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Deservingness perceptions, welfare state support and vote choice in Western Europe

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ABSTRACT

In today's diversified party systems, the economic dimension is no longer a unidimensional conflict between pro-redistribution voters of the left and anti-redistribution voters of the right. Analyzing 2016 European Social Survey data for 15 Western European countries, this article argues that perceptions of the deservingness of benefit recipients and attitudes towards the scope of the welfare state are distinct, powerful predictors of vote choice. The effects of attitudes on these two subdimensions are strong and congruent in predicting voting for older party families. Deservingness perceptions are an even more powerful predictor of voting for green and radical right parties, while attitudes towards the scope of the welfare state are not significant predictors of voting for either. Disaggregating the economic left/right reveals that certain types of redistribution attitudes predict vote choice even for parties known for their positions on 'non-economic' issues like immigration and European integration.

KEYWORDS redistribution attitudes; deservingness; vote choice; political ideology; welfare state politics

Scholars have argued that the rising vote share of green and radical right¹ parties and the weakening of longstanding party families in Europe indicate the declining relevance of attitudes on the economic dimension for voters and the rising importance of immigration, supranational integration, and post-materialist values for vote choice (Bornschier 2009; De Vries 2018; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Inglehart 1977; Kriesi 1998). These latter issues form a socio-cultural dimension seen by most researchers as orthogonal to the older economic left/right.² Green and radical right parties, competitors on the so-called 'transnational cleavage', emphasize their distinctive and extreme positions on immigration and the EU, while having indistinct or moderate positions on the redistributive dimension

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(Hooghe and Marks 2018; Rovny 2012; Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2020). Mainstream parties defined by older class and religious cleavages, meanwhile, display the opposite pattern (Hooghe and Marks 2018).

This article argues, on the contrary, that voters remain strongly motivated by redistributive conflict, including those who support radical right and green parties. This diverges from arguments that green and radical right voters are defined by their attitudes on the 'non-economic' dimension (e.g. Flanagan and Lee 2003; Inglehart and Norris 2017; Kriesi *et al.* 2008; Stubager 2009). This is not to say that economic and socio-cultural conflicts are entirely separate. Indeed, this article argues that moral judgments of the needy are a crucial aspect of political conflict over redistribution. However, thinking of deservingness as part of an economic dimension highlights that these 'other-oriented' redistribution attitudes are not reducible to attitudes towards immigrants or supranational authority which conventionally characterise the socio-cultural dimension.

This article builds on Cavaillé and Trump (2015) in arguing that attitudes towards redistribution can be broken into two distinct subdimensions. The first concerns support for the welfare state and inequality reduction. The second concerns perceptions of the deservingness of welfare state beneficiaries. These are not the same; indeed, voters can and sometimes do support an expansive welfare state while having a dim view of the deservingness of benefit recipients and vice versa.³ Applying this two-dimensional framework of redistribution attitudes to a cross-national analysis of vote choice, I demonstrate that, in combination, attitudes on each of these subdimensions predict vote choice for different party families. To my knowledge, this is the first application of said framework to explaining vote choice in a cross-national context.

Using 2016 European Social Survey Data for 15 Western European countries, I find that voting for green and radical right parties is strongly influenced by the perceived deservingness of benefit recipients. Those who see recipients as undeserving are substantially more likely to vote for radical right parties, while the opposite is true for those voting for green parties. This effect holds *even controlling for voters' positions on other issues like immigration and European integration*, traditionally identified in the literature as central issues for their electorates. Support or opposition to an expansive welfare state, however, is not statistically significantly related to the probability of voting for either party.

Voters for radical left and social democratic parties are more likely to favour a more expansive welfare state and stronger state action to reduce inequality, while liberal and conservative voters are more likely to support

a smaller state and be more tolerant of inequality. For these established party families, positions on the welfare state and inequality and perceptions of the deservingness of welfare state beneficiaries both predict the probability of voting for the party in similar ways.

Rather than being eclipsed by other conflicts or salient only to a shrinking subset of voters, redistribution remains relevant for vote choice for both emerging and established party families. This multi-dimensional analysis suggests that the contemporary landscape is one in which voters' choices of particular party families are associated with different combinations of attitudes about the welfare state and attitudes about the deservingness of welfare state beneficiaries.

Unpacking the economic left/right

Though different in important respects, literature in both the realignment and neo-cleavage traditions emphasizes that the rise of radical right and green parties is rooted primarily in their appeals on socio-cultural issues, rather than the issues of redistribution that distinguish older party families of the left and right (De Vries 2018; Dolezal 2010; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Kitschelt 1994; Kriesi *et al.* 2008; Stubager 2009; Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009).

However, many scholars have drawn attention to the rising political resonance of *welfare chauvinism*: support for a stronger welfare state, but with benefits and services restricted to natives rather than immigrants (Emmeneger and Klemmensen 2013; Magni 2018; Magni *forthcoming*; Mews and Mau 2014; Van der Waal *et al.* 2007). Welfare chauvinism implies a blending of economic and cultural issues, as individuals' positions on the welfare state are filtered through their perceptions of immigrants as potential competitors for resources.

Beyond purely ethnic motivations, a different approach argues that 'other-oriented' considerations centered around social affinity with recipients or negative character judgments of perceived 'freeloaders' also shape attitudes towards redistribution (Achterberg *et al.* 2011; Achterberg *et al.* 2014; Bloemraad *et al.* 2019; Cavaillé 2014; Cavaillé and Trump 2015; Houtman *et al.* 2008; Skocpol and Williamson 2012: 64-68).⁴ These affinities are not limited to immigration status or race, but also imply divisions rooted in class, education, social status, and geography.

In evaluating contemporary redistributive attitudes, then, there are conceptual and empirical drawbacks to adopting a unidimensional view (Cavaillé and Trump 2015; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Häusermann and Kriesi 2015; Roosma *et al.* 2013). Cavaillé and Trump's (2015) compelling theoretical framework divides attitudes towards redistribution into

two different subdimensions. Attitudes about the deservingness of benefit recipients and those about the scope of the welfare state⁵ cluster distinctly from one another, and individuals evaluate them using different psychological mechanisms.

Deservingness refers to perceptions that welfare state beneficiaries are or are not worthy of receiving public support and, relatedly, about whether or not receiving welfare state benefits and services undermine recipients' sense of personal and social responsibility. In forming deservingness judgments, citizens consider the extent to which they identify and empathise with those receiving help (Cavaillé and Trump 2015: 148).

This article conceives of deservingness as a *general orientation towards the needy*, rather than a relative ranking of different recipient groups. An exhaustive literature finds that individuals across welfare states perceive a similar hierarchy of deservingness between different groups of beneficiaries, with the elderly being the most deserving, followed by the sick/disabled, with the unemployed, and immigrants in particular seen as the least deserving (e.g. Jensen and Bang Petersen 2017; Petersen *et al.* 2011; Petersen 2012; Petersen 2015; Van Oorschot 2006).⁶ However, if respondents perceive a similar *rank order* of different groups receiving benefits in terms of deservingness, differences in the *level* of deservingness they ascribe to welfare state beneficiaries in general may be more relevant for voters' choices between different party families.⁷

In contrast with deservingness attitudes, the materialist literature suggests that attitudes towards the scope of the welfare state tend to evoke calculations of self-interest, as citizens consider whether they would be likely to benefit or lose out from welfare state programs and attempts to redistribute income (Alesina and Giuliano 2011; Meltzer and Richard 1981; Romer 1975). Specifically, those with higher income and greater labor market security tend to resist the expansion of the welfare state and redistributive taxation, while those with lower incomes and greater economic risk tend to support it (Cavaillé and Trump 2015: 148; Iversen and Soskice 2001; Rehm 2009; Rehm 2011).

If deservingness perceptions and welfare state support are separate and distinct subdimensions of economic attitudes, it follows that they may shape voting behavior in different ways across the party political landscape. Some parties may attract voters that are highly negative on one subdimension, but more positive on another, and vice versa, while other parties' electorates may have congruent views on both subdimensions. This raises the question: what is the relationship between voters' deservingness perceptions and welfare state support and their vote choice for different party families?

Deservingness perceptions and welfare state support for radical right and green voters

Perceptions of the deservingness of welfare state beneficiaries hinge on mechanisms of social affinity and empathy that we might expect to speak particularly strongly to radical right and green voters, for several reasons. First, voters for both party families tend to stand at opposing poles of a libertarian-authoritarian value divide as a function of their support or opposition to strong social hierarchies and their divergent levels of tolerance for deviance from social norms (Flanagan and Lee 2003; Kitschelt 1994: 10; Stubager 2010: 58). The authoritarian-libertarian dimension is usually associated in the literature with the socio-cultural, rather than the economic divide.⁸

However, views of the deservingness of welfare state beneficiaries reflect attitudes towards both social hierarchy and social deviance. On the one hand, the act of demarcating deserving from undeserving poor inherently constructs a hierarchy of social legitimacy between groups (Van Oorschot 2006); making or rejecting such a categorisation thus in part reflects a person's comfort with social hierarchy. On the other hand, those labeled as the undeserving poor are by definition perceived as socially deviant since they have failed to uphold norms of personal responsibility (Achterberg *et al.* 2014: 217). Radical right parties in particular have bombarded their voters with images of 'welfare scroungers', which likely sharpen perceptions of the needy as both undeserving and deviant (Andersen 1992).

A second dynamic which could divide green and radical right voters particularly sharply in terms of their deservingness perceptions is their membership in distinct socio-structural and status groups. Researchers have found that green voters are disproportionately highly educated, urban, and middle class socio-cultural professionals (Dolezal 2010). Radical right voters, on the other hand, are disproportionately lower-educated, suburban or rural residents (Oesch and Rennwald 2018; Rooduijn *et al.* 2017; Rydgren 2013). Iversen and Soskice (2019) emphasise the spatial dimension of this divide. They argue that, in order to function as engines of postindustrial economic growth, cities require concentrations of highly educated professionals, and the public investment and cultural diversity required to attract them. Disproportionately working class, low education residents of rural or suburban areas, meanwhile, oppose urban-concentrated public spending and see diversity as a source of competition for welfare state resources (Iversen and Soskice 2019: 52).

These groups differ markedly not only in their objective social characteristics but also in their levels of subjective social status. Social status is a positional good; in other words, status-conscious individuals care about whether they have more or less status than others. Crucially, people tend to be *last-place averse* (Cavaillé 2014; Gidron and Hall 2017; Kuziemko

et al. 2014). The status insecure are thus particularly concerned with policing social boundaries to distance and distinguish themselves from those at the very bottom of status hierarchies, a finding reflected in quantitative and ethnographic research in both the United States and Europe (Cramer 2016; Fiske 2011; Hochschild 2016; Jost and Banaji 1994; Lamont 2000; Tajfel and Turner 1986). In this vein, Gidron and Hall (2017) find that low subjective social status is associated with voting for radical right parties. By contrast, the relatively high social status of green voters may protect them from the need to demarcate themselves from the poor and thus make them more likely to attribute neediness to structural factors rather than individual failings.

In summary, I hypothesise that more positive perceptions of the *deservingness* of welfare state beneficiaries are on average associated with support for green parties and negatively associated with support for radical right parties (H1).

H1: perceptions of deservingness are positively associated with support for green parties and negatively associated with support for radical right parties.

For parties arrayed on the transnational cleavage, traditional issues of contestation over the scope of the welfare state are generally secondary in terms of salience. Since green and radical right parties seek to attract voters from both left and right party constituencies, they present ambiguous or centrist positions on issues of redistribution (Hooghe and Marks 2018; Koedam 2018; Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2020). Voters' positions on the economic left/right, operationalised in past research by questions about inequality and the scope of the welfare state, have thus not been found predictive of voting for green or radical right parties (Dolezal 2010; Rovny and Polk 2020: 14). I thus predict that support for the welfare state will not have a statistically significant impact on the probability of voting for green or radical right parties (H2).

H2: support for the welfare state is not related to the probability of voting for green or radical right parties.

Deservingness perceptions and welfare state support for classic party family voters

Deservingness perceptions may be particularly powerful for green and radical right voters, but they should also be relevant for voters for parties along the classic economic left/right cleavage. Discourses about deserving and undeserving recipients have always been a central aspect of welfare state politics (Van Oorschot 2006: 23). Historically, parties of the left on the traditional class cleavage have tended to attribute poverty and

recourse to social benefits to structural inequity, while parties on the right of that divide have tended to associate them with individual failings. I thus expect positive perceptions of benefit recipients' deservingness to be associated with a higher probability of voting for social democratic and radical left parties and a lower probability of voting for conservative and liberal parties (H3).

H3: perceptions of deservingness are positively associated with support for social democratic and radical left parties and negatively associated with support for conservative and liberal parties.

Parties of the economic left have historically supported an expanded role for the welfare state while the converse is true for parties on the right of the classic class and religious cleavages (Korpi 1983; Allan and Scruggs 2004). I thus expect that support for the welfare state is on average positively associated with the probability of voting for center left and radical left parties, and negatively associated with the probability of voting for conservative and liberal parties (H4).

H4: support for the welfare state is positively associated with support for social democratic and radical left parties and negatively associated with support for conservative and liberal parties.

Data

The 2016 European Social Survey is an appropriate dataset to test these hypotheses, as it includes a battery of questions specifically looking at redistributive preferences and vote choice across a range of countries. In particular, I analyze 15 Western European countries⁹ from the dataset in order to examine the relationship between deservingness perceptions, welfare state support, and vote choice.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is vote choice by party family. The party families are *radical left*, *social democratic*, *green*, *liberal*, *conservative*,¹⁰ and *radical right*. Parties are coded using a combination of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES, Bakker *et al.* 2015), ParlGov Database (Döring and Manow 2019), and the author's own judgment. A full list of party family codings can be found in [Online Appendix A](#).

Key independent variables: attitudes towards deservingness and the welfare state

My key independent variables measure attitudes towards redistribution. I use principle component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation to analyze

Table 1. Factor Loadings.

Variable	Deservingness	Welfare State
<i>Many manage to obtain benefit they are not entitled to</i>	.419	−.126
<i>Social benefits and services in [respondent's country] make people lazy</i>	.526	.054
<i>Social benefits and services in [respondent's country] make people less willing to care for each other</i>	.504	.002
<i>Most unemployed do not really try to find a job</i>	.494	−.014
<i>Government should reduce differences in income levels</i>	−.017	.413
<i>Large differences in income are acceptable to reward talents and efforts</i>	.113	.312
<i>For a society to be fair, differences in people's standard of living should be small</i>	.036	.376
<i>It should be government's responsibility to ensure a reasonable standard of living for the elderly</i>	−.087	.479
<i>It should be government's responsibility to ensure a reasonable standard of living for the unemployed</i>	.151	.409
<i>It should be government's responsibility to ensure sufficient child care services for working parents</i>	−.075	.419

(Strongest loadings in bold).

the structure of redistribution attitudes. I retain the two most coherent components I call *deservingness*¹¹ and *welfare state*, corresponding to Cavaillé and Trump's (2015) 'Redistribution To' and 'Redistribution From', respectively. *Deservingness* (eigenvalue = 2.88) explains approximately 29% of the variance in attitudes towards redistribution, while *welfare state* (eigenvalue = 1.82) explains about 18% of the variance. Full factor loadings can be found in Table 1, above. For ease of comparison, both variables are standardised.

Questions that load most strongly onto the *deservingness* component ask respondents to make judgments about those who receive social benefits and services and the effects of government assistance on recipients' sense of personal and social responsibility. Answers to these questions should reflect respondents' social affinity with and empathy for benefit recipients. Higher values of *deservingness* indicate more positive views towards benefit recipients.

Questions that load most strongly onto the *welfare state* component concern attitudes towards inequality and the scope of government responsibility in social policy. Instead of eliciting a character judgment of or an evaluation of social affinity with some other recipient, questions of government responsibility should provoke a calculation of self-interest, in which respondents ask themselves whether they would benefit or not from redistribution. Higher values of *welfare state* indicate support for

government responsibility for providing social services and reducing inequality.

It is important to test whether the relationship between *deservingness* perceptions and vote choice is a spurious one driven by support or opposition to immigration. Therefore, another substantively vital independent variable in my robustness checks is *immigration attitudes*, measured by a question asking respondents on a 0-10 scale whether they think immigrants make their country a worse (0) or better place to live (10).

Controls

My models include a series of controls. The first is *income*, measured by respondents' self-reported household income decile. The second is *education*, an ordinal variable measuring highest degree attainment. *Subjective economic insecurity* is a binary variable in which respondents who feel either A: very or somewhat worried about losing their job or B: that it is very or somewhat difficult living on their current income receive a score of 1, and 0 otherwise. *Occupational class* is a measure using Oesch's 8-class typology (see: Oesch 2006). *Age* is the respondent's age in years. *Urban* is an ordinal variable measuring whether respondents are from a rural area, a small town, a suburb, or a big city. *Union* is a binary variable with current or past union members coded as 1 and 0 otherwise. *Female* is a dummy variable. Finally, *attend services* is an ordinal measure of religiosity asking respondents whether they attend religious services never or almost never, rarely, or at least once a week. Space limitations preclude a discussion of the effects of these controls on vote choice, but full results can be found in [Online Appendix B](#).

Distinguishing party family electorates by deservingness perceptions and welfare state support

Figure 1 displays the mean *deservingness* (Y axis) and *welfare state* attitudes (X axis) for the voters of each party family. On average, green and radical left voters have the most positive *deservingness* perceptions, followed by social democratic and liberal voters, while conservative and (to an even greater extent) radical right voters have the most negative *deservingness* perceptions. On the *welfare state* subdimension, radical left voters are on average the most supportive, while conservative and liberal voters are the most opposed. Green and social democratic voters are on average moderately positive on *welfare state*, while radical right voters are moderately negative.

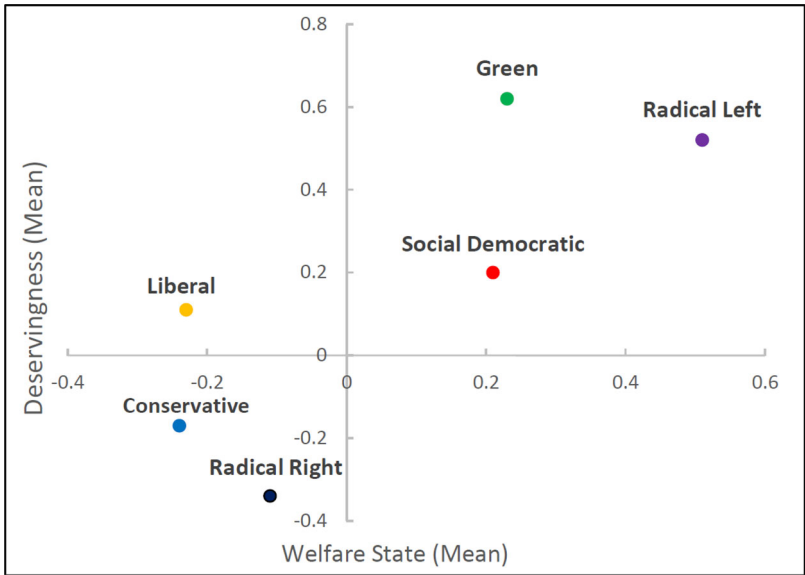


Figure 1. Mean *deservingness* and *welfare state* by party family.

Moving beyond descriptive analysis, multinomial logistic regression allows us to measure whether and how deservingness perceptions and welfare state support affect voting for different party families under statistical controls. These models are long and unwieldy, so I limit my discussion to the effects of *deservingness* and *welfare state* support on vote choice and report the full results with controls in [Online Appendix B](#). Multinomial logistic regression requires that a base outcome be omitted for comparison; I choose conservative parties for this purpose. Coefficients can thus be interpreted as the effect of *deservingness* perceptions and *welfare state* support on voting for a given party family, relative to voting for a conservative party (and under all the controls described above).

Results

Table 2 below displays multinomial logistic regression coefficients for the effects of *deservingness* perceptions and *welfare state* support on vote choice. As we can see, both have effects on vote choice, however, the pattern of their associations varies across party families. Positive perceptions of benefit recipients' *deservingness* and *welfare state* support distinguish radical left and social democratic voters from conservative voters, on average. Positive perceptions of *deservingness* have the strongest association with voting green, relative to voting conservative. *Welfare state* support is also associated with green support relative to conservative voting,

Table 2. Effects of deservingness perceptions and welfare state support on party family vote.

	Deservingness	Welfare State
Conservative (base outcome)	N/A	N/A
Social Democrat	.37*** (.03)	.47*** (.09)
Radical Left	.67*** (.04)	.72*** (.07)
Liberal	.17 (.12)	.08 (.11)
Green	.75*** (.08)	.38*** (.08)
Radical Right	-.26*** (.07)	.33*** (.08)

N = 12,105. $R^2 = .19$. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$. Note: multinomial logistic regression model, with country fixed effects and standard errors clustered at country level. See [Online Appendix B](#) for complete results including controls.

although the relationship appears weaker than that for *deservingness*. Liberal voters are not statistically significantly different from conservative voters on either subdimension.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is the contrast between radical right and conservative voters. Negative perceptions of *deservingness* are on average statistically significantly associated with support for radical right parties, even relative to conservative parties. However radical right voters are also statistically significantly more *positive* towards the *welfare state* than conservative voters.

To interpret the relative magnitude of effects of *deservingness* and *welfare state* on vote choice and directly test the hypotheses, predicted probabilities derived from the multinomial logistic regression model are more useful than regression coefficients. All figures below report the probability of voting for a given party family across the range of both *deservingness* and *welfare state* values, holding all controls at their means. The bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

[Figure 2](#) reports the predicted probability of voting for parties on the transnational cleavage across the range of *deservingness* and *welfare state* values, under controls. *Deservingness* perceptions stand out for their powerful effects on the probability of voting for green and radical right parties. Respondents with the most negative *deservingness* perceptions have slightly less than a 2% chance of voting green, while those with the most positive perceptions of *deservingness* are over seven times as likely to vote green at around 15%. Conversely, respondents with the most negative *deservingness* perceptions are the most likely to vote for radical right parties at approximately 14%, while those with the highest *deservingness* perceptions have only an approximately 3% chance of voting for a radical right party. This constitutes strong evidence in favour of H1. This mirror image of the impacts of *deservingness* perceptions for each party suggests a potentially novel attitudinal basis underlying green and radical right voters' opposing positions on either side of the transnational cleavage.

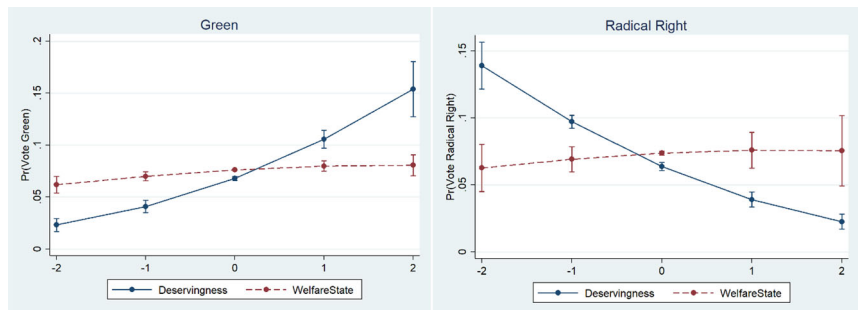


Figure 2. Predicted probability of voting green or radical right by *deservingness* and *welfare state*.
Note: predicted probabilities derived from multinomial logistic regression, bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

By contrast, variation in *welfare state* support has no statistically significant effect on the probability of voting for either green or radical right parties. The lack of statistically significant effects of *welfare state* support on voting green or radical right also suggests that this subdimension is secondary for both party families. This finding constitutes evidence in support of H2.

Figure 3 reports the predicted probabilities of voting for social democratic or conservative parties, under controls. In contrast to voters for parties along the transnational cleavage, positions on *deservingness* and *welfare state* subdimensions have very similar effects on the probability of voting for these older parties of the left/right cleavage. Respondents with the most negative views of *deservingness* have approximately a 22% chance of voting for social democrats, while those with the most positive views are almost twice as likely to vote social democratic at about 38%. The estimates for the effects of *welfare state* support are strongly similar.

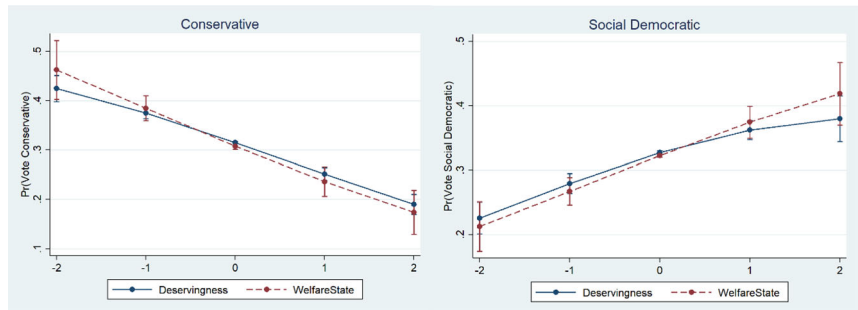


Figure 3. Predicted probability of voting social democratic or conservative by *deservingness* and *welfare state*.
Note: predicted probabilities derived from multinomial logistic regression, bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

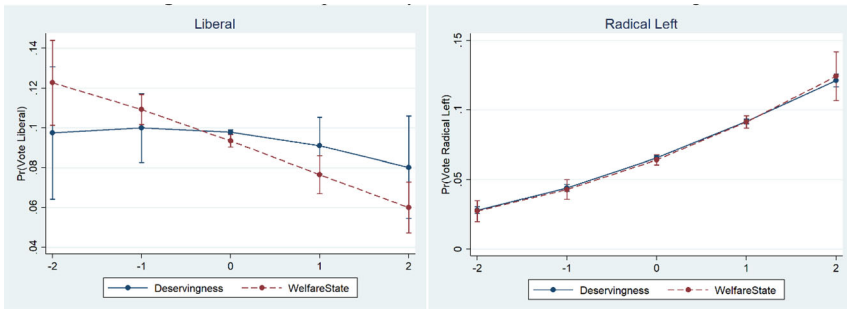


Figure 4. Predicted probability of liberal and radical left voting.

Note: predicted probabilities derived from multinomial logistic regression, bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Conversely, respondents with the most negative *deservingness* perceptions have about a 42% chance of voting conservative, which falls to approximately 20% for those with the most positive *deservingness* perceptions. The relationship is similar for *welfare state* support, with respondents with the most negative *welfare state* attitudes most likely to vote conservative at about 45%, falling to only approximately 19% for those with the strongest support for the *welfare state*.

Turning to our final two party families, Figure 4 reports the effect of *deservingness* perceptions and *welfare state* support on voting for liberal and radical left parties. For liberal parties, the confidence intervals are very large, indicating a high degree of uncertainty about the point estimates of the effects of both subdimensions. There is no statistically significant effect of *deservingness* on liberal voting, evidence against H3. There is, however, a statistically significant negative effect of *welfare state* support on voting for liberal parties, evidence in support of H4. The effects of *deservingness* perceptions and *welfare state* support on the probability of voting for the radical left are clearer and highly congruent; at the most negative values of each, the probability of radical left voting is about 3%, but at the highest values rise to around 12%.

Robustness check: is deservingness just a proxy for immigration or EU integration attitudes?

One might argue that the *deservingness* subdimension itself is simply a reflection of immigration attitudes which are central to the socio-cultural dimension. Citizens generally see immigrants as less deserving of public benefits and services than natives (Magni *forthcoming*; Van der Waal *et al.* 2010; Van Oorschot 2006; Van Oorschot and Uunk 2007). In the U.S., with the rising salience of immigration, perceptions of immigrants are now strong predictors of attitudes towards welfare recipients generally

(Garand *et al.* 2017). Perhaps this is why deservingness perceptions so powerfully predict support or opposition to parties for whom immigration is a central issue (Rydgren 2008). However, even if this were to be true, it should be noted that none of the questions which make up the *deservingness* variable mention immigration or immigrants at all. To the extent that questions about the deservingness of benefit recipients map closely onto support or opposition to immigration, this sheds light on how migrants have become the new face of ‘the undeserving poor’.

Yet we can also go a step further and directly test whether the propensity of those with low and high *deservingness* perceptions to vote for radical right and green parties respectively can be explained by their immigration attitudes. Figure 5 below shows the predicted probability of voting for green or radical right parties across the range of *deservingness* perceptions, holding all controls at their means except for *immigration attitudes*. Radical right and green voters stand out for their particularly negative and positive attitudes towards immigration, respectively. To account for this, I set *immigration attitudes* to their 10th percentile (a strongly anti-immigration position) for generating predicted probabilities of radical right voting, and to their 90th percentile (a strongly pro-immigration position) for predicted probabilities of green voting.¹²

Controlling for immigration attitudes has little effect on the relationship between *deservingness* and support for green parties. Controlling for immigration attitudes does weaken the effect of *deservingness* perceptions on the probability of voting radical right. Nonetheless, *deservingness* perceptions continue to have a strong and statistically significant effect on the probability of voting for a radical right party, even after controlling for immigration attitudes. *Deservingness* perceptions, it appears, are related to immigration attitudes but have a strong impact on voting for parties along the transnational cleavage irrespective of them.

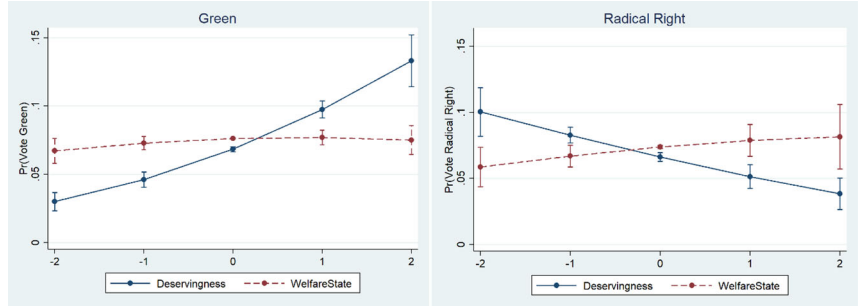


Figure 5. Predicted probability of green and radical right voting, controlling for immigration attitudes.

Note: predicted probabilities derived from multinomial logistic regression, bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Stoeckel and Kleider (2018)'s analysis of supranational redistribution attitudes suggests that in the wake of the eurozone crisis and bailouts, distributional conflict has a European as well as a national dimension. Traditionally a defining issue for parties on the transnational cleavage, support for European integration could also potentially confound the relationship between *deservingness* perceptions and the probability of voting green or radical right. As a robustness check, I re-run the multinomial logistic regression predicting vote choice, controlling for respondents' opposition to or support for European integration on a 0-10 scale in addition to previous controls. I again derive predicted probabilities for voting radical right and green across the range of *deservingness* and *welfare state*. I find *deservingness* perceptions are strongly associated with radical right and green voting, even after controlling for both immigration and EU integration attitudes (see [Online Appendix D](#) for results).

Discussion

There are four main takeaways from these analyses. First, the results suggest that *deservingness* perceptions are worthy of study as a substantively important predictor of vote choice, alongside more commonly researched attitudes about the scope of the welfare state. In political conflicts over redistribution, moral judgments of the beneficiaries of the welfare state are as important as disputes over its size and scope. Vote choice on the economic dimension is thus shaped to an important degree by individuals' orientations towards hierarchy and social deviance, previously understood as primarily relevant to the socio-cultural dimension.

Second, this article's findings underline the value of analyzing redistribution attitudes in a multi-dimensional framework. Attitudes on the economic dimension are an important predictor of green and radical right voting. This suggests that these voters are motivated by more than just positions on socio-cultural issues like immigration and European integration. However, this becomes apparent only once the economic dimension has been disaggregated into components of *deservingness* and *welfare state* support. Through this lens, we see that voters for different party families combine attitudes along these two subdimensions in distinct ways. The effects of the two sets of attitudes on vote choice are congruent for mainstream party voters, but not for voters for newer parties competing on the transnational cleavage, who stand out for their polar positions on *deservingness*.

Third, the effects of *deservingness* perceptions on vote choice may help explain changes in the links between socio-structural groups and political parties. This includes the much-studied flight of less-educated working

class voters from parties of the left to parties of the radical right (e.g. Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Harteveld 2016; Houtman *et al.* 2008; Rydgren 2013), as well as the shift of highly educated professionals from liberal and conservative parties to green, left, and center-left parties (Abou-Chadi and Immergut 2019; Arndt 2014; Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Häusermann and Kriesi 2015; Kitschelt 1994; Oesch and Rennwald 2018; Piketty 2018). Most recently, this ‘New Partisanship’ literature has fruitfully used multi-dimensional analyses of redistribution attitudes in explaining vote choice, focusing in particular on the trade-off between preferences for maintaining social consumption policies demanded by working class voters and social investment policies preferred by the ‘New Middle Class’.

A deservingness/welfare state framework may challenge the conception of a strict trade-off between social consumption and social investment preferences in favour of a voter calculus that mixes economic self-interest and deservingness perceptions. The moral judgments formed by different social classes may sometimes predispose them to support or oppose certain types of social spending in line with their preferences on social consumption vs. social investment, and sometimes may contradict these preferences. For example, in deciding who to vote for, working class voters’ disproportionate reliance on unemployment benefits may conflict with their perceptions of welfare abuse by undeserving freeloaders.

Finally, these findings speak to the bounded relevance of immigration for the politics of redistribution. Controlling for immigration attitudes weakens the relationship between *deservingness* perceptions and voting for radical right parties. This suggests that radical right voters’ general perceptions of *deservingness* are mediated by their negative attitudes towards immigrants, implying a view of immigrants as undeserving welfare recipients. However, the negative association between *deservingness* and radical right voting holds even after controlling for immigration attitudes and opposition to EU integration. Moreover, controlling for immigration and EU integration attitudes has virtually no impact on the relationship between *deservingness* and the predicted probability of voting green. The opposition of green and radical right voters on *deservingness* is thus strengthened by the rise of welfare chauvinism, but also appears to be related to a deeper divide potentially rooted in status differences and authoritarian/libertarian values.

This article argues that deservingness perceptions and welfare state attitudes are substantively important for vote choice in different combinations for voters of different party families. However, the cross-sectional data on which the analysis relies yields a static perspective. Further research should investigate how individuals’ positions on these two subdimensions connect to changes in voting behavior over time. Furthermore, the scope of this

article was limited to the demand side, but future research should further explore connections between deservingness perceptions, welfare state attitudes, and vote choice on the supply side. In particular, what is the role of exogenous shocks, media coverage and framing, and party strategies in shaping the relationship between voters' attitudes on the two subdimensions and their vote choice? The results of this article should be interpreted with caution, as the cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow us to tell whether deservingness perceptions and welfare state support are influencing vote choice, or whether support for a certain type of party leads voters to adopt that party's positioning on the two subdimensions. In addressing these questions, longitudinal data combining measures of deservingness perceptions, welfare state support, and vote choice will be vital.

Notes

1. Scholars have used several different labels to describe this party family, including populist right, far right, and Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist (TAN) (see Golder 2016, 481–82). I use the term radical right because it is the most commonly used in the field.
2. The division in values between opponents and supporters of transnationalism is expressed in a new dimension of political conflict which scholars use different labels to capture, but which are conceptually similar: post-materialism (Inglehart 1977), cosmopolitanism vs. parochialism (De Vries 2018), particularism vs. universalism (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015), libertarianism vs. authoritarianism (Kitschelt 1994), the group dimension (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014), demarcation vs. integration (Kriesi *et al.* 2006; Kriesi *et al.* 2008) or Green/Alternative/Libertarian (GAL) vs. Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist (TAN) (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002).
3. In a particularly illustrative example, Bullock (1999) finds that poor American benefit recipients were themselves more likely than middle class respondents to support the claim that welfare recipients are lazy or dishonest, while opposing cuts to welfare and maintaining that welfare programs themselves were socially legitimate. Middle class respondents, meanwhile, were less likely to make negative character judgements about the poor but more likely to support cuts and reject the legitimacy of welfare programs in the first place.
4. Still other contributions in the literature on 'other-oriented' motives for redistributive attitudes present a model of parochial altruism compatible both with theories rooted in welfare chauvinism or in other forms of status competition (Shayo 2009; Lupu and Pontusson 2011).
5. Cavaillé (2014) and Cavaillé and Trump (2015) refer to these two dimensions of redistribution attitudes as 'Redistribution To (the poor)' and 'Redistribution From (the rich)', respectively.
6. More specifically, scholars have found that perceptions of the work ethic of recipients and the degree of control they have over their economic circumstances have an important effect on people's evaluations of their deservingness (Feather 1999; Fincham and Jaspars 1980; Magni *forthcoming*).

Research by political psychologists argues that deservingness perceptions result from a pre-political, automatic heuristic which motivates individuals to help the genuinely needy within their in-group while harshly punishing free riders, a tendency with roots in evolutionary psychology (Petersen *et al.* 2011; Petersen 2012; Petersen 2015; Jensen and Petersen 2017).

7. For a similar approach geared towards explaining perceptions of welfare beneficiaries generally rather than the relative merit of different groups, see Roosma *et al.* (2016).
8. Houtman *et al.* (2008) is an important exception in its linking of working class authoritarianism to both strong preferences for conditionality and populist right voting.
9. The countries are Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. These countries have different party systems, which means the choice set for voters varies across them. Since I am interested in capturing the relationship between redistribution attitudes and vote choice across a range of party systems, I retain a pooled sample. However, to demonstrate the robustness of my results, [Online Appendix C](#) contains an analysis of a restricted sample of ten countries with the same constellation of party families. The results are substantively unchanged.
10. Since the article must present a series of statistical analyses of the effects of two different attitudinal subdimensions across many different party families, I combine Christian democratic and conservative parties into one category for parsimony's sake. This also allows for greater comparability across countries, since some countries may have only a conservative party or a Christian democratic party, but not both.
11. Other survey research operationalises the concept of deservingness with reference to perceptions of specific groups, rather than as a general orientation. Such research employs questions asking if specific groups deserve more or less money from the welfare state than they currently receive (Jeene *et al.*, 2014), if respondents are concerned about the living standards of a group (Van Oorschot, 2006), about their relative concern for each group in relation to others (Ibid), or directly if groups are deserving of state financial assistance or not (Van Oorschot, 2000; Jensen and Petersen, 2017). The factor analysis approach used here has several benefits. Methodologically, combining multiple measures reduces the measurement error associated with using single survey items to capture attitudes (Ansolabehere *et al.* 2008). This approach also accounts for the fact that *deservingness* is a multi-faceted concept which may be hard to fully capture with a single measure. Substantively, the choice to measure deservingness as a general orientation towards the needy rather than a relative evaluation of individual groups is more appropriate for highlighting variation across different party family electorates.
12. For the sake of space, I only display predicted probabilities for radical right and green voters, whose support I expect to be most strongly related to deservingness perceptions.

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