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A Multilevel Analysis

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THE YOUNG AND THE ELDERLY AT RISK

Individual Outcomes and Contemporary
Policy Challenges in European Societies

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The Young and the Elderly at Risk. Individual Outcomes and Contemporary Policy Challenges in European Societies

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ABSTRACT

The young and the elderly are among the most vulnerable groups in contemporary societies, especially in times of economic slowdown. The current retrenchment of the welfare states is buffering the growing demographic and economic pressures in European countries at the expense of the young and the elderly, and particular subgroups with intersecting high-risk characteristics. However, both investing in the young, who determine a society's future, and providing public support for the elderly, the most deserving needy group, are seen as musts. How well young people fare in their early stage of life is related to their success in the labour market and later well-being, which in turn impacts the sustainability of the welfare state. Challenges for the welfare state are as well that the elderly are being pushed and pulled too early into (pre-)retirement schemes and that many of them find themselves in precarious situations despite their pension income.

This book reflects on when and why the young and the elderly are at risk in European welfare states, as well as whether and how specific welfare policies respond to their needs. It also identifies particularly vulnerable groups who cumulate being young or old with other risk characteristics, such as being a woman or having a migration background, and investigates how these disadvantages could be tackled.

The reader is presented with selective studies addressing policies and institutional settings, as well as individual outcomes and attitudes towards governmental responsibilities. Focusing on the young in its first part, this book reveals the contribution of ethnic and social capital to educational outcomes, and the role of national and European policies in the transition from school to work, the duration of unemployment and the minimum income dependency of Europe's youth. The second part of the book focuses on the elderly and discusses intersections with gender and ethnicity in old-age poverty, pension outcomes of mobile (cross-border) workers, the impact of the recent social security reforms and the possible outcomes of including financial assets and housing wealth in old-age income protection. The final chapters address the potential erosion of the solidarity of and towards the young and the elderly, as a challenge for the European welfare states.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Professor Jos Berghman (1949–2014), initiator and director of IMPALLA, the International Master in Social Policy Analysis by Luxembourg, Leuven and Associated Institutes.



Photo: Jos Berghman

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It is with deep gratitude that we acknowledge the support of a few people without whom this book would not have been the same. First of all, we are immensely grateful to Jos Berghman, who motivated us to edit a book comprising some of the many high-quality contributions that were presented at the 2013 IMPALLA-ESPAnet conference in Luxembourg. Jos guided us through and inspired us over the years, not only for this book but in many other ways. We sincerely thank Wim van Oorschot, who agreed to write the engaging preface of this book. Many thanks also to Jacques Hagenaars for his continuous support, long before and especially after Jos Berghman passed away.

Furthermore, we would like to cordially thank Esther Zana-Nau for her constant encouragement in the initial phase of this book. Alex Carrol has kindly provided language editing for parts of the book.

We would like to express our appreciation to our publisher Intersentia for their patience and support during the process. We thank the two anonymous reviewers for taking time to review the manuscript and for their fruitful suggestions.

We acknowledge CEPS/INSTEAD (now LISER – Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research) and ESPAnet (European Network for Social Policy Analysis) for having organised the conference in 2013, which brought together the authors who contributed to this book. In addition, we are grateful to CEPS/INSTEAD for organising and supporting financially and morally the IMPALLA programme over 12 years, since its beginning, as well as to its initiators, Prof. dr. Gaston Schaber and Dr. Pierre Hausman (both CEPS/INSTEAD), Prof. dr. Jos Berghman (KU Leuven), and Prof. dr. Jean-Claude Ray (Université de Lorraine), Prof. dr. Jacques Hagenaars (Tilburg University), Prof. dr. Jean-Paul Lehnens (Université de Luxembourg). Last but not least, a thank you to all those not mentioned here but who have supported us, whether directly or indirectly.

Ioana SALAGEAN, Catalina LOMOS and Anne HARTUNG
The editors

While finalising the editing of this book, Ioana Salagean was employed by STATEC (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg) and LIS (Cross-National Data Center in Luxembourg), Catalina Lomos worked at LISER (Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research) and Anne Hartung was supported by the University of Luxembourg (INSIDE research unit).

PREFACE

Wim VAN OORSCHOT

While the welfare state, as a modern social institution taking responsibility for the fair re-distribution of life chances, as well as for creating an inclusive society, is regarded as a European invention, and while the existence of an encompassing welfare state has often been depicted as one of the defining criteria of Europe, the concept of the European welfare state and its concrete manifestations in specific social policies became substantially challenged in the past two decades. In this period European welfare states were, and at present still are, challenged by intensified international economic competition threatening their redistributive capacity; by social developments as demographic aging and the rise of new family arrangements confronting them with a series of 'new social risks' associated with postindustrial society; by increasing labour market flexibility and inflow of cheap migrant labour having consequences for the structure of the wages and benefits system of countries; and by the European Union becoming a critical intervening level in domestic processes of welfare state change leading to an era of semi-sovereign welfare states. The combination of these challenges results in a precarious social-political context marked by intensified discussions about the generosity, universalism and scope of European welfare states. As a result, substantial welfare reforms are visible in European countries, taking various forms (of retrenchment, recalibration, and partly extension as well), and leading to new perspectives on the welfare state goals and approaches governments should adopt. Clearly, welfare states are changing all over Europe, but in different speeds and directions. However, the European welfare state is not only challenged by structural economic and social processes, increasingly it is subjected to more ideologically grounded accusations of undermining individual responsibility, of damaging traditional social ties and of weakening private forms of mutual solidarity and self-help. Ideas of collective, public responsibilities for the contingencies of modern life, which are at the base of the solidaristic welfare state 'European style', are giving in to a perspective that emphasizes the value of individual responsibility and, related to this, of private and informal welfare arrangements. All this contributes to rising concerns on the future sustainability of the European welfare state, in economic and political terms, as well as in terms of social legitimacy.

It is in this context that, at the occasion of its tenth anniversary, IMPALLA, the International Master in Social Policy Analysis of Luxembourg, Leuven and Associated Institutes, organised an international conference on *Building blocks for an inclusive society: empirical evidence from social policy research* in cooperation with ESPAnet, the Network for European Social Policy Analysis. At this conference, hosted by LISER (Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research, formerly CEPS/INSTEAD) in Luxembourg, where the international student group of IMPALLA and the program's alumni convened with European welfare state scholars and experts from various countries, disciplines and policy domains, the central focus was on the welfare state's objective of contributing to an inclusive society. Fully in line with the overall character of the IMPALLA program, which combines the theoretical and empirical comparative study of social policies, the conference papers and lectures addressed research that can contribute to policy making that aims to integrate various social groups and their needs in a balanced approach, thereby fostering overall social cohesion and inclusion. Such balance is increasingly necessary, now that at the level of individual citizens new forms of social risk have grown out of increasingly precarious and insecure life-courses, and old balances and social contracts between social classes and groups are disturbed.

This book presents a selection of conference papers that address specifically the life chances of the younger and the older generations in European welfare states. Both groups are at risk, due to high unemployment rates among the young, and the retrenchment of pension provisions for the old. Due to fiscal constraints, in an ever more direct way the social protection of both groups is experienced as a zero sum game, in which welfare states have to balance between creating life opportunities for new generations on the one hand, and caring for those who contributed so much to society in the past on the other. When it comes to generations, an inclusive society assumes sustained levels of inter-generational solidarity, that is, of a commonly supported social contract between the young and the old. Empirical research, as it is presented in this book's contributions, can add much to our understanding of how this social contract, and by extension also others, like the social contracts between the active and inactive, the healthy and the sick, and the rich and the poor, can be sustained, economically, politically, as well as socially.

I thank the editors of this book for their efforts, which have resulted in this important contribution to the on-going welfare state debate,

Wim VAN OORSCHOT

Professor of Social Policy at KU Leuven and Honorary President of ESPAnet

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CHAPTER 8

DO SELF-INTEREST, IDEOLOGY AND NATIONAL CONTEXT INFLUENCE OPINIONS ON GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR CHILDCARE FOR WORKING PARENTS?

A Multilevel Analysis

Wouter DE TAVERNIER

ABSTRACT

Why would people favour government support for childcare services for working parents? We examine whether five hypotheses explaining individuals' attitudes toward the welfare state are applicable in a context of childcare policies. We apply multilevel analysis on the ESS 2008 data, including individual and country-level variables. On the individual level, both self-interest and ideology have limited influence on support for childcare policies. Support for these policies does not differ much between countries, but we manage to account for two thirds of the differences that are there. We find evidence for institutional effects (childcare hours), public interest (female employment and part-time work) and cultural variables (Protestantism and seeing provision as government responsibility). The results suggest that a distinction between Calvinism and Lutheranism may be useful when studying the relation between Protestantism and the welfare state. Finally, making country clusters on childcare, we conclude that existing care regime typologies do not fit the recent data.

Keywords: legitimacy, childcare, welfare state, public opinion, social care typologies

1. INTRODUCTION

What explains why certain individuals favour specific welfare policies? Many social science scholars have asked this question. Traditionally, people's attitudes vis-à-vis particular policies are explained by whether they can profit from them, and by their political and religious beliefs. More recently, studies also examined whether existing policies, socio-economic or cultural realities in a country could influence individuals' attitudes toward those policies. Most of these earlier studies, however, focused on opinions toward traditional social protection measures, while social services such as childcare were less highlighted. Therefore, we investigate which individual characteristics and national social realities and social policies affect the attitudes of individuals toward government support for childcare services for working parents. We use 2008 European Social Survey (ESS) data to examine whether five theories used to explain opinions toward welfare states are applicable to childcare for working parents as well. Step by step, we evaluate these theories related to individual and contextual characteristics in separate models, to finally test them in a few multilevel models.

Analysing opinions on childcare requires a slightly different approach than the one applied in studies on attitudes toward social security measures. In this study, childcare is approached from a policy perspective, referring to out-of-house professional care for children. As childcare is broadly considered a tool to enhance female labour market participation in general and employment of mothers with young children in particular, opinions on childcare may well reflect more fundamental opinions on the family, women's emancipation and gender roles. This differs from the traditional deservingness approach used in the context of social security, where attitudes on social benefits are influenced by more broad opinions on redistribution and equality.

In the theoretical framework, we present an overview of five hypotheses used in previous studies to explain attitudes on welfare states, followed by a brief overview of social care regime typologies. Subsequently, the data and method used are described. After presenting the results, we discuss in the conclusion the consequences of our findings for the hypotheses. We conclude by considering some methodological limitations of this study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. ATTITUDES TOWARD WELFARE STATES

From earlier literature, we draw five different theories explaining opinions toward welfare states: two of them are situated on the individual level, while the other three involve mechanisms at the country-level. At the individual

level, most studies explain these attitudes by self-interest (Jæger, 2009; Muuri, 2010), ideology, or both (Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003; Gelissen, 2000; Van Oorschot, 2010). The *self-interest hypothesis* states that people tend to show more support for measures they benefit from, or from which they are 'at risk of benefitting'. Indeed, based on a multilevel analysis of 15 OECD-countries, Jæger (2009) found that people with higher incomes are more inclined to take a negative stance on redistribution than people with lower incomes, and that social measures receive more support from unemployed people. Achterberg et al. (2013) came to similar conclusions based on a survey in the Netherlands. Moreover, there is some evidence indicating that support for age-specific social policies is higher among the benefitting age groups, such as Blekesaune and Quadagno's (2003) multilevel analysis of International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) data, showing higher levels of support for welfare policies for the sick and the old among older respondents. Goerres and Tepe (2010), on the other hand, find high levels of support for public childcare among elderly individuals in an analysis of twelve countries, implying a sense of intergenerational solidarity. However, as the study only included people above 55, it does not give grounds for a comparison of opinions of the elderly to those of younger people. Furthermore, even if support for a social scheme is indeed higher among its beneficiaries, this does not necessarily indicate self-interest. A (former) beneficiary could be more aware of the needs of benefit-receiving people out of own experience. Then, the demand for government support can be the result of a better knowledge of needs, rather than self-interest. Based on this hypothesis, we expect the following individuals to have a more positive attitude toward government support for childcare for working parents: parents having at least one child younger than 12; parents, especially mothers, in paid employment; and individuals below the age of 45, as from that moment onward the 'risk' of having a child diminishes, certainly for women.

The *ideology hypothesis*, on the other hand, states that individuals support social measures in correspondence with their personal system of values and beliefs. Gelissen (2000) finds supportive evidence for this hypothesis performing multilevel analysis on individuals' attitudes toward extensiveness and intensity of the welfare state in eleven European countries. Specifically for childcare attitudes, individuals' ideas on the place of the woman within the family may be relevant as, in feminist literature, childcare is considered a measure to improve women's involvement in paid employment, leading to independence and thus to full and equal citizenship of women (Meyers et al., 1999). The ideology hypothesis also incorporates religious beliefs, especially the difference between Protestants and Catholics being widely investigated. While older studies indicate that Catholics used to have more conservative opinions regarding women's employment and gender roles than Protestants (Aldwin, 1986; Lehrer, 1995), more recent studies show little difference (Vella, 1994), or even find the

opposite to be the case (Brooks, 2002; Lehrer, 1995; Wilcox and Jelen, 1991). All these studies, though, agreed that non-religious people have less conservative attitudes than religious people. Van Oorschot (2010), analysing individuals' opinions on the consequences of the welfare state in the Netherlands, concluded that neither religious denomination nor belonging to a religion influenced these opinions. Summarizing, the ideology hypothesis expects lower support levels for governments taking responsibility for childcare supply for working parents among: religious individuals, with Protestants being the least supportive; individuals oriented to the right on the political left-right spectrum; individuals less in favour of redistribution and government intervention in general; and those less supportive of female labour market participation.

At the country-level, we can distinguish three theories explaining individuals' opinions on social policies: institutionalism, public interest and culture. The *institutional effect hypothesis* assumes that the set of institutions and measures taken on the national level determines individuals' attitudes toward the welfare state. Overall, research has shown low support for this hypothesis (Jæger, 2009), but Albrekt Larsen (2007), for instance, finds some institutional effects on individuals' opinions on whether poverty is the consequence of laziness and lack of will power, when performing an Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis on 16 countries. A major problem in this approach is the assumption of causality. Although it seems acceptable that national policies influence citizens' opinions, it goes against the democratic idea that a country's policies, measures and institutions represent the opinion of its citizens. Barr (2002), for instance, regards public support for redistribution as one of the factors influencing the level of social spending in a country. Based on this hypothesis, we expect individual support for governments taking responsibility in the supply of childcare for working parents to be higher in countries where the share of children in childcare is higher, and where childcare is available for a longer time.

Second, the *public interest hypothesis* states that societal support will be higher for measures supporting a specific group of needy if the share of individuals in society meeting these needs is larger. In this vein, the results of Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003) indicate that nations with high unemployment levels are more inclined to support welfare state policies benefiting the unemployed. Finseraas (2008) also found evidence supporting this hypothesis. Performing both aggregate and multilevel analyses of 22 European countries, he shows that higher income inequality in a country coincides with stronger public support for redistribution. Following the public interest hypothesis, we expect higher support for government involvement in childcare supply for working parents in countries with a higher female labour market participation rate, a lower share of women working part-time, and higher fertility rates.

The third group of national level indicators embodies cultural and ideological variables. The *culture hypothesis* comprehends the idea that factors such as

religion and egalitarianism in a country influence the individuals' attitudes toward the welfare state. Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003), for instance, found that nations with a more egalitarian ideology are more in favour of policies supporting the unemployed. Concerning religion, Minkenberg (2002) concludes that in countries where Catholicism is the main religious denomination, there are more conservative pressures on politics than in predominantly Protestant countries, as a result of path dependencies in policies and policy elites. Blome et al. (2009, p. 217), on the other hand, note that childcare outside the family first emerged in Catholic countries during the Industrial Revolution. This reflects a different approach to childcare. While childcare can be introduced to support women's emancipation, it can also be a measure to improve the education and development of children, as is the case in Spain, for example (Escobedo, 1999). In line with this hypothesis, we expect a more positive attitude toward government support for childcare for working parents in countries with more egalitarianism, more support for government intervention in general, and more positive attitudes toward female labour market participation. We expect the opposite in more religious countries, especially in the Catholic ones.

2.2. SOCIAL CARE REGIME TYPOLOGIES

In the past, a lot has been written on the position of the family in different welfare regimes. Different studies criticised Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology of welfare regimes for its lack of focus on the family and especially on the position of women therein. These studies added information on gender and families to the typology (Blome et al., 2009; Esping-Andersen, 2009; Finch, 2006) or proposed different typologies based on gender roles (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996; Fraser, 1994; Lewis, 1992; Mahon, 2002; Meyers et al., 1999; Sainsbury, 1999; Sainsbury, 1997; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008).

Blome et al. (2009) state that the family has a central position in conservative welfare regimes in terms of the performance of care tasks, with policies even actively encouraging family care (Fraser, 1994). Anttonen and Sipilä (1996), though, note that there are substantial differences between conservative welfare regimes in terms of care provision, with Belgium and France having elaborate childcare policies, while care policies are mainly oriented toward the elderly in Germany and the Netherlands. Reliance on the family for care supply is highest in the Mediterranean countries (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996). In social-democratic welfare regimes, the state is the main supplier of childcare, allowing women to become breadwinners, too (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996; Blome et al., 2009; Lewis, 1992). In liberal welfare regimes, lacking policies supporting work-family combinations (Lewis, 1992), it is the market that takes over care tasks, leaving low income families with limited access to childcare (Blome et al., 2009). Hence, Sainsbury (1999) and Lewis (1999) categorise these regimes as

male breadwinner models, even though the male breadwinner paradigm is less visible in their policies than is the case in conservative regimes. Finally, Szelewa and Polakowski (2008) develop a typology of childcare regimes in Central and Eastern Europe using fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis. Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia are grouped as explicitly familialist countries, implementing policies that actively support the traditional family and care at home. Implicit familialism is found in Poland, where policies are gender-neutral, but the government does not undertake measures to make work and family life more combinable. A third category consists of Estonia and Latvia, where female-mobilising policies, aiming at high childcare coverage and low income replacing benefits for parental leave, discourage women to stop working. Finally, in the comprehensive support model, applicable to Lithuania and Hungary, the government actively supports dual earner families by providing good quality childcare services, combined with a universal and generous parental leave system.

3. DATA AND METHOD

We perform this research using the European Social Survey (ESS). There are other datasets available with items on childcare and attitudes toward childcare support, but of all these surveys, ESS is the only one containing enough countries to apply multilevel analysis. Only the fourth wave of the study, stemming from 2008, contains the item measuring attitudes toward government support for childcare for working parents. For the sake of comparability between models, we maintain only respondents and countries without missing values on any of the individual level, respectively country-level variables considered in this study. Our sample includes 28,699 individuals from 23 countries.¹

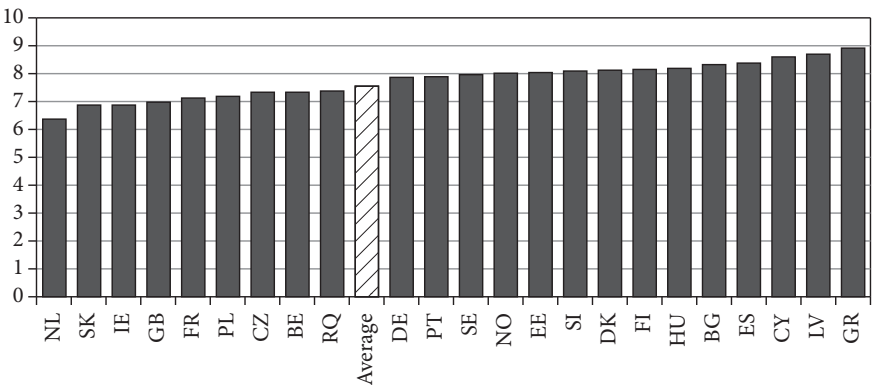
The country-level variables in this study stem from two types of sources: religion and ideology variables are constructed calculating country means using the 2008 wave of the European Values Study (EVS); the indicators used to measure policies and public interest come from Eurostat, the OECD and the World Bank, as well as from national statistics offices in particular cases. These are data from 2008, in exceptional cases extended with data from 2007 or 2009 when data are not available for the year under study.²

¹ The countries in our study are Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Spain (ES), Finland (FI), France (FR), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Latvia (LV), the Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Sweden (SE), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK) and the United Kingdom (UK).

² An overview of the country-level data used, including all country scores, is available on demand.

Our dependent variable (*gvcldc*) contains the answers on the following question (D19): “How much responsibility do you think the governments should have to ensure sufficient child care services for working parents?” It is an item with eleven categories, coded from zero, “Should not be governments’ responsibility at all”, to ten, “Should be entirely governments’ responsibility”. The country means on the dependent variable can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Country means on the opinion that governments should have the responsibility to ensure childcare provision for working parents (2008)



Source: Author’s calculations, using the ESS 2008 data.

In order to examine to what extent the two hypotheses on the individual level and the three hypotheses on the country level manage to explain opinions toward government support for childcare, we perform multilevel analyses. The multilevel model will be constructed in three steps. First, we create models containing only individual level variables. Then, we generate models containing only country-level variables in order to reduce the amount of variables that are to be taken into consideration in the multilevel models. Given the limited amount of countries in the ESS data, we can only include a few country-level variables per model. Finally, we combine variables from both levels in a few multilevel models. For all analyses, though, we apply the *proc mixed* procedure in SAS, controlling for the nested structure of the data. In order to compare the performance of the models, we calculate a pseudo R-squared for both levels of analysis using the *hlmrsq* SAS-macro developed by Recchia (2010).

Both design and population weights are applied in all analyses, but the choice to apply population weights in multilevel analyses is not a straightforward one. In principle, population weights are to be applied when the goal is to generalise to a larger, in this case pan-European, population, while they should not be used when one generalises to a larger group of (European) countries (in which case, in fact, a weight making all countries equally important and hence correcting for differences in sample sizes would be a better option). Our multilevel analyses,

however, deal with both kinds of generalisations at the same time: having fixed effect variables at the individual level involves the assumption that effects are the same for all individuals, which involves a generalisation to this 'pan-European population'. Country-level indicators, on the other hand, are generalised to 'all European countries'. Population weights do not influence the values on country-level variables, though, nor do they affect the amount of units at the higher level, so the country-level effects will not be affected by the application of population weights. Based on this and the fact that all variables at the individual level are fixed effects and hence involve generalisation to a larger population, we decide to apply population weights.

In our last multilevel models, we also include a typology of welfare states, testing whether opinions toward government support for childcare services for working parents differ between these clusters. However, due to the lack of consistency among existing typologies, we cluster the countries in our analysis utilising Latent Gold, using the following indicators: childcare coverage for the children below three (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996); childcare coverage for the children between three and five (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008); percentage of female part-time employment (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996); female labour market participation rate (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996); and average amount of hours a child below three spends in childcare per week (Hagemann, 2006).

4. RESULTS

Running a multilevel regression without predictors, we get an intra-class correlation coefficient (ρ) of 0.11, indicating that a little more than 10 per cent of the total variance in the dependent variable can be attributed to country-differences. In Table 1, we present models containing variables connected to the *self-interest hypothesis*. Model 1, consisting of control variables, shows significant effects for the gender and age variables on the opinion that governments should take responsibility in ensuring childcare services for working parents. Conform the expectations, women score higher than men (0.20) and the effect of age is non-linear. However, the highest support is found among the elderly, and not among young (possible) parents. Those who had higher education are less in favour of government support for childcare for working parents, though further analyses will indicate that this is the consequence of higher educated individuals having different political opinions. Finally, and in line with our expectations, support increases with 0.27 for every child below the age of three the individual has, and with 0.14 for every child between three and five years old. Having children between six and eleven years old does not influence individuals' opinions on government support for childcare services.

In Model 2, interactions between being a woman, being employed and the number of children younger than twelve are included in the model. The effects of sex and number of children found in the previous model disappear, and instead, being in paid employment and its interaction with sex become significant. Employment, however, has a negative effect on the dependent variable (-0.24), partly compensated for by the interaction with sex. Hence, the lowest support levels are found among employed men. Neither the interactions between employment and having young children and between sex and number of children, nor their three-way interaction is significant. Furthermore, support levels are higher among individuals who ever had children and among those living with a partner. On the other hand, those perceiving childcare as affordable have lower support levels, and so do married respondents (-0.22).

In the third Model, we included a variable describing whether or not parents are at home during the day³, with the reference category containing people without children younger than twelve. In those families where no parents are at home during the day (0.47), support is higher than in those families where at least one parent stays at home (0.39), though from further analyses we know that this difference is not significant. Moreover, the fact that the effects of the number of children younger than six cancel out, suggests that it is the presence rather than the amount of young children that matters.

In conclusion, we find some support for the self-interest hypothesis in these models, though effects are rather low. These models hardly explain more than one per cent of the total variance at the individual level. Furthermore, the positive effect of ever having had children may indeed indicate the existence of a knowledge effect. In line with the better AIC score, we will use the variables from the third model in the multilevel models, as they allow for the inclusion of the more specific age categories for children.

In Table 2, we assess the impact of the *ideology hypothesis*. First, In Model 4, we insert the general variables of religion and political ideology; then, in Model 5, certain specific opinions on female employment, fairness and the welfare state enter the model. Model 4 clarifies that religiosity⁴ has no significant effect, but belonging to certain religious denominations does. Compared to non-religious people, Protestants are less of the opinion that the government should take responsibility for childcare services for working parents (-0.22), while the opposite is the case for Muslims (0.30). Individuals belonging to other religious denominations do not differ significantly from those who are not religious in

³ Individuals who indicated that their main occupation during the past seven days was doing housework are considered to be at home, as well as those who were unemployed, permanently sick or disabled or retired.

⁴ The religiosity scale is constructed using the items 'How religious are you', 'How often do you attend religious services' and 'How often do you pray'. Cronbach's alpha = 0.84 (lowest in Romania: 0.66); Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = 0.73 .

Table 1. Self-interest as a predictor of the opinion that childcare supply for working parents is a government's responsibility (2008)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P
Female	0.196	0.023	***	0.036	0.038		0.179	0.023	***
Age	0.028	0.004	***	0.027	0.004	***	0.024	0.004	***
Age ²	-0.000	0.000	***	-0.000	0.000	***	-0.000	0.000	***
Highest education received									
<i>Below secondary (reference category)</i>									
Secondary	-0.032	0.031		-0.015	0.031		-0.034	0.031	
Above secondary	-0.152	0.032	***	-0.119	0.033	***	-0.160	0.032	***
Number of children (0-2)	0.267	0.043	***				0.007	0.055	
Number of children (3-5)	0.143	0.041	***				-0.050	0.049	
Number of children (6-11)	0.016	0.026					-0.209	0.041	***
Number of children (0-11)				0.038	0.066				
Has/ever had children									
Provision of affordable childcare				0.202	0.035	***	0.122	0.037	***
Living with a partner				-0.039	0.005	***	-0.038	0.005	***
Married				0.104	0.041	*	0.052	0.041	
Employed				-0.217	0.039	***	-0.183	0.039	***
Female * employed				-0.242	0.040	***			
Female * employed				0.194	0.051	***			
Employed * number of children (0-11)				0.008	0.070				

Table 1. Self-interest as a predictor of the opinion that childcare supply for working parents is a government's responsibility (2008) (continued)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P
Female * number of children (0–11)				0.030	0.073				
Female * employed * number of children (0–11)				0.034	0.083				
Parents at home									
<i>No children below age of 12 (reference category)</i>									
No parents at home							0.469	0.068	***
One parent at home							0.390	0.074	***
Two parents at home							0.396	0.097	***
Constant	7.149	0.156	***	7.511	0.165	***	7.392	0.164	***
N ₁ ; N ₂	28699	23		28699	23		28699	23	
Pseudo R ² ₁ ; Pseudo R ² ₂	0.008	0.003		0.010	–0.015		0.012	–0.003	
AIC	138174			138061			138039		

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.
Source: Author's calculations and estimations, using the ESS 2008 data.

Table 2. Ideology and religion as predictors of the opinion that childcare supply for working parents is a government's responsibility (2008)

	Model 4			Model 5		
	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P
Female	0.194	0.023	***	0.148	0.023	***
Age	0.026	0.004	***	0.026	0.003	***
Age ²	-0.000	0.000	***	-0.000	0.000	***
Highest education received						
<i>Below secondary (reference category)</i>						
Secondary	-0.018	0.031		-0.010	0.030	
Above secondary	-0.143	0.032	***	-0.046	0.032	
Number of children (0–2)	0.265	0.042	***	0.291	0.041	***
Number of children (3–5)	0.153	0.041	***	0.175	0.040	***
Number of children (6–11)	0.024	0.026		0.021	0.025	
Religiosity	0.013	0.010		0.004	0.010	
Religious belonging						
<i>Not religious (reference category)</i>						
Roman Catholic	-0.042	0.036		-0.001	0.035	
Protestant	-0.220	0.040	***	-0.169	0.039	***
Eastern Orthodox	0.114	0.100		0.093	0.098	
Jewish	0.227	0.267		0.489	0.262	
Muslim	0.300	0.088	***	0.352	0.086	***
Other religion	-0.082	0.098		-0.046	0.096	
Placement on the left-right scale	-0.086	0.006	***	-0.035	0.006	***
Women should be prepared to cut down on paid work for family				-0.060	0.011	***
Social services and benefits work				0.088	0.016	***
Social services and benefits have negative consequences				-0.101	0.013	***
Government should reduce differences in income levels				0.206	0.012	***
For a fair society, differences in standard of living should be small				0.129	0.013	***
Government should increase tax and social spending				0.017	0.006	**
Many with very low incomes get less benefit than legally entitled to				0.050	0.013	***

Table 2. Ideology and religion as predictors of the opinion that childcare supply for working parents is a government's responsibility (2008) (continued)

	Model 4			Model 5		
	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P
Insufficient benefits in country to help people in real need				0.172	0.012	***
Constant	7.579	0.159	***	5.358	0.179	***
N ₁ ; N ₂	28699	23		28699	23	
Pseudo R ² ₁ ; Pseudo R ² ₂	0.019	0.020		0.075	0.194	
AIC	137889			136713		

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Source: Author's calculations and estimations, using the ESS 2008 data.

terms of the dependent variable. These effects remain rather stable after inclusion of other attitudes in Model 5. Unsurprisingly, the more to the right an individual places oneself on the political left-right continuum, the less he or she will support government intervention in the supply of childcare services for working parents. This effect is partly mediated by the other attitudes included in Model 5.

Analysing Model 5, we find that individuals who are of the opinion that women should be prepared to reduce their involvement in the labour market for the family are less in favour of the government taking responsibility in the supply of childcare for working parents. Those who think that social benefits and services have negative consequences⁵ also have lower support levels; on the contrary, individuals who say social benefits and services work⁶ have higher scores on the dependent variable. Further, support is higher among individuals who are in favour of reducing differences in income and standard of living, among those who are in favour of increased taxation and social spending and among those who are of the opinion that benefits are too low or that they do not reach the people who need them.

Regarding the ideology hypothesis, we can conclude that belonging to a specific denomination rather than the level of religiosity influences support

⁵ The 'social benefits and services have negative consequences' scale is constructed using the items 'social benefits/services make people lazy', 'social benefits/services make people less willing to care for one another' and 'social benefits/services make people less willing to look after themselves/family'. Cronbach's alpha = 0,82 (lowest in the Netherlands: 0,73); KMO = 0,71.

⁶ The 'social benefits and services work' scale is constructed using the items 'social benefits/services prevent widespread poverty', 'social benefits/services lead to a more equal society' and 'social benefits/services make it easier to combine work and family'. Cronbach's alpha = 0,67 (lowest in the Netherlands: 0,48); KMO = 0,65.

for the government taking responsibility in the supply of childcare for working parents. Further, support levels are higher among those with more egalitarian attitudes and a more positive opinion about the welfare state. It seems to be determined more by general opinions on fairness, redistribution and the functioning of the welfare state, than by one's opinion on the role of women within the family and the labour market. The variables in Model 5 will be included in the final multilevel models. The AIC score of this model is markedly better than those of the models containing self-interest variables. This is confirmed by the pseudo R-squared, indicating that religion and ideology explain about seven per cent of the individual level variance.

In Table 3, we find the regression models containing only country-level variables. Testing the *institutional effect hypothesis*, only the average amount of hours a child spends in childcare appears to be relevant, while none of the childcare coverage variables matter. Of the variables we used to test the *public interest hypothesis*, both female employment rate and enrolment of women in part-time employment have significant effects. Concerning the *culture hypothesis*, opinions on provision being a governments' responsibility and on women in paid employment⁷ are significant. Moreover, even if main religious denomination does not have any significant effects here, we do consider it useful to take the variable into consideration in the final models. Even though between-country variance is limited, the pseudo R-squares indicate that the variance at the country-level is well accounted for in these models, with about one third of the variance explained in Models 6 and 7, and approximately one fourth in Models 8, 9 and 10.

The results of the most optimal division of country clusters are presented in Table 4. In the table, we see that the strongest differences between the clusters are found on the three variables that were also retained in Table 3: amount of hours per week in childcare, female labour market participation rate and the share of women in part-time employment. These clusters differ substantively from those presented in the literature review. This can be connected to the indicators used: other indicators may have led to different clusters. However, some countries have gone through changes in childcare and female employment policies since the end of the 1990s, which can be the result of female employment being one of the priorities in EU employment policy.

⁷ The opinion that women should be in paid work is measured combining the items 'job is the best way for women's independence' and 'both husband and wife should contribute to household'. The opinion that the household is a women's responsibility, on the other hand, is measured using the items 'pre-school child suffers with working mother', 'women really want to be at home with the children' and 'being a housewife is as fulfilling as a paid job' (Cronbach's alpha = 0,60; KMO = 0,60).

Table 3. Country-level variables as predictors of the opinion that childcare supply for working parents is a government's responsibility (2008)^o

	Model 6			Model 7			Model 8			Model 9			Model 10		
	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P
% children in childcare (0-2)	-0.007	0.007													
% children in childcare (3-5)	0.012	0.012													
% children in childcare (4)	-0.004	0.012													
Average amount of hours of childcare per week (0-2)	0.059	0.019	**												
Female employment rate				0.059	0.025	*									
Female part-time employment				-0.025	0.009	**									
Total fertility rate				-0.432	0.576										
Average religiosity							0.004	0.010							
Main religious denomination															
No main religious denomination (ref. cat.)															
Roman Catholicism							-0.150	0.399							
Protestantism							0.407	0.439							
Eastern Orthodoxy							0.583	0.544							
Average on the left-right scale										0.065	0.319				
Provision is governments' responsibility										0.593	0.225	*			
Household women's responsibility													0.215	0.502	
Women should be in paid work													1.740	0.605	**
Constant	5.614	0.872	***	5.099	1.590	**	7.344	0.555	***	4.565	2.049	*	1.714	2.267	
N ₁ N ₂	28699	23		28699	23		28699	23		28699	23		28699	23	
Pseudo R ² ; Pseudo R ² ₂	0.004	0.360		0.040	0.350		0.027	0.234		0.026	0.229		0.031	0.266	
AIC	138414			138412			138418			138414			138413		

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

^o In two other models (not presented here), we tested the effects of per capita GDP, Gini-coefficient, unemployment rate and the percentage of GDP spent on social matters. None of these effects were significant, with a standard error for each variable being about the size of the coefficient.

Source: Author's calculations and estimations, using the ESS 2008 data.

Table 4. Clusters of countries by female employment and childcare indicators

	Cluster 1 [°]	Cluster 2 ^{°°}	Cluster 3 ^{°°°}
% women in part-time employment	++	0	--
Female labour market participation rate	++	0–	--
Childcare coverage (0-2)	0+	0	–
Childcare coverage (3-5)	0+	0+	–
Mean hours/week in childcare	–	0+	+

[°] Cluster 1 consists of: the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Germany.

^{°°} Cluster 2 consists of: Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, France, Spain, Cyprus, Finland, Portugal and Slovenia.

^{°°°} Cluster 3 consists of: Estonia, Romania, Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary.

Note: The signs in the table indicate to what extent a cluster scores high (++, + or 0+), average (0) or low (--, - or 0-) on the variables presented.

Source: Author's calculations and estimations, using the ESS 2008 data.

Finally, we bring the individual and country-level variables together in a few multilevel models in Table 5. In all four models, the individual level effects are very similar to those in the first two tables – with the difference that also Jewish individuals have markedly higher scores than non-religious people in these models –, and about ten per cent of the variance at this level is explained. At the country level, we find significant effects of the female labour market participation rate and the percentage of women in part-time employment, supporting the public interest hypothesis (Model 11, half of the between-country variance is explained). The effect of amount of hours children spend in childcare, on the contrary, loses its significance in this multilevel model. The clusters, even though they are mainly based on the same variables, do not affect the dependent variable (Model 13, about one fifth of the between-country variance is explained).

With almost two thirds of the between-country variance explained in Model 12, however, cultural variables appear to be the most successful in explaining the differences between countries. Regarding the cultural effect hypothesis, we find the highest support for governments taking responsibility in supplying childcare for working parents in the countries where Protestantism is the main religious denomination (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) – though with a p-value of 0.054 the effect falls just outside the indicated significance levels in Model 14 –, while the same models indicate that being a Protestant at the individual level leads to lower support levels (Models 12 and 14). Even if the positive effect of Protestantism at the country level is a spurious effect of the Scandinavian welfare regimes, it does not allow for an interpretation in terms of *Protestant ethics*. Finally, support for government intervention in the supply of childcare for working parents is higher in countries where people agree more with the idea that provision is a governments' responsibility.

5. CONCLUSION

From the literature, we drew five possible explanations for individuals' opinions on welfare states: self-interest and ideology are believed to play important roles on the individual level, while existing institutions, public interest and culture are believed to influence these opinions at the country-level. Applying these five different hypotheses on support for the statement that the supply of childcare for working parents is a government's responsibility, we did find some partial evidence for all five explanations, though some do markedly better than others. With maximally ten per cent of the individual level variance explained, the theories at the individual level do not perform well in predicting support for the government taking the responsibility to supply childcare. Of the country-level variance, on the other hand, almost two thirds can be explained applying these hypotheses. However, between-country variance only accounts for ten per cent of the total variance of the dependent variable.

The *self-interest hypothesis* is found not to be important for individuals' opinions toward government intervention in childcare for working parents. Despite the significant effects found, we can conclude that people do not favour government support for childcare more if they could benefit from such measures. Even though support was indeed highest among employed mothers and in families where both parents work outside the house, the self-interest models could barely explain one per cent of the individual level variance. The broad support in the population, not dependent on the self-interest of individuals – possibly because of a general understanding of the needs of families with children –, indicates that policies in favour of childcare services are broadly accepted, also among those not directly benefiting from the measures taken. The *ideology hypothesis*, on the other hand, performed somewhat better with an explained variance of seven per cent, especially due to the variables measuring political attitudes. Partly, though, these results may be the consequence of a more positive opinion toward government intervention in general, rather than specifically toward government support for childcare.

At the country-level, the outcomes are rather different. Regarding the *institutional effects hypothesis*, surprisingly, the average amount of hours children spend in childcare appears to be of importance, and not the childcare coverage rate. Possibly, in countries where childcare covers more hours, it may be easier for individuals to see the added value of childcare for working parents; or, put the other way around, they may fail to see the benefit working parents receive from childcare if this care is only available for a limited amount of hours per week. In line with the *public interest hypothesis*, the female labour market participation rate has a positive effect on the dependent variable while the percentage of women working part-time has a negative effect. This can be explained by the need for childcare being higher when more women are in paid employment,

Table 5. Individual and country-level variables as predictors of the opinion that childcare supply for working parents is a government's responsibility (2008)

	Model 11			Model 12			Model 13			Model 14		
	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P
<i>Individual level</i>												
Female	0.135	0.023	***	0.135	0.023	***	0.135	0.023	***	0.135	0.023	***
Age	0.020	0.004	***	0.020	0.004	***	0.020	0.004	***	0.020	0.004	***
Age ²	-0.000	0.000	***	-0.000	0.000	***	-0.000	0.000	***	-0.000	0.000	***
Highest education received												
<i>Below secondary (reference category)</i>												
Secondary	-0.012	0.030		-0.013	0.030		-0.012	0.030		-0.012	0.030	
Above secondary	-0.054	0.033		-0.054	0.033		-0.053	0.033		-0.054	0.033	
Number of children (0-2)	0.018	0.054		0.018	0.054		0.018	0.054		0.018	0.054	
Number of children (3-5)	-0.033	0.048		-0.034	0.048		-0.033	0.048		-0.034	0.048	
Number of children (6-11)	-0.217	0.040	***	-0.217	0.040	***	-0.217	0.040	***	-0.217	0.040	***
Has/ever had children	0.109	0.036	**	0.109	0.036	**	0.109	0.036	**	0.109	0.036	**
Provision of affordable childcare	-0.019	0.005	***	-0.019	0.005	***	-0.019	0.005	***	-0.019	0.005	***
Living with a partner	0.072	0.040		0.072	0.040		0.072	0.040		0.071	0.040	
Married	-0.129	0.039	***	-0.128	0.039	***	-0.129	0.039	***	-0.128	0.039	***
Parents at home												
<i>No children below age of 12 (reference category)</i>												
No parents at home	0.482	0.066	***	0.482	0.066	***	0.482	0.066	***	0.482	0.066	***
One parent at home	0.411	0.072	***	0.411	0.072	***	0.411	0.072	***	0.411	0.072	***

Table 5. Individual and country-level variables as predictors of the opinion that childcare supply for working parents is a government's responsibility (2008) (continued)

	Model 11			Model 12			Model 13			Model 14		
	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P
Two parents at home	0.352	0.094	***	0.352	0.094	***	0.352	0.094	***	0.352	0.094	***
Religiosity	0.007	0.010		0.008	0.010		0.008	0.010		0.008	0.010	
Religious belonging												
Not religious (reference category)												
Roman Catholic	0.003	0.035		0.006	0.035		0.003	0.035		0.005	0.035	
Protestant	-0.160	0.039	***	-0.161	0.039	***	-0.160	0.039	***	-0.161	0.039	***
Eastern Orthodox	0.088	0.097		0.072	0.100		0.090	0.098		0.071	0.100	
Jewish	0.519	0.261	*	0.516	0.261	*	0.519	0.261	*	0.516	0.261	*
Muslim	0.385	0.086	***	0.381	0.086	***	0.384	0.086	***	0.380	0.086	***
Other religion	-0.051	0.096		0.006	0.035		-0.052	0.096		-0.053	0.096	
Placement on the left-right scale	-0.034	0.006	***	-0.053	0.096	***	-0.034	0.006	***	-0.034	0.006	***
Women should be prepared to cut down on paid work for family	-0.058	0.011	***	-0.035	0.006	***	-0.057	0.011	***	-0.057	0.011	***
Social services and benefits work	0.095	0.016	***	-0.057	0.011	***	0.096	0.016	***	0.095	0.016	***
Social services and benefits have negative consequences	-0.101	0.013	***	0.096	0.016	***	-0.101	0.013	***	-0.101	0.013	***
Government should reduce differences in income levels	0.203	0.012	***	0.203	0.012	***	0.203	0.012	***	0.203	0.012	***
For a fair society, differences in standard of living should be small	0.129	0.013	***	0.129	0.013	***	0.129	0.013	***	0.129	0.013	***
Government should increase tax and social spending	0.018	0.006	**	0.018	0.006	**	0.018	0.006	**	0.018	0.006	**
Many with very low incomes get less benefit than legally entitled to	0.048	0.013	***	0.049	0.013	***	0.049	0.013	***	0.049	0.013	***
Insufficient benefits in country to help people in real need	0.168	0.012	***	0.168	0.012	***	0.168	0.012	***	0.169	0.012	***

Table 5. Individual and country-level variables as predictors of the opinion that childcare supply for working parents is a government's responsibility (2008) (continued)

	Model 11			Model 12			Model 13			Model 14		
	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P	Coef.	S.E.	P
<i>Country-level</i>												
Average amount of hours of childcare per week (0–2)	0.027	0.018										
Female employment rate	0.054	0.023	*									
Female part-time employment	–0.017	0.008	*									
Main religious denomination												
<i>No main religious denomination (reference category)</i>												
Roman Catholicism				–0.315	0.209					–0.421	0.236	
Protestantism				0.629	0.246	*				0.525	0.259	
Eastern Orthodoxy				0.200	0.275					0.226	0.282	
Provision is governments' responsibility				0.468	0.171	*				0.505	0.184	*
Women should be in paid work				0.752	0.486					0.791	0.486	
Country clusters												
<i>Cluster 3 (reference category)</i>												
Cluster 1							–0.166	0.326		0.127	0.294	
Cluster 2							0.010	0.278		0.255	0.224	
Constant	1.470	1.376		0.857	1.443		5.551	0.241	***	0.478	1.622	
N ₁ ; N ₂	28699	23		28699	23		28699	23		28699	23	
Pseudo R ² ₁ ; Pseudo R ² ₂	0.113	0.496		0.128	0.626		0.078	0.199		0.129	0.641	
AIC	136619			136616			136628			136619		

* p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Source: Author's calculations and estimation, using the ESS 2008 data.

while this need is lower when a larger part of employed women work part-time. The institutional effects and public interest hypotheses both explain about one third of between-country variance, and even half when combined in one multilevel model. The *cultural effect hypothesis*, however, performs best, with almost two thirds of the between-country variance explained in a multilevel model. Here, support is higher in countries where the population supports more strongly the opinion that provision is a government's responsibility, and in Protestant countries. The high support found in Protestant countries, in contrast to the negative effect of Protestantism found at the individual level, indicates that thinking in terms of *Protestant ethics* to explain religious differences in welfare state support may be an oversimplification of reality. The fact that the group of Protestant countries consists exclusively of Scandinavian countries characterised by Lutheran Protestantism, while substantial groups of Protestants in countries without a main religious denomination mainly belong to the Calvinist tradition (the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, Germany being the exception) may indicate that 'Protestant' is too diverse a category for a meaningful analysis of the effects of religion on welfare state attitudes. In this light, it may be fruitful to distinguish between Lutheran and Calvinist Protestantism in future research. This is supported by Kahl's (2005) historical overview of the relation between Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism and social policies, from which it is clear that, in Lutheran tradition, the state is relied on as provider for the needy, while Calvinist tradition has taken a more critical stance on the state involvement and redistribution.

Finally, one can question the usefulness of typologies on childcare, social care and female labour market participation. Cluster analyses remain very vulnerable to the selection of items for clustering, though by taking items used for the same purpose in other studies, we tried to limit this effect. If we compare typologies of childcare presented in earlier studies to the one we created using Latent Gold, there are many incongruences, not least the fact that the United Kingdom, Germany and Sweden end up in the same cluster, while in previous typologies they were consistently considered to represent completely different models. Not only are most of these models built upon evidence from a limited amount of countries, they may also be out-dated due to recent changes in childcare policies in several European countries.

6. LIMITATIONS

This study has some methodological limitations that have to be taken into consideration. Jæger (2009) points at the problem of multicollinearity in quantitative welfare state research, meaning that countries belonging to the same type of welfare regime tend to have similar characteristics. This makes it

difficult to assess which one of these characteristics is the cause for differences in the dependent variable. Even though, statistically, multicollinearity is not an issue in this study, with only the variables 'age' and 'age squared' having a high Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) score, the positive effect of Protestantism at the country-level may be a spurious effect of the social-democratic welfare regimes in Scandinavian countries. This positive effect may well be caused by the fact that Lutheran Protestantism as a main denomination only occurs in social-democratic welfare regimes, in combination with the impossibility to fully control for all the distinctive characteristics of these welfare regimes.

Finally, our analysis does not comply with three basic requirements for regression analysis. First, the dependent variable is not normally distributed, but skewed to the left. Even though it would be possible to transform the dependent variable in a categorical one and apply multilevel multinomial logistic regression, we decided to use linear regressions as a non-normally distributed dependent variable is not a substantial problem given a large sample size. This way, results remain more interpretable. Second, as is typical for multilevel analyses on countries, the aggregate sample units are not randomly selected, so caution is needed when generalising these results to a specific population or to other countries. And lastly, one can question whether certain independent variables really are independent of the dependent variable, a causality problem occurring often in opinion research. This assumption of causality is especially problematic for the variables related to the institutional effects hypothesis: however plausible it may be that policies shape individuals' opinions, this goes against the very basic democratic principle that policies are supposed to reflect the ideas of the citizens, not the other way around.

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