

# **Coming to Denmark: Americans' adaption to social democratic institutions**

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## **Abstract**

Cross-national differences in public opinions about welfare policies, and the role of the government more generally, are often explained in terms of institutional differences. It is widely believed that the hostility towards welfare policies in the US and their support in the Nordic countries is partly caused by the institutional structure of what Esping-Andersen (1990) famously labeled liberal and social democratic welfare regimes. The paper contributes to this literature by analyzing welfare attitudes among American migrants living in a social democratic welfare regime. The paper combines a survey among first generation American migrants living in Denmark with already existing survey data on American and Danish welfare attitudes. As expected, the article finds that Americans living in a context of social democratic welfare institutions are 1) more supportive of the welfare state than are Americans living in (neo)liberal welfare institutions and 2) are as, or more, supportive than are native Danes. The article finds more evidence of the context-effect being caused by exposure to Danish welfare state institutions than to Danish culture in general.

## Introduction

Denmark served a remarkably large role in the first Democratic debates of the 2016 US presidential election. In this debate Senator Bernie Sanders pointed to the Nordic countries as places that embody his political vision: *“I think we should look to countries like Denmark, like Sweden and Norway, and learn what they have accomplished for their working people”* (CNN live debate, 13th October 2015). In terms of actual policies Bernie Sanders suggested universal health care coverage (also known as single-payer) and universal college education; i.e. a shift to “Nordic” tax-financed services with entitlement given to all who resides in the country. These suggestions were rejected by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton: *“I love Denmark. [But] we are not Denmark. We are the United States of America”* (CNN live debate, 13th October 2015). Instead she argued that the way to help the middle class is through growing small and middle sized businesses and curbing the effects of capitalism through redistribution to the poorest. Bernie Sanders self-labeled “democratic socialism” was judged un-American. Besides the ideological rhetoric, a central issue was how Bernie Sanders policy proposals could be financed. Bernie Sanders pointed to increased revenues from corporate taxes, capital gains, and high income earners, while Hillary Clinton campaign argued that it would take general tax increases. The health care reform Bernie Sanders proposed to congress in 2013 was by the Hillary campaign estimated to cause a general tax increase of 13 percentage points (if implemented), which was deemed unfeasible. Hillary Clinton’s position is given support by many prominent American public intellectuals. In a recent book, “American Amnesia”, Pierson and Hacker (2016) concluded that Americans, and the American political system, have largely forgotten that the state can serve a role in people’s lives beyond redistribution. The likely electoral failure of Bernie Sanders will further underpin the interpretation that Americans are not ready for a Nordic welfare state. This will resonate with a large literature on American exceptionalism, which states that the liberal creed basically is a cultural constant to which previous and contemporary policy makers simply have to adapt. This contemporary American discussion reflects a long standing academic debate about the impact of institutions and culture on public opinion about the size and responsibilities of government.

The article contributes to the literature that emphasis that institutions, understood as the programmatic structure of welfare state policies, can influence public opinion. This position would agree with the interpretation that Americans are “locked” into a position of being against Nordic “democratic socialism”. However, it would disagree with interpretation that Americans could never come to embrace the programmatic structure of the Nordic welfare states if they happened to be installed. The article is divided into eight sections. The first section outlines the overall institutional argument and the potential counterarguments. The second section introduces the idea of using migrants as a natural experiment to study the impact of institutions. The third section describes the data and the applied methods. The fourth section provides simply descriptive measure of the differences between Americans living in different institutional settings. The fifth section provides multivariate analyses that control for compositional effects. The sixth section analyses the impact of time and embedding in social relationships. The seventh section explores a numbers of the specific mechanisms suggested in the literature about impact from Nordic institutions. Finally, the main results are summarized and discussed in the conclusion.

## Theory

The origins of public opinions about the size and the responsibility of government are numerous. The origins have been theorized with point of departure in self-interest, class-mobilization, socio-tropic thinking, moralizing deservingness discussions, and socialized values. The article is positioned in the strand of literature that emphasizes that the societal context matters. Within this literature the overall point is that welfare attitudes cannot be reduced to universal logics, e.g. universal self-interest effects (e.g. Meltzer, Richard 1981) or universal deservingness effects (e.g. Aarøe, Petersen 2014), but needs to be understood in relation to the societal context. Therefore this strand of literature has had a strong interest in the cross-national differences in attitudes, which international survey programs such as ISSP (International Social Survey Program), WVS (World Value Survey) and ESS (European Social Survey) have enabled social scientists to study. This strand of literature has demonstrated both a number of differences and similarities across country; even sizeable differences across otherwise fairly similar Western democratic and capitalist countries (e.g. Svallfors 1997, Larsen 2006, Jaeger 2009, van Oorschot, Meuleman 2012). In many of these studies the Americans do indeed stand out as some of the most reluctant to support anti-poverty, redistribution in general and taxation, whereas the Scandinavians stand out as some of the most supportive for such policies.

The interpretation of the societal context-effects varies. One of the primary divisions runs between an institutional versus a cultural account. The former basically interpret contemporary cross-national differences in welfare attitudes as the outcome of cross-national variations in institutional structures of the welfare state, which the current public has inherited from previous generations. One of the most influential categorization of cross-national differences in the institutional structures of the welfare state has been Esping-Andersen's distinction between social democratic, conservative and liberal welfare regimes, which led many to search for links between these regimes and attitudes (e.g. Edlund 1999, Gelissen 2000, Svallfors 2003, Mau 2004, Larsen 2006, Jæger 2006, Jæger 2009, Larsen 2013). In terms of theory, one of the main arguments has been that the programmatic structures of the means-tested policies found in the liberal regimes generate reluctance towards state interventions, whereas the programmatic structures of the universal policies found in the social democratic regimes have the opposite effects (e.g. Titmuss 1974, Rothstein 1998, Larsen 2006, Crepaz, Damron 2009, Larsen, Dejgaard 2013, Larsen 2013). The impact of the programmatic structure of the compulsory insurance schemes found in conservative regimes has been less theorized and analyzed. Ascribing cross-national differences to the institutional structures of government is especially prominent among political scientists; in this field it often carries the label of policy-feedback. The latter, the cultural account, basically interpret contemporary cross-national differences as a reflection of a broader set-up of historically given cultural values, which both have a potential to explain the presence or absence of contemporary institutions and the contemporary attitudes to these or other suggested policies. This position has especially been developed in order to understand American's reluctance to support various forms of welfare state policies. The narrative of an American exceptionalism has long existed within both popular culture and a number of scholarly fields, including welfare state studies (e.g. Prasad 2016). The most prominent example of this is Lipset (1997) who argues that for historical reasons, which

can be traced back to the American Revolution, a special “American creed” hinder support for welfare policies and government intervention in general. Central to this creed is values of liberty, equal opportunity, individualism and populism, which Americans according to Lipset find to be incongruent with having a large welfare state. However, the cultural account has also had a prominent place in explaining cross-national differences in attitudes towards public child- and elderly care within Europe; the argument being that deep cultural differences towards family life shape the public policy preferences across countries (e.g. Pfau-Effinger 2005, van Oorschot, Opieklā et al. 2008). Ascribing cross-national differences in welfare attitudes to a broader set of cultural values is especially prominent among sociologists (see e.g. Lamont 2012 for a more general account of using culture as an explanation for cross-national differences in attitudes).

The studies of cross-national differences in welfare attitudes have provided ample evidence for the presence of context effects. It is evident that public opinion in a number of areas varies across countries. However, the methodological setup is not well-suited to distinguish between the institutional and the cultural account, which often both provide plausible interpretations of the same empirical data. For the institutional account the optimal design would be to exogenously change the institutional structures of welfare states and track public opinion before and after. Such exogenous regime change rarely happens though the reunification of East and West Germany provided an interesting case. Following the institutional line of reasoning Svallfors (2012) predicted that the replacement of the socialist East German welfare state with the conservative West German welfare state would change welfare attitudes in East Germany. Using the ISSP role of government data, Svallfors demonstrated that East Germans did indeed change their attitudes towards the size and responsibilities of the welfare state in the direction of west-Germans. Svallfors (2012), however, also found this process to be mainly driven by generational replacement, which opens for a more cultural interpretation. Thus, overall it has proved difficult to solve the “chicken and egg-problem” of whether institutions shape welfare attitudes or culture shape institutions and welfare attitudes. Naturally, one could judge the discussion irrelevant as many scholars in each camp are open to the argument that it naturally is an interactive process; the “chicken and egg” belong to the same nexus, which ends up establishing sizeable context-effects. However, for progressive policy making with an intention to break the current equilibrium it is not at all an irrelevant discussion. If the Nordic universal policies never can be legitimized in the American cultural context it makes little sense to suggest such policies. However, if the American public would rapidly come to embrace such policies, it makes a lot of sense to push for new institutional structures. The attitudes of the Americans actually living in “democratic socialist” institutions might help us shed new light on how such institutions might change welfare attitudes.

## **The case of American migrants in Denmark**

The article follows an emerging literature, which studies institutional effect by analyzing the attitudes of migrants who had the institutional structure of the country of origin, in our case the US, replaced with the institutional structure of the host country, in our case Denmark. Following this logic of treating migrants as a natural experiment it has been shown that migrants in general adapt to host-country attitudes to general redistribution (Reeskens, van Oorschot 2015), to female employment (Breidahl, Larsen 2016) and to generalized trust (Dinesen, Hooghe 2010, Dinesen 2013). This article adds to this literature by sampling a specific group of migrants, where the natural experiment resembles the difference between the institutional structure of a liberal and a social democratic regime, which has had such a prominent place in the previous literature. The attitudes of the Americans living in Denmark will be compared with the attitudes of the Americans living in the US and native Danes. With point of departure in the institutional line of reasoning, the main theses are that Americans living in Denmark will be more in favor of welfare policies than Americans living in the US (H1) and as supportive of welfare states policies as Danes living in Denmark (H2). The null theses are that the Americans living in Denmark have the same attitudes as Americans living in the US (H01) and are less supportive than Danes living in Denmark (H02).

In the case H1 and H2 can be verified it is, however, still not easy to disentangle the institutional effect from the cultural effect. As we only include first generation American immigrants in the sample, one can exclude the possibility of assimilation through generational replacement emphasized by the cultural account. However, even first generation migrants are naturally exposed to a broader set of cultural values found in Denmark. Therefore we will elaborate on the patterns behind the welfare attitudes of the American migrants. Section six searches for the presence cultural assimilation effects. Following Breidahl & Larsen (2016) the thesis is that a rapid assimilation is to be expected from an institutional account (H03) whereas a more long-term assimilation is to be expected from a cultural account (H3); i.e. the impact of time in the host country gives a rough indication of institutional versus cultural effects. We will also more directly test the importance of having Danish friends on welfare attitudes. From an institutional account this should be of little importance (H04), whereas embedding in social relationships with natives should be important from a cultural account (H4). Section seven searches for the presence of institutional effects. Following Rothstein (1998) the thesis is that Nordic institutions' ability to create (perceived) procedural justice is pivotal for understanding the high levels of support for welfare policies (H5). We also test the argument of the Nordic welfare states' ability to blur the calculation of self-interest (H6) (Larsen 2006, Goul Andersen 1992). These mechanisms are believed to be of extra importance for the Americans migrants as they constitute a group of high income earners (see below) who are net-contributors to the Danish welfare states. The null-theses are that such effects cannot be found (H05, H06).

## Data and method

The main logic of the article is to compare the attitudes of Americans living in the US with Americans in the US and native Danes. To capture the attitudes of Americans living in the US and native Danes we will use the ISSP's (International Social Survey Program) fourth version of the Role of Government-module, which respectively had 1518 American respondents and 1368 Danish respondents surveyed in 2016. Both surveys reflect a representative sample of the adult population above the age of 18 (ISSP 2006). The attitudes of Americans living in Denmark and of natives Danes were measured in our own survey called MIFARE (Migrants Welfare State Attitudes) conducted in the fall and winter of 2015. A random sample of 900 citizens born in the US, but living in Denmark, was drawn using the Civil Registration System (also called the CPR-system). This gives a very precise way of sampling a random selection of the 9.222 US born residents in Denmark (January 2016). The sample was limited to Americans who were above 16 years old when they entered Denmark and who have lived in Denmark for a year or more. Both thresholds were selected to ensure that the migrants had living memories from both the US and Denmark, and that they had permanent residence by the UN definition (Font, Méndez 2013).

Migrants are a difficult group to sample both in terms of reliability problems caused by high drop-out rates and validity problems caused by potential misunderstanding of the survey items (Deding, Fridberg et al. 2008). These are standard problems that haunt the previous studies using ESS data (Dinesen, Hooghe 2010, Dinesen 2013, Breidahl, Larsen 2016, Reeskens, van Oorschot 2015). In order to overcome some of these problems the survey were both fielded in Danish and English (in contrast to the ESS only available in the native main language) and a relatively generous incentive were used in order to boost response rates. This English-option was preferred by two thirds of the Americans, which indicates that this was a positive addition. The questionnaire could be answered by mail and online, the latter was preferred by 40 percent of the Americans. The end result was a response rate at 34 percent out of the total sample, which gives full responses from 310 Americans living in Denmark. The data collection in 2015 also included an additional random sample of 394 adult native Danes, out of a sample of 900, which gives a response rate of 44 percent. On the dependent variables (see below) there were only a significant differences between the Danes' answers in 2006 and 2015 on one of the six items (see Tables A3 and A4 in online appendix). Therefore we treated the Danish answers as a merged sample of 1765 Danish respondents.

The most crucial methodological question is whether those exposed to the natural experiment, the American migrants, on other parameters resemble Americans living in the US and Danes living in Denmark. The distributions across gender, age, education, labor market status and income are shown in appendix Table A1. In terms of gender, the American migrants resemble the distribution in the US and Denmark. In terms of age profile the migrants also resemble the general American and Danish age structure; besides a slight underrepresentation of the youngest group. In terms of education, however, there are clear differences between the American migrants and the two other samples. The American migrants are much better educated than Americans in general. Among the American migrants 29 percent and 34 percent respectively hold a bachelor or graduate degree.

The shares are respectively 16 percent and nine percent in the American sample and 24 percent and 16 percent in the Danish sample. Education might influence welfare attitudes in various ways. The higher salary of high educated groups normally decrease support for taxation and general redistribution, while less negative attitudes to “the poor” normally increase support for antipoverty policies. Thus, in the multivariate analyses it is important to control for education (it should also be mentioned that education is not easy to compare across countries, the larger share in “other levels” in Denmark is caused by the large amount of vocational training that cannot easily be categorized in the American educational system). In terms of labor market status, the American migrants largely resemble the American sample; the only notable difference is that more Americans in Denmark are employed in the public sector than it is the case in the American sample (a product of a larger and more labor intensive public sector in Denmark). This might be of importance as public employment normally goes together with more positive attitudes to the welfare state (Tepe 2012). Compared to the labor market status of the Danes, there are less retired among the sample of American migrants, which might influence attitudes to old-age provisions. Finally, the income of the American migrants also needs to be taken into account as high income tends to decrease support for welfare state intervention. The data does not hold accurate information on incomes (see footnote to appendix Table A1), which makes comparison across countries and time troublesome. However, a rough placement of the American migrants into Danish household income quartiles was established. As expected from the higher education level, the American migrants have higher incomes than Americans and Danes in general. 34 percent and 33 percent of the American migrants are respectively placed in the Danish third and fourth income quartile. In the multivariate analyses these background variables will be used to control for composition effects; standard OLS-regression with dummy coded variables will be applied (in order to ease interpretation of estimates and enable comparisons of coefficients across models).

The standard procedure of control variables in multivariate analyses, however, does not solve all potential problems in this methodological setup. The main uncertainty is caused by a potential self-selection into host countries, i.e. Americans in favor of welfare state interventions and a willingness to pay higher taxes might have been attracted to Denmark. If the decision to come to Denmark is based on such political preferences the causal argument of the article is problematic. We believe that migration decisions are normally based on a myriad of other factors (though the data does not have information about motivation behind migrant) but a tendency of progressive Americans to self-select into Denmark cannot be ignored. We establish a test for self-selection by including a measure of hostility towards government regulation of business. On the established 0-4<sup>i</sup> measure the American migrants score 0.45 lower than do Americans in the US and 0.13 lower than do native Danes. As Danish business is as little, or less, regulated than American business, according to the Heritage Foundation measure of economic freedom (2016), one should expect little context-effect from being in Denmark, i.e. the lower score of the American migrants could be an indication of self-selection. In the models we therefore control for this “general acceptance of state interference”, which we believe constitute a conservative test of H1 and H2.

The dependent variables originate from the ISSP “role of government” module and have been repeated in the MIFARE survey. Here we will look at two sides of the multifaceted welfare state attitudes (Roosma, Gelissen et al. 2013), in the form of attitudes to government responsibility and attitudes to taxes. In the comparative literature on welfare state attitudes one often distinguish between absolute and relative measures. The latter questions center on attitudes to spending on the welfare state and welfare state programs. These can be said to be relative measures of welfare state support, as they try to take current institutional arrangement and spending levels into account. The absolute measures ask more in more abstract terms about what the government ought to be involved in. We will primarily make use of the available absolute measures. The ISSP survey included the following four absolute questions: “On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government’s responsibility to...”, “provide healthcare for the sick”, “provide a decent standard of living for the old”, “provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed”, and “reduce income differences between the rich and poor”. Respondents were given the possibility to answer that is “definitely”, “probably”, “probably not”, or “definitely not” should be a government responsibility. Respondents were also given a “cannot choose” option, which we treated as missing data for this and all other dependent variables. In order to capture the tax dimension we also include the three standard ISSP-items that respectively measured the (relative) attitudes to taxation of “those with high income”, “middle incomes” and “low incomes”, as no absolute measures are found in the module. For the three income groups the respondents could describe these taxes to be “much too high”, “too high”, “about right”, “too low” or “much too low”. For all three income groups the Danish taxes are higher than the American, i.e. American migrants’ acceptance of the Danish taxes would indicate more willingness to pay taxes than Americans’ acceptance of American taxes.

In the elaboration of the Americans welfare attitudes we used a number of variables not available in the general ISSP-survey. *Time*: A rough estimate for number of years living in Denmark was established. The Americans migrants were asked when they first entered Denmark and then asked where they primarily were located in the years that followed. On the latter question they could choose from (a) “most time in Denmark”, (b) “partly Denmark, partly US”, (c) “partly Denmark, partly other countries”, (d) “most time in the US” or (e) “most time in other countries”. Those answering (a) were calculated as being in Denmark since the year of entry (this constitutes 86 percent of the group), those answering (b) or (c) were calculated as being in Denmark half of the years since the year of first entry (this constitutes 10 percent of the group) and finally those answering (d) or (e) were calculated as being in Denmark 20 percent of the time since first year of entry. Using this rough estimate, the group has been between less than a year and 85 years in Denmark. The mean time in Denmark is 17.3 years, the median is 14.5 years and the standard deviation is 14.2 years; the latter reflecting a skewness towards being few years in the country. *Social embedding*: They Americans migrants were asked how many of their friends were Danish. The responsibility possibilities were “none” (0), “few” (1), “several” (2), “most” (3) and “all” (4). *Procedural justice/blurring of self-interest*: The Americans migrants were asked to judge whether American migrants: (1) “contribute with more in taxes than they receive in benefits and services”, (2) “get more in benefits and services than they contribute in taxes”, (3) “it is balanced” or (4) “do

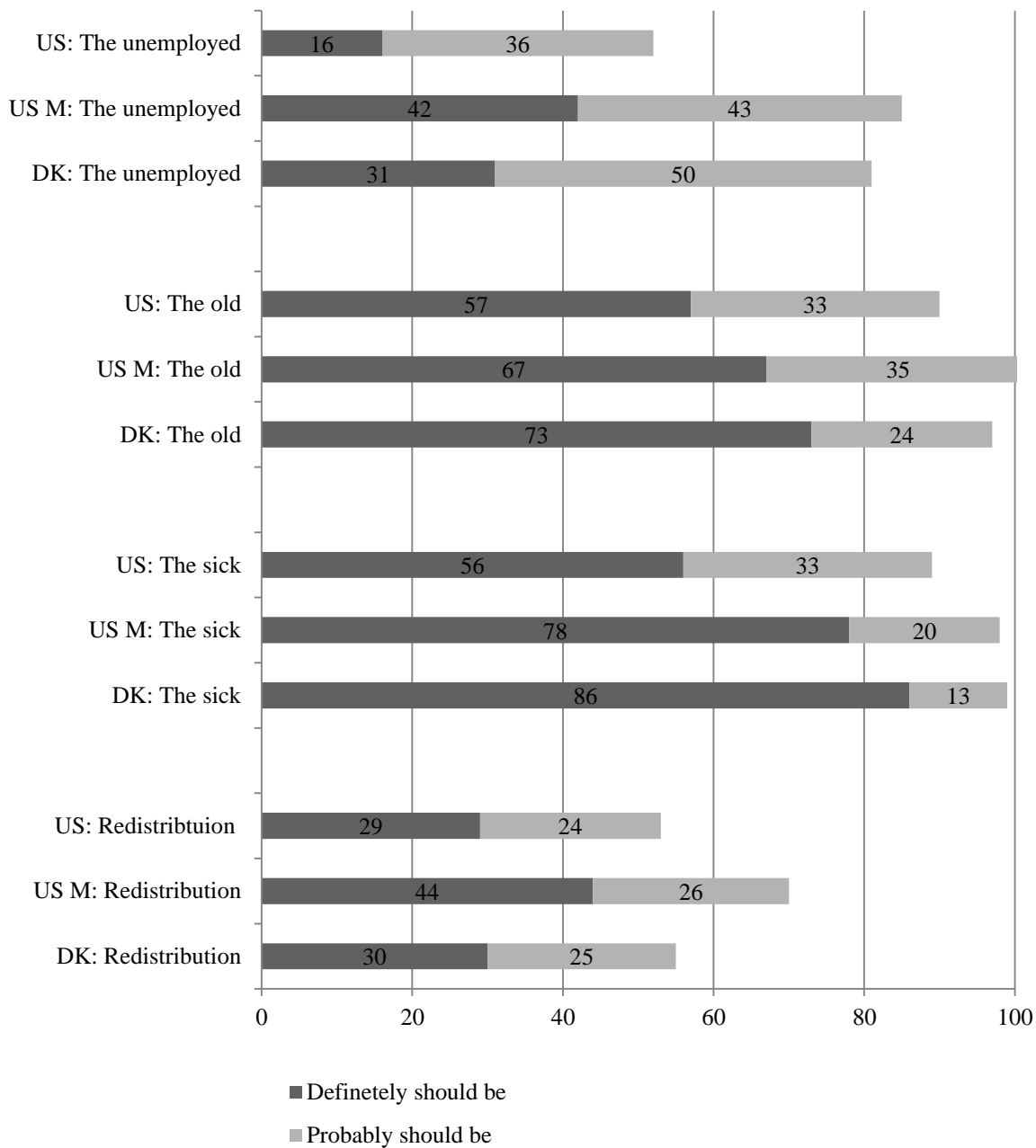


not know”. Dummy coding of this variable (reference group, answer 1) is used as a proxy for institutional effects. Answer 2 (take more out than put in) is a proxy for perception of free riding problems, answer 3 (balanced) is a proxy for perception of procedural justice and answer 4 (do not know) is a proxy for the blurring of self-interest.

## **Bivariate results**

We will first show differences between the groups in direct bivariate comparisons. When comparing attitudes bivariate H1 holds true for all the four items measuring government responsibility. The Americans living in Denmark (USM) are more inclined than Americans living in the US (US) to support government responsibility (see Figure 1). Among Americans living in the US, 16 percent answer that it definitely should be a government responsibility to provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed; another 36 percent answer that it probably should be a government responsibility. Among Americans living in Denmark shares are respectively 42 and 43 percent. Added up the difference on this statement is 31 percentage points ( $42+43-16-36$ ). In terms of state responsibility for general redistribution between “the rich” and “the poor” the difference is also sizeable. Among Americans living in the US, 29 percent indicates it definitely should be a government responsibility; another 24 percent indicate probably should be. The shares are respectively 44 and 26 percent for Americans living in Denmark, i.e. all together a 17 percentage point difference ( $44+26-29-24$ ). The differences are small when it comes to “providing health care for the sick” and “providing a decent standard of living for the old”; in both case a clear majority of Americans living in the US also think it definitely or probably should be a government responsibility. However, differences can still be found. Especially in terms of the sick, where 78 percent of Americans living in Denmark answer “definitely”, compared to 56 percent of Americans living in the US. Thus, the Danish single payer health system does seem to generate public support among the American migrants.

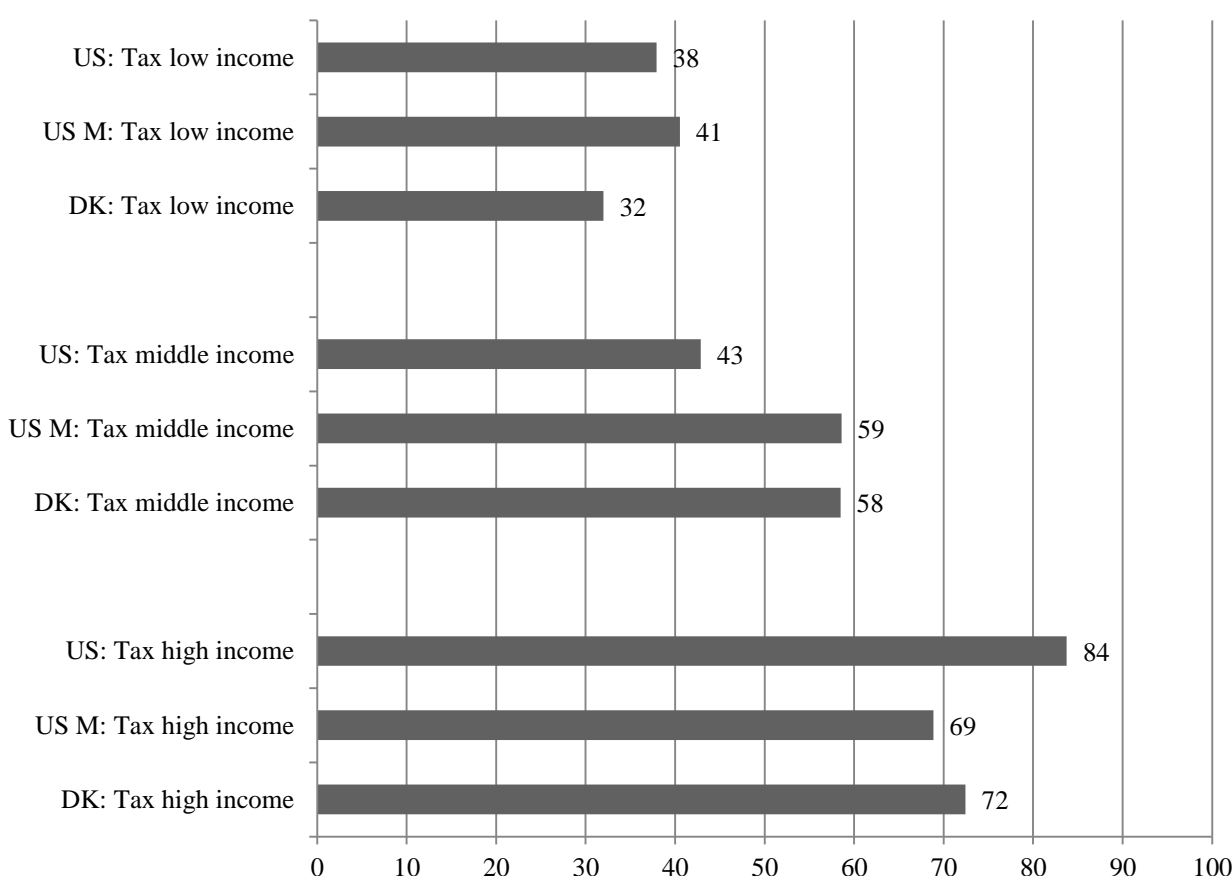
Figure 1: Attitudes to responsibility of the government. Combined support for helping specific groups among Americans (US), American migrants (US M), and native Danes (DK)



The differences between American migrants and native Danes are less straight forward. In terms of attitudes towards responsibility for the old and the sick there are no sizeable differences between the two groups, which support H2. In terms of government responsibility for securing a decent standard of living for unemployed and general redistribution, the American migrants are actually more supportive than are Danes (both bivariate differences are statistical significant, see next section). This would indicate a stronger context effects on American migrants than natives Danes, which e.g.

could be caused by Americans migrants being more aware of the positive effect from these policies in Denmark. Another interpretation is that Danes might be more inclined to answer these questions relatively, i.e. as *more* redistribution and *more* help to unemployed, than American migrants. In any case, this is somewhat surprising results; especially taken into account that the American migrants in general is well-off group.

Figure 2: Acceptance of current taxation (“too low” and “about right” combined) of those with low, middle and high incomes among Americans (US), American migrants (US M), and native Danes (DK)



The results are as remarkable when it comes to acceptance of current taxes levels. The actual taxation of various groups is a complicated matter but the income taxation rate is the most visible and often what people have in mind. For low income groups, 41 percent of the American migrants find the current Danish levels acceptable (“too low” and “about right” added) compared to the level of 38 percent in the US. According to OECD (2016:118) the direct income tax for a low income earner (67 percent of average production worker, single) was 15.2 percent in US compared to 33.6 percent in Denmark (2015). The difference is even more remarkable for the taxation of the middle

income groups. 59 percent of the Americans living in Denmark find the taxation of those with middle income “about right” or “too low” compared to 43 percent in the US; despite an income taxation rate for an average production earner (single) of 35.9 percent in Denmark and 18.0 percent in the US (OECD 2016:118). Thus, for low and middle income groups, the first generation Americans living in Denmark (in a high tax regime) finds these level acceptable, or even more acceptable, than do Americans living in the US (in a low tax regime). This again supports H1. Only when it comes to the high income groups are Americans living in the US (with low taxation of high income groups) more inclined to find current taxation levels “too low” or “about right” than are Americans living in Denmark. On the three tax items, the attitudes of the American migrants do not divert much from the attitudes of the Danes (located in the same tax regime), which again supports H2; the only bivariate difference is that the Americans migrants finds the current taxation of those with low income more acceptable than do Danes but the difference is not significant after control for composition effects.

### **Control for composition effects and potential self-selection**

This section controls for compositional differences in gender, age, education, labor market status and placement in the income hierarchy. This is done by OLS-regression with dummy coded independent variables. The dependent variables are attitude to government responsibility measured on the scale from 0 (definitely should not be a government responsibility) to 3 (definitely should be a government responsibility) and attitudes to taxes measured on the scale from 0 (much too high) to 4 (much too low), e.g. on both measure higher score indicate more support for the welfare state. Table 1 includes the beta estimates of the country dummies for the bivariate model, the model controlled background variables and the model controlled for background variable and attitudes to government intervention in business (controlling for potential self-selection effects).

Table 1: The impact of migrating to Denmark. OLS-regressions for the bivariate relationship, the relationships controlled for compositional effects (gender, age, education, labor market status, and placement in income hierarchy) and the relationships controlled for attitudes to government intervention in business. Beta and significance levels reported.

	The unemploy ed	The sick	The old	Redistribu tion	Tax low income	Tax middle income	Tax high income
Bivariate:							
US (dummy)	-0.70**	-0.32**	-0.18**	-0.38**	-0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.17**	0.61**
US M	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
DK (dummy)	-0.16**	0.09*	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.33**	-0.14**	0.01 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.04 <sup>ns</sup>
Controlled for background:							
US (dummy)	-0.74**	-0.40**	-0.28*	-0.59**	0.05 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.12*	0.57**
US M	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
DK (dummy)	-0.18**	0.05 <sup>ns</sup>	0.01 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.47**	-0.08 <sup>ns</sup>	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.12 <sup>ns</sup>
Plus control for attitudes to regulation of business							
US (dummy)	-0.71**	-0.38**	-0.25**	-0.53**	0.04 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.10 <sup>ns</sup>	0.65**
US M	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
DK (dummy)	-0.17**	0.06 <sup>ns</sup>	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.44**	-0.08 <sup>ns</sup>	0.03 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.09 <sup>ns</sup>
N	3412	3475	3474	3370	3331	3369	3265

Notes: \* = statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ , \*\* = statistically different at  $p > 0.01$  ns = not statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ . The full model is show in Table A2 in the appendix.

The bivariate relationships presented in the upper part of Table 1 is just another way to describe the relationships discussed in the previous section. In terms of state responsibility for providing a descent standard of living for unemployed, the model just shows that the Americans living in the US score 0.70 lower on the scale from 0 to 3 than do first Americans living in Denmark (US dummy -0.70) and the difference is clearly significant. The models also shows that the native Danes scores 0.17 lower on this scale than do American living in Denmark (DK dummy -0.17) and the difference is again clearly significant. The other estimates can be interpreted in the same way and the substantial findings are already discussed in the previous section. The middle part of Table 1 shows the estimates after control for the background variables. The lower part of Table shows the

estimates after control for attitudes to regulation of business (which was significantly negatively correlated with all the seven dependent variables, i.e. as expected hostility to government regulation of business go together with negative attitudes to the welfare state).

The higher tendency of Americans living in Denmark to assign more responsibility to the government clearly stands the test of control for background variables and potential self-selection of left-wing Americans. In fact the difference between the two groups of Americans actually increased once background differences are taken into account. Thus, the Americans that left for Denmark have background characteristics that in general should make them more skeptical about state responsibility. Taken these differences into account, the estimated difference between the two groups increased e.g. from 0.70 for unemployment protection (beta bivariate) to 0.74 (beta controlled). This estimated is then controlled for the American migrants' tendency to be more positive about regulation of business, which reduces the coefficient from -0.74 to -0.71. The same pattern is found on the other items of government responsibility. In terms of acceptance of taxation levels between the two groups of Americans, the larger acceptance of the taxation of middle income groups in Denmark stands after control for background variables (-0.12) but turn insignificant after control for acceptance of regulation of business (-0.10). Thus, the conclusion is that the Americans migrants are as acceptant of the current Danish (high) taxation levels for the middle groups as are Americans of the (low) American taxation; with a small not significant tendency to higher acceptance in the former group. The similar conclusion holds for acceptance of low income groups (0.04). We take this as support for H1. Only when it comes to high income groups are Americans living in US more willing to increase taxation levels; an difference that increase from 0.57 to 0.65 once it is taken into account that Americans living in the US is more inclined to oppose regulation of business.

The described differences between American migrants and native Danes are neither altered much by composition effects; with the exception that the American migrants' larger acceptance of current taxation of low income (bivariate -0.14) turn insignificant when controlled the background characteristics (high education and high income). Thus, H2 is strengthen after control for background variables and potential self-selection.. The aim of the article is not to explore individual-level effects but the estimated effects of the background variable can be found in appendix Table A2 (in general well-known pattern are found).

## **The impact of time and social embedding**

The previous sections have established that clear differences in welfare attitudes between Americans living in the US and Americans living in Denmark exist. They have also established that the Americans living in Denmark are as positive towards the welfare state, or even more positive, than are natives Danes. Quantitative data are not well-suited to answer the difficult question of *why* this is the case. However, as discussed in section three, the impact of time in the host country might give us some indications. The regressions presented in Table 2 both include the effect from years in Denmark and the natural logarithm of years being in Denmark. The latter has the advantage that

those being many years in the country do not influence the regression estimates much more than the “normal” cases. However, it is also a theoretical issue whether time is expected to have a linear effect (the former measure) or whether the impact of time should diminish over time (the latter measure), which cannot easily be solved. Therefore estimates are shown for both variables. The models include the background variables in order to control for differences within the group of American migrants.

Table 2: The impact from years living in Denmark and having Danish friends (separate models). Control for compositional effects (gender, age, education, labor market status, and placement in income hierarchy, estimates not shown) and attitudes to government regulation of business (not shown). OLS-regressions with beta and significance levels reported.

	The unemployed	The sick	The old	Redistribution	Tax low income	Tax middle income	Tax high income
Years living in Denmark	0.007 <sup>ns</sup>	0.006 <sup>*</sup>	0.003 <sup>ns</sup>	0.007 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.003 <sup>ns</sup>	0.006 <sup>ns</sup>	0.009 <sup>ns</sup>
n	287	294	294	282	257	266	253
Years living in Denmark (ln)	0.047 <sup>ns</sup>	0.040 <sup>ns</sup>	0.000 <sup>ns</sup>	0.063 <sup>ns</sup>	0.018 <sup>ns</sup>	0.041 <sup>ns</sup>	0.111 <sup>ns</sup>
n	287	294	294	282	257	266	253
Friends in Denmark (0-4)	0.04 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.01 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.01 <sup>ns</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09 <sup>**</sup>	0.19 <sup>**</sup>
n	288	295	295	284	259	268	255

Notes: \* = statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ , \*\* = statistically different at  $p > 0.01$ , <sup>ns</sup> = not statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ .

The estimates are general positive, which indicates that years living in Denmark tend to increase the support for welfare state intervention; in the case of support for government responsibility of health care it turns significant (using the linear time variable). The two exceptions are for old-age and taxation for low income groups, where the effect sizes are around zero. However, the time effect on support for unemployed, redistribution and middle and high income taxation does not turn significant. It is mixed results but no clear effect from time can be found, which supports H03 (a rapid transformation shift in welfare state attitudes) and oppose H3 (a slow transformation caused by broader cultural assimilation). One of the problems could naturally be that time might neither has a linear or log linear effect. However, we have also modelled time by means of categorical variables and the results are very similar (not shown). There is a small indication that those Americans being

from 12 years to 20 years in Denmark are a little more skeptical about the welfare state than those being shorter or longer time in Denmark. However, it is a weak effect without an easy substantial interpretation.

We also created a more direct test of the potential impact of broader cultural embedding. The lower part of Table 2 shows the impact of having friends on the welfare attitudes of the American migrants (included in separate models as time in country and composition of friendship is highly correlated). Having Danish friends has no impact on the four items about state responsibility, which supports H04 and opposes H4. However, having Danish friends do have an impact on the attitudes to the Danish tax regime; for the attitudes to the (high) taxation of high income groups the relationship is highly significant. An American having no Danish friends (0) is estimated to score 0.76 higher on the scale from 0 – 4 for acceptance of the taxation of the high income groups (four times 0.19); controlled for background variables. The effect is estimated to be twice the size for acceptance of the taxation of the low (0.07) and the middle group (0.09); still highly significant for the latter. Thus, one interpretation is that it takes exposure to Danish culture more broadly to come to accept the high Danish tax levels, especially those for high income groups, while principal support for state interventions does not take the same. Another interpretation is that acceptance of high income taxes, which many of the American migrants pay, is dependent on a basic solidarity with Danes established through friendship relations. This is naturally a broader adaption than a “hard core” institutional account would suggest but at the same time it is not the adaption imagined by a “hard core” cultural account. Furthermore, from a policy making perspective such a mechanism is unlikely to be hindrance for progressive policies; most Americans living in the US have American friends.

### **The impact of procedural justice and blurring of self-interest**

The absence of clear time-effects and the modest impact of friendship relations point to the importance of the institutional account. However, the exact institutional mechanisms have not been pinpointed. It is not an easy task as the welfare attitudes might both be influenced by the respondents' general assessment of the overall welfare regime, the assessment of specific policies and own personal experiences. Self-interest has been used to pin-point some of these institutional effects; one of the main arguments being that giving to everybody creates large groups with vested interests in the Nordic welfare states. However, such accounts often forget that the Nordic welfare states need to be paid through high taxes and the American migrants clearly belong to the group of net-contributors. This is also reflected in attitudes. 53 percent of the American migrants indicate that Americans migrants contribute with more than they benefit from the Danish welfare state. 25 percent indicate that it is balanced and 19 percent indicate that they do not know; only 2 percent perceive the American migrants to take more out than they put into the Danish welfare state. Thus, a narrow self-interest account is unlikely to account for the American migrants' positive attitudes towards welfare policies. Furthermore, additional analyses (not shown) indicate that it is difficult to find correlations between the individual consumption of welfare benefits and services and the



attitudes of the Americans migrants (with a few exceptions, such as Americans receiving unemployment benefits being more in favour of state responsibility in this area). However, as described in section three, the item about contribution versus benefit can be used to illustrate the theoretical argument about the Nordic welfare regime generating (perceptions of) absence of free-riding, (perceptions of) procedural justice and a blurring of self-interest. The effects from the three proxies are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The impact from assessments of American migrants' contributions to the Danish welfare state. Controlled for background variables (gender, age, education, labor market status, and placement in income hierarchy, friendship relations; estimates not shown) and potential self-selection (attitudes to regulation of business, estimates not shown). OLS-regressions with beta and significance levels reported.

	The unemployed	The sick	The old	Redistribution	Tax low income	Tax middle income	Tax high income
Net-contributor	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Net-benefit	-0.05 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.19 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.25 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.56 <sup>ns</sup>	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.46 <sup>ns</sup>	-0.46 <sup>ns</sup>
Balanced	0.11 <sup>ns</sup>	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.01 <sup>ns</sup>	0.10 <sup>ns</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.19 <sup>ns</sup>	0.38**
“Do not know”	0.14 <sup>ns</sup>	0.03 <sup>ns</sup>	0.06 <sup>ns</sup>	0.43**	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.32**	0.36*
n	288	295	295	284	259	268	255

Notes: \* = statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ , \*\* = statistically different at  $p > 0.01$ , <sup>ns</sup> = not statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ .

In general, the minority of Americans migrants that thinks American migrants take more out of the Danish welfare state than they put in are more skeptical about the welfare state than are the American migrants that thinks American migrants are net-contributors. This perception of free riding on the system has sizeable effect on attitudes to general redistribution (-0.56) and acceptance of taxation of high (-0.46) and middle (-0.46) income groups (though non-significant due to small n). The larger share (25 percent) of American migrants that think there is a balance between what American migrants put in and take out of the Danish welfare state is in general more positive than are Americans migrants who thinks the group contribute with more than it takes out. The effects are not as sizeable as in the free riding scenario but due to a large n the effects turn statistical significant for acceptance of the taxation of high groups (0.38). These findings support H5. Finally, those answering “do not know” (a sizeable group of 19 percent) are in general also more supportive than

are the group who thinks American migrants are net-contributors. The effects are as sizeable as in the free-riding scenario and turn statistical significant for support for general redistribution (0.43) and acceptance of taxation levels for high (0.36) and middle (0.32) income groups. This findings support H6; the idea that the complexity of calculating self-interest helps to explain the high support for welfare policies in social democratic welfare regimes.

## Conclusion

The article has contributed to the large strand of literature that emphasizes that the institutional structures of welfare states shape public welfare attitudes. As welfare states rarely changes overnight, the article has used migrants' relocation from one institutional structure to another as a natural experiment; adding to an emerging literature applying this design. The case has been Americans' relocation from a liberal welfare regime to a social democratic welfare regime. As the impact from these two institutional structures has had a pivotal position in the literature, the case is of clear theoretical relevance. In terms of methodology, this is in one sense a best-case for demonstrating the institutional effects as the cross-national surveys have shown large differences between Americans (living in the US) and Scandinavians; especially in terms of support for antipoverty policies and taxation. In another sense, however, this could also be seen as a conservative test as a large literature has emphasized that especially Americans are socialized into a culture in favor of freedom and in opposition to state intervention. Thus, if social democratic institutions can convert the attitude of Americans, it could hold true in other cases. The overall finding is that sizeable context-effects seem to be present. The Americans living in social democratic institutions are much more positive towards the welfare state than are Americans living in liberal institutions (confirming H1 and rejecting H01). The American migrants are also as positive towards the welfare states as are native Danes (confirming H2 and rejecting H02).

In terms of potential causal mechanisms, the article finds more support for the idea of institutional effects than the idea of broader cultural effects. The very finding that first generation migrants (entering Denmark after the process of youth socialization) can hold "Nordic" welfare attitudes would be hard to interpret in a "hard core" cultural approach. Furthermore, a "soft" cultural approach would expect a time effect (it takes time to a-cultivate old values and adopt new ones), which we could not find in the data material (confirming H3; rejecting H03). A "soft" cultural approach would also expect that the Americans' assimilation to the Nordic welfare state would be dependent on the degree of exposure to Danish culture; in the data operationalized as the share of Danish friends. The article found no such effect on the attitudes towards general government responsibility (supporting H04) but did found a significant effect on acceptance of taxation of middle and high income groups (supporting H4). However, it could simply be a matter of friends making the Americans' sympathetic towards Danes (to whom the taxes of the Americans go) rather than a matter of Americans' absorbing Nordic equality culture. Finally, the article also investigated some of mechanisms suggested by the institutional accounts. It proved difficult to find the self-interest effects sometimes suggested in the institutional literature. Instead the article pointed

to the potential importance of perception of (absence of) free-riding, procedural justice (supporting H5) and difficulties in calculating economic self-interest in the social democratic welfare regime (supporting H6). Nevertheless, the difficult question of *why* Americans in Denmark are so supportive of the welfare state is not fully answered and calls for qualitative research.

The policy relevant take away message of the article is that it makes good sense for progressive forces to push for institutional changes. In our point of the view, the cultural “lock in” of welfare attitudes seems to be exaggerated, even in the American case (see Kenworthy 2014 for a similar argument). The 2016 US election is likely to show that there is limited support for implementing “democratic socialist” policies. However, our data indicate that should such policies be implemented, a softening of attitudes is to be expected. It is telling that most Danes do not perceive universal health care or the public elderly care service as particular socialist and that most Americans have come to embrace Social Security. This does not necessarily make progressive policy making much easier, but it makes it more relevant. The tricky part is naturally that some of the old institutional effects have to be dismantled before new ones can be established. The American willingness to increase taxation for those with high income does provide a window of opportunity but the unwillingness to increase taxation of the middle income groups clearly creates an obstacle; universal welfare institutions cannot be achieved without a broad tax base. Furthermore, the Nordic experience demonstrates that the system of “everybody putting in” and “everybody taking out” is important for establishing the perceptions of procedural justice and the blurring of self-interests; probably of special importance for the support from the upper-middle and upper-classes, which were strongly represented in our sample of American migrants.

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## Online appendix

Appendix Table A1: Distribution on background variables. Percent

	Sample of Americans living Denmark (MIFARE 2015)	Sample of Americans living in the USA (ISSP 2006)	Sample of Danes living in Denmark (ISSP 2006 / MIFARE 2015)
Male	49	47	46
Female	51	53	54
16-29	10	16	12
30-39	21	20	14
40-49	21	24	19
50-59	21	18	20
60-69	21	12	20
70-	7	11	15
Less than high school	3	16	12
High School	4	52	4
Junior college	10	7	26
Bachelor	29	16	24
Graduate	34	9	16
Other level- not available	20	0	18
Public employed	21	13	23
Self-employed	8	9	4
Private employed etc.	36	43	30
Unemployed	6	3	2
Looking after home	4	11	2
Full time education	8	3	7
Retired	11	13	24
Sick/disabled	1	0	4
Others, including no answer	6	5	5
First house hold income quartile <sup>1</sup>	14 <sup>2</sup>	22	23
Second	12	19	27
Third	34	23	23
Fourth	33	22	24
Income not available	7	15	4

Notes: <sup>1</sup> The placement in income quartiles is not exact as data was collected in brackets.

Furthermore, the ISSP data ask about income before tax while MIFARE ask about income after tax. However, taxation is unlikely to change the household's relative placement in income quartiles.

<sup>2</sup> Placed into Danish income quartiles (based on Denmark MIFARE 2015).

Appendix Table A2: Full version of OLS-regressions. Beta and significance levels reported.

	The unemploy ed	The Sick	The Old	Redistri bution	Tax low income	Tax middle income	Tax high income
US Migrant	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
American	-0.73***	-0.38***	-0.26***	-0.54***	0.048	-0.082	-0.73***
Dane	-0.18**	0.063	0.016	-0.45***	-0.080	0.040	-0.18**
Male	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Female	0.082**	0.068***	0.12***	0.13***	-0.016	0.070**	0.082**
Age	-0.000099	-0.0015	-0.000095	-0.00083	-0.0044***	-0.000066	-0.000099
Public employed	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Private- employed/others	-0.12**	-0.044	-0.064*	-0.24***	-0.0068	-0.022	-0.12**
Self-employed	-0.22***	-0.10*	-0.13**	-0.39***	0.023	0.046	-0.22***
Fulltime	-0.10	-0.10	-0.17**	-0.30**	0.17*	0.19**	-0.10
education							
Unemployed	0.26**	0.056	0.065	-0.016	-0.27**	-0.015	0.26**
Sick or disabled	0.055	-0.11	-0.015	0.11	-0.053	0.083	0.055
Retired	-0.094	-0.050	-0.14***	-0.16*	0.044	0.0095	-0.094
looking after	0.022	-0.073	-0.031	-0.27**	-0.039	-0.051	0.022
home							
Something else	0.059	-0.042	-0.079	-0.077	-0.096	0.039	0.059
NA							
First income quartile	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Second income quartile	-0.051	-0.035	-0.063	-0.073	0.020	-0.0091	-0.051
Third income quartile	-0.13**	-0.039	-0.065	-0.19**	0.13**	0.00087	-0.13**
Fourth income quartile	-0.29***	-0.12***	-0.22***	-0.52***	0.17***	-0.11*	-0.29***
Not available	-0.082	-0.068	-0.087*	-0.16*	-0.052	-0.11*	-0.082
Less than high school	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
High school	-0.079	-0.081*	-0.077*	-0.085	0.060	0.056	-0.079
Junior college	-0.14*	-0.13***	-0.093*	-0.24**	0.078	-0.020	-0.14*
Bachelor	-0.14*	-0.24***	-0.26***	-0.31***	0.25***	0.12*	-0.14*
Graduate	-0.0021	-0.20***	-0.24***	-0.32***	0.23***	0.13*	-0.0021
No answer, other level	-0.19**	-0.14**	-0.11*	-0.40***	0.11	0.085	-0.19**
Attitudes to government regulation of business (1-5).	-0.048***	-0.052***	-0.052***	-0.13***	0.013	-0.070***	-0.048***
Constant	2.66***	3.24***	3.10***	3.09***	1.16***	1.61***	2.66***
Observations	3385	3447	3446	3343	3305	3342	3385
R <sup>2</sup>	0.143	0.149	0.105	0.099	0.046	0.041	0.143



Appendix table A3: Attitudes to government responsibility. Average scores, on a scale from defiantly should be (0) to defiantly should not be (3), for Danes in the ISSP and MIFARE survey.

	Danes (MIFARE)	Danes (ISSP)	$\Delta$
Provide health care for the sick	0.17	0.15	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>
Provide a decent standard of living for the old	0.33	0.29	0.04 <sup>ns</sup>
Provide a decent standard of living for the unemployed	0.87	0.93	-0.06 <sup>ns</sup>
Reduce income differences between the rich and poor	1.41	1.33	0.08 <sup>ns</sup>

Notes: N(min) for the MIFARE survey is 367 and N(min) for the ISSP survey is 1288. The questions are worded exactly similarly. Differences are calculated as independent t-tests. \* = statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ , \*\* = statistically different at  $p > 0.01$ , ns = not statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ .

Appendix Table A4: Relative attitudes to taxes. Average scores, on a scale from much too high (0) to much too low (4), for Danes in the ISSP and MIFARE survey.

	Danes (MIFARE)	Danes (ISSP)	$\Delta$
Taxes for low income	1.18	1.08	0.10 <sup>ns</sup>
Taxes for middle income	1.61	1.48	0.13 <sup>ns</sup>
Taxes for high income	2.06	1.87	-0.19 <sup>*</sup>

Notes: N(min) for the MIFARE survey is 365 and N(min) for the ISSP survey is 1287. The questions are worded exactly similarly. Differences are calculated as independent t-tests. \* = statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ , \*\* = statistically different at  $p > 0.01$ , ns = not statistically different at  $p > 0.05$ .

<sup>i</sup> The MIFARE respondents were asked "Here are two things the government might do for the economy. Are you a supporter or opponent of ... expanding the governmental regulation of business". The response categories were "strongly in favour of" (0), "in favour of" (1), "Neither in favour of nor against" (2), "against" (3), "strongly against" (4). The ISSP respondents were asked "Here are some things the government might do for the economy. Please show which actions you are in favour of and which you are against ... less government regulation of business". The response categories were "strongly in favour of" (4), "in favour of" (3), "Neither in favour of nor against" (2), "against" (1), "strongly against" (0). In order not to lose individuals "do not know" answered was grouped as "neither in favour or nor against"; indicating not having strong preferences on this issue.