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**PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILD CARE:  
THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS AND WELFARE REGIMES**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the extent to which individual's attitudes toward government responsibility for child care provisions are influenced by personal characteristics as well as the social contexts in which these attitudes are formed. The analysis

draws on data from a random sample of 24,178 respondents in twelve of the countries included in the European Social Survey (ESS) round 4 (2008-09). The analytic framework focuses on individual-level factors related to self-interest, perceptions of the current care available and egalitarian ideology as well as the societal context reflected in the alternative institutional arrangements for social welfare represented by the countries clustered into different welfare state regimes. The findings indicate that among the individual level variables, although factors related to self interest were significant, egalitarian ideology had the relatively strongest impact on the respondents' level of support for government provision of child care. At the institutional level the introduction of welfare regimes increased the proportion of explained variance well beyond that accounted for by individual level factors.

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## **1. Introduction**

Policy makers in industrialized democracies are interested in and sensitive to public opinion polls that take the pulse of their constituencies on a range of social issues, which include citizen's attitudes toward the role of government and

social spending. Public opinion on these matters can influence government decision making by lending support to specific social policies and more generally confer a sense of legitimacy to the welfare state. Thus, from a social welfare policy perspective it is beneficial to gain insight into the factors that influence the formation of public attitudes. To this end there is a substantial body of research into public attitudes toward the welfare state. Bean and Papadakis (1998) note that reviews of opinion polls going back to the 1940s have revealed strong support for government intervention related to health care and old age pensions.

Until recently this research has focused on public attitudes toward specific established welfare programs such as social security, unemployment, disability and medical care and more generally toward “welfare spending.” Thus, for example, an annual public opinion survey conducted by the German Marshall Fund asks Americans, Europeans and Turkish respondents whether they want to increase, maintain or decrease the current level of welfare spending (in the U.S instead of “welfare” the wording used is spending on social security and medicare ). In 2013, despite public support for cutting government expenditure to reduce national debt, respondents on both sides of the Atlantic wanted to increase or maintain spending on social welfare (German Marshall Fund, 2013).

The focus of these polls on the general question of public support for the welfare state and for major mainstream social welfare programs reflects the conventional perspective that has framed welfare state research. Over the last several decades the research perspective on social welfare has shifted and

expanded due to significant changes in family structure and gender roles, which have generated new social needs. These changes have raised issues about the relationship between the traditional functions of the family and the policies of modern welfare states. At the same time a feminist critique emerged, which argued that mainstream welfare state research was too narrowly based on income transfer programs for the male breadwinner (O'Connor, 1993; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1994, 2001). As a result the focus of welfare state analysis has broadened with an increasing emphasis on the role of government in harmonizing paid employment and childcare obligations of family life.

There is considerable variation among countries in the design and implementation of government initiatives to reconcile work and care (Daly & Lewis, 1998; Gilbert, 2008). Scandinavian countries employ a range of childcare provisions aimed at creating a dual-breadwinner model of family life. This approach is quite different from childcare provisions in Britain, which are primarily for children in poor families. In comparative analysis of care policies in Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands, Kinj and Kremer (1997) found that due to the focus on care as a right of citizenship, the Danish welfare state came closest to creating a system of gender equality.

Not only are there programmatic differences among individual countries, but from a broader perspective levels of public spending on these programs vary among groups of countries that cluster in alternative welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1999). A longitudinal study of public expenditure on the full range of

family policies in 18 countries representing four welfare state regimes showed that differences in the level of public spending among these regimes increased between 1980 and 1990 and then began to narrow between 1990 and 2001 (Guo & Gilbert, 2007). Throughout this period, however, the highest level of spending remained in countries represented by Social Democratic regimes, followed in order by countries associated with the Continental, Liberal, and Southern European regimes (as seen in Figure 1). Who supports government provision of child care in these countries and why?

--Figure 1—

## **2. Analytic Framework: Individual and Institutional Influences**

This paper examines the extent to which different types of welfare regimes and individual-level factors are associated with public attitudes supporting government responsibility for child care provisions in twelve European countries. Although individual's attitudes are shaped by personal characteristics and experiences they are also influenced by the social contexts in which they are formed; as, for example, how growing up in a religious community can influence one's attitude toward marriage and family life. In the realm of social welfare policy a survey of fourteen OECD countries suggests that preferences for redistributive spending are related to individual-level factors such as age and income as well as to the characteristics of the country in which the respondents lived (Busemeyer, Goerres, & Weschle, 2009; Pfeifer, 2009; Gelissen, 2000). Similarly Pfeifer (2009)

showed that attitudes towards minimum income protection in European welfare states were related to individual socio-economic traits along with institutional welfare arrangements. Examining the influence of institutional arrangements, Gelissen's (2000) study found that public support for the welfare state did not follow the pattern expected according to welfare regimes.

In analyzing public attitudes towards welfare policy, cause and effect are difficult to entangle. Policy feedback theory argues that public attitudes toward social policies operate on a two-way street. While public opinion has some bearing on the way government officials vote, the implementation of social policies can have an effect on public perceptions of these initiatives. Over time, for example, negative attitudes or lack of support toward welfare policies can shift in a positive direction if the public experiences the benefits of these measures. This theoretical perspective moderates the prevailing view of cause and effect between public attitudes and welfare state institutions, highlighting the role of institutional policy arrangements in shaping public support for social welfare (Jordon, 2013; Thelen and Steinmo, 1992).

There is however no clear calibration on the impact of alternative welfare state arrangements. Examining the relationship among public attitudes toward the welfare state between 1985 and 1990, Clive and Papadakis (1998) found only weak variations in public support among respondents in different welfare state regimes. Blekesaune and Quadagno's (2003) analysis of support for welfare policies for the unemployed and the sick and elderly concluded that it was difficult to distinguish

the differential effects of ideological positions at the individual or national level. Svallfors (1997) uncovered little difference among four welfare regimes in their citizen's attitudes toward the redistributive role of government.

However, Jordon (2013) suggests that the mixed results in the existing research may stem from relying on general typologies of welfare regimes and attitudinal indicators, which fail to capture the complexity of institutional arrangements and individual opinions. Exploring some of the complexities inherent in survey research on social policy opinions, Kangas (1997) reminds us that individual preferences are not necessarily straightforward nor stable. He explains how the contextual framing and specific wording of survey questions may influence responses – and cautions against simple interpretations. For example analyzing a survey measure designed to tap altruism, Kangas shows the effect of a moral frame on responses to the statement: “In society the strong groups must care for the weaker ones.” The vast majority of those surveyed agreed. Yet, by adding the word “*humane* society” to this statement the level of agreement increased from 88-93%..

Although the findings are varied, there is general agreement in the literature about the importance of considering both individual characteristics and the institutional context as factors that lend insight into public attitudes and preferences about the provision of social welfare. But there is no resolution about exactly which individual traits are most salient and how these institutional contexts are operationally defined.

Our analysis of public attitudes toward child care focuses on the extent to which individual-level factors as well as the societal context correlate with public support for government provisions in this area. The societal context is represented broadly by the different countries as well as more specifically in the alternative institutional arrangements for social welfare represented by the different welfare state regimes. The individual-level factors are: A) personal characteristics related to self-interest, B) perceptions of the current availability of quality daycare, and C) degree of egalitarian ideology.

--Figure 2--

The first individual-level factor involves a set of personal characteristics: age, gender, education and the presence of a child in the home. The selection of these traits was informed by the self-interest theory of rational choice, which suggests that social welfare policy preferences will be affected to some extent by the particular benefits respondents might expect to receive. Age, gender and education are commonly analyzed as traits associated with self-interest in national and cross-national studies of public attitudes towards social welfare (Jaeger, 2006; Svallfors, 2008). Busemeyer, Goerres, and Weschle (2009) found significant age-related differences in support of redistributive policy. They also noted that for the case of educational spending, one's age or position in the life cycle is a more important predictor of preferences than income. Other studies suggest that age-related differences in self-interest are associated with relatively limited support of

government provisions for children's services -- from which older people are unlikely to experience a direct benefit (Goerres & Tepe, 2011, Jaeger, 2006; Pettersen, 2001).

But, Goerres and Tepe (2010) also argue that age-based self interest can be oversimplified. They found that the degree of intergenerational solidarity within the family expands older people's perceptions of self-interest and mitigates purely age-related social welfare preferences. In comparison to the elderly who tend to benefit indirectly, if at all, from child care provisions, women have a larger stake in programs and policies that assist families in caring for children. And it stands to reason that this self-interest would be heightened by the presence of a child in the home. Studies have shown that where gender is concerned, women tend to be more positive in the support of social welfare policies than men (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Linos & West, 2003; Svallfors, 1997). Although, Goerres and Tepe's study of attitudes toward care in Germany found positive relationships between being a woman, having a young child in the home and the respondent's support for public child care, the relationships were not statistically significant. Studies have generally shown education to have a negative effect on support of solidarity and redistributive social welfare policies (Andres & Heien, 2001; Arts & Gelissen, 2001; Jaeger, 2006).

The second individual-level factor involves the respondents' perceptions of the provision of affordable care for working parents. This factor relates to both the self-interest of working parents with young children who would have less need for

government provision of these services and the practical assessments of others about the need for government to provide a service already available at an affordable price.

Finally the third individual-level factor involves the respondents' political ideology, specifically the extent to which they express egalitarian values. People's attitudes and preferences tend to be guided by their values. In the realm of social welfare egalitarian values are associated with attitudes that support government provisions (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Jaeger, 2006). Jacoby (1994) found that the degree of liberal ideology was a strong determinant of attitudes toward government spending. Commenting on the implicit symbolic meaning of these words, he notes that the very term "government spending" although it covers a vast range of public activities, tends to automatically translate into welfare spending.

Egalitarian values also find expression in the second level of analysis in our study, which examines the extent to which differences in the national institutional arrangements help to explain the variance in public attitudes toward government provision of child care. Here we analyze the extent to which public attitudes vary by welfare regimes, adapting Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology of alternative institutional arrangements for social welfare. We employ this classification well aware that it has been criticized from various perspectives.

Some have argued that Esping-Andersen's analysis of data from 1980 no longer capture the changing landscape of welfare state policies over the last several decades, which have led to the convergence of the three regimes. (Evers and

Guillemard, 2013; Ferge, 1996; Gilbert 2002; Rojas, 2005 ). Others suggest that the three regimes ignore the distinctive characteristics of welfare systems in the Mediterranean countries (Ferrera, 1996; Leibfried, 1993) -- a critique initially accepted by Esping Andersen, but later rejected (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Arts & Gelissen, 2002). Van Voorhis (2003) reveals methodological flaws in the design and calculation of the de-commodification index. In a thorough review of the debate regarding the regime typology Arts and Gelissen (2002) find the outcomes of comparative analyses in this area inconclusive, suggesting welfare states are rarely pure types but the typology has heuristic value as a way of conceptualizing and analyzing institutional arrangements, which is worth pursuing.

And as noted earlier in this paper feminist scholars have argued that the welfare regime typology was too narrowly focused and lacked a gender lens for examining the impact of welfare states on women's issues. Addressing this question, Esping-Andersen (1999:51) re-examined the welfare regimes linking them to gender issues through the concept of de-familialisation -- defined as 'the degree to which households' welfare and caring responsibilities are relaxed either via welfare state provision or via market provision. He found the original regime typology relevant to this dimension of policy. Responding to the feminist perspective Lewis (1992) and Korpi (2000) have formulated alternative typologies that distinguish gender policy regimes according to the extent to which welfare state policies support equality in family life and the labor force. A comparison of

these models finds that the countries which cluster in each of Korpi's types (Dual-earner, general family support and market-oriented) match the examples of countries described as fitting into Lewis's model (weak male breadwinner, modified male breadwinner, and strong male breadwinner) and closely parallel the conventional social democratic, conservative, and liberal regimes (Guo & Gilbert, 2012).

--Table 1—

### **3. Data, Operational Measures and Methods**

Our empirical analyses are based on data from the European Social Survey (ESS) round 4 (2008-09) . The study involves a random sample of 24,178 respondents selected from twelve countries: Social democratic (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden), Continental Europe (Belgium, France, Germany, and Netherlands), Liberal (Ireland and UK), and Southern Europe (Portugal and Spain). Although the Netherlands was initially typed as a social democratic regime, Esping-Andersen (1999) later concluded that this country belonged in the continental regimes. The ESS recommended design weights were used when comparing countries. Our findings report standardized beta coefficients to facilitate comparisons of the relative impact of independent variables on attitudes toward government responsibility. We also include the amount of change in R squared, which allows comparisons of the extent to which the variables added in each model increase the overall proportion of explained variance.

In analyzing these data it is important to bear in mind that the survey was

conducted in the midst of the deepest economic recession in recent history. In the absence of longitudinal data we are unable to discern the extent to which the attitudes and opinions expressed represent stable views or were influenced by the uncertainty and economic stress of the times. However, an analysis of attitudes toward gender equality prior to and after the start of the recession showed with few exceptions a consistent trend in responses between men and women and among the countries (Guo & Gilbert, 2012).

--Figure 3--

The dependent variable represents the degree to which respondents express preferences for government assuming responsibility for childcare provisions. This variable is operationally defined based on responses to one question in the survey: “On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government's responsibility to provide child care services for working parents”. The answers vary from 0 (not government responsibility at all) to 10 (entirely government responsibility).

The independent variables included three blocks of individual level factors, one block of country level variables and one block of regime level variables. The first block of individual-level variables involves measures of respondents' personal characteristics related to self-interest; these measures include age, gender, education level, and having children living at home. Age and education level are continuous variables. Gender and children living at home are dummy variables. Female is coded as 1, male as 0. Having children living at home is coded as 1,

otherwise as 0.

The second block measures perceptions of the need for government provision of child care. This variable is operationally defined in terms of the perceived availability of care in responses to the question “What do you think overall about the provision of affordable child care services for working parents?” The answers range from 0 as “extremely bad” to 10 as “extremely good.”

The third block of variables represents egalitarian ideology in terms of the respondents’ support for economic and gender equality. Economic equality is operationally defined based on the level of agreement with the statement “for a fair society, differences in standard of living should be small,” on a scale of 1-5, from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” For coding purposes this scale was reversed so that a rating of 5 represented strong agreement with the statement. The operational measure of gender equality was based on the extent to which respondents agreed with the statement “Women should be prepared to cut down on paid work for the sake of family,” on a scale of 1-5, from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” We interpret the strong disagreement with this statement as supporting gender equality rather than the traditional gender division.

The fourth block includes a set of dummy variables that represent the 12 countries in the sample. (Eleven of the countries are dummy coded and the 12<sup>th</sup> serves as the reference variable). This contextual variable allows us to consider the degree to which additional variance in attitudes toward government responsibility is explained by the unmeasured sociopolitical, cultural and economic

characteristics in these countries. The fifth block substitutes a set of dummy variables that represent four welfare regime types for the block of variables representing the 12 countries. This block represents an alternative contextual variable that allow us to consider the degree to which additional variance in attitudes toward government responsibility is explained by the institutional arrangements for social welfare associated with Social Democratic, Continental, Liberal and South European regimes – to the extent that patterned differences exist among these types..

The empirical analysis involves descriptive statistics on the dependent and independent variables, multi-level linear regression that includes the blocks of independent variables and linear regression of individual-level variables by welfare regimes.

## **4. Results**

**4.1 Descriptive** –Table 2 shows the results of descriptive analysis of public attitudes towards government’s responsibility for child care provisions for working parents. The mean score across all twelve countries was 7.62 on a scale from 0 to 10. That is, on average the respondents’ attitudes showed a relatively high degree of support for public provision of family care-related benefits. Two Southern European countries, Spain and Portugal, show the strongest support for government responsibility with mean scores of 8.36 and 8.26 respectively. Other countries among the higher levels of public support are Germany, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, which are mostly Scandinavian countries. Countries

with lower levels of support are Belgium, France, Great Britain and Ireland, which are mostly liberal and conservative welfare states. The Netherlands shows the lowest level of support with a mean of 6.26.

--Table 2 --

**4.2 Bivariate** -- Table 3 reports the bivariate associations between the dependent and independent variables. For dummy variables, gender and having a child living at home, the numbers represent the means of agreements with the statement that it is government responsibility to ensure sufficient child care services for working parents. Being a female and having a child living at home are associated with significant higher degrees of support for government responsibility. The differences of means are statistically significant. For continuous variables, the numbers represent the correlates between the dependent variable and correspondent dependent variables. Age, educational attainment, and the availability of affordable child care services are negatively correlated with the support for governmental responsibility, while economic egalitarian and gender egalitarian variables are positively correlated. All correlates are statistically significant.

-- Table 3 --

**4.3 Multi-Level Regression Models** -- Table 4 gives the results of a set of five regression models that include individual level and societal/institutional level variables. All five models show significant coefficients; the relationships between the dependent variable and independent variables in the bivariate analysis are

supported in the regression models. Model 1 contains variables that capture self-interests in benefitting from government child care provisions. Being a woman and having a child living at home have positive coefficients. Age and educational attainment show negative coefficients. The degree of support for governmental responsibility to ensure sufficient child care services for working parents decreased with the increase of age and the education attainment. Model 2 adds the perception of affordable child care services for working parents in a country, which shows an inverse relationship to governmental responsibility. The greater the perceived availability of affordable child care services in a country, the lower the degree of respondents' support for governmental responsibility to ensure child care services for working parents. The self-interest variables remain significant, with small or no changes in the size of their coefficients. Hence, the perception of provision of affordable child care services does not change the impact of self-interest variables and the change in R squared between Model 1 and Model 2 involve just a trivial increase in the overall fit of the model.

Model 3 adds the variables representing economic egalitarian and gender egalitarian ideologies. Both variables show significant positive coefficients. The more respondents are supportive of a society where differences in standard of living are small, the higher the degree of their support of governmental responsibility to ensure child care services for working parents. Similarly support for gender equality is associated with support of government responsibility for

child care services for working parents. The R squared increases somewhat, but still remains quite small.

Model 4 adds a block of dummy country variables to assess the general effects of unmeasured factors in the broader societal context – cultural, sociopolitical, and economic factors. That is, controlling for the impact of individual level characteristics how much additional variance in the public attitudes toward government is explained by unmeasured factors linked to the sample countries. The R squared change of .09 shows a moderate and statistically significant improvement in the overall goodness-of-fit over Model 3, reflecting the important influence of the societal context on public attitudes.

In Model 5 we examine the impact of social context, but from a narrower institutional perspective. Here we substitute for the block of country variables a block of dummy variables that clusters the countries into the four regime types, which represent alternative institutional patterns for the provision of social welfare. The results show a R squared change of .06, which is a moderate increase in the proportion of explained variance over that attributable to the individual characteristics in Model 3. However, as an independent variable representing contextual/institutional factors the R squared increase linked to regime type level is lower than that which was linked to the introduction of the block of individual countries.

-- TABLE 4 --

**4.4 Regression Analysis by Regime Type** – Table 5 examines the extent to which

the individual level factors impact the attitudes of public support for government provisions of care and the amount of variance explained by these factors within each of the welfare state regime types. The findings here illustrate similarities and differences in the influence of individual factors in different regimes. Among the variables related to self-interest, gender remains statistically significant across the board and having a child living at home continues to have a significant relationship to public attitudes except in the liberal regime. In contrast, the level of education is no longer a significant factor in three of the four regimes and age remains significant only in the liberal and continental regimes. The perception of need remains significant in all of the regimes except for the social democratic ones. Finally, egalitarian ideology remains the strongest and most consistent factor influencing public attitudes across the four regimes. Of all the individual level variables, a comparison of beta coefficients reveals that support for economic equality has the relatively strongest impact on public attitudes across the four regimes.

-- TABLE 5 --

## **5. Discussion**

In interpreting these results there are several considerations to bear in mind. We are unable to control for what is commonly referred to in correlation analyses as the omitted variable bias – the impact of exogenous factors that were not included in the analytic model. Although it does not resolve the omitted variable bias, the

contextual factors in our analytic model estimate the influence of unmeasured sociopolitical, cultural, and economic characteristic as well as alternative institutional arrangements for social welfare. Also some of the questions bear critical examination. For example, the dependent variable regarding attitudes toward government responsibility is generally worded in a frame that excludes the other side of the issue: to what extent would respondents be willing to pay the taxes required for government provisions of care? Also the question concerning having a child at home does not specify whether that child was young enough to require child care.

With these caveats in mind, we analyzed the degree to which individual characteristics and broader contextual factors are associated with attitudes expressing public support for government provisions of child care. The individual factors under consideration involved self-interest, perceptions of existing care, and degree of egalitarian ideology. Analysis of the models that include the total sample from all 12 countries (Table 4) show relationships between the attitudes toward government responsibility and the individual-level variables representing self-interest, perceived need and egalitarian ideology are all significant and the directions of the relationship are as expected following the pattern generally reported in the literature. That is, support for government provision of child care tends to be higher when self-interest in the availability of child care is positive, there is positive support for egalitarian ideology and the perception of need for

child care is high. Among all the individual level variables, the egalitarian variables have the relatively strongest impact (Beta coefficients, model 3 in Table 4) on the dependent variable.

However, recognizing the difference between statistical and substantive significance, it should be noted that with a sample this large very small differences tend to be statistically significant and taken together all of the individual-level variables explain a meager 3.4% of the variance in attitudes toward support of government provision of child care.

A larger though still moderate proportion of the variance in public attitudes is explained when the analysis includes the impact of the broader social context – at the individual country level and countries clustered in regime types. The findings here reveal the relative importance of the contextual factors in influencing public attitudes. Specifically, the data show that controlling for individual characteristics, the introduction of regime types accounts for an additional 6% increase in the explained variance. This suggests that the typology of different institutional arrangements for social welfare represented by the four welfare state regimes is useful for understanding public support for government provisions. But in this regard the utility of the regime typology is ambiguous, since the amount of additional variance explained by the introduction of welfare regimes is less than

that explained by examining the impact of individual countries, which increased the R squared by 9%.

Shifting our analytic lens to examine the specific relationships between public attitudes and individual-level characteristics within each of the four regimes, the data show that several of the individual-level variables which were significant in the total sample no longer remain significant within some of the regimes. Most notably in the Social Democratic and Southern European regimes the self-interest variables of age and education have no significant influence on attitudes towards government provisions. This is contrary to some of the findings in the literature on public attitudes toward social welfare noted earlier (Goerres and Tepe, 2011; Jaeger 2006, Pettersen, 2001). These differences may be attributed in part to alternative operational definitions, populations and countries studied. For example, Goerres and Tepe's (2011) survey focused on a sample of respondents over 55 years of age and defined support for government child care provisions as a dichotomous (yes/no) variable. They found that 70 and 80% of the elderly over 55 years of age agreed that government should provide childcare, which they explain by defining self-interest to include family solidarity. Pettersen's (2001) analysis of survey results from Norway showed that age had a bearing on support for certain specific services such as elder care and child care, but not in other realms of social welfare. Jaeger's study of a Canadian sample found that education was negatively

associated with public support for social welfare broadly defined in terms of income distribution and providing a decent standard of living.

#### Conclusion

These findings convey a complex picture of diverse influences associated with attitudes toward government responsibility for child care as expressed in public opinion data. While no definitive pattern emerges to confirm a forceful impact of individual factors such as self-interest and perceptions of need, several general observations may help child-care policy makers to better understand some of the considerations underlying public opinion in this realm of social welfare. Overall at the individual level support for government responsibility for child care provisions is positively correlated with ideological beliefs that a good society is one where there are not large differences in standards of living. This relationship holds both within the total sample as well as within each regime. Arguably, support for this type of economic equality reflects a larger world view about the role of government vis-à-vis the market in the allocation of material benefits – one which favors a significant level of government intervention. From this perspective support for government provision of child care represents an extension of a general belief about the appropriate role of the state. In this regard, it is notable that the impact of support for gender equality although also positively related (Beta .071) to government provision of child care, was much weaker than economic equality (Beta .118) at the individual level as well as within regimes. The operational definition of gender equality (“Women should be prepared to cut down on paid

work for the sake of the family”), tapped into the respondents’ normative interpretation of gender expectations more than their views on the role of government. Thus it is possible to find the Southern Europe regime registering the overall highest degree of public approval for government provision of child care and the strongest impact of economic equality (Beta .192), at the same time that support for gender equality had the relatively weakest impact (Beta .052) among the five significant individual level variables.

But one should not overrate the importance of economic egalitarian ideology. For the sample taken as a whole the indicators of ideology, self-interest and need explained less than 4% of the variance in the public attitudes toward government provision of child care. When the impact of these variables is examined at the country level, the overall proportion of variance explained increases almost four-fold. This suggests the significant degree to which individual attitudes and beliefs about government responsibility for social welfare are influenced by the societal context in which they are formed. From a policy-makers perspective these findings do not offer much confidence regarding the leverage available to influence public opinion on government responsibility for child care through appeals to self-interest, perceptions of need and ideology.

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Figure 1 Public expenditure on family as % of GDP, (1980, 1990 and 2001).



Source: Guo and Gilbert, 2007

Figure 2 Analytic Framework

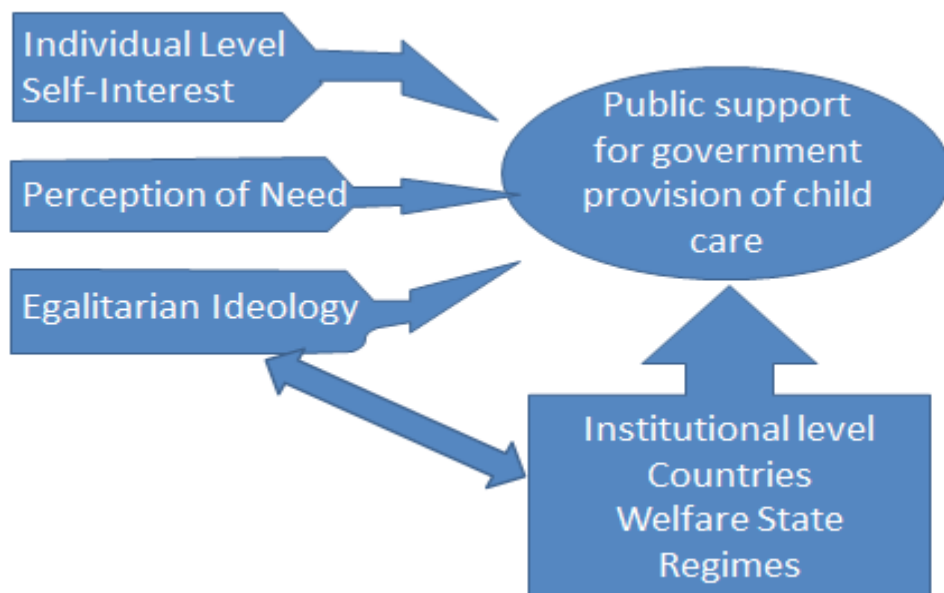


Figure 3 Comparison of Public Attitudes Toward Gender Equality Over Time

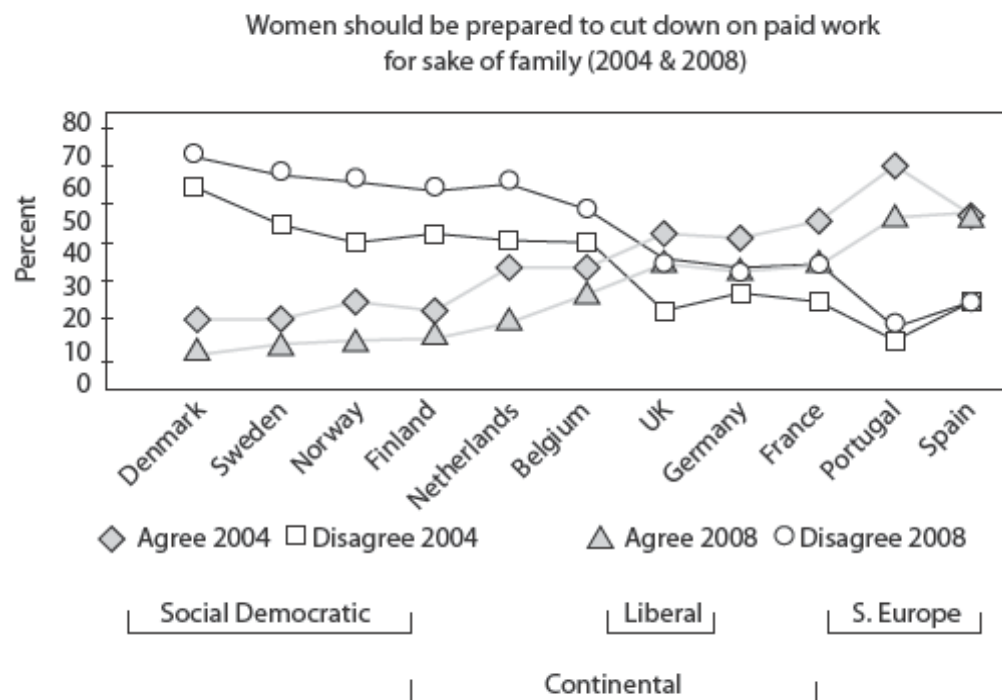


Table 1: Family and Labor force Equality in Gender- Policy Regimes

|                                                          |                                                             |                               |                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Continua of Political<br>Tendency<br><br>Gender Equality | Left<br><br>Equal Family Obligations<br>Employment Equality | >-----<br>→<br><br><br>-----→ | Right<br><br>Traditional Gender<br>Relations and Male<br>Employment<br>Privileged |
| Lewis                                                    | Weak Male Breadwinner<br>(Dual Earner)                      | Modified Male<br>Breadwinner  | Strong Male<br>Breadwinner                                                        |
| Korpi                                                    | Dual Earner                                                 | General Family<br>Support     | Market Oriented                                                                   |
| Esping Andersen                                          | Social Democratic                                           | Continental                   | Liberal                                                                           |

Adapted from Guo and Gilbert (2012)

Table2. Distribution measures for the DV.

|                                                                      | Total | BE    | DE    | DK    | ES    | FI    | FR    | GB    | IE    | NL    | NO    | PT    | SE    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Child care services for working parents, governments' responsibility |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| N                                                                    | 24240 | 1748  | 2726  | 1583  | 2485  | 2164  | 2058  | 2308  | 1741  | 1750  | 1541  | 2346  | 1790  |
| Mean                                                                 | 7.62  | 7.28  | 7.84  | 8.06  | 8.36  | 8.16  | 7.10  | 6.95  | 6.82  | 6.26  | 7.97  | 8.26  | 7.92  |
| SD                                                                   | 1.980 | 1.763 | 1.954 | 1.817 | 1.604 | 1.522 | 2.020 | 2.104 | 2.079 | 2.117 | 1.830 | 1.821 | 1.801 |

Notes: BE=Belgium, DE=Germany, DK=Denmark, ES=Spain, FI=Finland, FR=France, GB=Great Britain, IE=Ireland, NL=Netherlands, NO=Norway, PT=Portugal, SE=Sweden. To compare DV results for multiple countries separately, the design weight was taken into account.

Table 3. Child care services for working parents as governments' responsibility, by IVs

| Independence variables    | correlations        | Compare means              |
|---------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Age                       | -.019**<br>N=24178  |                            |
| Education level           | -.048***<br>N=24193 |                            |
| Gender                    | Male                | 7.48 [2.027]<br>N=11734    |
|                           | Female              | 7.75 [1.926]***<br>N=12498 |
| Having a children at home | No                  | 7.53 [1.991]<br>N=14801    |
|                           | Yes                 | 7.76 [1.954]***<br>N=9403  |
| Provision of child care   | -.035***<br>N=22069 |                            |
| Economic egalitarian      | .158***<br>N=24071  |                            |
| Gender egalitarian        | .029***<br>N=24092  |                            |

Notes: \*\*\* p<.001, \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05

Table 4. Regression models of public attitudes towards governmental responsibility for child care services in 12 European countries

|                                 | Model 1            |          | Model 2            |          | Model 3            |          | Model 4            |          | Model 5            |          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|----------|
|                                 | B                  | Beta     | B                  | Beta     | B                  | Beta     | B                  | Beta     | B                  | Beta     |
| Female                          | .252***<br>[.026]  | .065***  | .248***<br>[.026]  | .064***  | .208***<br>[.026]  | .054***  | .223***<br>[.025]  | .057***  | .209***<br>[.025]  | .054***  |
| Age                             | -.002**<br>[.001]  | -.019**  | -.002*<br>[.001]   | -.018*   | -.002*<br>[.001]   | -.015*   | -.002**<br>[.001]  | -.019**  | -.002**<br>[.001]  | -.018**  |
| Education level                 | -.054***<br>[.009] | -.040*** | -.052***<br>[.009] | -.039*** | -.042***<br>[.009] | -.031*** | -.031**<br>[.009]  | -.023**  | -.004<br>[.009]    | -.003    |
| Having a child at home          | .224***<br>[.027]  | .057***  | .218***<br>[.027]  | .055***  | .224***<br>[.027]  | .057***  | .265***<br>[.026]  | .067***  | .228***<br>[.026]  | .058***  |
| Provision of child care         |                    |          | -.024***<br>[.006] | -.028*** | -.020***<br>[.006] | -.023*** | -.043***<br>[.006] | -.049*** | -.062***<br>[.006] | -.071*** |
| Economic egalitarian            |                    |          |                    |          | .295***<br>[.013]  | .150***  | .232***<br>[.013]  | .118***  | .238***<br>[.013]  | .121***  |
| Gender egalitarian              |                    |          |                    |          | .118***<br>[.012]  | .071***  | .114***<br>[.012]  | .068***  | .074***<br>[.012]  | .044***  |
| Country dummy var. Block        |                    |          |                    |          |                    |          | --                 | --       |                    |          |
| Welfare regime dummy var. block |                    |          |                    |          |                    |          |                    |          | --                 | --       |
| R Square                        | .009               |          | .010               |          | .034               |          | .125               |          | .095               |          |
| Adjusted R Square               | .009               |          | .010               |          | .034               |          | .124               |          | .094               |          |
| R Square Change                 | .009***            |          | .001***            |          | .024***            |          | .091***            |          | .061***            |          |

Notes: Standard Errors in brackets. \*\*\*p<.001, \*\*<.01, \*<.05.

Table 5. Regressions on Child care services for working parents, governments' responsibility, by welfare regimes

|                             | Social Democratic |         | Continental Europe |         | Liberal            |          | Southern Europe    |          |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|----------|
|                             | B                 | Beta    | B                  | Beta    | B                  | Beta     | B                  | Beta     |
| Female                      | .271***<br>[.042] | .080*** | .201***<br>[.044]  | .050*** | .151*<br>[.066]    | .037*    | .232***<br>[.054]  | .067***  |
| Age                         | .002<br>[.001]    | .021    | -.003*<br>[-.024]  | -.024*  | -.012***<br>[.002] | -.101*** | .001<br>[.002]     | .006     |
| Education level             | -.019<br>[.017]   | -.014   | -.015<br>[.018]    | -.010   | -.112***<br>[.021] | -.088*** | -.017<br>[.022]    | -.014    |
| Having a child at home      | .401***<br>[.045] | .113*** | .235***<br>[.045]  | .057*** | .123<br>[.067]     | .030     | .195***<br>[.054]  | .056***  |
| Provision of child care     | .001<br>[.011]    | .001    | -.028**<br>[.011]  | -.030** | -.100***<br>[.016] | -.101*** | -.091***<br>[.012] | -.119*** |
| Economic egalitarian        | .209***<br>[.022] | .124*** | .175***<br>[.022]  | .087*** | .282***<br>[.035]  | .130***  | .421***<br>[.034]  | .192***  |
| Gender egalitarian          | .123***<br>[.021] | .074    | .092***<br>[.019]  | .055*** | .167***<br>[.032]  | .088***  | .083***<br>[.026]  | .052***  |
| Country dummy within Regime | --                |         | --                 |         | --                 |          | --                 |          |
| Adjusted R Square           | .036              |         | .022               |         | .047               |          | .061               |          |

Notes: Standard Errors in brackets. \*\*\*p<.001, \*\*<.01, \*<.05.