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# Ethnic Heterogeneity and Public Support for Welfare: Is the US Experience Replicated in Britain, Sweden, and Denmark?

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## **Abstract:**

The link between ethnic heterogeneity and public support for welfare policy is debated. The thesis of a negative relationship is supported by much American research. Historically the race issue has blocked a number of US welfare schemes; across the US ethnically heterogeneous states have less generous benefits, and citizens having negative attitudes towards blacks often oppose welfare. The research question is: To what extent will increased ethnic heterogeneity in European countries establish the same mechanisms? Three theoretical positions are discussed: the position that the American experience is unique; the position that it is generalisable; and a middle position of it being contingent on institutional settings. The latter position predicts that the US experience can be avoided especially in social democratic welfare regimes where the ethnicity issue has not been politicised. Empirically the article is based on survey data from the UK, Sweden and Denmark, in which a number of US items were directly replicated. Despite indications of US uniqueness and welfare-regime effects, the findings support the position that the in-group/out-group mechanisms found in the US are being replicated in Europe.

## Introduction

The recent influx of non-Western immigrants into Europe has fuelled both a public and academic debate about the consequences. One of the concerns has been that increased ethnic heterogeneity will lower public support for the generous welfare schemes found in many European countries. The prediction of lower public support is often inferred from the American experience which has been analysed in many studies. Historical studies have shown that American efforts to establish more generous welfare schemes was often blocked by the race issue, i.e. public and political support eroded when it was argued that especially African Americans would benefit from such legislation (e.g. Quadagno 1994). A number of studies have shown a negative relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and public welfare spending across US cities and states (e.g. Alesina, Baqir & Easterly 1999; Alesina & Glaeser 2004:147). Finally, American survey studies, primarily based on the General Social Survey (GSS), have consistently shown a strong relationship between negative attitudes towards black people and the public's lack of support for welfare policies (Gilens 1995, 1996, 1999, Alesina et al 2001, Lind 2007).

The question is to what degree this well-documented American experience can be generalised to European countries. This article considers three positions. The first position is that it can be generalised, seeing the US experience as the outcome of a very general process of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility that is well documented at the micro-level (e.g. Tajfel 1981). At the macro-level Alesina & Glaser (2004) substantiate the thesis by showing cross-national correlations between measurements of ethnic heterogeneity and social spending. According to Kymlicka & Banting this position has even become dominant: *'the strongly racialized dimension of U.S. welfare politics is no longer seen as an anomaly... but rather as a normal, even inevitable, reaction to the simple fact of ethnic heterogeneity. Indeed, the United States has come to represent the leading international example of the proposition that heterogeneity as such erodes redistribution. Its story has emerged as a sort of "master narrative"'* (2006:286).

A second position says that the US experience is unique. Two conditions are often mentioned: the Americans' belief in the free market, which leads to individualistic explanations of poverty, and the history of slavery. It has been argued that the combination of these two elements is the basis of contemporary American racism (e.g. Kinder & Sanders 1996). The idea of American uniqueness is also present in Gilens' work. He argues that it is not a general dislike of black Americans that lowers support for policy programmes from which African Americans (are perceived) to benefit disproportionately. Low support originates from the stereotype that the out-group is lazy: *'long before the birth of the welfare state, the defenders of slavery argued that blacks were unfit for freedom because they were too lackadaisical to survive on their own. This stereotype has been traced by social psychologists through generations of white Americans'* (Gilens 1999:78). Thus by this account the American link between the ethnicity and welfare issues is rooted in a unique historical experience that cannot be expected to be replicated in other countries that are becoming more ethnically heterogeneous.

A third, middle, position states that the negative relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and support is contingent on the institutional context. According to Festinger's old definition (1954), one's in-group comprises individuals who are similar on some salient dimension, and one's out-group comprises individuals who do not share that salient physical or social trait. Thus it has been argued that the American experience will be repeated only in countries where the ethnicity issue is salient. Despite their belief in general mechanisms, Alesina & Glaser (2004:10-11) do mention the importance of political entrepreneurs using the ethnicity issue strategically. Again, the inspiration from the American case is obvious. It is well documented that the Republican Party has consistently mobilised anti-welfare attitudes by emphasising the race dimension of welfare policies; this strategy has been labelled 'playing the race card' (e.g. Mendelberg 2001). Thus, one could argue that in countries where politicians have refrained from politicising the ethnicity issue (e.g. by trying to establish a counter-discourse of multiculturalism), we should not expect a replication of the American pattern (see below on case selection).

Another institutional argument is that the programmatic structure of the welfare state has an impact. It is a classic line of reasoning that universal welfare schemes might reduce the salience of societal divides and replace it with a feeling of a shared national citizenship (e.g. Titmuss 1974, Esping-Andersen 1990; Rothstein 1998). A large number of empirical studies have found support for welfare policies to be highest in the social democratic welfare regimes and lowest in liberal welfare regimes; especially when it comes to anti-poverty measures (e.g. Larsen 2008). Thus following this literature we can expect the US pattern to be replicated in other liberal welfare regimes and absent in all-encompassing social democratic welfare regimes (Crepaz & Damron 2009).

### **Previous empirical evidence**

Though there is solid empirical evidence in the American case (see above), cross-country evidence is scarce. Those who believe that the American case can be generalised have shown significant correlations between racial fractionalisation and total social expenditures at the aggregated level (Alesina & Glaser 2004). This makes the thesis plausible but does not provide ‘the smoking gun’. One easy critique from those believing in American uniqueness is that total social expenses are more dependent on the strength of left-wing parties than on ethnically heterogeneity (e.g. Taylor-Gooby 2005). Critics also point to the fact that within OECD countries there is neither a connection between ethnic heterogeneity and overall spending, nor any tendency towards a decline in overall spending within the last decades (e.g. Banting, 2005). The critics have also documented that within for example Danish municipalities (Gerdes, forthcoming) one cannot find a link between the number of immigrants and public spending. And Hopkins (forthcoming) has challenged Alesina et al. (1999) by showing that ethnically heterogeneity does not always accompany reduced public spending across US cities. The conclusion is that it can be questioned whether increased heterogeneity reduces public spending in general. Nevertheless, ethnic heterogeneity might still reduce public support for specific European anti-poverty programs. The most convincing piece of

evidence provided by Alesina & Glaeser (2004:147) is the negative link between the percentage of blacks within US states and spending on the means-tested (former) AFDC programme (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). Furthermore, one can argue that it might take a fair amount of time before public opinions are turned into public policies. Therefore it is an obvious step to turn to survey studies.

Unfortunately we do not have much cross-country survey evidence on the link between ethnic heterogeneity and the level of public support for anti-poverty measures. Using European Social Survey data, Senik et al. (2009) show a strong negative link between attitudes towards immigrants (measured as acceptance of interethnic marriage and judgement of whether immigrants on balance take out more than they put into the welfare state) and support for welfare policy. Their analyses do not look for contingent effects (the country level is not explored) and the US is not included, i.e. they cannot compare European attitudes to those of the Americans. The available single-country studies naturally have the same limitation. Using Canadian data, Johnston et al. (2010) find for example a positive link between nationalism and support for multicultural policies, including making immigrants entitled to welfare benefits. The argument is that being in favour of multiculturalism (and not being US) has become an integral part of the Canadian national identity. However, we do not know whether this immunity to the US pattern can be found in countries where immigrants are more concentrated in the lower socio-economic segments of the society. The most relevant single-country study is Eger (2009). In her article 'Even in Sweden' she demonstrates (using pooled cross-section data from 1986 to 2002) that in counties with a high proportion of recent immigrants, respondents indicate less support for welfare spending (measured on an index that includes various areas). The present article also used Sweden as a critical case (see below), but in contrast to Eger's study our data allowed us to determine whether the Swedish effects were marginal or as strong as in the US.

## **A comparison between the US, UK, Denmark, and Sweden**

The aim of this article is to add to current knowledge by comparing attitudes in the US, UK, Sweden and Denmark. The first, simple question was whether Europeans perceive the out-group of non-Western immigrants as negatively as Americans perceive the out-group of blacks. A similarity in out-group perceptions is a fundamental precondition for making the analogy between US and Europe. But to our knowledge this has not been investigated before. Therefore we asked British, Swedish and Danish respondents exactly the same questions – but about non-Western immigrants – that the Americans were asked about blacks in the GSS. The items were included in the British Social Attitude (BSA) survey 2009 and the Danish and Swedish ISSP survey (International Social Survey Programme) from 2009 (see below). The second research question was whether the connection between negative out-group perceptions and welfare attitudes found in the American GSS data was as strong in European countries. To our knowledge this question has also not been answered before.

This article focuses on European attitudes towards non-Western immigrants because their status is believed to correspond most directly to that of blacks in the US: They are (perceived as) culturally distinct, often living in separate neighbourhoods, and have lower employment rates. Naturally, most African Americans are citizens while many European ‘non-Western immigrants’ are not. Everything else equal, this difference speaks in favour of more positive attitude towards blacks in the US. The term ‘non-Western immigrants’ is a familiar concept in the Swedish and Danish context, while the term is less well known in Britain. In order to avoid ambiguity the respondents were told that ‘non-Western immigrants means asylum-seekers and other immigrants from Asia, Africa, South America and the Caribbean’. In the British case the respondents were also given a show card that stated which groups were *not* included in the concept.

If the argument of American uniqueness is true, we should not expect to find the American pattern in any of the other countries. And the other way around, if the American experience is general, we should expect to find the American pattern in all four countries. If the effect resulting



from ethnic heterogeneity is contingent on institutional structures, the pattern we could expect to find should be more complicated. The further motivation behind the country selection is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Motivation behind the country selection

	Major political parties have sought to politicise the ethnicity issue	Major political parties have sought to de-politicise the ethnicity issue
Liberal welfare regime	US	UK
Social democratic welfare regime	Denmark	Sweden

If welfare-regime type is the crucial institutional structure, we should expect to find the US pattern in the UK but not in Denmark and Sweden, the assumption being that harsh ‘deservingness discussions’ are fuelled by liberal welfare regimes and hampered by social democratic welfare regimes (see above). If the crucial factor is whether political parties have politicised the ethnicity issue, as has been the case in the US (see above), then we should expect to find the American pattern in Denmark, but not in Sweden or the UK. In Danish politics the established centre-right parties have used the issue of ethnicity strategically in recent years. The parliamentary basis for the present (2010) centre-right government (since 2001) is the Danish people party, an anti-immigration party established in 1995. In Britain and Sweden the established political parties have done their best to avoid politicising the ethnicity issue, i.e. by promoting the discourse of multiculturalism.

The various political strategies might be given different historical explanations, but one simple argument is that party competition matters (e.g. Green-Pedersen & Odmalm 2008). In the British electoral system the anti-immigration party, the British People’s Party, is no real threat and is not even represented in parliament. With a proportional election system, the Swedish case is more difficult to explain. But until recently (the 2010 election) the higher threshold for entering the

parliament in Sweden (four per cent compared to two per cent in Denmark) has largely kept the anti-immigration parties out. Furthermore it is well documented that the Swedish media have had an implicit strategy of not politicising the ethnicity issue, e.g. by refusing to show advertisements from the Swedish Democratic Party during election campaigns (Rydgren 2007).

Despite variations in the institutional arguments, one clear expectation can be inferred: The American pattern will not be replicated in Sweden, as the country has both a social democratic welfare regime and political parties which have tried not to politicise the ethnicity issue. So if the American mechanisms can be found in Sweden there is a strong case for arguing (as in Eger 2009) that the US experience is generalisable.

## **Data**

The American survey items, posed to respondents in the UK, Sweden and Denmark, were taken from the GSS, which is the most comprehensive US survey program. Of special relevance is the GSS 2000, as it included the ISSP module on social inequality and a module labelled 'Multi-ethnic United States'. The GSS is conducted as a face-to-face survey, but the ISSP items are in an attached self-completion section. The answers given in this large representative sample of the adult US population served as our baseline for answering the two research questions: whether the negative out-group perceptions, and the links between these perceptions and welfare attitudes found in the American GSS data, are as strong in Europe. In the UK the relevant GSS items were included in the BSA 2009. The BSA is the most comprehensive British survey and provides a representative sample of the adult British population. As the GSS, the BSA data was collected as a face-to-face survey with a self-completion section that included the ISSP and a number of other items. In Denmark and Sweden the GSS items were included in the ISSP 2009 survey, which in both countries was conducted as an independent postal survey among a representative sample of adults (the response rate was 59 per cent in Sweden and 56 per cent in Denmark, see ISSP archive for details). In all four countries the survey institutes reported that no severe bias could be found in the samples. Sometimes the method of data collection differed, which might make a difference in

relation to sensitive issues. Where a collection method differed, this is stated and discussed. Finally, it should be mentioned that out-group members were removed from the samples (for the US, 429 blacks; for the UK, Sweden and Denmark respectively 228, 144 and 30 immigrants).

### Comparing American, British, Danish and Swedish out-group perceptions

On Festinger's old definition (see above) it is clear that a precondition for a replication of the black American experience would be that the populations of Britain, Sweden and Denmark perceive non-Western immigrants as negatively as Americans perceive blacks. The out-group perceptions have been measured on two standard GSS items, i.e. in the UK, Sweden and Denmark, the term 'blacks' was replaced by 'non-Western immigrants'. The main findings are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Out-group perceptions in US (blacks, 2000), UK, Sweden and Denmark (non-Western immigrants 2009)

	US	UK	SE	DK
Attitude to living in neighbourhood where more than half is out-group. Share of 'opposed' + 'strongly opposed'	31% <sup>1</sup>	45% <sup>1</sup>	47% <sup>1</sup>	67% <sup>1</sup>
Judgement of work-ethic among out-group (7-point scale: 1 = hard-working, 7 = lazy). Mean	4.3 <sup>2</sup>	3.9 <sup>2</sup>	3.8 <sup>2</sup>	4.1 <sup>2</sup>
Share answering negatively (5,6 and 7)	38%	23%	21%	29%
N (minimum)	1548	728	920	1405

<sup>1</sup> All of the country shares are significantly above the US level (at 0.01 level).

<sup>2</sup> All country means significantly (at 0.00 level) lower than the American

Note: 'Don't know' responses were excluded.

The first item is about hostility towards living with the out-group, which is a classic way to measure negative out-group perceptions. Asked the GSS question about whether one would favour or oppose

living in a neighbourhood where half of your neighbours were blacks / non-Western immigrants, 47 per cent of the American respondents chose the neutral bracket 'neither favour nor oppose', 19 per cent answered 'oppose' and 12 per cent answered 'strongly oppose'. GSS has asked this question since 1990 and there has been a trend towards less negative attitudes. In 1990, 47 per cent of non-black Americans either 'opposed' or 'strongly opposed' living in a black neighbourhood. By 2000 this share had dropped to 31 per cent as seen in Table 1, and in 2008 the share was down to 22 per cent. Compared to this level the British, Swedish, and Danish attitudes towards the out-group are more hostile. The neutral bracket is the most chosen in the UK (51 per cent) and Sweden (43 per cent). But more Britons and Swedes than Americans 'oppose' or 'strongly oppose': the share is 45 per cent in Britain and 47 per cent in Sweden, which is near the most negative level measured in the US (1990). The Danish public is even more opposed to living with the out-group: 28 per cent 'strongly oppose' and 39 per cent 'oppose' it. Thus, 67 per cent of Danish respondents oppose it on some level. It should be taken into account that the American results were collected in face-to-face situations, which could have resulted in too positive answers (self-completion was used in the UK, Sweden and Denmark), but it is safe to conclude that in terms of negative attitudes towards out-group neighbourhoods, the Britons, Swedes, and especially Danes seem as hostile as the Americans.

The second item measures the perception believed to be the most uniquely American: the idea that the out-group is lazy (see above). The GSS has since 1990 asked Americans on a seven-point scale whether blacks are 'hardworking' (1) or 'lazy' (7). The most common answer is the neutral bracket 4: 44 per cent of non-black Americans gave that answer in 2000; 23 per cent answered 5, 11 per cent answered 6, and 4 per cent used the extreme category 'lazy', i.e. 38 per cent overall responded on the negative side of the scale (see Table 1). In contrast, only 8 per cent chose the negative side of the scale when asked about the work-ethic of white Americans, making a remarkable difference of 30 percentage points (in 2000). The perception of black laziness has been stable since first measured in the GSS in 1990. The mean, 4.5 in 1990, declined slightly to 4.3 by 2000 (which was also the level in 2008). With a mean of 4.3 the laziness stereotype is stronger in

the US (and the face-to-face situation might have weakened it) than in the UK, Sweden and Denmark (where the question was responded to in self-completion). However, the results indicate that the laziness perception is not unfamiliar to Britons, Swedes, and Danes. In Britain the mean was 3.9 and 23 per cent chose the negative side of the scale. In Sweden the mean is 3.8 and 21 per cent chose the negative side of the scale. In Denmark the mean is 4.1 per cent and 29 per cent chose the negative side of scale.

The overall conclusion is that European attitudes towards the out-group of non-Western immigrants are at least as hostile as the Americans' attitudes towards the out-group of blacks. The data material includes other out-group measures, which tell the same story. Actually, the article uses the items in which the American attitudes are most hostile. Thereby one creates a conservative test for the argument that the US mechanisms are being replicated in Europe. Furthermore, it can be concluded that neither difference in welfare regime nor degree of politicisation of the ethnicity issue seem to have any clear impact on hostility towards living with the out-group or judgement of work-ethic. Especially the latter finding is surprising, as comparative research shows that in terms of explaining poverty, respondents living in social democratic regimes are much less inclined to refer to laziness than respondents living in liberal regimes (Larsen 2008). The most plausible explanation is that the immigration and labour-market policies of liberal regimes make out-groups much more likely to work (above all in the low-paid service sector) than out-groups under social democratic regimes (Kogan 2007).

### **From negative perceptions of the out-group to opposition to welfare policy**

The next question is whether these negative out-group perceptions influence public support for welfare policy as strongly in Europe as in the US. In order to test this we needed to explore the link between out-group perception and policy attitudes. Public support for welfare policies were measured on three different levels: 1) a target-group-specific level where we replicated a GSS item that asks about spending preferences for 'improving conditions for blacks / non-Western

immigrants'; 2) an anti-poverty level, where we used the ISSP item, which states that the government should reduce spending on benefits for the poor, and finally 3) a general level where we used the ISSP item that asks about support for general redistribution. In the next three sections these three different levels of support will be analysed one at a time.

At the micro-level we will use a statistical model that, besides providing a measurement of the impact of out-group perceptions, also allows us to control for a possible influence of gender, age, household income (measured by quintiles) and a general dislike of government intervention (measured by sympathy for centre-right political parties)(see table 3 for further specifications). We first present a base model only including control variables, which due to space limitation will not be commented, and then a full model. A multi-classification analysis (MCA) was used and the total impact from each variable and significance levels are shown in the tables. The impact is measured by a beta-coefficient that can vary between zero and one, with the former indicating the lowest and the latter the highest possible impact. MCA-analysis was developed to analyse survey data and delivers a comprehensive and easily accessible output (Andrews et al. 1973).

#### *Out-group perceptions and support for spending on the out-group*

Table 2 shows the attitudes towards spending on improving the living conditions of blacks / non-Western immigrants. In the US 51 per cent answered that 'about the right amount' is spent on improving conditions for blacks; 9 per cent answered 'too much I spent', and 31 per cent answered 'too little'. This is naturally a relative measure and the responses do change over time. In 1973, 26 per cent answered 'too much', which share increased to 30 per cent by 1978. In the period from 1983 to 1993 the share answering 'too much' was around 20 per cent, which then increased to 25 per cent in 1994 and 1996 when the discussion about the reform from AFDC to TANF was intense. Then came a drop down to 19 per cent in 2000, as shown in Table 2, and a recent drop to 15 per cent in 2008.

Table 2: Attitudes to public spending on improving conditions for blacks (US 2000) and non-Western immigrants (UK, Sweden and Denmark 2009). Per cent

	Too little	About right	Too much	N (100%)
US	31	51	19	1043
UK <sup>1</sup>	10	33	57	965
SE <sup>1</sup>	15	42	43	748
DK <sup>1</sup>	22	47	32	1289

<sup>1</sup> Level (means) significantly above the US level (0.01 level)

‘Don’t know’ responses excluded (147 respondents in the US, 72 in UK, 220 in SE and 173 in DK)

When Britons (also in face-to-face interviews) in 2009 were asked the same questions, 57 per cent answered that ‘too much’ was spent on improving conditions for non-Western immigrants. This is a very high level. It is three times as high as the level of American resistance to spending on blacks in 2000, and around twice as high as any share ever measured in the GSS survey. Furthermore, it is difficult to see any prior large improvements in British benefits or services to non-Western immigrants which could have triggered the negative British response. The share in Sweden and Denmark answering ‘too much’ is also above that ever measured in the GSS. It should be taken into account that all Swedes and most Danes answered a postal survey. But it is still surprising that 43 per cent in multicultural Sweden answered ‘too much’, and again it is difficult to find any prior improvements that could have triggered this very negative response. It might also seem surprising that fewer Danes – 32 per cent – than Swedes answered ‘too much’. This effect can be explained however by recent Danish retrenchment. The Danish centre-right government has made recent reductions in the social assistance to non-Western immigrants, which were widely discussed and may have left the impression that it is an area where spending had been reduced (Andersen 2007). Nonetheless, 31 per cent still answered ‘too much’.

These findings indicate that Europeans are much more opposed to spending public money on non-Western immigrants than Americans are to spending money on blacks. As to the differences between the European countries, it does not seem to matter whether the dominant political parties have politicised the ethnicity issue: the Danes are not more opposed to spending than Swedes and Britons. It does seem to matter, however, whether respondents live in a liberal or social democratic welfare regime, for the Britons are more opposed to spending than Swedes and Danes. Nevertheless, we need to turn to the micro-level in order to test whether the higher support for spending in Denmark and Sweden is caused by a weaker link between out-group perceptions and spending attitudes.



Table 3: Model for explaining resistance to spending on improving conditions for out-groups.<sup>1</sup>  
MCA-analysis. Controlled effects (beta) and level of significance

Model:	Gender	Age (six brackets) <sup>2</sup>	Education (five brackets) <sup>3</sup>	Household income before tax (quintiles)	Dislike of state intervention (centre- right or not) <sup>4</sup>	Hostility towards living with out- group (1- 5) <sup>5</sup>	Stereotyp e of out- group work- ethic (1- 7) <sup>6</sup>	N	R <sup>2</sup>
US (I)	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.13 <sup>**</sup>	0.11 <sup>*</sup>	0.08 <sup>ns</sup>	0.14 <sup>**</sup>	-	-	1177	0.06
US (II)	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.11 <sup>**</sup>	0.09 <sup>ns</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.14 <sup>**</sup>	0.17 <sup>**</sup>	0.13 <sup>**</sup>	927	0.13
UK (I)	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.07 <sup>**</sup>	0.34 <sup>**</sup>	0.09 <sup>**</sup>	0.04 <sup>ns</sup>	-	-	951	0.14
UK (II)	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09 <sup>**</sup>	0.24 <sup>**</sup>	0.12 <sup>**</sup>	0.04 <sup>ns</sup>	0.26 <sup>**</sup>	0.15 <sup>**</sup>	763	0.24
SE (I)	0.09 <sup>**</sup>	0.05 <sup>ns</sup>	0.25 <sup>**</sup>	0.09 <sup>**</sup>	0.20 <sup>**</sup>	-	-	947	0.10
SE (II)	0.04 <sup>**</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.16 <sup>**</sup>	0.09 <sup>**</sup>	0.14 <sup>**</sup>	0.29 <sup>**</sup>	0.31 <sup>**</sup>	895	0.33
DK (I)	0.08 <sup>**</sup>	0.06 <sup>**</sup>	0.23 <sup>**</sup>	0.06 <sup>**</sup>	0.17 <sup>**</sup>	-	-	1430	0.10
DK (II)	0.03 <sup>**</sup>	0.06 <sup>**</sup>	0.14 <sup>**</sup>	0.07 <sup>**</sup>	0.13 <sup>**</sup>	0.32 <sup>**</sup>	0.26 <sup>*</sup>	1378	0.31

<sup>1</sup> 'Don't know' categories were moved to the neutral bracket 'spending is about right' (to avoid drop-out)

<sup>2</sup> 17-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70+

<sup>3</sup> Educational levels are established as follows: 1 (US: Less than high school 0 – 16 years; UK no qualifications, CSE or equiv foreign other; ", SW "folkskola eller grundskola"; DK "ingen erhvervsuddannelse, specialarbejder, EFG basis"), 2 (US: "high school"; UK O level or equiv, SW "2 årig gymnasie yrkeinriktat gymnasium, yrkeskola, folkhogskola, realskola" DK "Lærling / anden faglig"), 3 (US: "Associate junior college"; UK: "A level or equiv."; SW "tre eller firårig gymnasielinje, samhällsvetarprogrammet eller naturvetarprogrammet, studentexamen"; DK "kort videregående"), 4 (US: "bachelors"; UK: "higher education below degree"; SW: "universitet eller højskoleutbildning utan exam"; DK: "mellemlang videregående), 5 (US: "graduate"; UK: "degree", ", SW: "examen från universitet eller högskola"; DK: "lang videregående)

<sup>4</sup> The respondents are divided into 'centre-right' and not. What counts as right wing is voting or having sympathy for, in the US: the Republican Party; UK: Conservative Party; DK: 'Venstre' and 'Konservative'; SE: 'Moderate samling' and 'Folkepartiet liberalerne'. Those affiliated with nationalist parties in the UK (British National Party), Sweden (Sveriges demokraterne) and Denmark (Dansk folkeparty) were not included in centre-right. These nationalist parties do not have a general opposition to state intervention, which the variable is meant to capture.

<sup>5</sup> 'Don't knows' were moved to the neutral category 3 (to avoid drop-out)

<sup>6</sup> 'Don't knows' were moved to the neutral category 3 (to avoid drop-out)

\* Statistically significant at 0.05 level, \*\* 0.01 level, ns = not significant. The two British effects from out-group perceptions are not significantly different from the US effects. The Danish and Swedish coefficients are significantly higher than in the US (tested by means of interaction effects in OLS regression).

In the first model for the US (US I, see Table 3) only the background variables are included. In the second model (US II) is included hostility towards living in a neighbourhood dominated by blacks and the stereotype of laziness. As documented by previous American research, both perceptions have a strong and significant impact on spending attitudes (beta 0.17 and beta 0.13). Thus, in the US there is a strong link between out-group attitudes and spending preference. In UK the out-group perceptions also turn out to be strong predictors (beta 0.26 and beta 0.15). Actually the effects are stronger in UK than in the US context (though not significantly stronger). And even more surprisingly, when out-group perceptions are entered in Denmark and Sweden (DK II and SE II) they turn out to be stronger linked to spending attitudes than in the UK and US (beta 0.30, 0.33, 0.31, 0.29). These coefficients are significantly higher than in the US. The conclusion is that, in all four countries, negative out-group perceptions strongly influence public attitudes towards spending on improving the living conditions of the out-group. And the link is at least as strong in Europe as in the US.

#### *Out-group perception and preference for spending on the poor*

Theoretically it is highly interesting that Europeans, even Swedes, are more hostile to spending on non-Western immigrants than Americans are to spending on blacks, and that the link between out-group perception and spending preference also seems to be stronger in Europe. However, this pattern might not be of significant political importance; after all very few policies are directly targeted at these out-groups. Typically policies are framed as general anti-poverty policies. According to Gilens (1999) one of the keys to explaining the American mechanism is to understand that Americans came to equate poverty with being black. Thus, it is crucial to analyse how out-group perceptions are linked to support for anti-poverty measures in general.

In Table 4 are shown the responses to the statement 'the government should spend less on benefits for the poor'. In 1987 four per cent of (non-black) Americans 'strongly agreed' with this statement and 16 per cent 'agreed', i.e. 20 per cent gave a negative response. Twenty-five per cent

answered 'neither more nor less' while 43 per cent 'disagreed' and 14 per cent 'disagreed strongly'. Unfortunately this (voluntary) ISSP item was not asked in the GSS in the following years. However, the GSS has a more neutral spending-approval measurement which is used in the statistical model at the micro-level. As also shown in Table 4, 12 per cent of Americans answered in 2000 that the government spends 'too much' on assistance to the poor. In 1987 this share was 10 per cent, i.e. the ISSP statement (20 per cent negative) 'push' around 10 percentage points in the negative direction. In any case, from the general GSS spending measurement we can see that 1987 was an 'average' year. The share of persons answering 'too much' was around 10 per cent in the whole period from 1984 to 1993, whereafter it rose to 20 per cent in 1996. Then it declined to around 10 per cent in the period from 2000 to 2008. Finally, Table 4 also includes the Americans' attitudes towards spending on 'welfare', whereby most Americans think of the former AFDC and the current TANF programme. This is the programme that Americans came to hate. Even in 2000, after the harsh 1996 reform, 40 per cent answered that 'too much' is being spent on 'welfare'.

Table 4: Attitudes to government spending on the poor, US (1987 and 2000), UK, Sweden and Denmark (2009). Per cent

	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N (100 %)
US (1987)	14	43	25	16	4	1103
UK (2009)	14	42	27	15	3	1740
SE (2009) <sup>1</sup>	31	41	19	5	4	936
DK (2009) <sup>1</sup>	53	25	14	6	3	1427
	Too little		About right	Too much		
US (2000)	61		27	12		1153
Poverty						
US (2000)	18		41	40		1141
Welfare						

<sup>1</sup> Level (means) significantly (0.01) above the UK and US level

‘Don’t know’ response excluded

The UK responses given by self-completion survey in 2009 to the general ISSP statement ‘the government should spend less on benefits for the poor’ very much resembles the US-American answers in 1987. Three per cent of Britons ‘strongly agree’ and 15 per cent ‘agree’ with the statement, 27 per cent answered ‘neither agree nor disagree’, while 42 per cent ‘disagree’ and 14 per cent ‘strongly disagree’. That the Americans give face-to-face interviews while the British do self-completion surveys can naturally ‘hide’ more negative answers in US, and it can definitely be concluded that the level of resistance is lower in the UK than in the US in 1996. But still the UK answers indicate that the increased UK resistance to spending on the poor (e.g. Sefton 2003:4) has almost brought them to the ‘stable’ US level. In Sweden and Denmark support for spending on the

poor is above the American and British level. In Sweden 31 per cent ‘strongly disagree’ and 41 per cent ‘disagree’ with the statement. In Denmark the shares were respectively 53 and 25 per cent.

These aggregated levels indicate that attitudes towards spending on anti-poverty measures primarily seem to be contingent on welfare-regime types, which is in line with previous comparative research (Larsen 2008). Whether the major political parties have politicised the ethnicity issue does not seem to matter: The Danes are not more opposed to spending than the Swedes, and the Americans are not more opposed (in 2000) to spending than the Britons. Thus, as to contingent effects the findings support the argument that social democratic welfare regimes could be immune to wider implications of the public’s negative attitudes towards non-Western immigrants. However, before drawing such a conclusion we need to see whether the link is absent at the micro-level, i.e. does having negative out-group attitudes really not lower Scandinavians’ support for anti-poverty policies?

At the micro-level the first US model (US I) estimates (using 2000 data) the preference for spending on assistance to the poor. Being a Republican turns out to be the strongest predictor (beta 0.15) and it is highly significant. Model US II enters the out-group perceptions and, in line with previous American research, they turn out to influence attitudes to poverty reduction. The effect from hostility towards living in a neighbourhood dominated by the out-group is 0.10 and significant. The effect from the laziness stereotype is 0.06, but surprisingly it is not significant. This is a moderation of the previous American findings – not a contradiction. In order to show this, the models were replicated for the Americans’ spending preference towards ‘welfare’ (US III and US IV). Asked this way, model US IV shows the conventional finding that the laziness stereotype is the strongest predictor for spending preference (beta 0.14), followed by hostility towards living with the out-group (beta 0.12) and being a Republican (beta 0.12).

Table 5: Model explaining resistance to spending on poverty reduction.<sup>1</sup> Added model for explaining US resistance to spending on welfare (US III and IV). MCA-analysis, controlled effects (beta) and level of significance

Model:	Gender	Age (six brackets) <sup>1</sup>	Education (five brackets)	Household income before tax (quintiles)	Dislike of state intervention (centre-right or not) <sup>2</sup>	Hostility towards living with out- group (1- 5)	Stereotyp e out- group work- ethic (1-7)	N	R <sup>2</sup>
US (I)	0.03 <sup>ns</sup>	0.11 <sup>ns</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.15 <sup>**</sup>	-	-	1164	0.04
US (II)	0.01 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09 <sup>ns</sup>	0.10 <sup>ns</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.12 <sup>**</sup>	0.10 <sup>*</sup>	0.06 <sup>ns</sup>	933	0.06
US (III)	0.01 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09 <sup>ns</sup>	0.11 <sup>*</sup>	0.11 <sup>**</sup>	0.10 <sup>**</sup>	-	-	1176	0.04
US (IV)	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.11 <sup>*</sup>	0.10 <sup>ns</sup>	0.08 <sup>ns</sup>	0.12 <sup>**</sup>	0.12 <sup>**</sup>	0.14 <sup>**</sup>	929	0.09
UK (I)	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.12 <sup>**</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.17 <sup>**</sup>	0.17 <sup>**</sup>	-	-	1645	0.07
UK (II)	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.16 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09 <sup>ns</sup>	0.25 <sup>**</sup>	0.13 <sup>**</sup>	0.08 <sup>ns</sup>	0.17 <sup>**</sup>	756	0.13
SE (I)	0.00 <sup>ns</sup>	0.17 <sup>**</sup>	0.14 <sup>**</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.22 <sup>**</sup>	-	-	950	0.08
SE (II)	0.02 <sup>ns</sup>	0.14 <sup>**</sup>	0.09 <sup>ns</sup>	0.06 <sup>ns</sup>	0.21 <sup>**</sup>	0.07 <sup>*</sup>	0.22 <sup>**</sup>	892	0.14
DK (I)	0.09 <sup>**</sup>	0.13 <sup>**</sup>	0.05 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09 <sup>*</sup>	0.22 <sup>**</sup>	-	-	1429	0.09
DK (II)	0.07 <sup>**</sup>	0.13 <sup>**</sup>	0.04 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09 <sup>*</sup>	0.21 <sup>**</sup>	0.08 <sup>**</sup>	0.11 <sup>**</sup>	1365	0.11

<sup>1</sup> 'Don't know' responses moved into the neutral bracket; i.e. either 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'spending is about right'

See Table 5 for specification of independent variables

\* Statistically significant at 0.05 level, \*\* 0.01 level, ns = not significant

The British out-group perceptions (UK II) turned out to be as strongly linked to a preference for spending on assistance to the poor as in the US. The effect from the attitude towards living with the out-group is 0.08 (beta), which is below the relation found for the Americans' attitude towards 'welfare' (beta 0.12) and 'poor' (beta 0.10). But the degree to which Britons believe non-Western immigrants are lazy actually has a larger impact (beta 0.17) on a preference for spending on the

poor than did the Americans' judgement of the work-ethic among blacks (beta 0.06), even in the case where Americans were asked about 'welfare' (beta 0.14).

The same effects from negative out-group perceptions are present in Scandinavia. Despite Denmark and Sweden having high levels of support for anti-poverty reduction (see above), the data clearly indicate that Swedes and Danes are not immune to the in-group / out-group mechanisms documented in the US. In Sweden (SE II) the impact from hostility towards living with the out-group is statistically significant but still a little below (beta 0.07) the level found in the US (beta 0.10). However, the degree to which Swedes believe non-Western immigrants are lazy turns out to have a much stronger impact (0.22) on the preference for spending on the poor than was the case for the US (beta 0.06) and UK (beta 0.17). In Denmark the effect from hostility toward living with the out-group (beta 0.08) matches the effects found for the US (beta 0.10), UK (beta 0.08) and Sweden (beta 0.07). The effect from the laziness stereotype (beta 0.11) is above the American level (beta 0.06) but below the British (beta 0.17) and Swedish level (beta 0.22).

#### *Out-group perception and support for general redistribution*

The final question is whether out-group attitudes even have the strength to influence attitudes towards the very principle of economic redistribution. Table 6 shows country levels of public attitudes towards general redistribution. It was measured by the ISSP statement 'It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and people with low incomes'. As expected, the Americans indicated the largest resistance to the very principle of redistribution: 17 per cent of the US-Americans surveyed 'strongly disagree' and 27 per cent 'disagree' that it is the responsibility of the government to redistribute, i.e., 44 per cent is against and only 8 per cent 'strongly agree'. The share against redistribution is 19 per cent in the UK, 20 per cent in Sweden and 32 per cent in Denmark. The share that 'strongly agrees' is 18 per cent in the UK, 20 per cent in Sweden and 24 per cent in Denmark.

The aggregated levels suggest that, in terms of resistance towards general redistribution, the Americans are truly unique. And despite differences in welfare-regime type and the degree to which the major parties have politicised the ethnicity issue, the three European countries seem to be immune to this kind of US principled resistance to redistribution. The question is, to what extent these attitudes are also influenced by negative out-group perceptions and whether the impact is larger in the US than in Europe.

Table 6: Attitude towards general redistribution. US (2000), UK, Sweden and Denmark (2009). Per cent

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	N (100%)
US	8	23	25	27	17	1992
UK <sup>1</sup>	18	41	21	15	4	1757
SE <sup>1</sup>	20	37	23	13	7	937
DK <sup>1</sup>	24	29	14	16	16	1410

<sup>1</sup> Levels (means) significantly (0.01) below US level

‘Don’t know’ responses excluded

The Americans’ out-group perceptions (US II) do have an impact on public support for general redistribution. The effect from hostility towards living with blacks is modest (beta 0.06) and not significant, but the laziness stereotype does have a significant effect (beta 0.09). Entering perceptions of blacks do not change the base model much (USI). Thus, to account for the differences in Americans’ opposition to general redistribution, one should start with being a Republican (beta 0.20) and then add perceptions of blacks’ work-ethic as a supplementary. This pattern at the micro-level is also replicated for the UK, Sweden and Denmark.



Table 7: Model explaining resistance to general redistribution.<sup>1</sup> MCA-analysis, controlled effects (beta) and level of significance

Model:	Gender	Age (six brackets)	Education (five brackets)	Househol d income before tax (quintiles)	Dislike of state intervention (centre-right or not)	Hostility towards living with out- group (1- 5)	Stereotyp e of out- group work- ethic (1-7)	N	R <sup>2</sup>
US (I)	0.07**	0.08**	0.09**	0.19**	0.20**	-	-	2019	0.12
US (II)	0.06**	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.08*	0.09**	0.20**	0.06 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09**	1629	0.13
UK (I)	0.04**	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.15**	0.18**	0.20**	-	-	1645	0.13
UK (II)	0.04 <sup>ns</sup>	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.14**	0.22**	0.19**	0.10**	0.11*	757	0.16
SE (I)	0.13**	0.08 <sup>ns</sup>	0.09 <sup>ns</sup>	0.28**	0.26**	-	-	947	0.23
SE (II)	0.12**	0.09 <sup>ns</sup>	0.10 <sup>ns</sup>	0.28**	0.25**	0.07**	0.09 <sup>ns</sup>	889	0.25
DK (I)	0.08**	0.07**	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.10**	0.36**	-	-	1427	0.18
DK (II)	0.08**	0.06**	0.07 <sup>ns</sup>	0.10**	0.36**	0.07**	0.05 <sup>ns</sup>	1362	0.20

<sup>1</sup> 'Don't know' responses moved to neutral category 'neither agree nor disagree'

See Table 5 for specification of independent variables

\* Statistically significant at 0.05 level, \*\* 0.01 level, ns = not significant. None of the British, Swedish or Danish effects from out-group perceptions are significantly different from the US coefficients (tested by means of interaction effects in OLS regression).

The British base model is very similar to the American. Household income is the strongest predictor (beta 0.22, a linear effect of higher quintiles being more opposed) and being a Conservative is the second strongest predictor (beta 0.19). The full model (UK II) shows that the British out-group perceptions also have an impact on support for general redistribution. The effect from perceptions of laziness among non-Western immigrants is as strong as the Americans' perception of laziness among blacks (beta 0.11). Furthermore, the effect from hostility towards living with the out-group

seems to have a stronger impact on attitudes toward redistribution in the UK (0.10) than in the US (0.06) but the coefficients are not statically significant from each other.

The out-group perceptions also have an impact on the attitudes to general redistribution in Sweden and Denmark. The effects are very similar to the effects found in the US and UK. The effect from laziness perception is 0.09 in Sweden (compared to 0.09 in the US and 0.11 in UK). It is not significant but it is very close a meeting the standard criterion (the significance level is 0.06). Furthermore, the effect from hostility towards living with the out-group is significant. The effect (beta 0.07) is at the US level (beta 0.06) and a little lower than the British effect (beta 0.10). Thus even in Sweden negative out-group perceptions reduce public support of the general principle of redistribution. The links are actually weakest in Denmark; the effect from the laziness stereotype (beta 0.05) is lower than the effect in Sweden (0.09), the UK (0.11) and the US (0.09). However, there is a significant effect from hostility towards living with the out-group (beta 0.07), which is at the US (0.06), UK (0.10) and Swedish level (0.07). The overall conclusion is that these effects are very similar in the four countries (technically speaking the impact of out-group perceptions are not significantly different from the coefficients found in the US).

## **Conclusion**

That (non-black) Americans' perceptions of African Americans lower public support for welfare policies is well documented, but we have had only scattered evidence to judge whether this pattern is being replicated as ethnic heterogeneity increases in Europe. Especially relevant is immigration from non-Western countries, as these groups are perceived to be culturally distinct, often settle in distinct neighbourhoods and often have problems entering the labour market. By replicating the relevant American GSS items in the UK, Sweden and Denmark, this article offers the first truly comparative survey evidence in this field. The data primarily support the argument that the American patterns are being replicated. The data show that non-Western immigrants entering European countries are perceived as negatively and stereotypically as blacks are in the US, at least

as long as we can measure past American attitudes from the GSS. Britons, Swedes and Danes are more opposed than Americans to living in a neighbourhood where half of the neighbours belong to the out-group. And sizeable numbers of Britons, Swedes and Danes perceive non-Western immigrants as lazy.

The data also show that the link between negative out-group perception and opposition to welfare policy as found in the GSS can also be found in the European data. In all four countries the strongest predictor of opposition to direct public spending on the out-group was hostility towards the out-group. And the link was actually stronger in UK, Denmark, and Sweden than in the US (significant for Denmark and Sweden). In all four countries one could also find a connection between perceptions of the out-group and attitudes towards spending on the poor. Here the link at the micro-level was at least as strong in the UK, Sweden and Denmark as in the US. Thus, Europeans' negative perceptions of non-Western immigrants reduce support for spending on the poor as much as Americans' negative perceptions of blacks reduce support for US spending on the poor. The data even show that in all four countries, the negative perceptions of out-groups reduce support for the general principle of redistributing wealth from those with high incomes to those with low incomes. Thus, in terms of public opinion, it is not a matter of whether the American pattern will come to be replicated in Europe. The data clearly indicate that it has already happened.

As to the argument of the effect from ethnic heterogeneity being contingent on institutional structures, the data did indicate some regime effects. The Swedes and Danes were less hostile than Britons to spending directly on the out-group. The Swedes and Danes were also less hostile than Britons and Americans to spending on the poor in general. But the micro-level analyses demonstrated that the social democratic regimes were not immune to in-group/out-group effects known from the US. Thus, the low opposition to government spending in the Scandinavian countries has to be explained by other factors than the absent of such effects. Furthermore, the argument of the effects being contingent on whether major political parties refrain from politicising the ethnicity issue received no support at all. In Britain and Sweden, where the nationalist parties

are marginal and the dominant parties have tried to de-politicise the ethnicity issue, the populations do not feel any more shared identity with the out-group than is the case in Denmark or the US. Nor are the Britons and Swedes less inclined than Danes to perceive the out-group as lazy. And the causal links between out-group perceptions and welfare attitudes are not weaker in Britain and Sweden. The conclusion is that the major political parties actually have little control over the attitudes of the public in this area (though they might be in control of their implications; see below). To put it boldly, both the Britons and Swedes have developed hostile attitudes towards non-Western immigrants and their (perceived) misuse of welfare benefits without the help of leading politicians.

These findings should not lead to the conclusion that there is nothing unique about the American case; to some extent all countries are unique. Our data do show that Americans are more inclined to perceive the out-group as lazy and much more inclined to reject the general principle of redistribution. And both of these dispositions probably have unique historical roots. However, the important finding is that contemporary Americans do not seem to have attitudes towards blacks which are so harsh that they (and the consequences they have had on American politics) cannot be compared to the Europeans' perceptions of non-Western immigrants. If one can speak of uniqueness in this respect, it would be that Americans have actually developed a fair amount of tolerance for the black out-group. The character of this tolerance is controversial. Using more advanced survey techniques, e.g. the list experiments, a number of American studies find that despite statements of tolerance in surveys, one can still find (sometimes subconscious) hostility towards blacks (e.g. Gilens, Sniderman & Kuklinski. 1998).

There can be no doubt that in terms of public opinion the European countries are exposed to some of the mechanisms that the race issue has fuelled in US. However, from this conclusion one cannot infer that European countries will end up with a residual welfare state. The critics of Alesina & Glaeser (see above) are probably right that total social spending is not reduced by increased ethnic heterogeneity. The expensive European health care, pension, childcare and unemployment schemes have been, and will be, largely unaffected by the increased ethnic

heterogeneity. A much more likely result is that public attitudes underpin a process of ‘dualisation’ or ‘welfare chauvinism’ in which benefits and services are maintained and expanded for the in-group and retrenched for the out-group of non-Western immigrants (according to Emmenegger, forthcoming, a process already in progress). This is exactly the position taken by the anti-immigration parties in the Nordic countries. In Denmark this has led to real policy consequences, not in terms of reduced public spending, but in terms of lowering welfare benefits for non-Western immigrants. In a pessimistic scenario the same is likely to happen in Britain and Sweden. The major political parties can naturally continue not to follow public opinion in this matter, but in the long run it is hard to imagine that political entrepreneurs will not be tempted to exploit this political opportunity. In an optimistic scenario the integrative effects of the European welfare state will work in the long-run. Thus, despite the current ‘American’ pattern in the European public’s opinions, one can cling to the hope that integrative policies in the long run can turn non-Western immigrants into accepted European citizens. This however is not an easy task, and here there might actually be positive lessons to be learned from African Americans’ struggle to insert themselves successfully into the larger society.

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