them.

### ***Neighborhoods, Perceived Inequality, and Preferences for Redistribution: Evidence from Barcelona***

Gerard Domènech Arumí, Boston University

I study the effects of neighborhoods on perceived inequality and preferences for redistribution. Using administrative data on the universe of dwellings and real estate transactions in Barcelona (Spain), I first construct a novel measure of local inequality — the Local Neighborhood Gini (LNG). The LNG is



based on the spatial distribution of housing within a city, independent of administrative boundaries, and building-specific. I then elicit inequality perceptions and preferences for redistribution from an original large-scale survey conducted in Barcelona. I link those to respondents' specific LNG and local environments using exact addresses, observed in the survey. Finally, I identify the causal effects of neighborhoods using two different approaches. The first is an outside-the-survey quasi-experiment that exploits within-neighborhood variation in respondents' recent exposure to new apartment buildings. The second is a within-survey experiment that induces variation in respondents' information set about inequality across neighborhoods. I find that local environments significantly influence inequality perceptions but only mildly affect demand for redistribution.

## **SESSION 2: THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19**

### ***Polarized or United? Solidarity and Fairness Views of Liberals and Conservatives during COVID-19***

Maj-Britt Sterba, University of Jena  
(Co-author: Sören Hars) )

Liberals and conservatives disagree fundamentally over the fairness and the extent of economic redistribution in society. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on this disagreement as many people have fallen in severe economic need. Where does this disagreement between the two political camps come from and does the crisis polarize or unify their views on redistribution? In this paper we measure solidarity and fairness views with experimental games in a representative sample of N=746 US citizens. In our treatment condition subjects are provided with information about the severe impacts of COVID-19 on US society and are asked to recall personal experiences from the pandemic. Our main finding is that conservatives strongly increase solidarity and regard inequality due to luck as more unfair when exposed to our treatment. The treatment effect closes the entire gap in solidarity and fairness views that existed between liberals and conservatives at baseline. We further show that solidarity and fairness views are highly predictive for policy attitudes towards redistribution.

### ***What Does Make People Nice: A Common Identity, a Common Interest, a Large Shock?***

Mathias Dolls, ifo Institute  
(Co-authors: Cevat Giray Aksoy, Antonio Cabrales, Ruben Durante, Lisa Windsteiger)

We design and conduct large-scale surveys and experiments in eleven European countries to examine the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on social capital. Using incentivized outcome questions on

altruism, social trust and reciprocity towards fellow citizens, people from other EU countries and non-EU countries, we assess the causal effect of priming respondents about the COVID-19 crisis.

***Framing of Economic News and Policy Support During a Pandemic: Evidence from an Information Experiment***

Patrick Bareinz, University of Jena  
(Co-author: Fabian Könings)

We investigate the effect of how news outlets communicate macroeconomic information to consumers on support for governmental policy in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. In our survey experiment based on a representative sample of 3000 individuals in Germany, respondents are exposed to an expert forecast of GDP growth. Individuals are randomly assigned to either receive no information, the baseline forecast information, or real-world frames of the same information used in newspaper articles on the topic. We find that in contrast to the baseline information, positive framing of forecasted economic growth by news outlets increases support for pandemic policy. This effect is especially pronounced for respondents with more pessimistic macroeconomic expectations. Further evidence suggests that negative economic news are perceived as more credible and hence less surprising in times of recession, not translating into political opinion.

***Locked Down or Locked In? Institutionalized Public Preferences and Pandemic Policy Feedback in 32 Countries***

Hung H. V. Nguyen, University of Bremen  
(Co-authors: Nate Breznau, Lisa Heukamp)

The Novel Coronavirus Pandemic provides a unique opportunity to test theories of policy feedback in times of national emergency. An important question in this field is whether the discrepancy between public attitudes and emergency rules makes ordinary citizens less likely to comply, which in turn can undermine the goals of that national emergency policies such as the recent lockdown. In this study, we first compare 2016 institutionalized non-Covid-related public preferences for government intervention to government actions taken at the outbreak of this pandemic in early March 2020 across 32 middle to high income countries, using aggregated data from the International Social Survey Program and country-level Blavatnik Coronavirus Government Response Tracker data. Then, we use the relative discrepancy between them to predict public behaviors shortly after the initial outbreak in late-March into early April using the Measuring Worldwide COVID-19 Attitudes and Beliefs survey. We find no association between public preferences and government response at the outbreak. In the

subsequent stage, we find that, on average, countries with stronger government restrictions had lower levels of risky social behaviours. However, once controlling for this and the equivalent local severity of the pandemic, we also find some tentative evidence that the discrepancy between restrictions and public preferences from the outbreak stage shows a relationship with public behaviours. Where the government took much stronger interventions in the outbreak stage relative to public preferences for non-Covid government interventions, the public were more likely to engage in risky social behaviors, such as going out when asked not to, attending social gatherings, or not keeping a safe distance from others. In contrast, where the government took weaker measures, the public were instead more likely to avoid risky social behaviors. Although we cannot conclude whether this means that the enforced measures were more or less effective, our results may suggest that governments took stronger measures in countries where they expected more risky behaviors and that there may be a tradeoff between institutionalized public preferences and the ability to curtail social behaviours.

### **SESSION 3: MOBILITY, TRUST & MIGRATION**

#### ***Financial Support for Refugees in Germany: Determining Deservingness Perceptions using a Survey Experiment***

Verena Seibel, Utrecht University

(Co-author: Daniel Degen)

Since the so-called 'refugee crisis' starting in 2015, Germany has accepted one of the highest numbers of asylum applications in Europe, thereby sparking heated discussions among German citizens and politicians about how to proceed with the large number of refugees living in Germany, being in need of financial support. So far, little is known about the native's perception of fair financial support for refugees. In this study we therefore examine German natives' deservingness perceptions, displaying a vignette study in four large German cities. We find that natives differentiate strongly in their deservingness perceptions depending on certain characteristics of refugees. Refugees who indicate their ability (in terms of human capital) and their willingness to contribute to society are considered most deserving. Interestingly, we find a strong gender effect. Female refugees are generally perceived as more deserving than male refugees. In addition, refugees who currently not look for a job are less punished in terms of perceptions

### ***Explaining the democratic malaise: Testing perceived responsiveness as a mechanism for the inequality-trust link***

Simon Bienstman, Goethe University Frankfurt

(Co-authors: Markus Gangl, Svenja Hense)

Previous scholarship has suggested that rising inequality in democracies suppresses trust in institutions. However, it remains unclear if and why this is the case. In this paper, we investigate the proposition that income inequality leads to increased democratic distrust through a lack of perceived responsiveness. We do so by applying a mediation analysis to both longitudinal data at the country level from the American Election Study Time Series and cross-sectional data from the European Social Survey. The aim is to see whether changes in inequality over time within the same country-context or diverging levels of inequality between different countries account for differences in trust. We find that perceived responsiveness is an important predictor of political trust but that it does not mediate the effect of inequality. Instead, inequality has a negative effect on efficacy and trust in the time series analysis of the US, but not in the cross-sectional analysis in Europe. Our findings also show that perceived responsiveness is a more important predictor of political trust than changes or differences in economic inequality and that it explains large parts of diverging trust levels of socio-economic groups.

### ***Perceptions of Inequality and Social Mobility***

Alice Krozer, El Colegio de México

(Co-authors: Raymundo M. Campos-Vazquez, Aurora A. Ramírez-Álvarez, Rodolfo de la Torre, Roberto Vélez-Grajales)

Despite evidence of high inequality and low social mobility throughout the world, there has been only limited demand for change. Using new survey and experimental data, we investigate how perceptions about inequality and social mobility affect preferences for redistribution in Mexico. In addition to the perceived level of inequality typically measured in previous studies, we explore perceptions about who is rich and poor and their share of the population. The shape of perceived inequality that we find provides new insights as to why people tolerate large differences between the rich and the poor. We find that Mexicans generally perceive poverty and inequality not too far from measured levels, but they overestimate the income of the rich and their proportion of the population. Their perceptions of social mobility correctly estimate persistence rates at the top and bottom of the distribution, but they overestimate upward and downward mobility. Providing people with more information about observed income inequality and social mobility is one way to encourage a demand for redistribution. However, randomly providing selected participants with this information has almost

zero effect on their desired levels of equality, social mobility, and tax rates. We measure the degree of tax progressiveness people want and calculate whether it is consistent with the level of equality they seek. We find that Mexicans want a progressive tax system in which the poor pay an average tax rate of 14% and the wealthy pay 41%, and that preference for a more progressive tax structure is negatively related to wealth. Our analysis shows, however, that the post-tax but pretransfer income distribution respondents want is not consistent with these tax rates.

***Determinants of perceptions of social mobility Experimental evidence from providing information***

Anna Schwarz, Vienna University of Business and Economics  
(Co-author: Philipp Warum)

Perceptions of social mobility are at the heart of redistributive politics. Using data from a large-scale online survey experiment in Austria, we therefore attempt to shed further light on the determinants of perceptions of intergenerational mobility. Apart from confirming the expected correlations with political ideology, education, and experienced mobility, we find that low income earners tend to perceive the highest levels of intergenerational mobility and that perceptions are decreasing along the income distribution. The treatment even exacerbates this division between high- and low-income respondents, as we find treatment effects only for high- and partly for middle-income groups. However, right-wing respondents adjust their optimistic perceptions at baseline after seeing the information, which reduces the perception gap between the political left and right. These heterogeneous treatment effects are estimated with subgroup regressions, as well as with causal forests using a non-parametric machine learning method. Finally, the differential treatment effect by income can be replicated for the U.S. with data from Alesina et al. (2018), while heterogeneous effects by ideology seem to depend more on the specific country context. Overall, the evidence suggests that the same information is interpreted very differently by specific subgroups, indicating mechanisms of motivated beliefs. Our results thus provide evidence that socio-economic realities, in addition to political ideology, determine how information about social mobility is processed.

## ABOUT THE ORGANIZERS

Both research projects are funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

### **SOECBIAS: Socioeconomic analyses of perceptions of (re-)distribution in Europe**

Universität Hamburg (<https://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/soecbias>)

- How do Europeans perceive national and European social policy?
- What is the role of comparisons with other individuals - within and across national boundaries?
- What explains perceptions of one's own position within the (inter-)national income distribution?  
What are the consequences of these perceptions for the assessment of redistribution?

These questions relate to the acceptance of social security schemes in Europe and will be addressed using an interdisciplinary research approach. Conducting a survey experiment, the project tests the causal effect of respondents' (mis-)perceptions of their own income positions on their preferences for redistribution within a national as well as a European context. The project collects data for comparisons within- and between countries, including Germany, Sweden, Italy, and Poland. In the analysis, we then compare subjective (country-specific) perceptions with objective data.

*Examples of ongoing research:*

- Beblo, Miriam; Bublitz, Elisabeth; Jäger, Julian; Lohmann, Henning & Wang, Hequn "SOECBIAS data set: Socioeconomic data on income (mis-)perceptions and redistributive preferences in four EU Member States", Working Paper (March 2021).
- Bublitz, Elisabeth; Beblo, Miriam; Jäger, Julian; Lohmann, Henning & Wang, Hequn „ Where do I stand in the EU? European Comparisons and Perceptions”.
- Lohmann, Henning & Wang, Hequn “How does the COVID-19 pandemic change welfare attitudes in Germany? An empirical analysis using panel data”, Manuscript under review (February 2021).
- Jäger, Julian "Income, Perceptions, and Welfare Chauvinism - A Survey Experiment in Germany", Working Paper (March 2021).
- Wang, Hequn "Information, Income Perceptions, and Welfare Attitudes".

### **IMES: Integration of Migrants and Attitudes towards the Welfare State**

[ZEW Mannheim](#) & [MZES University Mannheim](#)

Against the background of the strong immigration to Germany in recent years, the role of the welfare state and its legitimacy are discussed controversially. On the one hand, social policy supports the integration of migrants into the labor market and society, thereby contributing to the stabilization of

social security systems. On the other hand, migration can undermine the legitimacy of the welfare state if the local population is reluctant to redistribute to migrants and fears a greater financial burden from the cost of immigration. The research group focuses on the following questions:

- How does social policy and new immigration influence the integration of different migrant groups?
- How does perceived integration of migrants affect attitudes towards the welfare state?
- How do perceived and actual integration interact in different socio-political fields?

*Examples of ongoing research:*

- Naumann, Elias & Stötzer, Lukas F. (2018) "Immigration and support for redistribution: survey experiments in three European countries". *West European Politics*, 41, 1, pp. 80-101.
- Brinkmann, Marvin & Naumann, Elias "How immigrants' status and citizenship affect natives' preference to exclude immigrants from access to social assistance and unemployment benefits"
- Khalil, Samir & Naumann, Elias "Does Contact with Migrants Reduce Worries about Immigration? A Longitudinal Analysis of Public Attitudes towards Migration in Germany"