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# **Worlds of Welfare, Worlds of Consent?**

**Public Opinion on the Welfare State**



# WORLDS OF WELELDS? WORLDS OF CONSENT?

*Public Opinion on the Welfare State*

BY

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## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements . . . . .	ix
1 Introduction and Research Questions . . . . .	1
1.1 Research questions. . . . .	3
Worlds of welfare capitalism. . . . .	5
Popular support for the welfare state . . . . .	7
Notions of solidarity and choices of justice principles . . . . .	9
Public support for health care systems . . . . .	11
Responsibility for old-age pensions . . . . .	12
1.2 Data. . . . .	14
International Social Survey Program . . . . .	14
Eurobarometer survey series. . . . .	15
European Values Study . . . . .	16
1.3 Scope and limitations of this study . . . . .	16
Cross-national comparability of attitudes . . . . .	17
Selection of countries for analysis . . . . .	18
Contextual-effects models and the small N problem . . . . .	19
1.4 Outline of the book . . . . .	21

## CONTENTS

2	Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism or More? In Search of Ideal Types and Real Forms . . . . .	25
2.1	Ideal types . . . . .	26
2.2	Three worlds of welfare capitalism . . . . .	29
	Or more? . . . . .	32
	Mediterranean welfare states. . . . .	37
	Antipodean welfare states. . . . .	39
	East-Asian welfare states . . . . .	41
	Familialism and late female mobilization . . . . .	42
2.3	Ideal and real types . . . . .	44
2.4	Empirical robustness of the three-way-classification . . . . .	49
2.5	Conclusion and discussion . . . . .	52
3	Popular Support for Institutionalized Solidarity: A Comparison between European Welfare States . . . . .	57
3.1	Theories and findings about welfare state support . . . . .	59
	Dimensions and levels of attitudes towards the welfare state .	59
	Motives to support the welfare state . . . . .	62
	Social position and support for the welfare state . . . . .	64
	Welfare state regimes and support for the welfare state . .	66
	Other contextual features and support for the welfare state .	67
3.2	Hypotheses . . . . .	67
3.3	Data, operationalization and method . . . . .	71
	Data . . . . .	71
	Operationalization . . . . .	71
	Method . . . . .	78
3.4	Results . . . . .	79
3.5	Summary and discussion. . . . .	84

## CONTENTS

4	Welfare States, Solidarity and Justice Principles: Does the Type really matter? . . . . .	89
4.1	Research questions. . . . .	90
4.2	Conceptual framework . . . . .	92
4.3	Differences in solidarity and justice between welfare states regimes. . . . .	94
4.4	Models and hypotheses . . . . .	99
	Distributive justice and solidarity: a causal model . . . . .	99
	Distributive justice and solidarity: additional hypotheses . . . . .	102
4.5	Data, operationalization and method . . . . .	105
	Data . . . . .	105
	Operationalization . . . . .	107
	Method . . . . .	111
4.6	Results . . . . .	112
4.7	Conclusion and discussion . . . . .	120
5	Public Health Care in the Balance: Exploring Popular Support for Health Care Systems in the European Union . . . . .	125
5.1	Solidarity and its motivational bases. . . . .	127
5.2	Reasons for welfare state support . . . . .	129
	Welfare state regimes . . . . .	129
	Institutional characteristics of the national care system. . . . .	132
	Individual, social and ideological position . . . . .	137
5.3	Hypotheses . . . . .	138
5.4	Data, operationalization and method . . . . .	144
	Data . . . . .	144
	Operationalization . . . . .	144
	Method . . . . .	150
5.5	Results . . . . .	151
	Attitudes towards public health care . . . . .	151
	Explaining differences in attitudes towards public health care . . . . .	154
5.6	Conclusions and discussion. . . . .	159

## CONTENTS

6	Old-Age Pensions: Individual or Collective Responsibility? An Investigation of Public Opinion within European Welfare States . . . . .	163
6.1	Welfare state regimes and public opinion on pensions . . .	165
6.2	Social position and opinions about old-age provisions . . .	170
6.3	Data, operationalization and method . . . . .	172
	Data . . . . .	172
	Operationalization . . . . .	173
	Method . . . . .	176
6.4	Results . . . . .	177
6.5	Conclusion and discussion . . . . .	187
7	Summary and Discussion . . . . .	193
7.1	Answers to the research questions . . . . .	194
	Worlds of welfare capitalism. . . . .	194
	Popular support for the welfare state . . . . .	195
	Notions of solidarity and choices of justice principles . . .	197
	Public support for health care systems . . . . .	199
	Responsibility for old-age pensions . . . . .	200
7.2	Conclusion . . . . .	202
7.3	Discussion. . . . .	206
	Scientific relevance . . . . .	206
	Societal relevance . . . . .	210
	Some shortcomings and prospects for future research . . .	213
7.4	Concluding remarks . . . . .	217
	BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	219
	INDEX OF SUBJECTS . . . . .	232

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The scope of public consent to welfare policies constitutes an important topic in the political and social scientific debate about the welfare state. In all Western democracies, the idea that the preferences of the majority – how vaguely these may be in practice – should have at least some bearing on actual policy developments has become self-evident (Taylor-Gooby, 1995). Furthermore, all welfare states are confronted with severe challenges: the ageing population, family instability and the labor market consequences of globalization and technological change. These have led to the almost universal claim that the welfare state has become unsustainable and therefore incapable of satisfying expressed social needs (Esping-Andersen, 2000). These more recent challenges have led to considerable reforms of welfare state arrangements in mature as well as in immature welfare states. Consequently, against the background of these developments, critics of the welfare state have reconsidered the chances of survival and the adverse consequences of welfare state arrangements (see, for example, Zijderfeld, 1999; Schmidt & Goodin, 1998). The question of the extent to which the general public is, in spite of this criticism, still committed to the solidary foundations of the welfare state has, since the 1970s, increasingly become the subject matter of empirical research (Coughlin, 1980; Wilensky, 1975; Papadakis & Bean, 1993; Svallfors, 1997; Kluegel & Miyano, 1995; Peillon, 1996; Taylor-Gooby, 1998). The study of popular commitment to welfare state solidarity has been particularly intensified in the wake of large-scale projects for the collection of survey data on opinions, values and attitudes. In general, it has become increasingly recognized that this fundamental knowledge is valuable, as these orientations may be essential in guiding human behavior. However, as Svallfors states “we are now rich on data, while qualified analyses and interpretations lag considerably behind” (1995a).

This study can be situated in the latter tradition of cross-national research on attitudes and opinions. Specifically, it is concerned with a description and explanation of public attitudes towards welfare state solidarity and distributive justice in Western, Antipodean and South East



Asian welfare states. In addition, this study investigates the relationship between public commitment to welfare state solidarity and fairness on the one hand, and the different welfare state regimes – as they have been conceived by Esping-Andersen (1990) and, later on, extended and amended by his critics – on the other. Citizens of different welfare states can be expected to be committed differently to welfare state solidarity and to differ in their choices of justice principles. One of the main objectives is therefore to investigate the extent to which the level of public commitment to welfare state solidarity and fairness are related to the institutional context that constitutes the welfare state of a country. Svallfors (1995b) argues that “in trying to explain national differences in attitudes a focus on institutions can be very fruitful”. According to him, “comparative research has shown that institutions have a substantial impact on things such as the income distribution, the standard of living, social mobility, and voting behavior. What comparative attitude research should aim at is to study variations and similarities in attitudes across national contexts, and explain, or at least interpret, these as the outcome of institutional arrangements. The attitudes we may register in our surveys are, at best, today’s traces of yesterday’s history. They are remnants of historical processes that have been structured by national institutions. National differences in attitudes could be explained as the outcome of the lived experience and interpretations of national institution”. One of the main objectives is therefore to answer Svallfors’s call, and to investigate the ways in which welfare state arrangements may matter for people’s commitment to welfare state solidarity and distributive justice.

Moreover, not only, as we have stated above, will citizens of different welfare states show different levels of commitment to welfare state solidarity, but also, within welfare states, these attitudes will differ between social groups. The first objective of this study is to examine the determinants of people’s commitment to welfare state solidarity and their choices of justice principles. This study not only investigates whether or not these variations reflect differences in institutional context created by differing welfare state arrangements, but also whether or not they reflect individual differences. In particular, we investigate the relevance of self-interest and ideology for people’s commitment to welfare solidarity and fairness. All studies on this topic have shown that people in different social locations and with differing socio-political orientations are indeed committed differently

to welfare state solidarity and that they have different preferences with respect to justice principles (see, for example, Papadakis, 1993; Svallfors, 1997; Kluegel & Miyano, 1995).

### *1.1 Research questions*

The central problematic dealt with in this study concerns the following questions: To what extent are citizens of different welfare states and with different social characteristics committed differently to welfare state solidarity and certain principles of social justice? And how can these differences can be explained? More specifically, five research questions have been formulated. The first one addresses the discussion on the variety in and clustering of welfare state arrangements at the national level. The remaining four research questions consist of two parts. The first part addresses how and why there may be differences between welfare state regimes in their population's endorsement of welfare state solidarity and particular justice principles. The second part raises the question of how and why individuals may differ in their commitment to welfare state solidarity and distributive justice.

With respect to the differences between welfare states, and specifically between welfare state regimes, it has been proposed that public attitudes will tend to reflect varying traditions of characteristic welfare governance. This proposition is based on the assumption that these welfare state regimes each have been influenced by different historical circumstances, political frameworks and social values (Taylor-Gooby, 1995).

According to Ullrich (2000), this is one of the more promising lines of research to explain national consensus and national particularity. However, thus far, only a limited number of studies have systematically investigated, with varying results, the impact of welfare state arrangements on people's commitment to welfare state solidarity, apart from their individual-level determinants (Svallfors, 1997; Gundelach, 1994; Papadakis & Bean, 1993; Mau, 1997). This study is also focused on assessing the impact of both individual-level (social characteristics and socio-political beliefs) and group-level variables (type of welfare state regime and structural characteristics of the national health and pension system) on an outcome at the individual level, namely people's commitment to welfare state solidarity and distributive justice. An important contribution of this study to previous such research is that explicit propositions concerning the

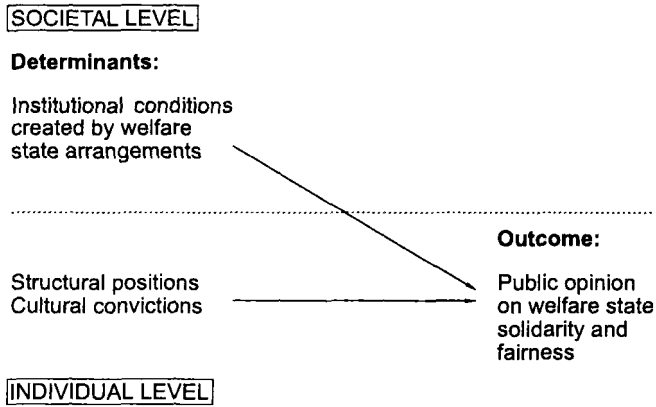


Figure 1.1: The structure of contextual explanation.

impact of the institutional context are formulated and specific information on group membership is included into the analytical framework. Essentially, attitudes are related to aspects of the social context and to indicators of location in the social structure and of socio-political beliefs. In Figure 1.1, we present the structure of explanation which is followed in this study.

As far as the relevance of societal institutions is concerned, we examine the extent to which the institutional conditions created by welfare state arrangements have an impact on people's commitment to welfare state solidarity and their choices of justice principles. Here, the point of departure is Esping-Andersen's well-known classification of welfare states into liberal, conservative and social-democratic regime-types (Esping-Andersen, 1990). These three ideal-typical Worlds of welfare capitalism constitute different models of welfare provision. However, this study will not be limited to welfare states which can be placed under these headings. Esping-Andersen's classification of welfare states has not only been applauded, but it has also been heavily criticized, which has resulted in important extensions of his original classification. Basically, his critics argue that more than just three types of welfare provision exist in the real world, and that classifications of welfare states should also take these alternative modes into account. Depending on the data available, we will

investigate the extent to which these different styles of welfare provision relate to people's attitudes towards welfare state solidarity and distributive justice.

However, real welfare states are only empirical approximations of ideal-typical constructs. Therefore, they may have limited relevance with respect to better understanding people's commitment to welfare state solidarity and fairness. Structural aspects of specific sectors of the national system of social protection may show a stronger association with attitudes towards welfare solidarity, as these particular institutional arrangements relate more concretely to the acceptance of specific styles of welfare provision (Ullrich, 2000). Therefore, not only the contextual effect of belonging to a certain type of welfare state regime is investigated here, but also the extent to which structural characteristics of specific sectors of the national system of social protection relate to people's commitment to welfare state solidarity. For example, we examine the extent to which people's endorsement of particular national (health) care systems is dependent on structural characteristics of these systems.

The contextual approach which we follow in this study requires both the examination of these differences and similarities not only across welfare states, but also within welfare states. As Figure 1.1 illustrates, the extent to which individuals are supportive of their welfare system and prefer certain principles of justice are seen as the result of their location in the social structure and their socio-political beliefs, controlling for contextual effects.

### *Worlds of welfare capitalism*

In the last decades, interest in comparing the welfare states of modern societies has grown fast. To grasp the differences and similarities which exist between the welfare state arrangements of different countries, the use of theoretical models has become both a widely accepted, and sometimes strongly disputed activity (see, for example, Baldwin, 1996). Goodin et al. (1999) argue in favor of the classification endeavor of welfare states, saying that the institutions of the welfare state are the result of many political tugs-of-war over a long period of time. As they point out, in the course of all this bickering over the design and redesign of these institutions, however, patterns have emerged and clusters have been formed. To some extent, the characteristics of welfare states within these clusters reflect certain intentions, ideas and values. This is partially because there are only a

limited number of ways of pursuing any given social objective. Those who are – from a policy-making perspective – involved in the shaping and reshaping of institutional arrangements, will in particular cling to old intellectual routines to further serve their intentions and principles. Moreover, these routines are real in the sense that there is, to some extent, an internal ‘regime logic’ that dictates what institutional options can fit together coherently and work together well.

This idea that qualitatively different regime logics have crystallized into real welfare states has gained momentum since the appearance of Esping-Andersen’s ground-breaking book *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990). In this book, Esping-Andersen combines Marshall’s (1950) definition of social citizenship with Titmuss’s (1958; 1974) classification of three different principles for the organization of welfare provision: residual, industrial-achievement and institutional-redistributive welfare state models. By distinguishing qualitatively different ways of welfare provision, Esping-Andersen aims to exemplify how specific constellations of political power have led to the development of historically different welfare state regimes. For this purpose he relates social citizenship and welfare (Boje, 1996). Esping-Andersen defines social citizenship indexdefinition!of social citizenship by the number of social rights attributed to individuals in the welfare state or by their ability to maintain a livelihood in the society without reliance on the market-level of de-commodification. He argues that, as we examine international variations in the substance of social citizenship and welfare state stratification, we find qualitatively different arrangements between the state, the market and the family. These cluster into a liberal, conservative and social-democratic regime type (Esping-Andersen, 1990), which are influenced by their historical roots, political systems and social values.

It is not surprising that Esping-Andersen’s claim of ‘three worlds of welfare capitalism’ has been contested by other students of the welfare state. Although his effort was much acclaimed, a great many alternative endeavors have been undertaken to categorize real welfare states into different welfare state regimes. Although the basic division into ‘liberal’/‘social-democratic’/‘conservative’ has, by now, become customary, opinions differ about whether these three regime-types are sufficient to classify welfare states which were not included in Esping-Andersen’s original account. In addition, as the act of typologizing is a matter of

deciding that some features are important in a certain respect and others not (cf. Baldwin, 1996), dispute has arisen about the proper classification of real welfare states. In the end, the explanatory value of Esping-Andersen's typology was questioned. The first research question relates to the discussion concerning the robustness of the Esping-Andersenian working typology. It reads as follows:

1. *Are there families of real welfare states or are all welfare states rather unique specimens? If the former is the case, are there three or more ideal-typical Worlds of welfare capitalism?*

To answer this question, we first review Esping-Andersen's original classification; we then consider the various criticisms which have been levied against the typological approach, in general, and the theoretical underpinnings of Esping-Andersen's typology, in particular. In addition, we offer a survey of welfare state classifications which have been proposed to extend and amend Esping-Andersen's original classification. We also offer a compilation of real welfare states and their classification according to the various typologies. Finally, we also discuss the various attempts which have been undertaken to test the goodness-of-fit of Esping-Andersen's classification.

#### *Popular support for the welfare state*

The second research question asks whether or not public opinion towards the welfare state tends to reflect the distinctive corporatist, social-democratic and liberal-leaning frameworks that are supposed to characterize the governance of different European welfare states. Roller (1992) has argued that attitudes towards government intervention in the area of social policy can be divided along three dimensions, which refer to the goals, means and outcomes of government intervention to achieve socio-economic security and justice. The second research question is limited to the public's preferences with respect to the goal-dimensions of government intervention. Roller divides this into extensiveness (whether individuals actually hold the state responsible for the provision of social protection) and intensity (the degree to which government should intervene in a certain area of social protection). Both kinds of preferences are put under the general heading of the public's preference for institutionalized solidarity,

as welfare state solidarity is achieved here by means of state intervention. Apart from an examination of the extent to which the different styles of government intervention are echoed in public opinion, several contextual factors are thought to affect the level of support for institutionalized solidarity: the level of social protection, income inequality and tax policies. The research question is as follows:

*2. To what extent do citizens of different welfare states support institutionalized solidarity? To what extent can differences between individuals and societies in this support be explained by differences between welfare state regimes, social protection level, income inequality, and tax regime, and, at the individual level, by social position and socio-political beliefs?*

To answer this question, people's preferences for an extensive and intensive welfare state are compared between France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Denmark, West Germany, Ireland, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece. Using the technique of multilevel-analysis, we estimate the effects of belonging to a certain welfare state regime. The effects of welfare effort, income inequality, and tax regime are also estimated. In addition, we estimate the effects of an individual's social position and his or her socio-political beliefs, as these characteristics can be expected to explain within-country variations in levels of support.

In previous research, cross-national variations and similarities in public commitment to the welfare state have been studied extensively (see, for example Svallfors, 1997; Taylor-Gooby, 1995; Papadakis & Bean, 1993). However, most studies are restricted to an analysis of one or only a few countries. Moreover, they usually do not explicitly include contextual conditions alongside of individual social characteristics in their analytical framework, although the impact of welfare state arrangements is often emphasized. Consequently, this presumed association has not really been empirically established (however, see Svallfors, 1997; Roller, 1995). One major contribution of this study is that it extends the previous research on popular commitment to the welfare state, in the sense that it analyzes a relatively large number of countries simultaneously, while adding comparative measures of contextual and individual characteristics. In this way, we estimate the impact of each type of welfare state regime, welfare state effort, income inequality and the tax regime on people's

preferences for an extensive or intensive welfare state in 11 countries in 1992, controlling for the effects of individual-level characteristics.

*Notions of solidarity and choices of justice principles*

The third research question is concerned with the problem of whether or not classifications of welfare states matters for people's notions of solidarity and their choices of justice principles. This research question is an extension of the previous research question. Specifically, we investigate, first of all, people's notions of solidarity in terms of the preferred broadness of government intervention to provide social protection which are intended to benefit citizens. Secondly, we examine the cross-national differences in preferences for the equality, need, and equity principle of distributive justice (Deutsch, 1975). But why focus on these two dimensions? As Goodin et al. (1999) argue, welfare states can, to a certain extent, be ranked on the basis of certain "external standards of assessment" such as the promotion of economic efficiency, social equality, social integration and stability, autonomy, and the reduction of poverty. These values have – in one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent – traditionally been served by various welfare state arrangements. Moreover, they emphasize that a broad consensus exists concerning these moral values across all welfare regimes. These values are the moral embodiments through which all welfare state regimes, of whatever type, are legitimized by their citizens. This broad consensus indicates that in the pursuit of these values certain similarities between welfare states may exist. However, the fact that welfare states quite often substantially differ in the allocation and distribution of welfare is a consequence of differences between them concerning which particular egalitarian justice principles they emphasize and which specific notions of solidarity they embrace. Variations in both the level of support for government responsibility in guaranteeing certain social rights and preferences for certain justice principles will be related to the type of welfare state regime a country's welfare state belongs to. In this way, we investigate whether certain moral underpinnings of welfare state regimes are echoed in the public's attitudes. The research question is as follows:

3. *To what extent do citizens of different welfare states have different notions of solidarity and do they choose different justice principles? To*



*what extent can differences between individuals and societies in these notions and choices be explained by differences between welfare state regimes, social position and socio-political beliefs?*

We compare popular notions of solidarity and choices of justice principles between Canada, the United States, Great Britain, Ireland, France, West Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Austria, Belgium, The Netherlands, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and The Philippines. After classifying these welfare states into liberal, conservative, social-democratic, Mediterranean, Radical or East-Asian Communitarian, the explanatory value of this welfare state typology is assessed. Moreover, we also estimate the effects an individual's social position and his or her socio-political beliefs.

As far as the explanation of cross-national differences in people's notions of solidarity are concerned, we mainly follow Taylor-Gooby (1998) and Kluegel and Miyano (1995). These studies compared people's notions of solidarity in terms of their consent to government responsibility for different aspects of welfare provision. In both studies, only a limited number of countries could be compared, as data on public attitudes towards government intervention were not available for all welfare states. Specifically, Taylor-Gooby (1985) only compared attitudes among West Germany, Great Britain, Italy and Sweden. Based on this limited number of countries, Taylor-Gooby concluded that "public attitudes, though in some respects still distinctively 'national', seem obstinately to resist conforming to the dominant policy themes of the welfare states they inhabit". Kluegel and Miyano (1995) compared public support for government intervention to reduce inequalities and the effects of justice beliefs on the endorsement of government intervention between Great Britain, Japan, West Germany, The Netherlands, and the United States. They found that Japan is characterized by a especially high level of support and the United States, as is also found in other studies (for example Papadakis & Bean, 1993; Svallfors, 1997) by an especially low level of support.

One major contribution of our approach is the replication and extension of previous research by Taylor-Gooby (1998), Svallfors (1997), and Papadakis and Bean (1993). This is a replication in the sense that the type of welfare state regime is explicitly included to assess the explanatory power of the regime-typology for people's notions of solidarity and their choices of justice principles. It is an extension in the sense that