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The Institutional Logic of Welfare Attitudes

How Welfare Regimes Influence Public Support

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Why are people who live in liberal welfare regimes so reluctant to support welfare policy? And why are people who live in social democratic welfare regimes so keen to support welfare policy? This article seeks to give an institutional account of these cross-national differences. Previous attempts to link institutions and welfare attitudes have not been convincing. The empirical studies have had large difficulties in finding the expected effects from regime-dependent differences in self-interest, class interest, and egalitarian values. This article develops a new theoretical macro–micro link by combining the literature on deservingness criteria and the welfare regime theory. The basic ideas are that three regime characteristics, (a) the degree of universalism in welfare policy, (b) the differences in economic resources between "the bottom" and "the majority," and (c) the degree of job opportunities, have a profound impact on the public deservingness discussion and thereby on public support for welfare policy.

Keywords: *welfare regime; deservingness; public support; micro foundation; welfare policy*

A number of theoretical explanations have been given to the empirical finding that the electorate in some countries is in favor of welfare policy, whereas the electorate in other countries is much more reluctant. Primarily based on the American experience, a number of recent studies have emphasized the importance of the degree of ethnic homogeneity (e.g., Alesina &

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Glaeser, 2004; Freeman, 1986; Glazer, 1998; Goodhart, 2004). Another tradition explains cross-national differences in support for welfare policy with differences in egalitarian values in different cultures (e.g., Graubard, 1986; Lipset, 1996). As we are skeptical about these two popular explanations, this article will try to advance the third major position, namely, that cross-national differences in attitudes toward welfare policy can be (partly) explained by cross-national differences in the institutional structure of the different welfare regimes.

This latter line of reasoning is prevalent within the comparative welfare state literature, which has often taken Esping-Andersen's (1990) famous distinction among liberal, conservative, and social democratic welfare regimes as a point of departure. The prime examples of these three ideal types are, respectively, the United States, Germany, and Sweden. Within this tradition, it is a prevailing idea that the institutional structure has a large impact on institutions at one point in time and on welfare policies at a later point in time. This path dependency is partly caused by a feedback mechanism through the electorate. In Esping-Andersen's words, "Each case will produce its own unique fabric of social solidarity" (p. 58). The idea is even more prominent in Pierson's (2001) pioneering work on "the new politics of the welfare state." Within his work, and in the following bulk of studies on "the new politics," it is claimed that the conflict between political leaders wanting to change the welfare state and a reluctant electorate is one of the most salient in contemporary Western politics. It is also claimed that the degree of resistance from the electorate is highly influenced by the institutional structures of the welfare state. Naturally, the welfare regime theory is not without its critics; particularly, the existence of more than three regimes has been discussed. However, following Esping-Andersen's (2000) re-examination of the regime theory, we will continue to operate with three ideal types.

A number of studies have tried to test the institutional line of reasoning by analyzing survey questions primarily made available by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP). At first glance, the findings from these studies point in different directions. Some find evidence for a regime pattern, especially if they restrict the analysis to the countries that come closest to Esping-Andersen's ideal types (Andress & Heien, 2001; Evans, 1996; Heien & Hofäcker, 1999; Svallfors, 1997). Others report that they do not find the expected pattern (Arts & Gelissen, 2001; Bean & Papadakis, 1998; Gelissen, 2000). However, a closer review of the previous studies reveals that the discrepancy is to a large extent caused by differences in the items used as dependent variables. The items that measure attitudes toward policies that primarily concern the poor and unemployed actually seem to follow a regime pattern.[1] Thus, in terms of support for welfare policy in the "narrow" or "American" meaning, we have an indication of a pattern with low support in liberal regimes, moderate support in conservative regimes, and high support in social democratic regimes.

Nevertheless, it is one thing to find the expected regime pattern in public attitudes and another thing to explain how this pattern comes about. In this latter respect, none of the previous empirical studies have been very successful. With (often implicit) reference to the power resource theory (Korpi, 1983), scholars have looked for different class effects. Especially the position of the middle class—believed to form a "welfare coalition" with the working class in social democratic regimes and to form an "anti-welfare coalition" with the upper class in liberal regimes—has been emphasized. But the empirical studies do not find such a class effect. Actually, class differences seem to be very similar in the different regimes (e.g., Evans, 1996; Svallfors, 1997). Scholars have also looked for effects from short-term self-interest, especially with reference to the rational choice argument about concentrated versus dispersed costs. Pierson (2001), for example, points to the fact that the "welfare clientele" (those who receive benefits plus public employed) is very big in social democratic regimes, moderate in conservative regimes, and low in liberal regimes and uses this as an explanation for differences in public support. In most studies, there is a positive effect from being unemployed (e.g., Andress & Heien, 2001; Gelissen, 2000; Svallfors, 1997), but otherwise it has been difficult to find the expected self-interest effects. These "disappointing" findings for the institutional line of reasoning often lead scholars to emphasize the importance of "culture" or "dominant welfare state ideology" (e.g., Andress & Heien, 2001; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003). However, this culture explanation remains a residual explanation that is underspecified. In 1998, Korpi and Palme—being the prime defenders of the power resource theory—rightly argued that "the empirical testing of the macro-micro-links among institutions and the formation of interest and coalitions provides a major challenge for social scientists" (p. 682).

In our opinion, this "dead end" of the institutional line of reasoning is caused by the fact that the grand theories of welfare state development (and thereby also the previous empirical studies guided by these theories) have a rather "mechanical" perception of the electorate. It is assumed that the welfare attitudes of individuals can be directly deduced from long-term class interests (the power resource theory), short-term self-interests (the new politics theory), or internalized values and norms (the culture theory). These mechanical positions stand in sharp contrast to modern election research, where it is broadly recognized that voters' stands on concrete policy issues cannot be directly deduced from their self-interests, class interests, or internalized values and norms (e.g., Merrill & Grofman, 1999).

In an attempt to rescue the institutional line of reasoning, this article aims to establish a new theory that explains how characteristics of the three welfare regimes influence attitudes toward welfare policies that concern the living conditions of the poor and unemployed; call it a theoretical construction of the missing link between welfare regimes and attitudes or a specification of the intervening variables. At an overall level, we will try to operate with a more reflexive "political man" whose policy attitudes are open to different perceptions of reality. Such a position nicely fits with studies that have shown that attitudes toward concrete policy proposals are highly dependent on the framing of the political issues (e.g., Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Kangas, 1997; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997). The overall idea is that the institutional structure of the different welfare regimes influences or—using another terminology—frames the way the public perceives the poor and unemployed. Thus, the political preferences of individuals are not exogenous, as in rational choice theory, but are highly influenced by the institutional structures (e.g., March & Olsen, 1984, 1989).

At a more concrete level, we base our line of reasoning on a combination of the welfare regime theory and the literature on deservingness criteria, which for some strange reason have lived rather separate lives. In the first section, we briefly introduce some of the main arguments within the deservingness literature and describe the lack of effort to link this literature to institutional reasoning. We also present a figure of our theoretical reasoning. In the following three sections, we describe how three different regime characteristics are likely to influence the public perceptions of the poor and unemployed and thereby the judgment of deservingness and the support for concrete welfare policies. We discuss the impact from the degree of universalism or selectivism, the differences in economic resources between the bottom and the majority, and the degree of job opportunities. These add up to the overall expectation (which, without much discussion, is taken for granted in previous empirical studies) that support for welfare policy is low in liberal regimes, moderate in conservative regimes, and high in social democratic regimes, at least when we speak about welfare policy in the narrow sense. In the following three sections, we try to verify our line of reasoning using the World Values Study from 1990. The analysis shows that welfare regimes do influence the public perception of the poor and unemployed, which further influences support for welfare policy. In the last section, we summarize the main argument and discuss the two competing theories.

The Five Deservingness Criteria and Public Support for Welfare Policy

Our understanding of public support for welfare policies takes its point of departure in the literature on deservingness. The main effort of this tradition has been to pinpoint which criteria the public use to judge whether a person or a group deserves help. In this regard, the studies conducted by Feagin (1972), Feather (1974), Cook (1979), De Swaan (1988), Will (1993), and Van Oorschot (2000) are extremely helpful to our purpose. The literature on deservingness seems capable of explaining the pattern of public support for social policy that Coughlin (1980) found in his pioneering cross-national study. He found what he calls "a universal dimension of support" because the ranking of the deserving groups followed the same line in all the countries included in his study. The public was most in favor of support for old people, followed by support for the sick and disabled, needy families with children, and the unemployed. The group given the least support was people on social assistance. Petterson (1995), Van Oorschot (2000), Van Oorschot and Arts (2005), and others have confirmed this ranking. If we follow the review in Van Oorschot, we arrive at the following five deservingness criteria:

1. Control (the less in control of neediness, the higher the degree of deservingness)
2. Need (the greater the level of need, the higher the degree of deservingness)
3. Identity (the higher the degree of group belonging, the higher the degree of deservingness)
4. Attitude (the more grateful, docile, and compliant, the higher the degree of deservingness)
5. Reciprocity (the higher the level of previous or future payback, the higher the degree of deservingness)

Both Van Oorschot's empirical findings on the Dutch case and the previous studies show that the issue of control is especially important. Thus, the key to explain modest support for the unemployed is the perception that they are much more in control of their situation than the disabled, the sick, and pensioners. In De Swaan's historical study of the modern welfare state, he labeled the criterion "disablity." In Cook's study of Americans' views on supporting the poor, she labels the criterion "locus of responsibility." Finally, Will also found that the most important deservingness criterion was the degree to which the problems facing poor families were beyond the immediate control of the individuals. Naturally, the level of need also plays a part, but within the Anglo-Saxon poverty tradition, need is more or less taken for granted, as welfare policy is all about support for those in need. The application of the need criterion is more difficult in social democratic regimes, where everyone is entitled, and in conservative regimes, where those who have paid contributions are entitled. We will return to this question below.

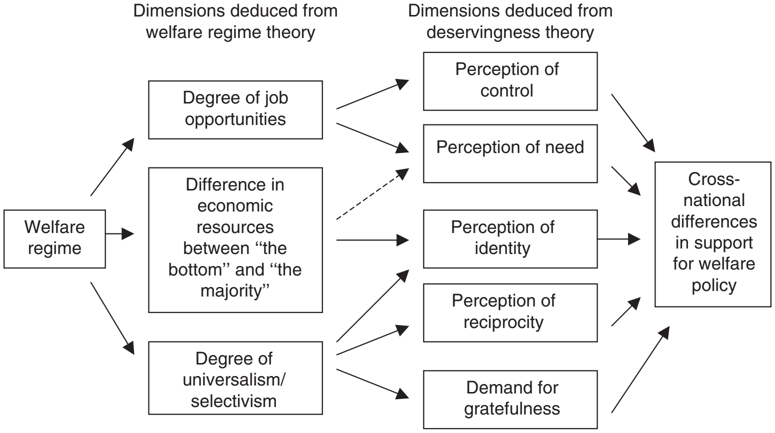
The identity criterion refers to the importance of feeling a shared identity with the groups who are to be supported. Using the label of proximity, De Swann (1988) argues that the boundary of the area can be defined by kinship relations, by place of residence, or, more generally, by the boundaries of a certain identity group, such as “our family,” “our town,” “our church,” or “our people.” The question of identity has been given strong attention in recent, primarily American studies that investigate the link between ethnic divides and public welfare attitudes (e.g., Alesina & Glaeser, 2004; Gilens, 2000; see also Quadagno, 1994). These studies, however, do not explicitly relate to the deservingness literature, and they do not apprehend the institutional embeddedness of this identity discussion (see below).

The attitude criteria refer to the ways recipients respond to public support. De Swann (1988) uses the term *docility* to highlight that the poor who hide their misery and ask for nothing are seen as more deserving than those who make impudent demands. Cook (1979) uses the terms *gratefulness* and *pleasantness*. Finally, the attitude criteria can be linked to a more general criterion of reciprocity, for example, such behavior as “the smile of thanks,” but also, in a modern context, actively looking for a job and willingness to participate in reinsertion programs. Van Oorschot (2000) furthermore argues that the needy who at the moment are unable to reciprocate might fulfill this criterion if they have contributed to “us” in the past or are likely to do so in the future.

Thus, the large support for public assistance to the old found by Coughlin (1980) and others might be explained by the perception that (a) they are not in control of their neediness; (b) they belong to “us;” (c) they are often grateful, docile, and compliant; and (d) they have contributed to “us” during their working age. At the other extreme, the low support for the group on social assistance is caused by the perception that (a) they could get a job if they wanted (i.e., they are in control of their neediness), (b) they do not fully belong to “us,” (c) they are often ungrateful, and (d) they have not often contributed much to “us” in the past. It is more difficult to see how the old and people on social assistance differ in terms of need.

The task in the following is to theorize how the regime context influences the ability of the poor and unemployed to fulfill these seemingly universal deservingness criteria. Figure 1 presents the main causal reasoning, which will be elaborated in the following sections.

Figure 1
The Theoretical Link Between Welfare Regime and Cross-National Differences in Welfare Attitudes


Dimensions deduced from welfare regime theory
Dimensions deduced from deservingness theory
Welfare regime
Degree of job opportunities
Difference in economic resources between "the bottom" and "the majority"
Degree of universalism/ selectivism
Perception of control
Perception of need
Perception of identity
Perception of reciprocity
Demand for gratefulness
Cross-national differences in support for welfare policy

The Link Between Degree of Universalism and Fulfillment of the Deservingness Criteria

According to Esping-Andersen (1990, 2000), the three welfare regimes are distinguished by differences in terms of welfare state, labor market, and family structures. But it is especially on the state dimension that we can find theoretical inspiration from previous studies. Within the welfare *state* literature, it is a classic thesis that systems dominated by universal benefits and services (the ideal policy of the social democratic welfare regime) and systems dominated by selective benefits and services (the ideal policy of the liberal welfare regime) generate quite different public discussions and perceptions of recipients. The typical coverage of the incidence of long-term unemployment in liberal and social democratic welfare regimes is quite different. If we take the United States, the country closest to the liberal ideal, the unemployed are covered by a short period with unemployment benefits, and after that, those in need (i.e., those without private savings or insurance) are covered by selective benefits and services such as Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, food stamps, general assistance, and so on. In contrast, the unemployed in Sweden, the country closest to the social democratic ideal, are covered by a long period with unemployment benefits, combined with a large number of citizenship-based services and benefits such as general health care, child allowance, basic old-age pension, housing allowances, and so on. Means-tested social assistance is available to those who have not qualified for unemployment benefits, but it only plays a minor role.

Following Rothstein (1998), the first step of the argument is simply to point to the fact that a selective policy that aims to provide the needy with economic resources must determine (a) who is needy and (b) how much they need. Therefore, “The public discussion of social policy in a selective system often becomes a question of what the well-adjusted majority should do about the less well-adjusted, in varying degrees, socially marginalized minority” (Rothstein, 1998, p. 158). The general fairness of the policy is also open to challenge, as the majority might start asking “a) where the line between the needy and the non-needy should be drawn, and b) whether the needy themselves are not to blame for their predicament” (p. 159). Relating this argument to the deservingness criteria presented in the previous section, one could say that a system dominated by selective welfare policies opens discussions of need and control (see Table 1). The identity dimension of deservingness is also influenced by this logic, connected to selective policy, as “the very act of separating out the needy almost always stamps them as socially inferior, as ‘others’ with other types of social characteristics and needs” (p. 158).

Furthermore, it is obvious that the boundaries between “them” and “us” generated by a selective welfare policy highlight who benefits from the welfare state (i.e., those who pay little or no tax and receive targeted benefits) and who loses on the welfare state (i.e., those who pay tax but do not receive any benefits). Thus, the reciprocity of the system will be perceived as very low, which increases the importance of grateful, docile, and compliant attitudes among those who receive the targeted benefits or services. Finally, this logic of selective welfare policy tends to generate vicious circles or even self-fulfilling prophecies because the needy, exactly because they are labeled as not being ordinary people, alter their behavior. It creates a further division between “them” and “us” and probably makes it more difficult to find grateful, docile, and compliant attitudes among recipients.

The logic of a system dominated by universal welfare policy is in all aspects contrary to the logic within a system dominated by selective policies. In the Scandinavian systems of “Rolls-Royce universalism,” no line needs to be drawn between the needy and the non-needy. Thus, the discussion of

Table 1
The Effects From Respectively Selective and Universal Social Policy on Different Dimensions of Deservingness

Dimensions of Deservingness	A Welfare State Dominated by Selective Benefits and Services	A Welfare State Dominated by Universal Benefits and Services
Need	Open the discussion of whether recipients are in need	Close the discussion of whether recipients are in need
Control	Open the discussion of whether recipients are to blame	Close the discussion of whether recipients are to blame
Identity	Define the recipients as a special group distinguished from the well-adjusted majority	Define the recipients as equal citizens who belong to a national “us”
Reciprocity	Highlight the boundary between those who give and those who receive	Blur the boundary between those who give and those who receive
Attitude	Open the discussion of whether recipients receive benefits and services with a grateful, docile, and compliant attitude	Close the discussion of whether recipients receive benefits and services with a grateful, docile, and compliant attitude

need and to what extent the poor and unemployed are in control of their neediness becomes more or less irrelevant. As Rothstein (1998) argues,

> Welfare policy does not, therefore, turn into a question of what should be done about “the poor” and “the maladjusted,” but rather a question of what constitutes general fairness in respect to the relation between citizens and the state. The question becomes not “how shall we solve their problem?” but rather “how shall we solve our common problem (healthcare, education, pensions, etc.)?” (p. 160)

Instead of defining a line between “them” and “us,” universal benefits and services actually help define everybody within the nation-state as belonging to one group. The vicious cycle of selective welfare policy is replaced by a positive circle.

The reciprocity discussion is also suppressed in social democratic regimes. For the majority of citizens, it is not an easy task to calculate whether one is a net winner or a net loser, even though welfare states dominated by universal policy have been shown to be the most redistributive nation-states in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) area. If the cost-benefit analysis were done at the individual level in a given year, the calculation would be manageable. The market value of the universal benefits and services received in that year would be subtracted from the amount paid in value-added tax (VAT), income tax, and different duties. But the calculation is complicated, and it becomes even more complicated if the cost-benefit analysis is done at the household level and within a lifetime perspective. In that case, the amount of VAT, income tax, duties, and so on paid by the family during a lifetime would be subtracted from the value of free education for the children, the old-age pension of one's partner, the likely use of free hospitals, the likely use of unemployment benefits, and so on. The most likely end result is that an ordinary citizen does not start to calculate at all.[2] So the point is that both the programmatic structure and the very size of the ideal social democratic regime (see also Korpi & Palme, 1998) blur the boundary between net winners and net losers, which restrains the reciprocity discussion. Finally, as the institutional logic of universalism suppresses the discussion of need, control, identity, and reciprocity, the attitudes among recipients of benefits and services also become more or less irrelevant. Nobody expects citizens—including the poor and the unemployed—to be grateful because they receive a basic old-age pension, have access to free hospital treatment, have access to heavily subsidized child care, and so on. Following this line of reasoning, we have theoretical reasons to believe that because of institutional mechanisms, the poor and unemployed in liberal regimes will be asked to fulfill much harder deservingness criteria than the poor and unemployed in social democratic regimes. Thereby, we have established the first part of the institutional explanation for high support for welfare policy in social democratic regimes and low support in liberal regimes.[3]

The Link Between Degree of Generosity and Fulfillment of the Need Criterion

The degree of generosity and the degree of universalism or selectivism of the welfare regimes are often not clearly distinguished from each other, probably because they often go together. However, we argue that the degree of generosity has an independent effect on the identity discussion. It is a classic thesis that pursuing a welfare policy that allows recipients to continue an "ordinary" lifestyle reduces the risk of stigmatizing (otherwise) poor and unemployed citizens. The basic argument is that reduced differences in economic resources between the majority and the bottom of society generates more similar living styles, which as a consequence makes it easier for the bottom to fulfill the identity criterion. In social democratic regimes, the unemployed use the same child care facilities, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and so on as the more well-off citizens. The generosity of the welfare states also allows the unemployed to live in ordinary neighborhoods. Thereby, we have a self-reinforcing feedback mechanism where policies that generate good living conditions among the potential poor produce public support for "more of the same." And the other way around: If those at the bottom of society are not provided decent economic resources, they are forced to have a way of living that is quite different from the way of living of the majority. Thereby, it becomes harder to fulfill the identity criterion, and we have a negative feedback mechanism on public opinion. It is quite symptomatic that the largest discussions about dependency culture took place in liberal regimes, which provide the least generous benefits and services (for the United Kingdom, see Dean & Taylor-Gooby, 1992; for the United States, see Murray, 1984). To boldly put it, one can argue that the lack of identification with Blacks in the United States is not a matter of only Black being Black. It is also a matter of Black being poor.

In terms of poverty risk, a number of empirical studies have demonstrated that the risks tend to be highest in liberal regimes, medium in conservative regimes, and lowest in social democratic regimes. If we take the countries closest to the ideal types, we find the expected pattern. Measured by Gini coefficients based on OECD data from the mid-1990s, the disposal income distribution was most equal in Sweden (23.0), less equal in Germany (28.2), and most unequal in the United States (34.4; Förster & Pearson, 2002, p. 38). If we take the percentage of the total populations that have an income below 50% of the median (equivalence) income, we see the same pattern. In Sweden, 6.6% fell below this threshold in the mid-1990s; in Germany, the share was 8.2%; and in the United States, the share was 17.8% (Luxembourg Income Study, 2005). These conventional figures for the whole population also include poverty among children and the elderly. If we use figures that narrowly measure the poverty risk among the group of able-bodied persons in the working age, which is our main concern, the pattern is even clearer. Relative poverty rates among the unemployed can, for example, be calculated from the European Household Panel Study, and the results are convincing, even though the extreme cases of Sweden and the United States are not included. In Denmark, another social democratic regime, only 8.1% of the unemployed fell below the relative poverty threshold of 50% of the mean income. In Germany, the share was 26.8%, and in the United Kingdom, the share was 48.5% (Gallie, Jacobs, & Paugam, 2000, p. 51).

Thus, on a one-dimensional scale, the difference in economic resources between the bottom and the majority is high in the ideal liberal regime, medium in the ideal conservative regime, and low in the ideal social democratic regime. Thus, we can expect an effect that should make it the most difficult to fulfill the identity criterion in liberal regimes and the easiest in social democratic regimes.[4] This is the second part of our institutional argument.

The Link Between Degree of Job Opportunities and Fulfillment of the Control Criterion

It is not only the generosity and the character of the welfare policy in the different welfare regimes that influence the deservingness discussion. The labor market structures in the different regimes are also likely to have a profound impact. Esping-Andersen and a number of "institutional economists" have shown that the programmatic structure of the welfare state is interwoven with the labor market. In his 1990 book, Esping-Andersen (pp. 144-161) described how welfare policy creates important structures that influence how workers through early retirement can exit from the workforce, how workers can claim paid absence from work, and how women especially can enter the workforce. However, his main interest was how these institutional regime differences have influenced the transformation from industrial to postindustrial economies (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1996, 2000). The pressure on the industrial production structure comes from external factors such as increased economic integration and new technologies and from internal factors such as the women's desire to participate in the workforce.

The most discussed indication of these pressures is the high rate of unemployment that haunted most Western welfare states during the 1980s and 1990s. Very generally speaking, the situation is that the social democratic regimes have followed a trajectory where new jobs were generated in the public sector. It boosted employment considerably, created opportunities for women, and prevented declining wages in service jobs. At the same time, an active labor market policy was designed to train manual workers for new postindustrial jobs. The liberal regimes followed a neoliberal trajectory, where new service jobs are created in the private sector. It also boosted employment and created opportunities for women, but at the same time inequality increased, and a large group of working poor was established. Finally, conservative regimes followed a labor reduction route. It did not boost employment in the service sector. Instead the male "insider" breadwinner was protected against the risk of unemployment through strict job protection and early retirement schemes (Esping-Andersen, 1996).

Now the point is that these different employment trajectories influence the public perception of the poor and unemployed. Especially the degree to which poor and unemployed groups are believed to be in control of their neediness is influenced by the level of unemployment. Therefore, the poor and unemployed in conservative regimes are seen as less in control of their neediness than are the poor and unemployed in social democratic and liberal regimes, where job growth in the public and private sectors, respectively, generates job opportunities. Recent empirical studies strongly support such an impact from labor market structures. Using Eurobarometer surveys, Gallie and Paugam (2002, p. 21) found a clear connection between level of unemployment in European countries and the perception that poverty was caused by laziness among the unemployed. Using the World Value Study, the same finding is reached by Larsen (2006). Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003), using the ISSP role of government module, also found a strong connection between level of unemployment and support for welfare policy (see also Eardley & Matheson, 1999).

However, it is not just the level of unemployment that matters. The differences in wage-setting mechanisms in each regime are also likely to have an impact. The poor and unemployed are perceived to be more in control of unemployment in countries where individuals are able to negotiate the wages themselves. This is possible in liberal regimes, where the importance of unions always has been limited and was further undermined by the neoliberal employment strategy during the 1980s and 1990s. To boldly put it, this institutional setting facilitates the perception that everybody can get a job in the private service sector if only they are willing to reduce their wage demands. This is not possible in social democratic and conservative regimes, where unions still have considerable influence on wage setting, especially in blue-collar sectors. So the poor and unemployed cannot escape unemployment by lowering their wage demands. Finally, the degree of job protection for the "insiders" (Lindbeck & Snower, 1988), which is very high in conservative regimes, also contributes to the perception of the poor and unemployed being out of control. Therefore, it is no surprise that Larsen (2005) finds that the share answering "that most poor people have very little chance of escaping poverty" (p. 62) is highest in two conservative regimes (Germany = 83%, Spain = 73%).

Alesina and Glaeser (2004) have rightly argued that the American perception of the poor, as having a good chance to escape poverty, does not coincide with the facts. Referring to Gottschalk and Spolaore (2002), who compare the United States and Germany, and to Checchi, Ichino, and Rustichini (1999), who compare the United States and Italy, reality seems to be that the poor are more "trapped" in the United States than in Germany and Italy. In the United States, 60% of the bottom quintile in 1984 were still in this quintile in 1993, compared to 43% in Germany. In the United States, 25% of the fathers in the bottom quartile have children who are also in this quartile. In Italy, the share is 21%. To explain this paradox, Alesina and Glaeser refer to different ideologies (p. 76) and later to a general negative perception of the poor caused by racial divides (pp. 133-183). In contrast, we point at regime-dependent labor market structures as a more straightforward explanation. Job growth in the private service sector and the ability of individuals to negotiate their salary might not on average increase the chance of moving out of the lowest quintile, but the possibility of getting a job gives the public the impression that each individual has a decent chance.

Thus, based on the argument of structural differences in service sector expansion, wage-setting mechanisms, and job protection, we would expect the labor markets to facilitate perceptions of little control of neediness among the poor and unemployed in conservative regimes, medium control of neediness in social democratic regimes, and high control of neediness in liberal regimes. This is the third part of our institutional argument.

Empirical Testing

Above, we have established a new theoretical link between welfare regimes and public attitudes. The three relevant regime dimensions were the degree of selectivism, the difference in economic resources between the bottom and the majority, and the degree of job opportunities. The ideal liberal welfare regime had high scores on all three dimensions, and therefore the poor and unemployed have difficulties in meeting the deservingness criteria. The ideal social democratic welfare regime had low scores on the two former dimensions and a medium score on the job opportunity dimension. Therefore, the poor and unemployed can more easily fulfill the deservingness criteria. Finally, the ideal conservative welfare regime had medium scores on the two former dimensions and a low score on the job opportunity dimension. Therefore, we expect that the perceptions of the poor and unemployed in conservative regimes fall in between the perceptions found in the liberal and social democratic regimes.

Now the question is whether we can find empirical evidence for this new line of reasoning. The link between welfare regimes (typically measured by dummy variables) and support for welfare policy (in the narrow sense, measured by the ISSP items) is well established (see above). The task is to test the soundness of the suggested intervening variables. To verify our theory, we would need comparative data on the dimensions deduced from the deservingness literature (i.e., the question of control, need, identity, reciprocity, and gratefulness; see Figure 1). Unfortunately, such comparative data are simply not available. Therefore, we will test our argument by using a proxy found in the World Value Study from 1990 (not available in the 1999 wave). The data cover the 3 countries closest to the ideal and another 13 countries of relevance. Therefore, we end up with 16 countries and 25,679 respondents in the data set.

The respondents were asked "why there are people in this country who live in need" and were given the following four possibilities: (a) "because they have been unlucky," (b) "because of laziness and lack of willpower," (c) "because there is much injustice in our society," and (d) "it's an inevitable part of modern progress." In our opinion, people who choose to explain poverty with "laziness and lack of willpower" indicate that the poor and unemployed are perceived to be in control of their neediness (i.e., they could get a job if they wanted). In the other cases, the poor and unemployed can hardly be seen as being in control. However, the proxy also taps parts of the identity dimension. Explaining poverty with "laziness and lack of willpower" also denotes that the poor are culturally distinct from the majority, who share a common work ethic.

Now the first question is whether we can find a connection between welfare regimes and this proxy. The second question is whether we can find a connection between this proxy and public support for welfare policy. We should expect to see both of these connections if perceptions of control and identity are the intervening variables between welfare regimes and cross-national differences in public support.

The Link Between Welfare Regimes and Fulfillment of the Deservingness Criteria

If we consider only the three countries closest to Esping-Andersen's (1990, 2000) ideal types, the expected pattern emerges. In the United States, 39% explain poverty with laziness and willpower, whereas the share is only 16% in Sweden. With 23%, Germany (West) comes in between, as expected.

However, we are also able to show that the expected pattern is present when the more deviant cases are included. The 16 available countries are grouped following Esping-Andersen. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland make up the liberal cluster. Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and the somewhat deviant case, the Netherlands, make up the social democratic cluster. Finally, Germany (West), France, Belgium, Austria, Spain, Portugal, and Italy make up the conservative cluster.

Using a simple ordinary least squares model, it is estimated that belonging to the social democratic cluster reduces the share answering "laziness and lack of willpower" by 13.4 percentage points (see Table 2, Model I). The liberal cluster is used as a reference category. It is also estimated that belonging to the conservative cluster reduces the share answering "laziness" by 5.0 percentage points. Thus, as expected, we find a strong effect from living in a social democratic regime and a medium effect from living in a conservative regime. The former is highly significant, even with only 16 cases. The latter effect is significant at 0.25 levels. However, the overall regime effect clearly would be significant if we had included regime belonging as an ordinal variable. The explained variation in Model I is 43%.

Naturally, not all the cases neatly follow the pattern (if so, the two dummy variables would explain 100% of the variation). However, some of the deviant cases can be explained by the fact that they differ on the job opportunity dimension. That holds for Austria, which, in contrast to the other conservative regimes, experienced low unemployment rates throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a large share in Austria (37%) answer that poverty is caused by laziness. It also holds for Ireland, which until the 1990s experienced some of the highest unemployment levels in Europe. Thus, it is no surprise that fewer than expected (from the regime belonging) explain poverty with laziness (21%). This argument is formalized in Model II (see Table 2). Here, we have included level of unemployment (OECD standardized) as a separate variable. It is estimated that a 1-percentage-point increase in unemployment reduces the share answering "laziness" by 0.8 percentage points. The effect is significant at a .10 level (which is acceptable given the number of cases). Furthermore, the impact from the original regime dummies increases, as expected (from 13.4 to 16.6 in social democratic case and from 5.0 to 5.8 in the conservative case), and the explained variation significantly increases (from 43% to 54%). These estimates clearly support our argument.

One could naturally still pose the question of whether the regime dummies only tap the dimensions we have discussed above. The residual culture explanation is not seen as a strong competitor, as it does not deliver a better

Table 2
Prediction of Proportion Answering in Poverty Caused by "Laziness and Lack of Willpower" Based on Degree of Regime Belonging, Level of Unemployment, and Ethnic Fractionalization (Ordinary Least Squares)

Model	I	II	III
Belonging to social democratic regime (dummy)			
β[a]	–13.4	–16.6	–14.0
Sig.	.01	.03	.02
Belonging to conservative regime (dummy)			
β	–5.0	–5.8	–4.4
Sig.	.25	.16	.30
Level of unemployment			
β		–.8	–.89
Sig.		.10	.09
Ethnic fractionalization			
β			10.3
Sig.			.27
R^2	.43	.54	.59
N	16	16	16

Source: World Value Study (1990).

a. Unstandardized.

suggestion for the intervening variables. The heterogeneity explanation offers more competition. Following Alesina and Glaeser (2004), the argument would be that the so-called ethnic fractionalization is low in the social democratic regimes and high in the liberal regimes. Thus, the fulfillment of the identity criteria could have more to do with ethnic divides than the institutional structure of the welfare regimes. To control for this objection, we have included Alesina and Glaeser's ethnic fractionalization measure in Model III. Their figures are based on information from Encyclopaedia Britannica, and they calculate the probability of two randomly selected individuals belonging to different ethnic groups (Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kaurlat, & Wacziarg, 2003). The increase in the share answering "laziness" is estimated to be 10.3 percentage points if one goes from a totally homogeneous society (the probability of selecting 2 people belonging to different ethnic groups is 0) to a totally heterogeneous society (the probability of selecting

2 people belonging to different ethnic groups is 1). In the real world, the cross-national differences are much more modest. Measured by the standardized beta coefficient (not shown), ethnic fractionalization is the weakest of the variables included in Model III. Furthermore, the effects from the regime dummies are not seriously reduced (from 16.6 to 14.0 on the social democratic dummy and from 5.8 to 4.4 on the conservative dummy). One could add more control variables, but the limited number of cases makes further elaboration more or less impossible. However, the analyses we can make support the argument that welfare regimes influence the perception of the poor and unemployed.

The Link Between Deservingness and Support for Welfare Policy

The second task is to test whether the deservingness judgments measured by our proxy are linked to support for welfare policy. Unfortunately, the latter questions were measured in the ISSP surveys and not in the World Value Survey. However, for eight countries we can correlate the share answering “laziness and lack of willpower” with support for welfare policy at the aggregated level. For public support, we use an additive index of the three ISSP items (attitude to “redistribution,” “provide jobs to all,” and “provide basic income”) from the social inequality module used in the previous studies that confirm a regime pattern. The result is a strong correlation (.69) at the aggregated level; the larger the share answering “laziness and lack of willpower,” the lower the support for welfare policy (Larsen, 2006, p. 90).

At the individual level, it is possible to the test the correlation between deservingness perceptions and support for welfare policy on less fragile data. In a national (Danish) sample, we have measured two deservingness dimensions and public support for social assistance. The perceived degree of control was measured by the question “How do you believe the opportunities are for recipients of social assistance to get into the Danish labor market?” The perceived degree of shared identity between the bottom and the majority was measured by the question “How do you believe the work ethic, i.e., the desire and willingness to work, is among claimants of social assistance as compared to work ethic among employed?” In both cases, we found a strong connection between these deservingness dimensions and public support for social assistance (Larsen, 2006, pp. 123-138). Thus, the national data confirm that the dimensions discussed above are highly relevant to explain variations in attitudes toward welfare policy. Further analyses show that these connections remain strong and significant when political orientation is taken into account. Thus, the measured perceptions are not a simple reflection of basic egalitarian and antiegalitarian values (Larsen, 2006, pp. 134-135).

Conclusion and Discussion

This article has been an endeavor to rescue the institutional explanation of cross-national differences in support for welfare policy. The combination of welfare regime theory and deservingness literature allowed us to specify the link between the macro level of welfare regimes and the micro level of public attitudes. This combination also allowed us to operate with a "political man" whose formation of attitudes was less "mechanical" and more open to perceptions of reality. To heroically put it, it has been an attempt to provide the grand theories of welfare state development with a better micro foundation. It is clear that more empirical research must be done in this field. But using the World Value Survey from 1990, we were able to verify a connection between welfare regimes and perceptions of the poor and unemployed. We were also able to verify the presence of a strong connection between perception of control and identity and support for welfare policy.

This article has also been an attempt to establish a competing theory of the homogeneity explanation and the culture explanation. The homogeneity explanation basically claims that low support in liberal states for welfare policy primarily has to do with the presence of ethnic heterogeneity. The argument is primarily inferred from the American experience. The claim is that the presence of Native Americans and the importation of slaves simply gave and continue to give fundamentally different preconditions for the welfare discussion in the United States. This idea is widespread among American scholars and is supported by studies that show a strong correlation between attitudes toward the race issue and the welfare issue (e.g., Gilens, 2000; Quadagno, 1994). Moreover, this explanation gains more and more influence as recent European discussions about immigration sometimes also link up with the welfare discussions. From their study of ethnic fractionalization, Alesina and Glaeser (2004) infer that eventually increased ethnic heterogeneity will lower Europeans' passion for welfare policy (for a similar argument, see also Freeman, 1986; Glazer, 1998; Goodhart, 2004). However, simply by turning the argument around, one becomes more uneasy about the argument (i.e., to claim that higher support for welfare policy in European countries is caused by ethnic homogeneity). Naturally, the United

States has had a large Black minority, but European history is also filled with clashes between different ethnic groups. The building of nation-states had a homogenizing effect, a process that was not given the same time in previous colonies. However, this long process of turning inhabitants of a given area into national citizens also established new and persistent divides between the majority and the ethnic minorities who wanted their own nation-state or wanted to belong to another nation-state (e.g., Bommes & Geddes, 2000). Furthermore, a number of empirical studies have contested the link between homogeneity and support for welfare policy (e.g., Banting & Kymlicka, in press; Taylor-Gooby, 2005). Finally, Alesina and Glaeser (2004) and others may argue that the degree of ethnic homogeneity was crucial for establishing different kinds of welfare institutions, but they still need to take into account that once welfare institutions are established, they get an impact on their own. It is this institutional feedback on public support that has been theorized in this article.

The second popular explanation of cross-national differences in support for welfare policy is the culture thesis. It basically claims that lower support in the United States and other liberal regimes is caused by a "passion for freedom over inequality." This argument is in line with Lipset's (1996) thesis of an American exceptionalism. And the other way around: The culture thesis claims that the high support in social democratic regimes is caused by a "passion for equality" (Graubard, 1986). This explanation is widespread among Europeans, probably because, from a European perspective, it reproduces the "nice" idea about a socially responsible Europe and a socially irresponsible United States. However, the argument contradicts one of the very first and strongest impressions Europeans got after crossing the Atlantic. Coming from France, Tocqueville described in detail, and was indeed somewhat worried about, the "passion for equality" that prevailed in the United States. Naturally, it was first of all a call for equality of opportunities, and naturally much has happened in Europe since then. But the overall impression is that the liberal regimes are rooted in quite egalitarian cultures. The comparative studies that try to measure justice beliefs or level of egalitarianism do not find a distinct liberal antiegalitarian culture (see Larsen, 2006, pp. 34-43). Larsen (2006, p. 40) actually shows that, measured in terms of perception of just wage differences (which probably is the most valid and reliable cross-national measure we can establish), the most antiegalitarian attitudes are found in the conservative welfare regimes and not in the United States or the other liberal welfare state regimes (as Tocqueville would predict if he were still alive). What distinguishes Americans and others who live in liberal welfare state regimes is not a general antiegalitarian attitude.

Instead, we find a specific antiegalitarian attitude toward the bottom, which (partly) can be given an institutional explanation.

Finally, our institutional line of reasoning gives a new perspective on the future public support for welfare policy. The prospect is that future support will depend not just on the future configuration of class interests, self-interests, ethnic homogeneity, or shifts in egalitarian values; it will also depend on the institutions in place. Within this perspective, the increased use of selective welfare policies, increased levels of inequality, and increased deregulation of labor markets are indeed worrying developments, for these could uphold public support for welfare policy in the long run.

Notes

1. The studies that find a regime pattern primarily use the International Social Survey Program items that measure whether it should be a public responsibility to "provide job for all," "provide everyone a guaranteed basic income," and "reduce income differences." See Larsen (2006, pp. 25-44), for a further discussion.

2. This argument is in line with Goul Andersen's (in press) findings on the Danish case. He shows that even if we delimit the analyses to the group of private employees without their own or family experience of unemployment, there is no majority against the welfare policy in general. He also shows that support for increased public expenditures in a given area is not higher among employees working in this area.

3. Now the question is how this reasoning applies to the welfare policy conducted by the ideal-type conservative regime. In terms of expected support for welfare policy, the previous empirical studies simply put—without much further discussion—the conservative regimes between the "extreme" liberal and social democratic welfare regimes. On a scale between universalism and selectivism, it is fair to place the conservative regimes in between, but a number of more substantial arguments can be made (see Larsen, 2006, pp. 45-64).

4. However, one also could argue that if the pursued welfare policy—following whatever principle—manages to provide (potentially) poor and unemployed groups with good life conditions, one should expect the public to make tougher judgments about the fulfillment of the need criterion. Therefore, Figure 1 includes a dotted arrow to the need criterion. Thus, we probably have a second order feedback process on deservingness that restrains what above seemed to be self-reinforcing first order feedback processes. Nevertheless, to explain the regime pattern in public support for welfare policy, it is fair to assume that the first order "identity effect" is more relevant than the second order "need effect."

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