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## Policy Attitudes, Ideological Values and Social Representations

Christian Staerklé

University of Lausanne, Switzerland

### *Address for correspondence:*

Christian Staerklé

University of Lausanne

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences

Institute for Social Sciences

Bâtiment Vidy

1015 Lausanne

Switzerland

[christian.staerke@unil.ch](mailto:christian.staerke@unil.ch)

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### Abstract

This article reviews research on policy attitudes and ideological values from the perspective of social representations theory. In the first part of the paper, key features of lay political thinking are presented, its pragmatic imperative, its focus on communication and the social functions of shared knowledge. *Objectification* transforms abstract and group-neutral ideological values into concrete and socially useful knowledge, in particular stereotypes of value-conforming and value-violating groups. Such shared understandings of intergroup relations provide citizens with common reference knowledge which provides the cognitive and cultural basis of policy attitudes. Social representations theory further suggests that lay knowledge reflects the social context in which it has been elaborated (“*anchoring*”), an aspect which allows conceptualising aggregate-level differences in policy attitudes. In the second part of the paper, a model of lay conceptions of social order is outlined which organises four shared conceptions of social order, along with the stereotype-based thinking associated with each conception: Moral order, Free Market, Social diversity and Structural inequality. We conclude by arguing that policy attitudes are symbolic devices expressed to justify or to challenge existing social arrangements.

### Policy Attitudes, Ideological Values and Social Representations

In democratic societies it often seems that citizens are not well equipped to take an informed stance towards important social and political issues (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996) and that considerable variation in citizens' political expertise hampers effective participation in democratic debate (Converse, 2000). Taking a perspective of lay political thinking, the present article puts such alarmist claims into perspective. It argues that most citizens are actually aware of political alternatives, but not necessarily in their expert formulations. They know the kind of society they are attracted to and the models of society they oppose, in terms of its level of cultural diversity, individual freedom or social equality, for example. Citizens express such preferences in attitudes and opinions towards a wide range of social, economic and legal policies that are destined to achieve political goals, for example the upholding of public order or the reduction of economic inequalities. Accordingly, *policy attitudes* refer to individual evaluations concerning the desirability and legitimacy of different models of society.

The present contribution offers a social psychological approach to policy attitudes from the perspective of political lay thinking, with a focus on the influence of ideological values on policy attitudes. The discussion of policy attitudes and values is built upon social representations theory which provides a conceptual framework of lay thinking and everyday communication (Augoustinos, Walker & Donaghue, 2006; Deaux & Philogène, 2001; Doise, Clémence & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993; Moscovici, 1961/2008; Wagner & Hayes, 2005). We first consider research on ambivalent political attitudes and highlight the social and relational foundations of ideological values. In the second part of the paper, we outline a model of lay conceptions of social order which links multiple ideological values with social psychological processes.

### Attitude Ambivalence, Value Pluralism, and Social Representations

People often hold contradictory political attitudes. Such attitudinal ambivalence is one of the major issues in policy attitude research (Cantril & Davis Cantril, 1999; Feldman & Zaller, 1992). Studies have shown, for example, that people support abstract egalitarian principles, while advocating at the same time policies that are contrary to egalitarian principles, for instance tax breaks for the wealthy or cutbacks in unemployment protection (Feldman & Zaller, 1992). Similarly, citizens easily endorse broad principles such as human rights, but they equally easily support specific policies which violate human rights, for example in case of torture of a suspected terrorist (Staerklé & Clémence, 2004). And while public agreement with a general principle of solidarity is generally found to be high, this support crumbles when specific groups such as the unemployed are mentioned as beneficiaries (Kangas, 1997). Such apparent inconsistency has been viewed as reflecting ideological innocence (Kinder & Sears, 1985), a schizoid combination of values (Free & Cantril, 1968), or as the result of missing political information and awareness (Converse, 1964). In light of such widespread ambivalence and inconsistency, many researchers in political science and beyond bemoan the lack of principled, value-based, higher-order understanding of complex political phenomena by ordinary citizens (e.g., Zaller, 1992). Converse (1964), in particular, argued that attitudes of the general population are notoriously uninformed, inconsistent and ambivalent, whereas attitudes of the elite are more informed and more consistent, because they are based on higher order political reasoning. Relying on models of cognitive consistency (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958), consistency between values and attitudes has therefore been viewed as a sign of informed political reasoning and cognitive sophistication (Converse, 2000; Zaller, 1992).

An alternative view suggests that attitudinal ambivalence and apparent inconsistency are part and parcel of the contemporary political culture, characterised with a large array of competing values and models of social organisation (Hochschild, 1981). This can be

exemplified with a value conflict that has frequently been evidenced in policy attitude research: values denoting self-reliance and meritocratic achievement *versus* values of social justice and relative equality between citizens. This ambivalence is viewed as a conflict between capitalism vs. democracy (McClosky & Zaller, 1984), the protestant work ethic vs. egalitarianism-humanitarianism (Katz & Hass, 1988), or freedom vs. equality (Rokeach, 1973). Ambivalent attitudes that refer simultaneously to these two sets of attitudes are not necessarily indicative of confusion, inconsistency or lack of sophistication, but rather reflect “a problem of reconciling the multiple values, beliefs, and principles simultaneously present in the political culture” (Feldman & Zaller, 1992, p. 270). Such value pairs represent socially constructed and shared knowledge which are presumably present in any democratic society as “ideological dilemmas” (Billig, 1989) and as a pluralistic public sphere (Jovchelovitch, 2007). They convey ideological reference markers which feed and orient lay political thinking (Young, 2007). Consequently, inconsistent and ambivalent attitudes may merely reflect the fact that citizens constantly refer to opposing values when making up their opinion, and may even indicate higher “integrative complexity” (Tetlock, 1986). This value pluralism is the background on the basis of which citizens develop policy attitudes. Citizens are embedded in a political culture that is made up by widely shared ideas circulating in society—social values, beliefs, ideologies—which can be seen as “social representations” (Moscovici, 1961/2008) that help people to make sense of their social life and to take a stand towards the existing social order.

Social representations theory argues that lay thinking does not follow the same rules as expert thinking (Jovchelovitch, 2007; Moscovici & Hewstone, 1983). Lay thinking obeys to a “pragmatic imperative” (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Reasoning in terms of abstract categories is of little use to cope with everyday life contingencies, and most citizens rather rely on concrete everyday experience to make up their minds on political issues (Augoustinos

et al., 2006). Political lay thinking is pragmatically elaborated in order to come to terms with concrete everyday issues and to be able to act upon the social world (Reicher, 2004). This view also implies that the relationship between ideological values and policy attitudes depends on the specific social context, for example a policy domain, in which it is enacted.

The social representations approach also highlights the importance of social communication (Moscovici, 1961/2008; Jovchelovitch, 2007). When citizens are intrigued by a social issue—be it criminality, unemployment, immigration or inequality—they are likely to attend to relevant media reports and discuss the matter within reference groups, for example with friends, family and colleagues. Exposed to distinct points of view and contrasting ideological values, individuals take up a position on the basis of shared reference knowledge (Clémence, 2001). Shared knowledge makes communication and debate within a social context possible, and thus regulates relations within groups and communities. At the same time, shared knowledge, beliefs and values differentiate one social context from another, thereby creating social identities, for example when group norms are reproduced in social judgements (Clémence, 2001) or when policy attitudes and ideological values are shared by members of social categories (Staerklé, Delay, Gianettoni & Roux, 2007). Shared knowledge both represents and creates the social context in which it is developed, thereby exemplifying the *anchoring* process in social representations theory (Moscovici, 1961/2008).

#### Ideological Values as Models of Social Relations

In this view, reference to abstract ideological values such as justice, equality or humanitarianism does not necessarily reflect higher order reasoning (Feldman & Zaller, 1992), since such values enter people's lives precisely through everyday communication and experience. Shared values necessarily emerge from social life, from the ongoing communication in private life and from debate in the public sphere (Jovchelovitch, 2007). The values of individualism and meritocratic achievement, for example, are conveyed by the

widely disseminated everyday belief that hard work is a “good” thing, that laziness is “bad”, and that people should get rewarded according to their efforts and their merits. Equality values, in turn, might be communicated through the widespread biblical idea according to which people should treat others as they would like to be treated themselves. Values can therefore be viewed as “cultural truisms”, that is, beliefs that are widely shared and rarely questioned (Maio & Olson, 1998).

In order to convey meaning to abstract philosophical principles, lay thinking transforms ideological values into shared, normative models of social relations. Values of traditionalism and authoritarianism, for example, stress the relationship between conforming, “good” citizens, and non-conforming, potentially dangerous and “bad” citizens. Values of individualism and meritocratic achievement, in turn, emphasise competitive relations between “winners” and “losers”. Values of diversity and multiculturalism highlight intergroup respect and positive group differences, whereas values of universalism and equality underscore cooperative group relations and intergroup solidarity. Children gradually become aware of such “values”, not in their abstract and principled form, but as discursive themes and cultural frames through which they make sense of the social relations around them (Fiske, 1991). Abstract values should therefore not be confounded with cultural common sense and taken-for-granted knowledge of which almost everyone living in a given political culture is aware.

This relational view of values has implications for the interpretation of the construction of policy attitudes. People take up and justify their stance towards policies by referring to normative relational models rather than to abstract values (Staerklé et al., 2007). Individuals who score high on traditionalist or authoritarian values, for example, are likely to view their social world through the lens of a relationship between “good” and “bad” people and thus to support repressive policies which control and punish “bad” people. Individuals who think that society should be organised as a function of a competitive relation between

“winners” and “losers”, in turn, should support meritocratic policies which promote such a competitive relationship.

The idea that values reflect heuristics to describe relational models between individuals and groups places a greater emphasis on the relational and contextual nature of values than the original conceptualisations which see values as enduring and context-independent beliefs concerning desirable *modes of conduct* and *end states of existence* that transcend specific objects and situations (Rokeach, 1973). Yet, there is a large body of research in which values are explicitly viewed as heuristics describing social relations. Sidanius and his colleagues have suggested that conservatism is motivated by a desire for group based dominance, the value of conservatism thereby becoming a normative model of hierarchical relations between groups (Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996). Emphasizing its role as a key belief system underlying policy attitudes, self-declared and measured conservatism has been shown to predict a wide range of policies which maintain or increase inequality (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). In this view, “legitimising beliefs” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) also represent ideological values, since they contain normative statements about the organisation of social relations, for example the idea that discrimination between groups is no longer a problem (also a component of symbolic racism, Henry and Sears, 2002), that equal opportunity between citizens is a reality rather than an ideal, or that ignoring group differences will lead to greater social harmony (Glaser, 2005).

#### Objectification of Values: Stereotypes and Policy Attitudes

The analysis of the relational foundations of values can be taken a step further by arguing that values implicitly incorporate stereotypical images of those groups who are seen to conform to important values and those groups who are thought to violate these same values, a process termed *judgemental value expression* by Henry and Reyna (2007). Research



has shown that conformity with important values such as self-reliance, hard work and discipline is associated with social groups located at upper levels of the social hierarchy, whereas perceived non-respect of these values is associated with groups at lower levels of the social structure, exemplified by fat people (Crandall, 1994), welfare recipients (Gilens, 1999), women and Blacks in the U.S. (Biernat, Vescio, Theno & Crandall, 1996; Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Reyna, Henry, Korfmacher & Tucker, 2005). This research shows how lay thinking associates ideological values with social groups in order to put forward a political stance.

From the perspective of social representations theory, abstract knowledge such as ideological values is transformed into politically useful and functional everyday knowledge through the process of *objectification* (Moscovici, 1961/2008). Through this process, values are objectified into stereotypes of value-conforming and value-violating groups, a phenomenon which can be observed with any value which prescribes desirable and appropriate conduct and ways of being. The value of democracy, for example, is objectified into stereotypes of democratic and non-democratic countries (Staerklé, Clémence & Doise, 1998; Staerklé, 2005), while the value of self-control is transformed into representations of people “in control of themselves” versus those who lack control (Joffe & Staerklé, 2007). Survey research on welfare attitudes, in turn, has shown that perceived deservingness emerges as a central motivation to justify one’s policy attitude: the less potential beneficiaries are perceived as deserving in terms of their compliance with social values such as the work ethic, the less individuals support policies in their favour (van Oorschot, 2006). Policy judgements based on perceived deservingness of beneficiaries lead to conditional solidarity in which egalitarian values may be supported in the abstract, but do not apply to groups perceived as undeserving. And even researchers themselves are not immune against this tendency of objectifying values into stereotypes. In Feldman and Zaller’s (1992) seminal analysis of social

policy attitudes, statements referring to laziness of the poor were considered to reflect ideological and principled reasoning about “individualism”. From a political lay thinking perspective, however, such derogatory images represent widely shared and age-old stereotypes of the poor, culturally invoked to justify subordinate positions in society (Geremek, 1994).

Stereotypes and prejudice towards beneficiary groups thus provide an important link between abstract ideological values and policy attitudes. Contrary to claims that policy attitudes are mainly determined by “group-neutral” ideologies and values such as “principled conservatism” (Sniderman & Carmines, 1997), ideological values, when viewed as building blocks of political lay thinking, cannot be group-neutral (Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles & Goff, 2006; Reyna et al., 2005). They predict policy attitudes not because of their disinterested philosophical meaning, but because they have become associated with groups symbolising conformity and non-conformity with these values. Values therefore implicitly provide the cognitive content upon which stereotypes and prejudice develop. This process may explain why prejudice and racism are important driving forces behind policy attitudes (Federico & Sidanius, 2002). Symbolic racism, for example, has been shown to trump other explanatory factors in accounting for attitudes towards “racial policies” such as welfare and affirmative action policies (Gilens, 1999; Sears, van Laar, Carillo & Kosterman, 1997) or crime regulation policies (Green, Staerklé & Sears, 2006). Augoustinos et al. (2006) forcefully summarise the political function of stereotype-based policy judgements: *“An ‘attitude’ of dislike or disdain of the poor, of the unemployed, of people of a different class, of people of different colour, serves not only to orient the individual to that particular social object, but also to position that object, be it a person or a group, in social space. This helps to explain, as well as justify and reproduce, the social system which produced those social positions, and to defend the individual’s own social position.”* (p. 140). Relating stereotype content to

ideological values thus represents a strategy to account for the political functions of stereotypes (Tajfel, 1981; Pratto & Pitpitan, 2008).

#### A Model of Lay Conceptions of Social Order

So far, our discussion of policy attitudes from the perspective of political lay thinking suggests that citizens develop policy attitudes on the basis of value pluralism, and that they express preferences for a certain social order through policy attitudes. People take up a position in a symbolic network of stereotype content (Joffe & Staerklé, 2007), made up by representations of social antagonisms between value-conforming categories (deemed to represent the bedrock of the social organisation) and value-violating categories (perceived to threaten the social order). Policy attitudes are therefore based on stereotypical images of groups. These images may be strategically deployed to justify policies destined to deal with value-violating, disturbing or threatening groups (Reicher, Hopkins & Condor, 1997). Social policies are thus viewed as institutional means to regulate the relationship between subordinate and dominant, or between threatening and conforming groups.

A model of lay conceptions of social order brings together these features of political lay thinking. This model as well as its empirical foundations are fully developed elsewhere (Staerklé et al., 2007). Like Schwartz's (1992) universal value structure, it is intended to systematise multiple values into a single conceptual model and link the different values to distinct social psychological processes. And like Relational models theory (Fiske, 1991), the model aspires to account for the relational foundations of ideological values by specifying representations of four emblematic relationships. It departs from these models by assuming that the basic psychological process underlying political lay thinking is differentiation (Tajfel, 1981), and that antagonisms between groups and individuals representing contrasting values, or differential value conformity, are at the core of democratic politics (Mouffe, 1993) and thus of political lay thinking.

As shown in Table 1, the model describes two basic forms of differentiation: normative differentiation occurring within groups and categorical differentiation occurring between groups (see Kreindler, 2005). In the process of normative differentiation, people believe that social cleavages are the outcome of deliberate, individual actions, and that the meaning of these actions can be assessed with respect to perceived conformity with important ingroup values. The process of categorical differentiation, in turn, is based on representations of differences between groups and categories which are related to each other through antagonistic intergroup relations.

Differentiation requires a comparison dimension on which groups and individuals are perceived to differ. In contrast to social identity theory which emphasises the flexible selection of comparison dimensions as a function of comparative context (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this model focuses on the psychological processes determined by the actual content of two general types of comparison dimensions: a first one based on moral, cultural and non-quantifiable attributes which defines processes of *recognition*, and the second one based on material, tangible and quantifiable attributes which gives rise to processes of *redistribution* (Isin & Wood, 1999). The crossing of these two polarities—normative vs. categorical differentiation on the one hand and recognition and redistribution on the other—yields four conceptions of social order: *Moral order*, *Free market*, *Social diversity* and *Structural inequality* (see Table 1). The overall ambition of the model is to provide an account of four representative ways of thinking about the social order.

Each of these types describes a set of representations derived from a particular normative model of social order. Similar to Max Weber's ideal types of behaviour, these four conceptions do not describe any particular society; rather, they are simplified representations of four ways of organising a society, along with their main modes of institutional regulation and their core antagonisms. The model describes how policy attitudes are shaped by four

types of stereotypical thinking which can be assessed with measures of prejudice towards (1) deviant and non-conformist individuals, (2) undeserving individuals who take advantage of others' work, (3) immigrants and outgroups, and (4) low-status groups and organisations defending an egalitarian social order. By specifying an emblematic antagonism justifying different types of social order, the model seeks to account for the pluralism of stereotypical thinking which guides policy attitude construction. In line with classical work on social representations (Doise, 1990; Moscovici, 1961/2008), the model assumes a homology between social and cognitive regulation such that the conceptions of the social order are at the same time "in the heads" and "in the world". The model also presents a fourfold typology of social domains regulated by policies: public order, labour market, diversity, and inequality. Our assumption is that specific social psychological processes are associated with each of these four policy domains. Let us now briefly look at each of these types of social order.

In the conception of *Moral order*, political lay thinking follows along the lines of morality and conformism with established and consensual norms. Much like in Talcott Parsons' (1951) functionalist sociology or in Amitai Etzioni's (1994) conservative communitarianism, social order is explained with citizens' respect for common values: the "good" citizens are those who respect and represent the core values of the society, whereas those who disrespect them, with deviant, non-conformist and disorderly behaviour, are categorised as "bad" citizens who threaten the social order. In this conception, individuals are assumed to strive for recognition through value conformity. Accordingly, the policy goal is to enforce value assimilation and strengthen conformity with social rules and norms, through disciplinary and repressive government intervention. The moral order conception is captured in values of traditionalism and authoritarianism which bemoan the moral decline, glorify the "good old days" (Eibach & Libby, 2009), and stress the duty of group members to conform to conservative ingroup values of morality, self-reliance and discipline (Duckitt, 1989). Based

on representations of a “dangerous world” full of “bad” people (Duckitt, 2001), it reflects authoritarian modes of thinking, characterised by endorsement of dominant group norms, intolerance of deviance, and submissiveness to authorities (Altemeyer, 1996; Duckitt, 1989). Research on retributive justice and attitudes towards punitive and repressive policies appeals to processes of moral order, showing for example that perceived threat to the social order, operationalised with a high number of unresolved crimes, increases punitive policy attitudes (Rucker, Polifroni, Tetlock & Scott, 2004), or that a perceived decline in the moral consensus about right and wrong shapes attitudes towards punitive policies such as the three-strikes initiative (Tyler & Boeckmann, 1997).

The *Free market* conception, in turn, describes political lay thinking based on economically liberal principles. Social order is thought along meritocratic principles and citizens are evaluated as a function of individual performance and success. Individuals are expected to engage in competitive relations with each other and endorse the equity principle of distributive justice according to which retributions, in form of salary for example, should be proportional to contributions and personal investment (Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978). Free market thinking assumes that the basic human motivation is self-interest, one of the most influential cultural norms in contemporary Western societies (Miller, 1999). Accordingly, policies are implemented to promote principles of meritocratic achievement, for example active unemployment policies (van Oorschot, 2004). Values of economic individualism (see Kinder & Sanders, 1996) capture free market thinking. The threat to a social order governed by free market principles stems from individuals who violate its core principles: free-riders and “losers”. People perceived to misuse welfare benefits are a particularly likely target of stereotypical judgements as are welfare beneficiaries in general, suspected to take advantage of other members’ hard work and thus to be a burden to other

group members. Researchers have invoked this conception to study for example the effects of perceived deservingness on policy attitudes (e.g., Appelbaum, 2001; van Oorschot, 2006).

Table 1

## Model of lay conceptions of social order

	RECOGNITION	REDISTRIBUTION
NORMATIVE DIFFERENTIATION	<i>MORAL ORDER</i>	<i>FREE MARKET</i>
<i>Regulatory principle</i>	Conformism	Competition
<i>Ideological value</i>	Authoritarianism, Traditionalism	Individualism, Meritocracy
<i>Stereotypical antagonism</i>	“Good” vs. “Bad”	“Winners” vs. “Losers”
<i>Policy domain</i>	Crime regulation, Public order	Labour market, Employment
CATEGORICAL DIFFERENTIATION	<i>SOCIAL DIVERSITY</i>	<i>STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY</i>
<i>Regulatory principle</i>	Group differentiation	Group hierarchy
<i>Ideological value</i>	Multiculturalism vs. Racism	Equality vs. Inequality
<i>Stereotypical antagonism</i>	Ingroup vs. Outgroup	Dominant vs. Subordinate groups
<i>Policy domain</i>	Group rights, Affirmative action	Social welfare

The conception of *Social diversity* differs from the two preceding conceptions to the extent that political lay thinking relies upon ascribed group membership and an *a priori* distinction between social groups rather than between groups defined by individual conduct (as is the case for the antagonisms between “good” and “bad” people and between “winners” and “losers”). The regulatory principle of social order at work in the social diversity

conception is group differentiation (Doise, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It thereby provides a conceptual framework for accounting for lay thinking on social diversity and multiculturalism, in both positive and negative terms (Verkuyten, 2004). On the policy level, group rights (or cultural rights) are at stake in this conception. If the two former conceptions, moral order and free market, call for individual rights (and duties) granted irrespective of group membership, the conception of social diversity accounts for situations in which social groups claim rights in the name of their group, both minority and majority groups (see Isin & Wood, 1999). The social diversity conception can be measured for example with scales tapping multicultural (van de Vijver, Breugelmans & Schalk-Soekar, 2008) and racist values and beliefs (Henry & Sears, 2002). Stereotypical judgements in this conception are based on the evaluation of perceived categorical difference between groups defined with physical, cultural or historical qualities, often associated with essentialised and immutable qualities (Haslam, Rothschild & Ernst, 2000; Yzerbyt, Rocher & Schadron, 1997). According to social identity theory, such thinking based on group membership is likely to develop in contexts where people strongly identify with their group and where their social identities are salient (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The *Social diversity* conception is more complex than the moral order and free market conceptions, because group differences can be evaluated as either positive, for example in multiculturalism and in movements defending rights of particular groups, or negative, as in racist and discriminatory thinking and behaviour. In the case of a positive view of intergroup differences, the social order is based on a diversity-friendly recognition and valorisation of ethnic, cultural, sexual, or religious difference between groups. To the extent that group membership is officially recognised as a cause of unequal treatment and discrimination, group differences provide the foundation of affirmative action policies and group rights. Studies investigating the role of racism and prejudice on attitudes towards



affirmative action policies, for example, draw upon this conception (Bobocel, Son Hing, Davey, Stanley & Zanna, 1998; Federico & Sidanius, 2002), as does research on differences in policy attitudes between (ethnic) minorities and majorities (Staerklé, Sidanius, Green & Molina, 2009). In the case of a negative view of intergroup differences, social order is based on privileges granted to members of the (ethnic) majority group. Accordingly, the threat to a social order based on majority rights stems from categorical otherness, represented in particular by ethnic and national outgroups, foreigners, immigrants and asylum seekers. Exclusionary, discriminatory and nationalist policies implement such negative social diversity principles. A vast field of research investigating attitudes towards racial policies (see Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Sears, Sidanius & Bobo, 1999) and exclusionary immigration and integration policies (Green, 2009; Scheepers, Gijsbert & Coenders, 2002; Sniderman, Hagendoorn & Prior, 2004) calls upon this facet of the *Social diversity* conception.

In the final conception, lay political thinking is structured by group hierarchy, that is, by *Structural inequalities*. Here, social order is thought to be governed by deterministic patterns of class-based inequality resulting in a social hierarchy of status and power. Class differences are seen as the result of social reproduction and inherited privileges rather than as the outcome of individual strivings (e.g., Bourdieu, 1979). Policies in this conception regulate social inequalities, in particular redistributive tax policies and social welfare programmes. This conception is therefore mostly concerned with (opposition to) social rights which grant individuals with decent and dignified living conditions (Roche, 2002). The stereotypical cleavage characteristic of this conception is the distinction between underprivileged, subordinate groups on the one hand, and privileged, dominant groups on the other. Much like in classic Marxist analyses, these groups are seen as being in a competitive relation of negative interdependence with each other: the demands by low status groups directly threaten the well-being of the high status groups (Bobo & Hutchings, 1996).

Again, this conception is complex to the extent that structural inequalities can either be perceived as legitimate and fair, or on the contrary as illegitimate and unfair. When the inequalities are seen as legitimate and even desirable, individuals are likely to endorse strategies of justification of these inequalities, by promoting “legitimising myths” which provide a rationale for the superior position of the dominant groups (Jost et al., 2004). As a result, individuals assert and defend superiority of those in privileged positions by supporting hierarchy-enhancing policies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In this view, a hierarchical social order dominated by powerful groups is threatened by organised groups which defend egalitarian principles and aim to attenuate the social hierarchy, for example trade unions. By extension, the threat stems also from low status groups collectively defending their rights. However, when inequality is deemed illegitimate, citizens support inequality correcting policies which are destined to redistribute wealth and opportunities, for example progressive tax policies.

#### Implications: Organising Principles, Meaning and Causality

The model of lay conceptions of social order organises ideological knowledge and thereby defines the organising principles of political lay thinking. At the same time, the four conceptions of social order provide the building blocks of political lay thinking. Its four-fold dimensionality allows a fine-grained analysis of individual differences anchored in group processes (Duckitt, 1989; Kreindler, 2005). It is therefore both a model of individual differences and of shared, cultural knowledge concerning the different ways of organising a society.

Although the four conceptions are theoretically separate from each other, they are by no means impermeable. In most instances processes representing the four conceptions of social order mingle and combine in various ways, thereby giving rise to the extraordinary complexity of political lay thinking. As an example, research investigating the role of racism

in the support of punitive policies (Green et al., 2006) links racists representations derived from the social diversity conception with support for punitive policies implementing moral order principles. More generally, the model allows investigating value ambivalence by analysing the six possible value pairs resulting from the combinations of the four conceptions. The model thus provides a flexible tool to account for value pluralism and its effects on policy attitudes.

The model is also a heuristic device to study the relationship between thought content and thought process. In line with social representations theory, the meanings associated with actual thought contents condition the psychological processes at work. Therefore, the model is not primarily intended to predict causal links between its components. It rather represents a heuristic model which defines the different meanings associated with categories and concepts which are open to debate and interpretation. Equality, for example, takes on different meanings depending on the conception of social order it is referred to: in the moral order conception, *prescriptive equality* expects citizens to conform equally to the same dominant ingroup norms; *equality of opportunities* is central in a free market conception; *equality of treatment* of different groups is a cornerstone of the social diversity conception; and *equality of resources* between social categories is a central feature of the structural inequality conception. Similarly, stereotypes of immigrants vary as a function of the conceptions: in moral order, immigrants are seen as *dangerous and threatening*, in free market, they are *lazy profiteers* of welfare benefits, in the social diversity conception they represent *essentialised, cultural otherness*, and in the structural inequality conception they make up a *subordinate social category* dominated by ethnic majority groups. Future research needs to establish the extent to which such different meanings associated with one particular concept determine policy attitudes.

Moreover, the model may clarify some of the theoretical and methodological confusion in prior research regarding the boundaries between ideological values and policy attitudes. Policy attitudes are often used as indicators of some larger underlying attitude construct; egalitarianism, for example, has been measured with attitudes towards policies limiting excessive wage disparities (Kluegel & Smith, 1986), and authoritarianism with attitudes towards punitive policies (Altemeyer, 1998). Social values and ideologies as measured by survey instruments are thus often inferred from policy attitudes which suggests that they cannot be treated as epistemologically distinct constructs (as advocated by research which claims that political thinking invoking abstract values is more sophisticated than thinking on concrete everyday issues; Converse, 2000). This interpretation is supported by the fact that no consistent link between political sophistication and value-based reasoning has been evidenced (Feldman & Zaller, 1992). As a result, one should be cautious in asserting causal relationships between cognitive constructs which are all based on social representations and shared lay knowledge (Wagner & Hayes, 2005).

The model nevertheless suggests that certain relations among its components can be analysed as a causal sequence in order to explain policy attitudes. The model assumes that threats specific to each type of social order (e.g., crime and insecurity in the moral order conception) should heighten the salience of the respective stereotypical antagonisms (e.g., between good and bad people) which then determine the policy attitude (e.g., support for punitive policies). According to the model, the concepts of perceived threat, antagonism and policy attitude are qualitatively different: perceived threat captures perceptions of general problems a society has to face, antagonisms are based on perceived normative and categorical differences, and policy attitudes require a political decision (that is, they refer to “votable” issues). Due to its emphasis on stereotypical representations of group relations, this view is in line with models which consider prejudice and stereotypes as determinants of policy attitudes

(Bobo, 2000; Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Lowery et al, 2006; Sears et al., 1997). It also suggests that in order to understand why ideological values predict policy attitudes, it is necessary to analyse values in ways that make explicit their role in enhancing stereotypical antagonisms and value-based prejudice.

#### Anchoring of Conceptions and Policy Attitudes

In this final section, we briefly outline some of the factors which determine the extent to which individuals endorse the four conceptions of social order, either measured as perceived threats to social order, as perceived antagonisms or as policy attitudes. It should first be noted that all four conceptions may provide ideological justification for policies which maintain various aspect of social status quo: the moral order conception favours repressive policies which threaten dissent and democratic contestation, the free market conception supports meritocratic policies which put less competitive individuals at a disadvantage, the social diversity conception legitimises discriminatory and racist policies, and the structural inequality conception promotes inequality enhancing policies. Based on research showing that insecurity and instability bolsters cultural worldviews which provide a sense of stability (van den Bos, 2009), we could expect that the maintenance of status quo through all four policy domains is enhanced by feelings of uncertainty, vulnerability and precariousness. This prediction can be extended to status differences with respect to conceptions of social order. Research has shown that subordinate groups typically express higher levels of prejudice against other low status groups (Wagner & Zick, 1995), that they feel more threatened by various social problems (Staerklé et al., 2007), and that they score higher on some legitimising beliefs, for example meritocratic achievement and the value of hard work (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon & Sullivan, 2003). These effects point towards strategies of downward social comparison that members of subordinate groups may engage in, thereby expressing a heightened perception off the various social order threats and the corresponding stereotypical

antagonisms. Differentiating themselves from stigmatised groups such as welfare beneficiaries, asylum seekers or unruly youth provides the opportunity to affirm their relative superiority on appropriate dimensions of comparison. At a societal level, however, stigmatising consensual targets of public scorn is a strategy of justification of a social order that seeks its legitimacy in the exclusion of groups portrayed in the media and in political discourse as threatening the social order (Young, 1999).

Privileged groups in turn are also likely to endorse these status quo supporting beliefs, albeit for different reasons. Whereas members of subordinate groups engage in strategies to deal with a negative social identity associated with their low status in society (Wright, Taylor & Moghaddam, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), members of dominant groups are more likely to be motivated to secure their privileges (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Thereby, differential policy attitudes reflect the fact that people in privileged positions do not have the same interests with respect to the social organisation as those in subordinate positions.

These considerations suggest that individual variations should be investigated with respect to the significance of each conception regarding status quo maintenance and social change. For the four conceptions are not equivalent in this respect: moral order and free market conceptions are by definition status quo enhancing, since they are based on normative differentiation and value conformity, thereby legitimising and enforcing dominant majority values. Within these two conceptions, dissent can only be interpreted as deviance from common values, thereby making it illegitimate. Subordinate groups are likely to endorse these conceptions because they provide a platform of positive differentiation against non-normative groups and individuals. Dominant groups, in contrast, support them because it allows cementing social arrangements which produced their privileged position in the first place. Social change therefore necessarily (and maybe paradoxically) requires conceptions of the social order which are based on categorical differentiation, that is, social diversity and

structural inequality. It is indeed only in these conceptions that an awareness of illegitimate intergroup relations (characterised by discrimination, domination and exploitation) can be developed, denounced and eventually corrected.

If subordinate groups look after their group interests, they do so in order to correct inequality which in their view is illegitimate: women, for example, support unconditional maternity leave more than men, not only because they are the main beneficiaries of this policy, but also because the lack of maternity insurance creates inequality between men and women (Staerklé, Roux, Delay, Gianettoni & Perrin, 2003). Similarly, members of subordinate groups in general are more supportive of egalitarian and redistributive social policies (Kangas, 1997; Staerklé et al., 2007; Svallfors, 2006). By collectively defending their interests against dominant groups, subordinate groups draw upon an upward social comparison in order to condemn the perceived injustice (Spears, Jetten & Doosje, 2001).

This brings us back to the issue of political attitude ambivalence. Members of subordinate groups often simultaneously support egalitarian policies and endorse hierarchy-enhancing ideologies such as economic individualism and meritocracy. For political experts, these two sets of attitudes are contradictory, since egalitarian policies are hierarchy-attenuating, whereas meritocratic ideologies justify inequality. Sociological analyses may help to shed light on this apparently paradoxical pattern. Bourdieu (1979) has shown that members of social categories adopt ways of thinking and perceiving social reality which reflect their social position. In line with our argument that political lay thinking is anchored in the particular social contexts in which it is developed, subordinate groups typically develop a pessimistic outlook on society, they may revel in a past when things seemed better (Eibach & Libby, 2009) and they don't have much hope that their situation could fundamentally improve (Castel, 1995). Such a vision of society may lead to resentment towards groups who are believed to be responsible for the moral decay of society (e.g., immigrants, homosexuals or

delinquents), or toward groups thought to take advantage of good citizens and honest workers. At the same time, however, members of subordinate groups expect the government to do something for them. Only government intervention can guarantee a minimal standard of living (with appropriate social policies) and thus contribute to ease fears about an uncertain future. Members of dominant groups, in turn, display more optimistic and carefree attitudes (Staerklé et al., 2007). They are in a better position to cope in economically difficult times, and have a lower risk of being unemployed for a long time (Paugam, 2000). They enjoy a relatively positive social identity, and are more concerned with securing their privileges than with boosting their identity with comparisons with stigmatised groups.

These considerations lead to the conclusion that the position in the social structure is a key factor in explaining (apparent) attitude inconsistency: subordinate groups are more prone to attitudinal ambivalence because they expect more hierarchy attenuation and government protection, while struggling at the same time to enhance their negative social identity with ideological strategies which may clash with the support for hierarchy attenuating government intervention. This conclusion is consistent with research on attitude ambivalence. Politically liberal groups who advocate more social intervention by governments display more attitudinal ambivalence than conservative groups (Feldman & Zaller, 1992), left wing citizens show more cognitive complexity and integration by referring to multiple ideological values and tradeoffs (Tetlock, 1986), and ambivalent attitudes towards government are more frequent among people who feel less secure financially, compared to the financially secure (Cantril & Davis Cantril, 1999).

### Conclusion

The present paper approached policy attitudes and their variations from the perspective of political lay thinking. Based on social representations theory, we have argued that attitude ambivalence was actually a manifestation of political lay thinking which



continually seeks ideological reference points in order to make sense of the political world. Political lay thinking transforms, through the process of *objectification*, abstract ideological values into stereotypical representations of value-conforming and value-violating groups. In this view, citizens are competent enough to take up a stance towards policies, be it only on the basis of a hazy preference for a certain type of social order. Everyday political knowledge is not less informed, less sophisticated, less deep than expert political knowledge; it is qualitatively different and follows different rules, in particular the requirement that knowledge must be useful for everyday communication and action within one's reference groups. The *anchoring* process describes how citizens think politics in and out of the social relations they are embedded in. The end product of this process are the four conceptions of social order which represent divergent, yet shared representations of citizenship.

In this view, policy attitudes become symbolic tools with which citizens either provide legitimacy to existing social relations or challenge them. In a democratic society values and policies are always debated and debatable, since they represent different and often incompatible political goals (Mouffe, 1993). Policies implement certain types of social order which are questioned, contested, or approved by citizens. Such policy debates are likely to revolve around the four shared understandings of social order—*Moral order*, *Free market*, *Social diversity* and *Structural inequality*—which continuously feed and orient lay political thinking.

### Short Biography

Christian Staerklé is Associate Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. He has obtained his PhD in social psychology from the University of Geneva, and has worked as a post-doctoral researcher at the University of California, Los Angeles. On a general level, his research, based on both survey and experimental methods, concerns the connections between intergroup relations, social justice and legitimising ideologies from the perspective of social representations theory. He is currently involved in studies investigating contextual, collective and individual factors shaping policy attitudes, in particular with respect to welfare and disciplinary policies. He is also interested in intergroup processes occurring in collective punishment. His work has been published in *Political Psychology*, the *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *Social Justice Research*, *Culture and Psychology*, *Law and Human Behavior*, *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. He has recently also authored a book on the social psychology of policy attitudes, published by the Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.

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