

Attitudinal consistency in citizens' social policy preferences

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Studies of public opinion on welfare policy have zoomed-in on citizens' preferences on fine-grained policy issues. Yet, while survey measures have become more concrete and complex, we lack evidence on whether voters hold such specific and structured attitudes towards welfare policies. We rely on novel data on citizens' social policy preferences in eight West European countries to study attitudinal consistency across different policy domains of differing complexity. Addressing both logical and relational consistency, we find that most respondents hold consistent and structured welfare belief systems, even when confronted with complex tasks and tradeoffs. Moreover, by addressing individual-level heterogeneity in attitudinal consistency we show that differences related to socio-demographic factors are rather minor. Consistent welfare attitudes are not exclusive to highly sophisticated individuals. These results validate the effort of devising more fine-grained indicators of social policy preferences (and other topics) across the population.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, public opinion has come to play a central role in analyses of welfare reform. A large body of work has addressed the determinants of citizens' preferences regarding economic redistribution, social spending, and concrete policies like pensions, childcare, or education (e.g. Beramendi & Rehm, 2016; Bremer & Bürgisser, 2020, 2022; Brooks & Manza, 2008; Busemeyer & Garritzmann, 2017; Gallego & Marx, 2016; Rueda, 2005). While seminal studies of mass policy preferences tended to take rather crude measures of support for welfare state expansion (Brooks & Manza, 2008), recent analyses have implemented increasingly specific measures of social policy preferences, in line with the complex landscape of social policy reform in mature welfare states. New items ask respondents which kinds of policies they would want to expand, for which beneficiaries, and the costs they would be willing to accept in exchange for the expansion of these benefits. Respondents are now faced with complex choices that mirror the kinds of tradeoffs and limitations that political elites face (for some examples see Bremer & Bürgisser, 2022; Busemeyer & Garritzmann, 2017; Gallego & Marx, 2016; Kölln & Wlezien, 2016).

The increasing specificity of policies and scenarios presented to citizens implicitly assumes that the public holds specific and coherent attitudes concerning these complex choices. However, it may be problematic to take for granted that the public holds structured attitudes (on welfare reform or other topics). In fact, studying the degree of coherence and structure of citizens' policy preferences has been the focus of a large body of public opinion research, initiated by Converse's (1964) seminal study and, thereafter, periodically revisited by different scholars (e.g. Bizer et al., 2018; Goren, 2013; Krosnick, 1990; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985). While some of these studies concluded that very few citizens hold coherent political beliefs and preferences (Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992); others have found more optimistic results indicating that most people know the

basics of politics and hold general principles that guide and structure their specific attitudes on different issues (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985).

Addressing the level of attitudinal consistency of social policy preferences – and potential individual heterogeneity in it – is crucial since it underlies the recent efforts to understand the specific preferences held by citizens when faced with complex policy choices. These efforts are only meaningful if voters do, indeed, hold and manifest a consistent and structured set of policy positions. The focus recently put on the role of public opinion for welfare reform is based on the assumption that individuals' preferences guide electoral behavior and are relevant for issue voting and accountability. If citizens were not to hold consistent preferences – as implicitly assumed – on concrete welfare reforms, this would be highly consequential for social policy research in two senses: first, it would undermine the recent efforts to gather information about individuals' preferences concerning highly specific social policies, and, second, it would undermine the relevance of the role played by public opinion in the policy-making process.

To analyze the degree of attitudinal consistency in citizens' social policy preferences we rely on original survey data from eight West European countries. This data is exceptionally well-suited for this purpose because it includes several measures of welfare preferences, from more traditional items capturing general support for welfare expansion and retrenchment, to increasingly specific tasks facing respondents with tradeoffs and comparisons between different fields. The variety of items allows us to test for *logical* and *relational* consistency in citizens' preferences, and to contrast the performance of less and more demanding measures. Moreover, as additional tests of the robustness of our results, we replicate some our analyses with European Social Survey (ESS) and INVEDUC data (Busemeyer et al., 2018).

Our results indicate that respondents manifest consistent preferences on social policy reform. The simple, undemanding – and more traditional – questions concerning general support for welfare expansion and retrenchment indicate that a large majority of respondents hold coherent and non-contradictory policy preferences. Moreover, even when faced with more complex questions requiring the comparison of different policy fields, or the consideration of direct and opportunity costs, still a majority of respondents display consistent attitudes. In a second step, we also address individual-level heterogeneity in attitudinal consistency across individuals. Research on attitudinal constraint in public opinion has documented that the coherence of belief systems tends to vary by, for example, education or political interest (Kuklinski & Peyton, 2007). Heterogeneity in attitudinal consistency could affect the performance of more complex survey questions among specific groups, hence limiting the scope of applicability of such demanding items. Given that some of the factors underlying differences in attitudinal consistency – like gender or educational attainment – are also likely to ground social policy preferences, differences in attitudinal consistency across respondents could contaminate analyses of their conflicting preferences. Our analyses indicate that, even if there are some differences in attitudinal consistency across individuals, these are rather minor. The optimistic findings concerning generalized consistency among a majority of respondents, and low heterogeneity across them, support recent innovations in the measurement of public opinion on social policy. These findings substantiate the usefulness of implementing more specific measures of welfare preferences, which confront citizens with the complex landscape of welfare reform.

2. Theory

2.1. New measures of social policy preferences

Mass opinion on social policy, and how the public is divided on this topic, has been central in recent studies in comparative welfare state research (Beramendi & Rehm, 2016; Bremer & Bürgisser, 2020; Brooks & Manza, 2008; Busemeyer & Garrizmann, 2017; Gallego et al., 2022; Margalit, 2013; Rehm, 2009, 2016; Rueda, 2005; Svallfors, 2012b; Thewissen & Rueda, 2017). The focus on citizens' preferences is warranted by their relevance in the policy-making process. Voters' demands constrain what office-seeking parties can offer and what governments can do. Thus, voters' preferences have played a key role in the explanation of what is feasible in terms of welfare reform (Beramendi et al., 2015; Svallfors, 2012a).

Most accounts of the public's demands on welfare issues tended to rely on general measures gauging support for economic redistribution, welfare expansion or state intervention of the economy (Brooks & Manza, 2008; Svallfors, 1997). More recently, welfare politics has been increasingly studied from the lens of austerity, fiscal constraint and recalibration (Pierson, 1996), and studies of public opinion have aligned with this focus. In mature welfare states, political elites and policy makers face complex scenarios of welfare reform that frequently involve tradeoffs and constraints, by which increasing benefits or services for certain groups usually entails, at least, opportunity costs for other groups or benefits. Hence, generalized welfare state expansion is not an accurate depiction of the kind of social policy reforms under consideration in most mature welfare states.

In line with this complex landscape of welfare reform, recent studies have implemented more specific measures of social policy preferences that seek to reflect, at the individual level, the kind of choices faced by policy-makers. Many of the efforts have concentrated on accounting for

a context of greater – actual or perceived – fiscal constraint¹. Hence, in addition to welfare expansion, new studies also gauge preferences regarding the retrenchment of different social benefits and services. Other measurement strategies explicitly highlight the cost implications of welfare expansion: for example, they mention increases in taxation (e.g. Hansen, 1998); they face respondents with tradeoffs in which the expansion of benefits in one area comes at the explicit cost of cuts in other areas (e.g. expansion of education at the cost of pensions) (Busemeyer & Garrizmann, 2017); or they present a choice between different scenarios of welfare reform that make opportunity costs visible (Fernández & Jaime-Castillo, 2013; Gallego & Marx, 2016). What these measures have in common is that they reflect the difficulty – under fiscal restraint – to implement expansionary policies across the board. We have seen a surge in such measurement innovations as opportunities for data collection have become more easily available (e.g. through online surveys).

2.2. Attitudinal consistency

These recently-developed measures, as well as the survey questions on which we rely in this paper, represent a marked departure from earlier items gauging generalized support for increased welfare spending. Yet, these more complex items also place higher cognitive demands on respondents, who have to simultaneously assess their relative preferences on different policies, or evaluate increased benefits against a cost. We do not know to what extent citizens hold coherent preferences on these complex issues. Are the responses that we obtain through these questions the reflection of an underlying consistent social policy belief system? While recent research has invested more

¹ Perceptions of fiscal constraint are prevalent across a sizable share of voters in Western Europe (Häusermann et al., 2021).

efforts in introducing novel measures of welfare policy preferences, it has not addressed the potential inconsistency or lack of structure in them (see Goerres & Prinzen, 2012 for an exception).

The concept of attitudinal consistency or constraint was central to early studies of public opinion.² Converse (1964) was the first to provide a definition of belief system and constraint. A belief system is a ‘*configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence*’ (1964, p. 207). The coherence of belief systems is fundamental because it constitutes a functional ability in the political sphere that allows voters to make decisions and pursue specific policy demands on the basis of their personal preferences. Hence, we can conceive attitudinal constraint as a key prerequisite for the political relevance of attitudes. If attitudes and preferences are incoherent and loosely structured, they should be less consequential for political behavior and, ultimately, for the policy-making process. This is why different scholars have been concerned with measuring the degree of attitudinal constraint in citizens’ belief systems on different domains, such as foreign policy, globalization, democracy, or environmental policy, among others (Freeder et al., 2019; Goren, 2013; Hernández, 2019; Krosnick, 1990; Mader et al., 2019; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985, 1993; Rohrschneider, 1993).

Initial research assessing the extent to which the electorate held belief systems that are structured and coherent led to quite pessimistic conclusions. Only about 15 percent of American voters were included in Converse’s (1964) two highest-ranked categories of attitudinal constraint and structure. In contrast to this dire scenario, later research indicated that the public held more coherent attitudes than initially believed (Ansolabehere et al., 2008; Inglehart, 1985). Studying

² Since our analyses focus exclusively on horizontal constraint, also referred to as consistency, we use the terms constraint and consistency interchangeably.

different sets of attitudes (economic, racial, foreign policy, health policy or social-moral attitudes), Peffley & Hurwitz (1985) contended, that individuals are highly consistent. Moreover, studies have repeatedly found that policy preferences on specific issue areas tend to be more consistent and better structured, than preferences across different topics (Goren, 2013). Thus, even if we face respondents with complex survey items that underline the multidimensionality of current welfare politics, individuals might display rather integrated belief systems.

2.3. Logical and relational consistency

In its original conceptualization, attitudinal constraint is the success one has in predicting that an individual holds certain attitudes once knowing, beforehand, that she holds another attitude (Converse, 1964). It is, thus, a relational property of attitudes that refers to the coherence in their structuration. The starting point to be able to assess the degree of coherence of a belief system is to have an established understanding about ‘what attitudes go with what’, i.e. which bundles of ideas are consistent and which are not. We propose to study two types of horizontal constraint: *logical* and *relational*. The first and most basic form of attitudinal constraint is purely *logical*: consistency is lacking if individuals hold and express logically contradictory idea-elements. For instance, on the topic of social policy, citizens lack *logical consistency* if they report simultaneous support for the expansion and retrenchment of the same policy. Beyond pure logical coherence, *relational* consistency is also relevant for our purposes. This refers to the predictable structuration of two (or more) attitudes located at the same level of abstraction (Goren, 2013; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985). In the field of social policy this implies a consistent relationship between preferences on specific social policies (the idea-elements on a similar level of abstraction) that are gauged in different scenarios and against different costs. These specific preferences should be related through the structuration provided by an underlying support for the expansion or retrenchment of different

policies. For instance, an underlying strong support for increasing unemployment benefits, should be manifested in higher support for the expansion on this policy area, even when pitted against other policies. In other words, we expect a positive relationship between items measuring support for this policy across different scenarios. In this paper, we focus exclusively on measures of horizontal constraint consistency, since we address the level of structuration and coherence of specific preferences in the domain of welfare policy, without assessing to what extent there are linked to superordinate values (i.e., vertical constraint).

We test *logical* and *relational* consistency on preferences concerning specific policy reforms, gauged through relatively complex questions. We are not the first ones to attempt to capture more specific preferences concerning welfare reform. Recently many have developed increasingly specific measures of public opinion on welfare reform (e.g. Busemeyer et al., 2017; Chrisp et al., 2020; Gallego & Marx, 2016; Häusermann et al., 2019; Kölln & Wlezien, 2016; Laenen & Oorschot, 2020; Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2021). Yet, to date no efforts have been made to address the extent to which the attitudes elicited through these more complex items are consistent, and coherently related to other social policy attitudes. As Goerres and Prinzen (2012) have indicated, it is particularly important to address the structure of (non)attitudes when these are measured through close-ended survey questions, since respondents can provide an answer even if they do not have a clear and fully developed attitude about an issue.

2.4. Heterogeneity in attitudinal consistency

Studying the overall levels of attitudinal constraint among citizens is of the utmost relevance. However, there are also reasons to expect that attitudinal consistency could differ across individuals along socio-economic and political factors. Addressing heterogeneity in constraint along these lines is relevant for two reasons. First, finding expected associations between social

policy consistency and usual correlates of attitudinal constraint provides a source of nomological validation of the measures of consistency developed in this paper (Adcock & Collier, 2001). Second, some of these factors, such as or educational attainment, have been associated to particular preferences in the area of welfare reform. Hence, if these factors are strong determinants of attitudinal consistency, this could affect the analysis of social-based heterogeneity in these preferences.

We expect age to be positively associated to attitudinal consistency, and following studies on political knowledge and engagement, this relationship could follow a curvilinear life-cycle pattern. Individuals are more interested and know more about politics and public affairs (like welfare policy) during middle adulthood (Hendriks Vettehen et al., 2004; Jennings, 1996; Visser & Krosnick, 1998). Moreover, attitude strength and certainty are also higher during this period of life (Visser & Krosnick, 1998), which should also be reflected into higher attitudinal consistency. In what concerns gender, existing studies of belief systems' coherence have identified a negligible impact on measures of constraint (e.g. Barbet, 2020) or have found both positive and negative gender gaps depending on the dimension of constraint assessed (Hernández, 2019). While extant literature has documented lower levels of political sophistication and knowledge among women, differences by gender tend to be reduced when it concerns social policies (Ferrin et al., 2018; Kenski & Jamieson, 2000). Thus, for social policy consistency we might find a gender gap in favor of women, or little heterogeneity based on gender.

One of the factors most frequently addressed in relation to attitudinal consistency is educational attainment (Krosnick, 1990). People with higher levels of education are usually better capable and more motivated to form opinions on political issues. Moreover, education is also usually related to a higher ability to organize and process abstract ideas, which is also a

requirement for understanding policy reforms. Better educated individuals are usually more opinionated about politics, and their opinions are more likely to be coherently structured (Converse, 1964; Krosnick, 1990; Lupton et al., 2015).

Similarly, political sophistication and interest have been consistently associated to more articulated belief systems. Most people care little about politics and policy and, when asked about issue preferences, unsophisticated voters tend to provide top-of-the-head responses (Goren, 2013; Zaller, 1992). In contrast, those who are interested and think regularly about public affairs are better able to express and organize abstract ideas (Jewitt & Goren, 2016; Krosnick, 1990). Through direct and indirect exposure to political information they evaluate a wider range of issues than those who pay little attention to politics (Zaller, 1992). Hence, we expect less coherently structured social policy attitudes among those with lower levels of political interest.

Lastly, we also address heterogeneity in the consistency of belief systems by respondents' economic situation (as captured by income), since this is among the key foci of studies of welfare politics. Economic hardship places strains on citizens' cognitive resources and their motivation to seek information about public affairs (Marinova & Anduiza, 2020; Marx & Nguyen, 2016). Respondents under economic strain are also less likely to be exposed to information about politics and to process that information (Marinova & Marx, 2018). As a consequence, attitudinal constraint should be lower among them.

3. Data sources and measurement

3.1 New measures of welfare preferences

To address aggregate levels of welfare attitudinal consistency among citizens, as well as heterogeneity between them, we rely on novel data from the welfarepriorities project. Survey data was collected for 1,500 respondents in eight West European countries (Denmark, Sweden,

Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, United Kingdom, Italy and Spain). The target population was a country's adult population (>18 years), with quotas on age and sex (crossed), and educational attainment. The total sample includes 12,506 completed interviews that were conducted between October and December 2018. This dataset includes multiple items capturing social policy preferences, for which we can formulate clear theoretical expectations about how they should relate to each other (i.e. what constitutes (in)consistency).

The survey faced respondents with different questions and tasks that gauge welfare preferences for expansion and retrenchment across different social policy areas, and under different conditions. Important for the purpose of this paper, there are three types of measures on which we rely: *support* questions, *rating* (i.e. point distribution) tasks, and *tradeoff* questions.³

First, *support* questions generally enquired whether respondents would support welfare expansion and, separately, retrenchment in different policy areas. Support is measured by means of agreement (on a 4-point scale) with a statement proposing expansion or cutbacks of benefits in a certain area, like pensions or higher education. This type of question has been extensively used to capture citizens' preferences on different policies, and it places few demands on survey respondents. Cognitively, it is relatively simple to state (dis)agreement with whether benefits in an area should be generally expanded (or cut). In our analyses we rely on four *support* measures in two fields: support for increases and cutbacks of old age pensions, and of unemployment benefits. These *support* items were included at the beginning of the survey, where respondents were first asked to indicate support for the expansion of different fields, and subsequently about their support for retrenchment.

³ The exact wording of the items is presented in Appendix 1.

Second, *rating* tasks tap into more specific policy preferences. Individuals were asked to allocate a total of 100 points to six different social policy reforms, according to the relative importance they attribute to each of them. Two questions faced respondents with six expansionary reforms, in which allocating more points indicated higher support for the expansion of that specific reform. Another two questions faced respondents with six retrenchment reforms, in which allocating more points indicated support for the retrenchment of that policy. To illustrate this with an example, in one of the expansion scenarios, respondents distributed 100 points according to how much they prioritized welfare expansion in each of the following six areas: old age pensions, childcare, university education, unemployment benefits, labor market reintegration services, and services for the social and labor market integration of migrants. This type of question provides valuable information about how much respondents value expansion (or retrenchment) in an area relative to other, but it also places higher demands on them, since they have to evaluate these relative preferences across different reforms and distribute points accordingly.

Third, *tradeoff* questions asked respondents to state their agreement with a welfare reform in which increasing benefits in one policy area comes with the direct and explicit cost of a cutback in another policy. Respondents faced very concrete policy decisions. They were asked to indicate whether they thought these tradeoffs were completely unacceptable (1), rather unacceptable (2), rather acceptable (3), or completely acceptable (4). In subsequent analyses we rely on three tradeoff questions: (i) “*The government increases benefits for the unemployed, at a cost of slightly lowering the maximum old age pension benefits*”; (ii) “*The government increases the availability of childcare, at a cost of slightly lowering the maximum old age pension benefits*”; (iii) “*The government increases financial support for university students from low income families, at a cost of raising fees for students from middle and high income families*”.

The *rating* and *tradeoff* questions provide more information than generic *support* items, since they ask respondents to simultaneously evaluate preferences across different social policies and to factor in opportunity costs (in the *rating* task), and explicit costs (in *tradeoffs*). While these items make substantive inroads in bringing attitudinal survey questions on a par with the complex decisions to be made in mature welfare states, the question remains whether respondents hold (and are able to express) consistent preferences on such complex policy issues.

3.2. Measuring preference consistency

As we argue above, the consistency of political belief systems is a relational property of attitudes, hence it requires a theoretical framework that specifies, a priori, which attitudes should covary (i.e., “*what goes with what*”). The measures we implement to operationalize consistency are based on the premise that if individuals have a stable and coherent system of social policy preferences, particularly if they prioritize a certain policy field or reform (e.g. the expansion of pension benefits), this should be reflected in their responses across survey items that face them with different scenarios (whether a generic support measure, a rating task, or a tradeoff). Strictly, these measures allow us to address horizontal or ‘issue’ constraint, that is, consistency between concrete issue positions, but not their correspondence with more abstract beliefs, like, for example, ideology (Peffley & Hurwitz, 1985). We study two types of horizontal constraint or consistency: *logical* consistency, and *relational* consistency.

Logical consistency can be seen as the most elemental of the two measures, and only demands that citizens do not contradict themselves in the responses they provide. With this measure we assess that respondents not simultaneously report support for the expansion and retrenchment on the same policy field or reform. Entering such direct contradiction is illogical and constitutes a clear sign of lack of attitudinal constraint. Relying on the *support* items described

above, we compare responses to questions enquiring about preferences for the expansion and retrenchment of old-age pensions and unemployment benefits, and categorize as inconsistent replies those that support both the expansion and retrenchment in the same policy field. We employ a similar approach to operationalize a second measure of *logical* consistency based on the replies provided to the *rating* questions. Respondents face two tasks in which they rate their priorities for expansion and retrenchment along the same six policy fields. One task asks respondents to assign more points to welfare areas in which they prioritize expansion, and the other one asks them to attribute more points to areas in which they will accept retrenchment. For each social policy field we compute two dichotomous measures by social policy area: one captures support for expansion in that area, and another one support for retrenchment.⁴ As with the *support* items, we classify simultaneous preference for expansion and retrenchment in the same policy area as an inconsistent attitude. Due to the higher complexity of the rating task, this second measure of *logical* consistency imposes stronger requirements on respondents and is likely to return a greater number of inconsistent preferences.

In line with many previous analyses of attitudinal constraint, *relational* consistency assesses whether attitudes follow expected patterns of correlation. Our measure of *relational* consistency is based on the premise that if individuals clearly prioritize expansion (or

⁴ The dichotomous measure codes support for expansion (retrenchment) in a specific field if respondents allocate more than 17 points to expansion (retrenchment) in that field. Because respondents can distribute 100 points among six different policy fields, if they were indifferent between all of them, they should assign a maximum of 17 points ($100/6=16,\bar{6}$) for a specific policy field.

retrenchment) in a certain policy area or reform – e.g. when gauged against other measures, as in the rating task – this prioritization should be correlated to preferences concerning a policy tradeoff that involves that same area or reform. Take as an example a citizen who strongly prioritizes expanding unemployment benefits (i.e. assigns a high number of points to this field in the expansion rating question): we would expect her to be more likely to agree with a tradeoff that increases unemployment benefits at the cost of a reduction in the maximum old-age pension than another citizen who does not prioritize the expansion of unemployment benefits. If respondents hold articulated preferences, prioritizing a specific policy or reform in one question should be correlated with prioritization as reported in a different question. Thus, the second measure of *relational* constraint analyses the relationship between each of the two elements included in a tradeoff and their corresponding counterpart in the rating questions. This is a stricter assessment of attitudinal constraint since both the rating and tradeoff questions impose relatively high demands on citizens: they are asked to express their relative welfare preferences across different policy areas, in the face of opportunity or direct costs.

3.3. Correlates of consistency

We expect attitudinal consistency to be associated to certain individual characteristics. We study heterogeneity in relation to the socio-demographic factors age (measured in years), sex (male or female), and educational attainment (measured on five levels); to political interest (measured on a 4-point Likert scale); and to income (measured on ten deciles). A detailed description of all variables is included in Appendix 2. To estimate differences in attitudinal constraint along these factors we implement different modeling strategies, which we explain in further detail in the presentation of the results. We focus on how these different factors explain the number of logical inconsistencies reported by respondents, and on how they moderate the correlation between

preferences on the rating items and acceptability of the different tradeoffs. Moreover, across the different models, we include controls for country-fixed effects to account for disparities in levels of support for the different reforms across countries.

4. Results

4.1 Logical consistency in social policy preferences

To gauge the level of social policy attitudinal consistency, we start by presenting the results from a rather undemanding measure: the proportion of contradictory responses to the expansion and retrenchment *support* items. Table 1 reports the percentage of logically inconsistent respondents, who simultaneously express support for both the retrenchment and expansion on old-age pensions and unemployment benefits. Only a small portion of respondents, 3.68 percent on pensions and 4.52 percent on unemployment, enter the contradiction of supporting simultaneously expansion and retrenchment on the same policy field when asked separately about it. This is unsurprising given that these questions demand little from respondents: they do not entail comparing different policies or considering a cost.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents who support expansion and retrenchment in positional questions

		Opposition to retrenchment	Support for retrenchment
Old age pension benefits	Opposition to expansion	13.59	4.75
	Support for expansion	77.98	3.68
Unemployment benefits	Opposition to expansion	27.62	17.65
	Support for expansion	50.2	4.52

N= 12,236

Note: Cells report cell percentages by policy field (i.e. the four cells on old age pensions add up to the 100 percent total).

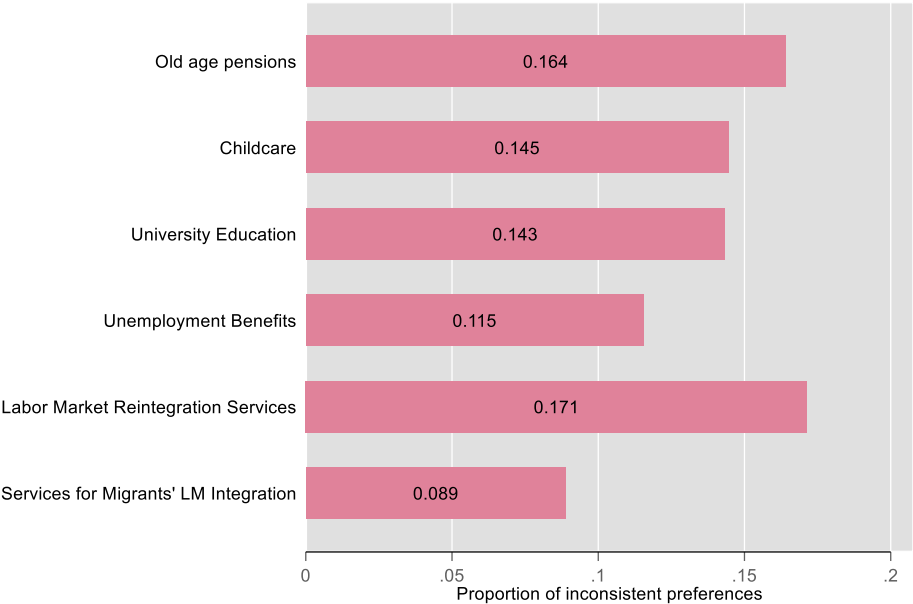
When, instead of the *support* items, we rely on the preferences elicited through *rating* tasks, which require that respondents consider different areas of policy expansion (or retrenchment) at the same time, we see an increase in the number of reported inconsistencies. Figure 1 presents the proportion of respondents reporting inconsistent preferences in the *rating* questions, across the six policy fields on which they were inquired. The measure is based on a dichotomization of the points attributed to each of the fields in the rating task. Because respondents can distribute 100 points among six different policy fields, we consider more than 17 points ($100/6=16,\bar{6}$) as a prioritization of expansion, respectively retrenchment) of that field. Responses that allocate more than 17 points to both retrenchment and expansion in the same policy field are coded as inconsistent. Relying on this more demanding measure of logical consistency increases the number of unconstrained or illogical attitudes. The lowest proportion of contradictory replies now amounts to 8.89 percent, for preferences concerning the expansion and retrenchment of services promoting the integration of migrants, and it rises up to the maximum of 17.14 percent, for labor market reintegration services.

Even if attitudinal consistency is lower when relying on information from the more stringent rating task, it is still less than a sixth of respondents who hold inconsistent preferences on any one of the six policy fields. Moreover, if we compute the number of fields (out of the six rated) in which respondents have expressed inconsistent preferences, an ample majority of the sample (about 76 percent) displays inconsistencies in, at most, one policy field.⁵ Inconsistent replies across the policy fields are fairly distributed, so that the majority of respondents display inconsistencies in one (or two) policy fields at most. Altogether, this information indicates that

⁵ The table in Appendix 3 presents how respondents are distributed by number of inconsistent responses provided.

most individuals hold consistent priorities over social policy, even when confronted with rating questions that force them to express relative preferences and to take into account opportunity costs.

Figure 1: Proportion of inconsistent responses to priority rating items



Note: Bars report the percentage of respondents providing logically inconsistent replies to support for the expansion and retrenchment of each of the six policy fields in the rating task.

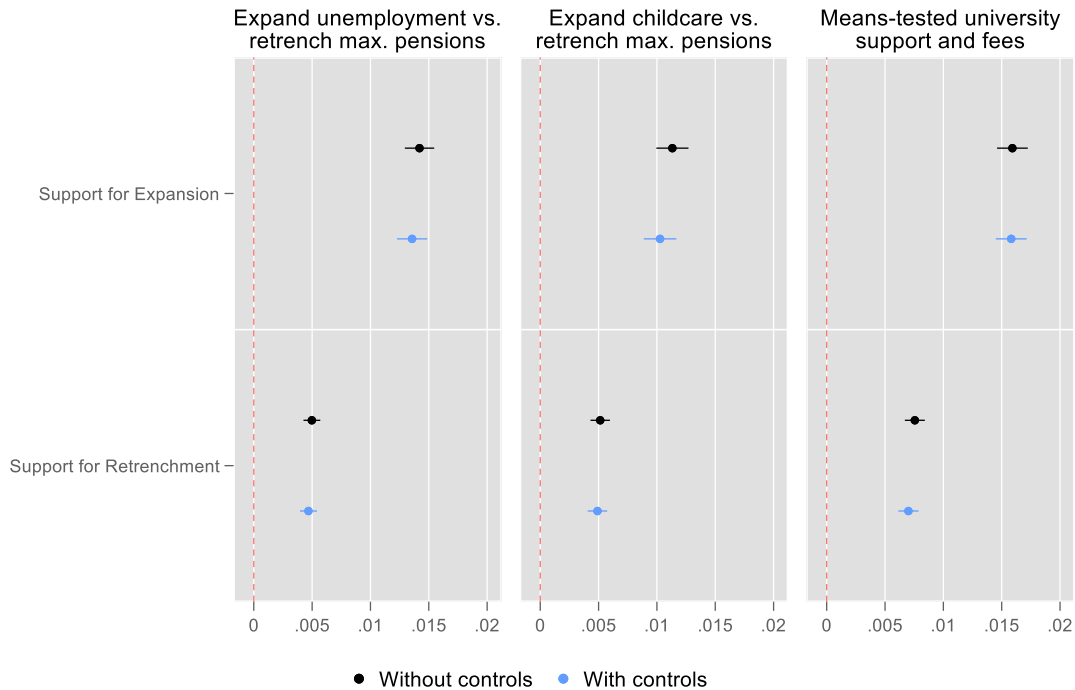
Additional analyses included in Appendix 4 study the correlation between the points allocated to the expansion and retrenchment of the same field. If individuals hold logically consistent attitudes, the correlation between preferences for expansion and retrenchment should be negative (higher support for expansion is paired with lower support for retrenchment) or zero. In contrast, a positive correlation would indicate a lack of consistency. It is important to note that a null association is not incoherent, because opposition to retrenchment does not necessarily imply a support of expansion and, vice versa, not supporting expansion does not necessarily entail preferring retrenchment. As shown in Appendix 4, overall, the relationship between prioritizing retrenchment and expansion is negative, and statistically significant at the 0.01 level. On average,

assigning one extra point to retrenchment on any policy field is associated to a reduction in the prioritization of expansion by 0.033 points (with slight differences across policy fields). Hence, this additional test indicates that individuals tend to hold logically consistent attitudes in what concerns benefit expansion and retrenchment.

4.2. Relational consistency in social policy preferences

To assess relational consistency, we rely again on the responses provided to the rating tasks, and we relate them to three tradeoffs of welfare reform. The first tradeoff faces respondents with the proposal to expand benefits for the unemployed, at the cost of lowering the maximum old-age pension benefits. The second one proposes to expand the availability of good-quality childcare at the cost of, again, lowering the maximum old-age pension benefits. The third one increases financial support for university students from low-income families, at the cost of raising fees for students from middle and high income families. For each of these tradeoffs, we have respondents' separate ratings of the two elements of the reform included in the tradeoff. If attitudes are well-structured these different preferences should be related. For example, a respondent who allocates many points (i.e. prioritizes) the expansion of unemployment benefits as well as many points (i.e. prioritizes) the retrenchment of the maximum old-age pension benefit, should be more likely to accept the first tradeoff. To assess the relationship between these preferences, we model acceptability of each of the tradeoffs (our outcome variable) on preferences concerning each of the constitutive elements of the tradeoffs by means of OLS regressions. We estimate one model assessing the correlation between these preferences without controls (other than the country fixed-effects) and a second model that introduces controls for age, sex, education, political interest and income.

Figure 2: Relationship between acceptability of a welfare policy tradeoff (between expansion and retrenchment) and preferences concerning the expansion and retrenchment element of the two social policies in the tradeoff



Note: OLS coefficients report how support for the expansion and retrenchment elements of the tradeoff (as reported in the rating items) relate to the acceptability of the tradeoffs. The model without controls includes only country-FE, while the second models include controls for age, sex, educational attainment, political interest and income. The full models are presented in Appendix 5.

Figure 2 displays how the preferences concerning each of the tradeoff elements relate to their acceptability. Overall, the results indicate that these attitudes tend to be coherently structured among respondents. As we would expect, prioritizing certain welfare expansions of unemployment benefits, of the availability of childcare, or of access to university among low-income families – increases the likelihood of accepting a tradeoff that expands these same policies. For every additional point attributed to expansion (out of a total of 100), acceptance of the tradeoff increases from 0.10 points (for the second tradeoff) to 0.16 in the third tradeoff. The strength of this

association is comparable to that corresponding to moving one decile down in the income distribution. Across the three items, the coefficient associated to the rating of expansion is larger – at least twice as large – than the coefficient associated to the cost. This would indicate that preferences for increasing the benefits are driving the willingness to accept the tradeoff to a larger extent than the acceptability of a specific cost.

4.2. Heterogeneity in attitudinal consistency in social policy preferences

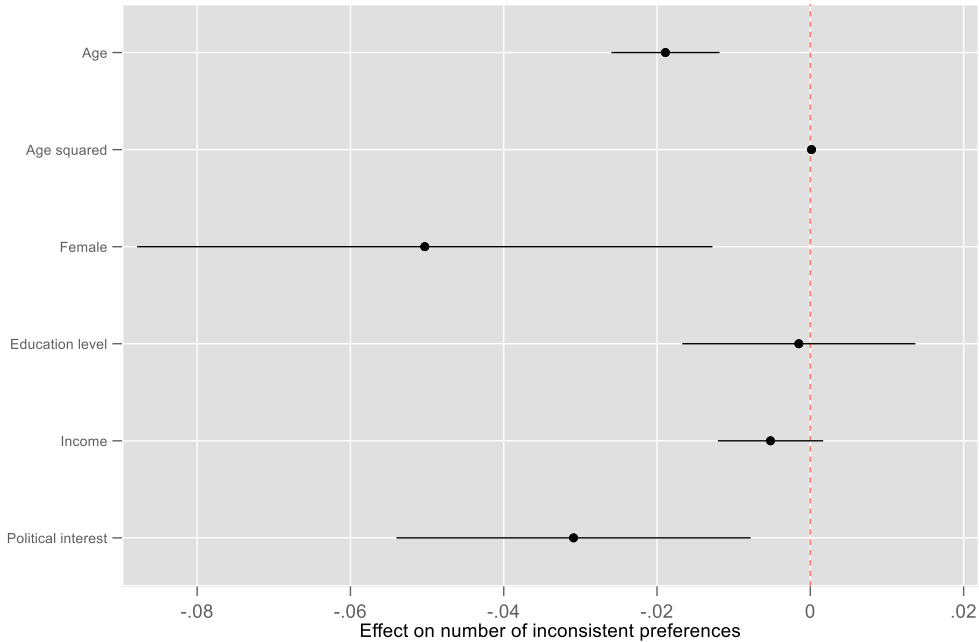
The results discussed above indicate that, overall, respondents tend to display consistent social policy attitudes. Contradictory preferences are rather infrequent, and replies to tradeoff scenarios are consistent with preferences expressed on separate items. However, there are reasons to expect attitudinal consistency to not be uniformly distributed among respondents. If heterogeneity in attitudinal structure is associated to some key socio-demographics or political factors, this could bias analyses of group differences on social policy issues.

In what concerns socio-demographic factors, we address differences in attitudinal consistency by age, gender, educational attainment and income, while in what concerns political factors we look at heterogeneity by political interest. Figures 3 and 4 below present, respectively, the results of studying heterogeneity in: (i) logical consistency, as captured by the total of contradictory replies provided in the rating questions⁶, and (ii) relational consistency in responses

⁶ The rating items inquired respondents about six different policy fields (as reflected in Figure 1), hence the number of contradictory replies can range from 0 (in none of the policy fields) to 6 (in all of them).

to the tradeoff and rating items. Figure 3 summarizes the results of an OLS regression modelling the number of logically inconsistent responses on the different individual-level factors.

Figure 3: Linear effects of socio-demographic characteristics on number of inconsistent preferences with 95 percent confidence intervals



Note: OLS coefficients report how the individual-level factors relate to the total number of logically inconsistent replies reported. The full models are presented in Appendix 6.

Figure 3 indicates that there are two demographic – age and gender – and one political factor – interest – systematically related to logical consistency. Moreover, the coefficient associated to squared age (presented in Appendix 6) is statistically significant at conventional levels, and the figure in Appendix 7 illustrates the non-linear nature of this relationship. In line with existing evidence about life-cycle effects, it is middle-aged individuals who display the highest levels of attitudinal coherence. In the sample under study, those aged 40 to 60 are the least likely to be logically inconsistent in their preferences for welfare expansion and retrenchment, as captured in their replies to the rating questions. In what concerns gender, the results indicate that

women display more logically consistent preferences than men. This is in line with previous evidence indicating that women perform better than men on concrete political knowledge items related to social policy.

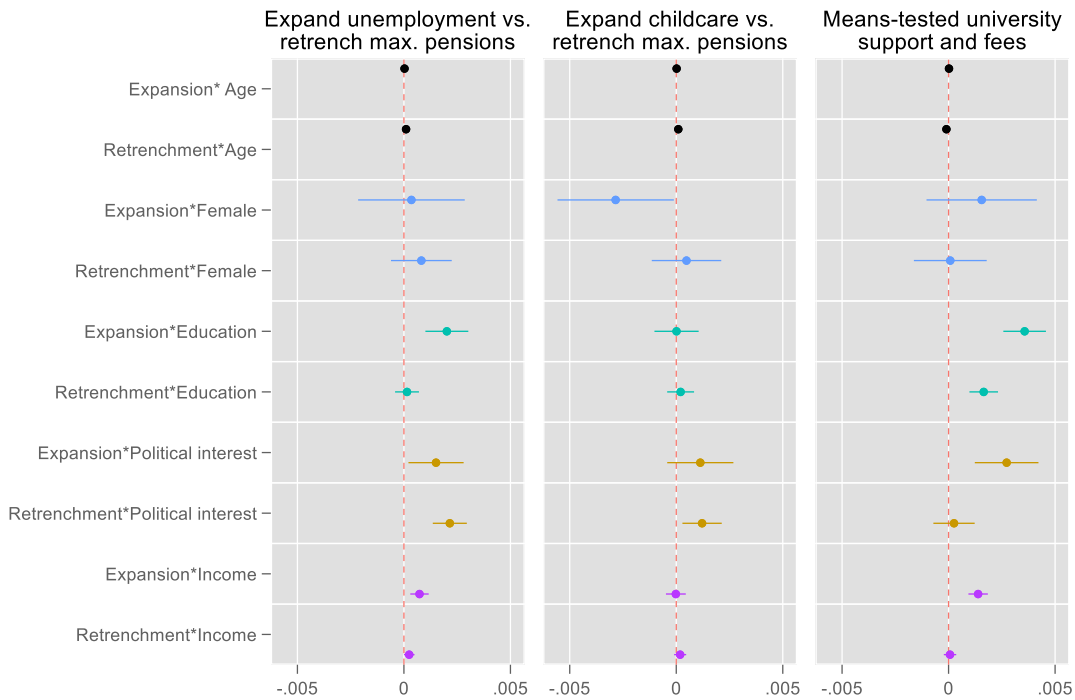
Along socio-demographic divisions, we expected to also find heterogeneity in logical consistency by educational attainment and income. However, there is no evidence that better-educated or high-income citizens are more likely to display logically consistent preferences than their less-educated and lower-income counterparts. Additional analyses (not shown) introduce further factors to account for potential exposure to economic difficulties (such as being unemployed, or being in temporary or involuntary part-time employment). These additional models do not indicate either that respondents under greater economic strain are more likely to hold inconsistent preferences. This is particularly reassuring since this kind of factors, corresponding to the socio-economic position of the individual, play a central role in explanations of social policy preferences.

Differences based on political interest are captured by the negative coefficient associated to this factor when explaining the number of contradictory replies. This indicates that, as we would expect, respondents with higher levels of political interest are less likely to report contradictory social policy preferences. Increasing political interest by one point (on the 4-points response scale) decreases the number of inconsistent replies by about 0.03 points. Overall, these analyses indicate that heterogeneity in logical consistency is related to only a few of socio-political factors, and that this heterogeneity is rather low.

We also address heterogeneity in relational consistency. To do so, we fit several interactive models that allow us to account for differences in how preferences for expansion and retrenchment, as expressed in the rating questions, are related to the acceptability of tradeoffs by socio-

demographic and political factors. We replicate the regression analyses behind figure 2 and introduce, step-wise, interaction coefficients between each individual characteristic and preferences for expansion and retrenchment.⁷ Figure 4 summarizes the results from these analyses. Overall, there are few differences in the structuration of social policy priorities along respondents' characteristics.

Figure 4: Socio-economic heterogeneity in the relationship between acceptability of a welfare policy tradeoff (between expansion and retrenchment) and preferences concerning the expansion and retrenchment of the two social policies in the tradeoff



Note: OLS coefficients report how the individual-level factors moderate the relationship between preferences for expansion and retrenchment (i.e. each of the elements of the tradeoff), and acceptability of the tradeoff. Interactions are introduced step-wise in different models, and all models introduce individual-level controls. The full models are presented in Appendix 8.

⁷ The coefficients from the different estimations are presented in Appendix 8.

On age differences, we find some evidence of older respondents holding more consistent attitudes. Preferences concerning the retrenchment element of the tradeoff are more strongly related to the acceptability of the tradeoff for older respondents. This interactive coefficient between the retrenchment rating and age is significant for all three tradeoffs, the two that ask about retrenching the maximum old-age pensions but also the last tradeoff concerning the expansion of support for university education for students from low-income backgrounds at the cost of higher fees for higher-income students. Hence, this stronger consistency among older respondents is not exclusively related to the topic of pensions (which could be related to older respondents' self-interest).

While women displayed signs of higher logical consistency, these gender differences are not replicated for relational consistency. There are no systematic differences by gender, and in the only case in which one of the interactive coefficients reaches conventional levels of statistical significance, it rather indicates that men have more constrained preferences in what concerns the expansion of childcare, and improving it at the cost of pensions. However, this difference is rather small and only significant at the 5% level.

There is some indication that higher educated respondents hold more consistent priorities, their prioritization of expansion of unemployment benefits is more strongly related to their acceptance of the unemployment benefits vs. maximum pension tradeoff, and their prioritization of means-tested measures for higher education is also more strongly related to their acceptance of this last tradeoff. However, there are no systematic differences for the tradeoff pitting childcare against maximum pensions. On income we also find rather few differences, only apparent for the expansion elements of the unemployment vs. maximum pensions, and the means-tested university support tradeoffs.

Political interest is the only factor for which we find some relevant heterogeneity across the three tradeoffs. The acceptability of the unemployment benefits vs. maximum pension tradeoff is more strongly related to preferences for the expansion of unemployment benefits and the retrenchment of the maximum pension for more politically interested respondents. In the childcare vs. pensions tradeoff, we see a similar interaction with political interest for the retrenchment of maximum pensions, but not for supporting the expansion of childcare. Finally, favoring greater support for the university education of lower-income students is also more strongly related to the acceptability of the third tradeoff among the more politically interested.

Overall, the analyses indicate that, while, there is certain heterogeneity in the articulation of social policy belief systems, these differences tend to be rather small. Political interest appears as the factor more consistently associated to higher logical and relational consistency.

5. Robustness checks

Our survey is not the only one to have included relatively demanding policy tradeoffs in the area of social policy. The special module on social policy of round 8 of the ESS as well as the INVEDUC survey (Busemeyer et al., 2017) introduced similarly designed items, in which respondents were faced with the option of expanding social policy benefits at the explicit cost of either retrenchment in other welfare areas or an increase in taxation. For example, the ESS measured support for introducing extra social benefits and services for working parents at the cost of raising taxes. INVEDUC measured support, e.g., for spending more on education and families, at the cost of cutbacks in old age pensions and unemployment benefits. Because these surveys also include separate items that allow us to capture unconditional agreement with each of the elements of the tradeoff, we are able to conduct similar analyses to those presented in Figures 2 and 4. This allows us to test whether the signs of consistency reported above are replicated on alternative

samples, which, moreover, were fielded implementing different modes of data collection: CATI for INVEDUC, and CAPI for the ESS (in comparison to our CAWI fieldwork).

The results presented in appendices 9 and 10 are in line with our findings. The willingness to accept a tradeoff is associated to the preferences concerning each of the elements in it also in the ESS and INVEDUC data. Higher support for the benefits increase agreement with the tradeoff, while disliking the cost reduces it. These alternative tests provide further evidence that respondents are able to provide meaningful answers to this type of tradeoff questions.

Appendices 9 and 10 also address differences in attitudinal consistency across individuals. The results from the interactive models conducted on ESS data mostly confirm our conclusions. Political interest appears as the most consistent factor associated to higher relational consistency. Highly educated and higher income respondents also display more consistent preferences in one of the tradeoffs analyzed. The analyses on INVEDUC data do not allow us to test the relationship to political interest, but they generally indicate that heterogeneity across socio-economic factors is rather low, since most of the interactive coefficients do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

6. Conclusion

Mass policy opinion plays a central role in analyses of welfare politics. Social policy analyses of micro-level preferences have become increasingly specific to reflect the context of welfare reform more adequately – for example, by taking into consideration welfare recalibration. Recent advances have implemented very concrete measurement strategies where, for example, respondents have had to express their preferences regarding welfare reform packages varying on several dimensions (Bremer & Bürgisser, 2022; Gallego & Marx, 2016; Häusermann et al., 2019).

Despite these advances, our study is the first to address whether citizens report consistent preferences on these issues when faced with questions of such complexity. Early research on the structuration of belief systems raised concerns about the ability of the electorate to hold coherently structured political attitudes (Converse, 1964). Relying on the notion of belief systems' attitudinal constraint, in this paper we have tested two dimensions of consistency (logical and relational), by relying on different measures of social policy preferences (from simpler to increasingly more complex items). Our, novel survey data, implementing different instruments to gauge social policy preferences, has allowed us to tackle the question of attitudinal consistency, which replicate with other similar datasets (ESS and INVEDUC).

Our analyses indicate that citizens hold rather structured and consistent preferences even when they concern specific and complex policy issues involving tradeoffs, opportunity or direct costs. As we would expect, levels of consistency are higher when assessed on less cognitively demanding items – e.g. only 3.7 percent of respondents provided logically inconsistent replies to general questions of support for the expansion and retrenchment of old age pensions. Yet, the number of inconsistent responses is also relatively low when relying on more complex measures. Moreover, even when respondents do manifest inconsistent attitudes, it tends to be on a small number of policy issues. Overall, most respondents express coherent preferences on most social policy issues. Relational consistency also indicates that attitudes referring to different types of reform (with different relative and direct costs) display expected patterns of association.

The second part of the analyses revealed some heterogeneity in how individuals with different characteristics articulate their social policy preferences, although these differences are generally not large. In line with earlier studies of belief systems, political interest is most consistently related to attitudinal constraint: respondents with higher interest in public affairs

display higher logical and relational consistency. Other factors like age, gender or educational attainment appear related to some of the indicators used, but the relationships are less consistent than the ones observed for interest. More importantly, income – a factor frequently related to welfare preferences – does not underlie substantive differences in attitudinal consistency, at least when controlling for political interest. This is a reassuring finding, since heterogeneity along this factor could undermine studies of how economic circumstances affect social policy attitudes. These results, and robustness tests with additional data, increase our confidence in the development and implementation of more specific measures of social policy preferences, including items with explicit and implicit costs, or direct tradeoffs.

These analyses provide key insights for existing and future studies of mass policy opinion on welfare reform, but also in other policy areas. The low levels of inconsistency identified (and the lack of heterogeneity therein) support recent efforts matching the complexity of policy questions asked to respondents, with the kinds of tradeoffs and dilemmas faced by political elites. However, researchers must bear in mind that asking more complex questions will inevitably increase the likelihood of eliciting inconsistent attitudes from respondents (as seen in the comparison between general support and rating items), which could be more unstable (Converse, 1964). Hence, increasing the complexity of measurement strategies should be accompanied with additional efforts to assess attitudinal constraint and potential differences in it. Beyond the implications for measurement strategies, the high degree of consistency in citizens' attitudes reinforces the relevance of public opinion in studies of welfare reform. Attitudinal constraint is a clear prerequisite for these preferences to be consequential for political behavior or evaluations of accountability. A minimum level of attitudinal constraint is one of the first conditions for respondents to base other preferences or behavior on them.

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Appendix 1: Wording of survey questions on social policy preferences

Support questions

To what extent do you agree with the following policy reform proposals? The government should...

... increase old age pension benefits

... increase unemployment benefits

- 1 Disagree strongly
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Agree
- 4 Agree strongly

To what extent do you agree with the following policy reform proposals? The government should...

... reduce old age pension benefits

... reduce unemployment benefits

- 1 Disagree strongly
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Agree
- 4 Agree strongly

Tradeoff questions

Please imagine that the government wants to improve certain social benefits. However, it can only do so by cutting back on other social benefits. To what extent do you find the following cutbacks acceptable in comparison to the improvement they allow?

The government...

... increases benefits for the unemployed, at a cost of slightly lowering the maximum old age pension benefits.

... increases the availability of good-quality childcare, at the cost of slightly lowering the maximum old age pension benefits.

... increases financial support for university students from low income families, at a cost of raising fees for students from middle and high income families.

- 1 Completely unacceptable
- 2 Rather unacceptable
- 3 Rather acceptable
- 4 Completely acceptable

Rating tasks

Imagine that the government had the means to increase some social benefits, but not all of them. Which of the following improvements of social benefits do you consider most important? You can allocate 100 points. Give more points to those improvements that you consider more important and fewer points to the ones you consider less important.

The government should ...

... increase the minimum level of old age pension benefits

... increase old age pension benefits for everyone

... increase the availability of good-quality childcare services only for lower-income families

... increase the availability of good-quality childcare services for everyone

... expand access to good quality university education for all students

... expand access to good quality university education only for students from lower-income families

___ [box to write down number]

Now imagine that the government had the means to improve benefits in some social policy fields, but not in all of them. You can allocate 100 points. Give more points to those fields in which you consider benefit improvement more important, and fewer points to those areas in which you consider benefit improvement less important.

Old age pensions

Childcare

University education

Unemployment benefits

Labour market reintegration services

Services for the social and labour market integration of immigrants

___ [box to write down number]

Imagine the government had to cut back on some social benefits, but not on all of them. Which of the following reductions of social benefits do you find most acceptable? You can allocate 100 points. Give

more points to those reductions that you consider more acceptable and fewer points to the ones that you find less acceptable.

... reduce old age pension benefits for everyone

... reduce only the maximum level of old age pension benefits, but preserve the minimum level as it is

... increase the fees for public childcare services only for middle- and higher-income families

... increase the fees for public childcare services for everyone

... increase student fees for university education except for students from lower-income families

... increase student fees for university education

___ [box to write down number]

Now finally imagine the government had to cut back benefits in some social policy fields, but not in all of them. You can allocate 100 points. Give more points to those fields in which you would find a reduction of benefits more acceptable, and fewer points to those areas in which you would find reductions less acceptable.

Old age pensions

Childcare

University education

Unemployment benefits

Labour market reintegration services

Services for the social and labour market integration of immigrants

___ [box to write down number]

Appendix 2: Coding and descriptive statistics of variables in analyses

Variable	Wording / coding	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dependent variables					
Tradeoff 1	Expansion of unemployment benefits vs. retrenching maximum pensions (1=Completely unacceptable, 2=Rather unacceptable, 3=Rather acceptable, 4=Completely acceptable)	2.078	0.954	1	4
Tradeoff 2	Expansion of childcare benefits vs. retrenching maximum pensions (1=Completely unacceptable, 2=Rather unacceptable, 3=Rather acceptable, 4=Completely acceptable)	2.110	0.950	1	4
Tradeoff 3	Expansion of financial support for university students from low income families vs. raising fees for middle and high income families (1=Completely unacceptable, 2=Rather unacceptable, 3=Rather acceptable, 4=Completely acceptable)	2.744	0.873	1	4
Number of inconsistent preferences	Number of inconsistent preferences reported in the rating tasks. Inconsistent= simultaneous high rating (above 17 points) of expansion and retrenchment of the same policy field	0.828	1.035	0	6
Independent variables					
Rating expanding unemployment benefits	Points attributed to expanding unemployment benefits in the rating question	14.470	12.318	0	100
Rating retrenching maximum pension benefits	Points attributed to retrenching only the maximum level of old age pension benefits, but preserving the minimum level as it is	21.708	21.658	0	100
Rating expanding childcare	Points attributed to expanding the availability of good-quality childcare services for everyone	14.341	12.718	0	100
Rating expanding university for low-income students	Points attributed to expanding access to good quality university education only for students from lower-income families	13.506	11.454	0	100
Rating retrenching university for high-income students	Points attributed to increasing student fees for university education except for students from lower-income families	20.578	17.488	0	100
Age	Age in years	48.678	16.615	18	108
Female	Respondents' sex (0=male, 1=female)	0.516	0.499	0	1
Education	Maximum education level attained (1=Lower secondary or lower , 2=Upper secondary, 3=Post-secondary and short-cycle tertiary, 4=Bachelor's or equivalent, 5=Master's and doctoral)	2.627	1.298	1	5
Political interest	Reported political interest (1=Not at all interested, 2=Hardly interested, 3=Quite interested, 4=Very interest)	2.672	0.851	1	4

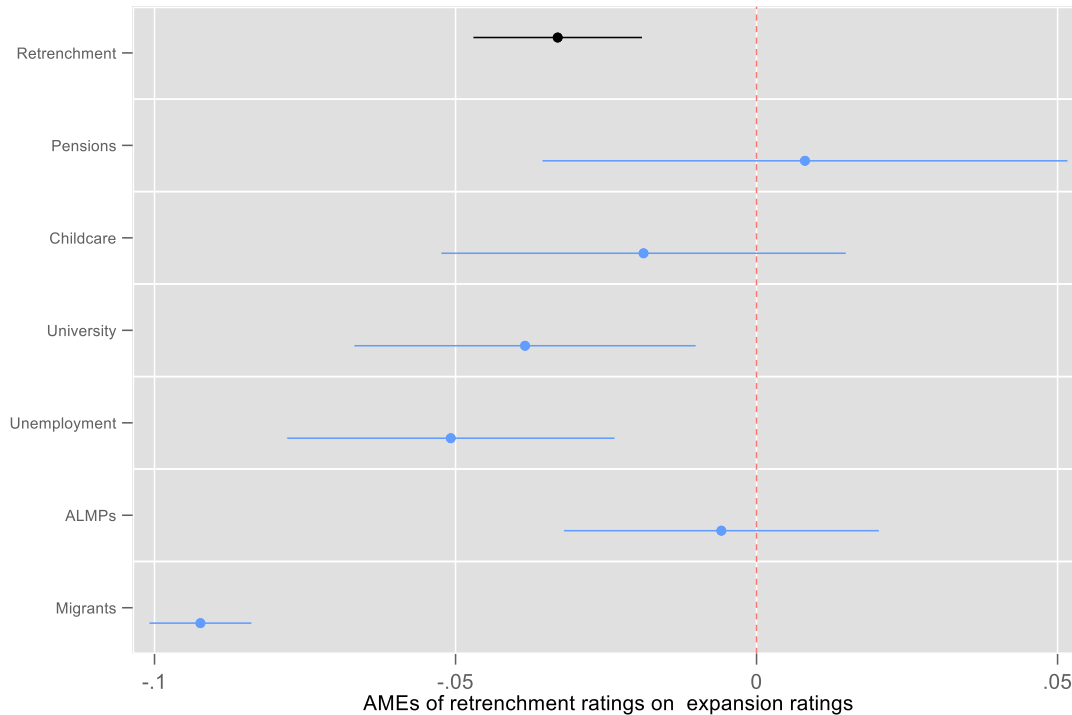
Income	Reported income, categorized in 10 country-specific income deciles	5.351	2.864	1	10
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Appendix 3: Number of inconsistent replies provided by respondents
Table A.3. Sum of inconsistent responses to priority rating items

Number of inconsistent responses	Percentage of respondents with inconsistent priorities
0	50.49
1	26.67
2	14.84
3	5.92
4	1.75
5	0.33
6	0.00

N= 12,501

Appendix 4: Correlation between preferences for expansion and retrenchment (from rating tasks)



Note: Coefficients from one OLS model regressing the rating of expansion (of each of the fields) on the rating of retrenchment (of the respective field). The data was stacked at the policy field level (ending up with six observations for each individual respondent). The model was estimated with clustered errors at the individual level. Each observation (line) corresponds to one of the six policy fields that respondents rated according to their prioritization of expansion and retrenchment. The field-specific coefficients indicate the correlation between preferences for expansion and retrenchment on that specific field, the generic coefficient for Retrenchment summarizes the overall correlation between preferences for expansion and retrenchment.

Appendix 5: Rating of expansion and retrenchment elements of a tradeoff as determinants of preferences on the respective tradeoff (additive OLS estimation)

	Expand unemployment vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand unemployment vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand childcare vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand childcare vs. retrench max. pensions	Means-tested university support and fees	Means-tested university support and fees
Expansion element of the tradeoff	0.014*** (0.001)	0.014*** (0.001)	0.011*** (0.001)	0.010*** (0.001)	0.016*** (0.001)	0.016*** (0.001)
Retrenchment element of the tradeoff	0.005*** (0.000)	0.005*** (0.000)	0.005*** (0.000)	0.005*** (0.000)	0.008*** (0.000)	0.007*** (0.000)
Age		-0.006*** (0.000)		-0.009*** (0.001)		0.004*** (0.000)
Female		-0.074*** (0.016)		-0.102*** (0.018)		-0.097*** (0.015)
Educational attainment		0.038*** (0.007)		0.021** (0.007)		-0.022*** (0.006)
Income		-0.020*** (0.003)		-0.011*** (0.003)		-0.026*** (0.003)
Political interest		0.032** (0.010)		0.006 (0.011)		0.044*** (0.009)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	1.365*** (0.025)	1.636*** (0.046)	1.487*** (0.025)	1.996*** (0.048)	2.224*** (0.024)	2.164*** (0.043)
<i>N</i>	12142	11787	9102	8828	12142	11787
<i>R</i> ²	0.191	0.208	0.227	0.255	0.096	0.115

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

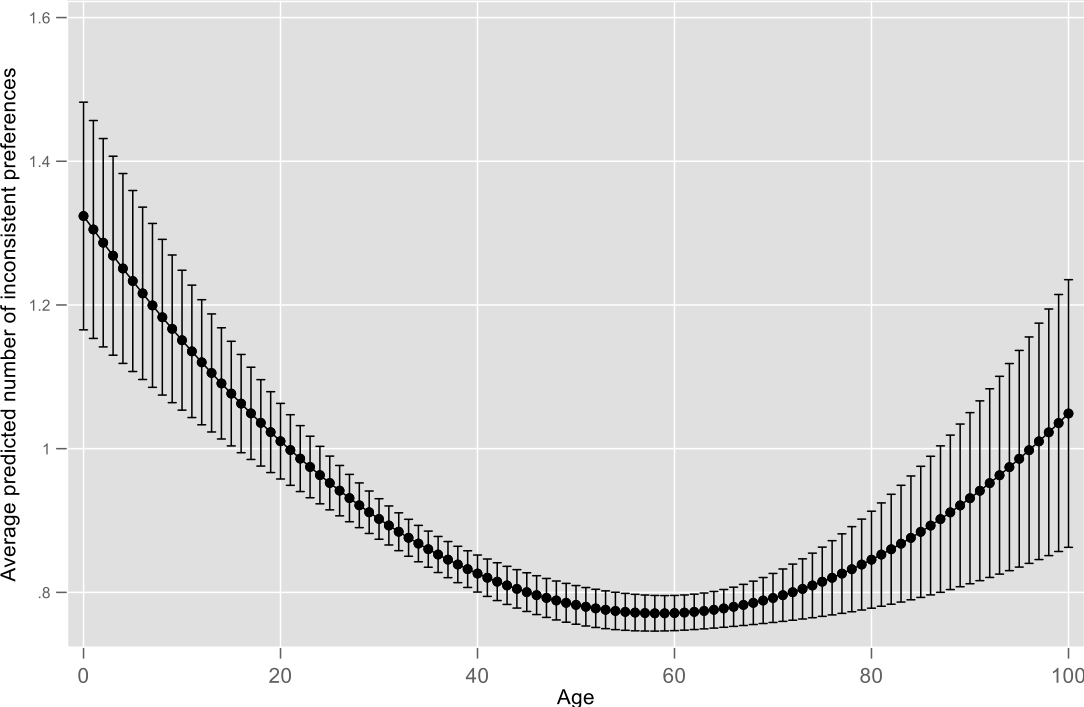
Appendix 6: Correlates of logical consistency (additive OLS estimation)

	Number of inconsistent preferences
Age	-0.019*** (0.004)
Age squared	0.000*** (0.000)
Female	-0.050** (0.019)
Educational attainment	-0.001 (0.008)
Income	-0.005 (0.004)
Political interest	-0.031** (0.012)
Country fixed effects	✓
Constant	1.375*** (0.090)
<i>N</i>	12143
<i>R</i> ²	0.012

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix 7: Curvilinear relationship between age and number of inconsistent preferences reported (predicted values with 95% confidence intervals)



Note: Figure based on estimation reported in Appendix 6.

Appendix 8: Correlates of relational consistency (OLS models with interactions)

Table A.8.1. Tradeoff expanding unemployment at the cost of retrenching maximum pensions

	Expand unemployment vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand unemployment vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand unemployment vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand unemployment vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand unemployment vs. retrench max. pensions
Support for Expansion	0.012*** (0.002)	0.013*** (0.001)	0.009*** (0.001)	0.010*** (0.002)	0.010*** (0.001)
Support for Retrenchment	-0.000 (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
Support for Expansion X Age	0.000 (0.000)				
Support for Retrenchment X Age	0.000*** (0.000)				
Support for Expansion X Female		0.000 (0.001)			
Support for Retrenchment X Female		0.001 (0.001)			
Support for Expansion X Education			0.002*** (0.001)		
Support for Retrenchment X Education			0.000 (0.000)		
Support for Expansion X Political interest				0.002* (0.001)	
Support for Retrenchment X Political interest				0.002*** (0.000)	
Support for Expansion X Income					0.001*** (0.000)
Support for Retrenchment X Income					0.000* (0.000)
Age	-0.008*** (0.001)	-0.006*** (0.000)	-0.006*** (0.000)	-0.006*** (0.000)	-0.006*** (0.000)

Female	-0.075 ^{***} (0.016)	-0.097 ^{**} (0.030)	-0.075 ^{***} (0.016)	-0.075 ^{***} (0.016)	-0.075 ^{***} (0.016)
Educational attainment	0.038 ^{***} (0.007)	0.038 ^{***} (0.007)	0.006 (0.012)	0.037 ^{***} (0.007)	0.037 ^{***} (0.007)
Political interest	0.032 ^{**} (0.010)	0.032 ^{**} (0.010)	0.031 ^{**} (0.010)	-0.038 [*] (0.017)	0.033 ^{***} (0.010)
Income	-0.020 ^{***} (0.003)	-0.020 ^{***} (0.003)	-0.020 ^{***} (0.003)	-0.019 ^{***} (0.003)	-0.036 ^{***} (0.005)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	1.763 ^{***} (0.059)	1.648 ^{***} (0.048)	1.719 ^{***} (0.053)	1.817 ^{***} (0.058)	1.717 ^{***} (0.051)
Observations	11787	11787	11787	11787	11787
R^2	0.209	0.208	0.209	0.210	0.209

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A.8.2. Tradeoff expanding childcare at the cost of retrenching maximum pensions

	Expand childcare vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand childcare vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand childcare vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand childcare vs. retrench max. pensions	Expand childcare vs. retrench max. pensions
Support for Expansion	0.009*** (0.002)	0.012*** (0.001)	0.010*** (0.002)	0.007** (0.002)	0.010*** (0.002)
Support for Retrenchment	0.000 (0.001)	0.005*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)
Support for Expansion X Age	0.000 (0.000)				
Support for Retrenchment X Age	0.000*** (0.000)				
Support for Expansion X Female		-0.003* (0.001)			
Support for Retrenchment X Female		0.000 (0.001)			
Support for Expansion X Education			0.000 (0.001)		
Support for Retrenchment X Education			0.000 (0.000)		
Support for Expansion X Political interest				0.001 (0.001)	
Support for Retrenchment X Political interest				0.001** (0.000)	
Support for Expansion X Income					-0.000 (0.000)
Support for Retrenchment X Income					0.000 (0.000)
Age	-0.011*** (0.001)	-0.009*** (0.001)	-0.009*** (0.001)	-0.009*** (0.001)	-0.009*** (0.001)
Female	-0.102*** (0.018)	-0.071* (0.031)	-0.101*** (0.018)	-0.101*** (0.018)	-0.101*** (0.018)

Educational attainment	0.021** (0.007)	0.021** (0.007)	0.016 (0.012)	0.021** (0.007)	0.021** (0.007)
Political interest	0.006 (0.011)	0.006 (0.011)	0.006 (0.011)	-0.035+ (0.018)	0.006 (0.011)
Income	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.015** (0.006)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	2.109*** (0.062)	1.980*** (0.050)	2.008*** (0.055)	2.108*** (0.063)	2.015*** (0.054)
Observations	8828	8828	8828	8828	8828
R^2	0.256	0.255	0.255	0.256	0.255

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A.8.3. Tradeoff expanding support for the university education of low income students vs. increasing fees for middle- and high-income students

	Expand support for low-income vs. higher fees for high- income	Expand support for low-income vs. higher fees for high- income	Expand support for low-income vs. higher fees for high- income	Expand support for low-income vs. higher fees for high- income	Expand support for low-income vs. higher fees for high- income
Support for Expansion	0.015*** (0.002)	0.015*** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.009*** (0.002)	0.009*** (0.001)
Support for Retrenchment	0.012*** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.001)	0.003** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.001)	0.007*** (0.001)
Support for Expansion X Age	0.000 (0.000)				
Support for Retrenchment X Age	-0.000*** (0.000)				
Support for Expansion X Female		0.002 (0.001)			
Support for Retrenchment X Female		0.000 (0.001)			
Support for Expansion X Education			0.004*** (0.001)		
Support for Retrenchment X Education			0.002*** (0.000)		
Support for Expansion X Political interest				0.003*** (0.001)	
Support for Retrenchment X Political interest				0.000 (0.000)	
Support for Expansion X Income					0.001*** (0.000)
Support for Retrenchment X Income					0.000 (0.000)
Age	0.006*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)	0.004*** (0.000)
Female	-0.097*** (0.015)	-0.120*** (0.029)	-0.096*** (0.015)	-0.097*** (0.015)	-0.095*** (0.015)

Educational attainment	-0.022 ^{***} (0.006)	-0.022 ^{***} (0.006)	-0.104 ^{***} (0.011)	-0.022 ^{***} (0.006)	-0.022 ^{***} (0.006)
Political interest	0.045 ^{***} (0.009)	0.044 ^{***} (0.009)	0.045 ^{***} (0.009)	0.002 (0.017)	0.044 ^{***} (0.009)
Income	-0.026 ^{***} (0.003)	-0.026 ^{***} (0.003)	-0.026 ^{***} (0.003)	-0.026 ^{***} (0.003)	-0.046 ^{***} (0.005)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	2.084 ^{***} (0.056)	2.177 ^{***} (0.045)	2.384 ^{***} (0.050)	2.276 ^{***} (0.057)	2.275 ^{***} (0.049)
Observations	11787	11787	11787	11787	11787
R^2	0.116	0.115	0.120	0.116	0.117

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix 9: Robustness checks with European Social Survey data
Tradeoff: Spending more on education for the unemployed at the cost of cutbacks in unemployment benefits

	Education for unemployed vs. Unemp. benefits	Education for unemployed vs. Unemp. benefits	Education for unemployed vs. Unemp. benefits	Education for unemployed vs. Unemp. benefits	Education for unemployed vs. Unemp. benefits	Education for unemployed vs. Unemp. benefits
Expand standard of living unemployed	-0.034*** (0.002)	-0.041*** (0.005)	-0.034*** (0.003)	-0.030*** (0.004)	-0.040*** (0.004)	-0.028*** (0.003)
Age	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)
Female	-0.018* (0.008)	-0.018* (0.008)	-0.023 (0.025)	-0.018* (0.008)	-0.018* (0.008)	-0.018* (0.008)
Educational attainment	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.005 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)
Income	0.014*** (0.002)	0.014*** (0.002)	0.014*** (0.002)	0.014*** (0.002)	0.006 (0.005)	0.014*** (0.002)
Political interest	0.000 (0.005)	0.000 (0.005)	0.000 (0.005)	0.000 (0.005)	0.000 (0.005)	0.029* (0.014)
Expand standard of living unemployed X Age		0.000 (0.000)				
Expand standard of living unemployed X Female			0.001 (0.003)			
Expand standard of living unemployed X Educational attainment				-0.001 (0.001)		
Expand standard of living unemployed X Income					0.001+ (0.001)	

Expand standard of living unemployed X Political interest						-0.004* (0.002)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	2.748*** (0.028)	2.795*** (0.043)	2.750*** (0.031)	2.722*** (0.038)	2.788*** (0.036)	2.705*** (0.034)
Observations	33934	33934	33934	33934	33934	33934
R ²	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: Preferences for the tradeoff are measured on a four-point scale (1=Strongly against, 2=Against, 3=In favour, 4=Strongly in favour). An independent measure of the elements of the tradeoff is only available for the cost. This variable captures whether respondents think it is the governments' responsibility to secure a standard of living for the unemployed (measured on a 0-10 scale in which higher values indicate that it is the governments' responsibility). Hence, a negative correlation entails higher attitudinal consistency.

Tradeoff: Spending more on benefits for parents to combine work and family at the cost of higher taxes

	Benefits for working parents vs. Higher taxes	Benefits for working parents vs. Higher taxes	Benefits for working parents vs. Higher taxes	Benefits for working parents vs. Higher taxes	Benefits for working parents vs. Higher taxes	Benefits for working parents vs. Higher taxes
Childcare govts' responsibility	0.064*** (0.002)	0.050*** (0.006)	0.066*** (0.003)	0.048*** (0.005)	0.047*** (0.004)	0.048*** (0.004)
Social benefits cost businesses too much taxes	0.030*** (0.004)	0.085*** (0.011)	0.024*** (0.005)	-0.012 (0.009)	0.007 (0.008)	0.008 (0.007)
Age	-0.001*** (0.000)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)
Female	0.012 (0.008)	0.012 (0.008)	0.007 (0.037)	0.011 (0.008)	0.011 (0.008)	0.012 (0.008)
Educational attainment	0.003 (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	-0.058*** (0.010)	0.004 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)
Income	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.038*** (0.007)	0.001 (0.002)
Political interest	0.012* (0.005)	0.011* (0.005)	0.012* (0.005)	0.012* (0.005)	0.012* (0.005)	-0.116*** (0.020)
Childcare govts' responsibility X Age		0.000* (0.000)				
Social benefits cost businesses too much taxes X Age		-0.001*** (0.000)				
Childcare govts' responsibility X Female			-0.004 (0.004)			
Social benefits cost businesses too much taxes X Female			0.013+ (0.007)			
Childcare govts' responsibility X Educational attainment				0.004*** (0.001)		

Social benefits cost businesses too much taxes X Educational attainment				0.010*** (0.002)		
Childcare govts' responsibility X Income					0.003*** (0.001)	
Social benefits cost businesses too much taxes X Income					0.004** (0.001)	
Childcare govts' responsibility X Political interest						0.011*** (0.002)
Social benefits cost businesses too much taxes X Political interest						0.014*** (0.004)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	1.940*** (0.032)	1.877*** (0.060)	1.943*** (0.036)	2.194*** (0.051)	2.143*** (0.047)	2.134*** (0.043)
Observations	32235	32235	32235	32235	32235	32235
R ²	0.069	0.070	0.069	0.070	0.070	0.070

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: Preferences for the tradeoff are measured on a four-point scale (1=Strongly against, 2=Against, 3=In favour, 4=Strongly in favour). The independent measure for the expansion element captures whether respondents think it is the governments' responsibility to provide child care services for working parents (measured on a 0-10 scale in which higher values indicate that it is the governments' responsibility). Hence, a positive correlation entails attitudinal consistency. The independent measure for the cost element captures whether respondents agree with the statement that social benefits/services cost too much in taxes/charges (measured on a five-point scale: 1=Agree strongly, 2=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Disagree strongly). Hence, a negative correlation entails attitudinal consistency.

Appendix 10: Robustness checks with INVEDUC data

Tradeoff: Spending more on education at the cost of reducing spending in old age pensions

	Expansion education vs. Pensions	Expansion education vs. Pensions	Expansion education vs. Pensions	Expansion education vs. Pensions	Expansion education vs. Pensions
Spending in education	0.340*** (0.037)	0.421*** (0.124)	0.436*** (0.052)	0.201* (0.087)	0.259*** (0.077)
Spending in old age pensions	-0.360*** (0.039)	-0.386** (0.130)	-0.379*** (0.054)	-0.272** (0.089)	-0.278*** (0.080)
Age	0.008*** (0.002)	0.010 (0.007)	0.008*** (0.002)	0.008*** (0.002)	0.008*** (0.002)
Female	0.015 (0.049)	0.016 (0.049)	0.305 (0.215)	0.012 (0.049)	0.012 (0.050)
Educational attainment	-0.055** (0.018)	-0.055** (0.018)	-0.055** (0.018)	-0.077 (0.067)	-0.056** (0.018)
Income	-0.012 (0.020)	-0.012 (0.020)	-0.012 (0.020)	-0.013 (0.020)	0.003 (0.081)
Spending in education X Age		-0.001 (0.002)			
Spending in old age pensions X Age		0.000 (0.002)			
Spending in education X Female			-0.183* (0.071)		
Spending in old age pensions X Female			0.038 (0.074)		
Spending in education X Educational attainment				0.041+ (0.023)	
Spending in old age pensions X Educational attainment				-0.026 (0.024)	
Spending in education X Income					0.030 (0.026)
Spending in old age pensions X Income					-0.031 (0.027)

Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	3.222*** (0.169)	3.111*** (0.388)	3.066*** (0.201)	3.306*** (0.273)	3.200*** (0.253)
Observations	1870	1870	1870	1870	1870
R ²	0.123	0.123	0.126	0.125	0.124

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: Preferences for the tradeoff are measured on a five-point scale (1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly disagree). The independent measure for the expansion element captures whether respondents would like the government to spend more on education (measured on a five-point scale: 1=Spend much more, 2=Spend more, 3=Spend the same as now, 4=Spend less, 5=Spend much less). Hence, a positive correlation implies higher consistency (i.e. supporting less spending in education increases the likelihood of disagreeing with the tradeoff). The independent measure for the retrenchment element captures whether respondents would like the government to spend more on old age pensions (measured on a five-point scale: 1=Spend much more, 2=Spend more, 3=Spend the same as now, 4=Spend less, 5=Spend much less). Hence, a negative correlation entails attitudinal consistency (i.e. supporting lower spending on pensions increases the likelihood of agreeing with the tradeoff).

Tradeoff: Spending more on pensions and unemployment benefits at the cost of reducing spending in family support and education

	Expansion pensions & unemployment vs. Family support & education	Expansion pensions & unemployment vs. Family support & education	Expansion pensions & unemployment vs. Family support & education	Expansion pensions & unemployment vs. Family support & education	Expansion pensions & unemployment vs. Family support & education
Spending in old age pensions	0.145*** (0.022)	0.043 (0.071)	0.164*** (0.031)	0.037 (0.052)	0.064 (0.046)
Spending in unemployment benefits	0.035+ (0.020)	0.117+ (0.063)	0.036 (0.028)	0.119** (0.044)	0.070+ (0.040)
Spending in family support	-0.109*** (0.021)	-0.108*** (0.021)	-0.109*** (0.021)	-0.107*** (0.021)	-0.109*** (0.021)
Spending in education	-0.198*** (0.021)	-0.199*** (0.021)	-0.198*** (0.021)	-0.198*** (0.021)	-0.197*** (0.021)
Age	-0.002+ (0.001)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.002+ (0.001)	-0.002+ (0.001)	-0.002+ (0.001)
Female	-0.023 (0.028)	-0.024 (0.028)	0.073 (0.127)	-0.020 (0.028)	-0.021 (0.028)
Educational attainment	0.058*** (0.010)	0.058*** (0.010)	0.058*** (0.010)	0.054 (0.040)	0.058*** (0.010)
Income	0.067*** (0.011)	0.066*** (0.011)	0.066*** (0.011)	0.066*** (0.011)	0.027 (0.049)
Spending in old age pensions X Age		0.002 (0.001)			
Spending in unemployment benefits X Age		-0.002 (0.001)			
Spending in old age pensions X Female			-0.037 (0.042)		
Spending in unemployment benefits X Female			-0.003 (0.037)		
Spending in old age pensions X Educational attainment				0.032* (0.014)	

Spending in unemployment benefits X Educational attainment				-0.025*	(0.012)
Spending in old age pensions X Income					0.032*
					(0.015)
Spending in unemployment benefits X Income					-0.014
					(0.013)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	3.950***	3.966***	3.901***	3.969***	4.046***
	(0.107)	(0.231)	(0.124)	(0.168)	(0.157)
Observations	3676	3676	3676	3676	3676
R ²	0.102	0.103	0.102	0.104	0.103

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: Preferences for the tradeoff are measured on a five-point scale (1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly disagree). The independent measures for the two expansion elements captures whether respondents would like the government to spend more on old age pensions and unemployment benefits (measured on a five-point scale: 1=Spend much more, 2=Spend more, 3=Spend the same as now, 4=Spend less, 5=Spend much less). Hence, a positive correlation implies higher consistency (i.e. supporting less spending in education increases the likelihood of disagreeing with the tradeoff).

Tradeoff: Spending more on pensions and unemployment benefit at the cost of reducing spending in family support and education

	Expansion pensions & unemployment vs. Family support & education	Expansion pensions & unemployment vs. Family support & education	Expansion pensions & unemployment vs. Family support & education	Expansion pensions & unemployment vs. Family support & education
Spending in old age pensions	0.145*** (0.022)	0.145*** (0.022)	0.146*** (0.022)	0.145*** (0.022)
Spending in unemployment benefits	0.035+ (0.020)	0.034+ (0.020)	0.035+ (0.020)	0.036+ (0.020)
Spending in family support	0.032 (0.064)	-0.096*** (0.029)	-0.183*** (0.047)	-0.139*** (0.041)
Spending in education	-0.270*** (0.069)	-0.144*** (0.030)	-0.148** (0.049)	-0.189*** (0.044)
Age	0.002 (0.004)	-0.002+ (0.001)	-0.002+ (0.001)	-0.002+ (0.001)
Female	-0.022 (0.028)	0.261* (0.114)	-0.023 (0.028)	-0.023 (0.028)
Educational attainment	0.058*** (0.010)	0.057*** (0.010)	0.034 (0.037)	0.058*** (0.010)
Income	0.066*** (0.011)	0.065*** (0.011)	0.066*** (0.011)	0.043 (0.042)
Spending in family support X Age	-0.003* (0.001)			
Spending in education X Age	0.001 (0.001)			
Spending in family support X Female		-0.025 (0.038)		
Spending in education X Female		-0.105* (0.041)		
Spending in family support X Educational attainment			0.022+ (0.012)	
Spending in education X educational attainment			-0.015 (0.013)	
Spending in family support X Income				0.012 (0.014)

Spending in education X Income				-0.003 (0.015)
Country fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	3.749*** (0.211)	3.814*** (0.119)	4.027*** (0.161)	4.007*** (0.149)
Observations	3676	3676	3676	3676
R ²	0.104	0.104	0.103	0.102

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: Preferences for the tradeoff are measured on a five-point scale (1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly disagree). The independent measures for the two retrenchment elements capture whether respondents would like the government to spend more on family benefits and education (measured on a five-point scale: 1=Spend much more, 2=Spend more, 3=Spend the same as now, 4=Spend less, 5=Spend much less). Hence, a negative correlation entails attitudinal consistency (i.e. supporting lower spending on family support increases the likelihood of agreeing with the tradeoff).