

Authoritarian values and the welfare state: the social policy preferences of radical right voters

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ABSTRACT

What kind of welfare state do voters of populist radical right parties (PRRPs) want and how do their preferences differ from voters of mainstream left- and right-wing parties? In this paper, we draw on an original, representative survey of public opinion on education and related social policies in eight Western European countries to measure (1) support for social transfers, (2) support for workfare and (3) support for social investment. Challenging the view that PRRPs turned into pro-welfare parties, our results indicate that their voters want a particularistic-authoritarian welfare state, displaying moderate support only for 'deserving' benefit recipients (e.g. the elderly), while revealing strong support for a workfare approach and little support for social investment. These findings have important implications for contemporary debates about the future of capitalism and the welfare state.

KEYWORDS Radical right parties; populism; authoritarianism; welfare states; social investment

What kind of welfare state do voters of populist radical right parties (PRRPs) want? Previous scholarship argues that these parties have a strong incentive to 'blur' their position on the socio-economic dimension of party competition (Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2019), focussing instead on 'wedge issues' that might be instrumental in breaking the dominance of mainstream parties and mobilising their voter base on issues such as immigration or European integration (van de Wardt et al. 2014). More recent contributions to the literature – we call it the *pro-welfare view* on PRRP positions – argue that PRRPs are increasingly supporting policies that stabilise or even expand the welfare state in response to their

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growing working-class support (see e.g. Afonso 2015; Afonso and Rennwald 2018; Betz and Meret 2012; Röth *et al.* 2018).

While these contributions provide valuable insights regarding the positions and, to some extent, policies of PRRPs, they focus much less on the individual-level social policy preferences of PRRP voters as this paper does. We therefore approach the issue from the perspective of the demand-side, i.e. the actual policy preferences and attitudes of PRRP supporters. This is a relevant and novel research question as PRRPs are increasingly likely to enter government coalitions with mainstream parties, transferring the social policy preferences of their electoral base into concrete policy output. Furthermore, this paper, rooted in comparative political economy and welfare state research, adopts a more fine-grained and differentiated perspective on the multiple dimensions of welfare states compared to existing work. Adopting this perspective is necessary in order to ascertain whether PRRP supporters are similar in their welfare state preferences compared to supporters of mainstream parties or whether they support a different welfare state model. We argue in favour of the latter.

More specifically, this paper theorises and measures the social policy attitudes of PRRP voters and supporters along three distinct dimensions: (1) support for social transfers, (2) support for workfare, and (3) support for social investment policies. Disaggregating social policies into these three categories yields a more nuanced and fine-grained picture of which type of welfare state PRRP supporters want. The core argument of the paper is that PRRP voters support a *particularistic-authoritarian model of the welfare state*, which is an idiosyncratic combination of policies along the three dimensions mentioned above: First, regarding social transfers, PRRP voters express a higher degree of support for social transfers compared to supporters of mainstream right parties, but less support compared to mainstream left-wing voters. Notably, PRRP voters are much more sensitive regarding the distribution of social transfers to different target groups, being more likely to support social spending on pensions and health care, but more opposed to additional spending for the unemployed, as the former are considered more deserving than the latter. Second, PRRPs are strongly supportive of workfare policies (i.e. policies that oblige the unemployed to accept jobs more quickly) compared to voters of all other party families. Third, PRRPs also display, by far, the lowest level of support for social investment policies (investing in human capital formation), which are broadly popular among the general electorate.

Our paper addresses several research gaps. First, we lack research on the question of how PRRP voters position themselves with regard to the 'social investment paradigm' in contemporary welfare states; that is, the shift in emphasis from transfer-oriented welfare benefits towards human

capital formation (see e.g. Busemeyer *et al.* 2018; Garritzmann *et al.* 2017; Hemerijck 2018; Morel *et al.* 2012). Second, it remains unclear how supporters of the radical right perceive the trend towards stricter conditions of benefit receipt, often called the ‘workfare’ approach (Bonoli 2010; Knotz 2018). Finally, while the existing literature has started to engage with the positions and policies of PRRPs on social transfers (Afonso 2015; Röth *et al.* 2018), we lack evidence on the question of what kind of social transfers PRRP voters support. Whereas previous studies explore the economic policy preferences of PRRP voters on the classical left-right scale (e.g. Arzheimer 2012; de Lange 2007; Ivarsflaten 2005; Kitschelt 2007), we engage in a much more fine-grained analysis of social policy attitudes by looking at the three dimensions of investment, workfare, and transfers as well as preferences for different types of social transfers.

We examine the social policy preferences of PRRP voters by drawing on the INVEDUC (‘Investing in Education in Europe’) survey (Busemeyer *et al.* 2018), which is a representative survey for eight Western European countries with a focus on support for education and related social policies. Our data are based on the reported policy preferences of voters in six parties that are known to share the radical right’s core ideology of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde 2007; 2016): the German AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*), the Danish DF (*Dansk Folkeparti*), the British UKIP (*United Kingdom Independence Party*), the Italian *Lega Nord*, the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*), and the French *Front National*.¹

Literature review

Traditionally and primarily, *scholarship on the radical right within the field of party politics* has studied the conditions that explain the electoral fates of different PRRPs, the composition of their electorates, and the implications of their rise for party competition. A major assumption in this literature is that PRRPs have started to move away from a neoliberal approach they adopted during the 1970s and 1980s towards a pro-welfare approach since the 1990s and 2000s, in line with their changing electorates.

Looking at an earlier generation of PRRPs, Kitschelt and McGann (1995) argue that neoliberalism resonated with the electoral demands of small- and medium-size employers (*petite bourgeoisie*) and, to a smaller extent, blue-collar workers in non-sheltered industries – the two core constituencies of PRRPs ever since (Oesch and Rennwald 2018). Neoliberalism would thus form part of the radical right’s electoral ‘winning formula’, because their voters tend to prefer market allocation over political redistribution and, more generally, ‘endorse competition and believe that owners (and not workers or some cooperative

arrangement between owners and workers) should run firms and that income equalisation is undesirable' (Kitschelt and McGann 1995: 73).

As PRRPs incorporated a growing share of working-class voters, the neoliberal 'winning formula' from the 1990s lost much of its appeal (e.g. Arzheimer 2012; Kitschelt 2007; Oesch and Rennwald 2018). Even though this realignment was less driven by economic concerns, but rather by issues related to immigration (Oesch 2008; Rydgren 2012), the growing support among the blue-collar working class had important implications for the agenda of PRRPs regarding the welfare state (Afonso and Rennwald 2018). Despite important regime-specific differences (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015), manufacturing workers have not only turned into the electoral strongholds of most PRRPs, but also displayed more support for the welfare state than the *petite bourgeoisie* before (de Lange 2007; Ivarsflaten 2005). PRRPs, according to the prevailing narrative, are increasingly turning from anti- into pro-welfare parties (for an alternative account, see Rathgeb 2021).

Even though scholarship in this tradition increasingly pays attention to the social policy profile of PRRPs (Afonso and Rennwald 2018; Röth *et al.* 2018), it works with a rather simplified model that underestimates the complexity of contemporary welfare states. Hence, we aim to connect the literature on the radical right in the field of party politics with *scholarship in welfare state research and comparative political economy*. Here, a large body of scholarship highlights the role of partisanship in the explanation of diverse welfare state reform trajectories (e.g. Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Busemeyer 2014; Häusermann *et al.* 2013; Iversen and Soskice 2015). However, much of this debate has traditionally been concerned with differences of voter demands from centre-left versus centre-right parties, and there are only few, if any, studies from the welfare state camp that look at the role of PRRP voters. The lack of interaction between these two literatures is unfortunate, because increased attention to both strands of literature is crucial to develop a deeper understanding of the role of the radical right in contemporary welfare states and capitalist democracies. In the following theory section, we thus attempt to synthesise the insights from the welfare state literature on the multi-dimensional character of welfare politics on the one hand (e.g. Beramendi *et al.* 2015) with the findings from the party politics literature on the ideology of the radical right (e.g. Mudde 2016) on the other.

Theory and hypotheses

Welfare state preferences

To begin with, we discuss our conception of the dependent variable – attitudes towards the welfare state. A core contention of welfare state

scholarship is that welfare states do not only (or even primarily) differ with regard to their relative size (i.e. how much public spending is devoted to social policy), but also and primarily with regard to their institutional design (see Esping-Andersen 1990 for an early contribution in this tradition). A central basic function of modern welfare states is to insure against social risks such as sickness, old age, being unemployed or in need of care. Providing social insurance via compensatory social spending on pensions, unemployment schemes, social assistance and similar transfer programs constitutes the historical core of European welfare states. Besides compensating for social risks via transfer programs, welfare states have increasingly adopted a more investment-oriented perspective. Promoting social investment policies such as investing in education, active labour market and childcare policies aim at preventing the emergence of social risks before they materialise through human capital formation rather than compensating income losses *ex post*. There are important cross-national differences in regard to how much welfare states have moved towards the social investment approach (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Bonoli 2010; Garritzmann *et al.* 2017; Hemerijck 2018; Häusermann 2012), although this model is generally gaining traction across the advanced capitalist countries. Finally, besides social transfers and social investment, welfare state institutions also intervene via regulatory policy, especially by making unemployment benefit receipt conditional on active job-search, often called the ‘workfare’ approach. Specifically, workfare refers to tighter obligations on the unemployed to take up any jobs deemed ‘suitable’, which Bonoli (2010) delineates from other active labour market policies by terming it ‘incentive reinforcement’, characterised by a strong employment orientation with no or little investment in human capital.

To sum up and in line with existing work (Beramendi *et al.* 2015; Garritzmann *et al.* 2017), our analysis conceptualises social preferences along three dimensions: the extent to which individuals demand (1) more or less generous social transfers and other forms of compensatory social spending; (2) ‘social investments’ in the form of policies that promote human capital formation, lifelong learning and labour market participation; and (3) workfare policies that set strong negative incentives for unemployed persons to re-enter the labour market.

Preferences of PRRP voters

Our theoretical conception of the welfare state preferences of PRRP voters starts from the premise of the party politics literature that PRRPs mobilise their voters primarily through their ideological core agenda that includes nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (e.g. Arzheimer 2012; Mudde

2007; Rydgren 2012). While this ideology centres on the socio-cultural dimension of political conflict, it affects the socio-economic dimension especially with regard to attitudes and preferences on ‘distributive deservingness’ (Häusermann and Kriesi 2015: 206; see also Ennser-Jedenastik 2016; Rathgeb 2021). According to this argument, PRRP voters should typically endorse a particularistic conception of deservingness, drawing sharp distinctions between in-groups deserving welfare support versus out-groups that do not. Thus, ideological conceptions about norms and values have important material implications regarding different target groups of welfare state benefits and services.

Related to the nativist ideology of PRRPs, recent works refer to the notion of ‘welfare chauvinism’ (Ennser-Jedenastik 2018; Rathgeb 2021; Schumacher and Van Kersbergen 2016), i.e. welfare support should be directed to the native in-group – as delineated by citizenship, ethnicity, race or religion – while the non-native out-group should receive limited or no welfare support at all. In other words, the notion of welfare chauvinism suggests that voters of PRRPs no longer reject the welfare state in general (as suggested by Kitschelt and McGann 1995), but instead combine a pro-welfare stance for natives with an anti-welfare stance for immigrants. By contrast, the populist ideology of PRRPs suggests that the established ‘corrupt elites’ should not be entitled to special welfare privileges (Ennser-Jedenastik 2016) and be more generally disempowered in the administration of welfare state arrangements due to their rent-seeking behaviour (Rathgeb 2021). Nativism and populism are therefore important ideological features that help understand why PRRP voters want to reduce the welfare entitlements of non-natives and established political elites.

While acknowledging the importance of welfare chauvinism (i.e. nativism) and attacks on the privileged position of ‘corrupt elites’ (i.e. populism), we emphasise the role of *authoritarianism* in shaping the positions of PRRP voters on workfare, social transfers, and social investment. This is partly due to the limitations of the data we use below, which does not include dedicated measures of welfare-chauvinistic and populist attitudes, but also due to the fact that we believe that authoritarianism is the defining feature of PRRP’s ideology when it comes to social policy preferences. Authoritarianism is typically associated with what Hooghe *et al.* (2002) term ‘TAN’ values (traditional-authoritarian-nationalist), although it is more specifically defined as the desire for order, conformity, and homogeneity, and the belief that these social norms should be ensured by state force if necessary (Altemeyer 1981).

We argue that authoritarian values translate into particularistic *deservingness* conceptions, which implies a preference for the punishment of

out-groups that are perceived to break with the social norm to be ‘hard-working’ and seek paid employment. In this way, the unemployed get often associated with ‘lazy free-riders’ that are *unwilling* to work as opposed to otherwise ‘hard-working citizens’ that are *unable* to work due to old age, disability or sickness (Van Oorschot 2006). For example, Ennser-Jedenastik (2016) finds that the party manifestoes of the Austrian FPÖ consider pensioners, the sick, and disabled as ‘deserving’ welfare recipients, whereas they treat the unemployed as ‘undeserving’. In a similar vein, Afonso and Papadopoulos (2015) find that the Swiss SVP pushed for retrenchment in the area of unemployment policy, but not on pension policy. From an ideological perspective, ‘workfare’ clearly forms part of authoritarian values, as it can be considered a way of enforcing the social norm to be ‘hard-working’. Taken together, we would thus assume that *PRRP voters express a strong preference for workfare policies (Hypothesis 1)*.

It could be argued that the authoritarian ideology underlying support for workfare is inconsistent with the material self-interest of PRRP working-class voters to be protected against the risk of unemployment. Yet, recent qualitative evidence from analyses of the Tea Party, which is in many ways similar to European PRRPs (Minkenberg 2011), suggests that their supporters believe they would not be affected by tightened obligations in the event of unemployment, as they are ‘hard-working citizens’ anyway (Hochschild 2018: ch. 7; Skocpol and Williamson 2016: 60). On the contrary, the punishment of the ‘lazy free-riders’ may help to enhance the individual self-esteem and social status of voters who consider themselves to be in social decline as well as to free up resources to provide support for truly ‘hard-working’ citizens (Bornschier et al. 2012: 27; Rydgren 2012: 7). As PRRP voters are primarily composed of social classes – blue-collar workers and *petite bourgeoisie* – that are indeed part of the ‘losers’ in the new knowledge economy, their preference to exclude out-groups is likely to be more related to the desire to restore their *relative* social status in society (Engler and Weisstanner 2020; Gidron and Hall 2017).

While the positions of PRRP voters should be straightforward on workfare, the above discussion makes clear that their policy preferences on social transfers depend on perceptions of authority and deservingness. We can assume that PRRP voters draw clear lines of demarcations between benefit recipients that deserve social transfers due to previous ‘hard work’ and those that do not. As Van Oorschot (2000; 2006) shows, the elderly are typically considered most deserving of support from the welfare state across European countries, followed by disabled and sick people, whereas the unemployed are perceived as least deserving. This rank order should also hold for PRRP voters. In line with the growing

share of working-class support, PRRP voters should not be opposed to social transfers across the board, but rather support those transfer programs for which they also expect concrete benefits for themselves (typically pensions). In contrast, PRRP voters should be more critical of social transfers that target groups that are deemed undeserving because they are not as ‘hard-working’ as themselves, i.e. in particular the unemployed and poor. These considerations therefore lead to a two-fold hypothesis regarding support for social transfers, in which the notion of deservingness plays a central role: First, we hypothesise *an overall medium level of support for social transfers among PRRP voters (Hypothesis 2a)*, but we also contend that *support for social transfer programs among PRRP voters will likely vary, depending on whether the target group of particular benefits are deemed deserving (pensioners) or not (the unemployed and poor) (Hypothesis 2b)*.

In line with the authoritarian values described above, PRRP voters can be expected to oppose spending on social investment. Social investment policies such as training-based ALMP or the public provision of childcare ‘aim at creating, mobilising, and preserving skills’ (Garritzmann *et al.* 2017: 36 ff.) – policies that are broadly popular with the general public, but not necessarily among supporters of the radical right, as social investment policies imply progressive gender values and a commitment to ‘lifelong learning’. As above, these ideological considerations are reinforced by material interests as the main target groups of social investment policies (i.e. the ‘new’ middle classes, including women and the young with high levels of education) are socially distant from the typical PRRP voters.

In line with this, Akkerman’s (2015: 56) analysis of PRRP party positions on gender issues concludes, ‘[t]hese parties are the most conservative of all parties’, whereas their recent liberal frames on gender issues are primarily instrumental to underpin anti-Islam positions. In fact, the authoritarian values of PRRPs can be seen as a counter-response to the emergence of progressive claims to gender equality in the wake of post-industrial change. As a result, PRRP voters are likely to have a preference for conservative family relations (Akkerman 2015), which implies an opposition to social investments in childcare facilities that are intended to enhance gender equality in labour market participation. Previous research also suggests that PRRP voters are less attuned to ‘lifelong learning’, because their authoritarian ideology values traditional hierarchies and tends to put a lower value on education, including the associated claims to equal opportunity and universal life chances (e.g. Fossati and Häusermann 2014; Häusermann and Kriesi 2015). Taken together, *we therefore hypothesise that PRRP voters display little support for social investment (Hypothesis 3)*.

We define the policy mix described above – strong support for workfare, moderate support only for ‘deserving’ recipients of social transfers, and low support for social investment – as a *particularistic-authoritarian type of welfare state*. First, building on the welfare state literature (e.g. Beramendi *et al.* 2015), the *particularistic* dimension of this preference structure stems from narrow conceptions of welfare deservingness, which exclude the unemployed and poor from entitlements to social transfers, as they are considered to break with the social norm to be ‘hard-working’. Low support for social investment points in the same direction, because it means to defend conservative family values and downgrade those training and care services on which new social risk groups rely to foster their opportunities in reconciling work-family life and labour market participation (e.g. Garritzmann *et al.* 2018; Hemerijck 2017). Finally, in line with right-wing *authoritarianism*, strong support for workfare implies that the welfare state should punish out-groups that are perceived to be ‘lazy free-riders’. Seen in this way, the function of the welfare state is not only to protect against market and life-course risks, but also to ensure conformity with socio-cultural norms inherited from the past.

The particularistic-authoritarian conception of the welfare state is particular to PRRP supporters and therefore different from the welfare state models supported by other partisan constituencies as we explore further below. Different from the supporters of the mainstream right PRRPs voter are more likely to support social transfers for ‘deserving’ social groups (e.g. the elderly). Different from the supporters of the mainstream left, they are much more likely to be opposed to social investment policies and social transfers for ‘non-deserving’ social groups (e.g. the unemployed), but in favour of workfare policies. Hence, when it comes to social policy preferences, PRRPs voters are not easily placeable into the traditional categories of party families, but represent a different kind of animal.

Data and operationalisation

For the empirical analysis, we make use of the INVEDUC survey (cf. Busemeyer *et al.* 2018 for a general overview and introduction of this survey). This survey was conducted in 2014 in eight Western European countries (Sweden, Denmark, the UK, Ireland, Germany, France, Spain and Italy). Compared to other existing comparative surveys such as the European Social Survey (ESS) or the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the INVEDUC has the significant advantage of providing more fine-grained measures of the different dimensions of welfare

state support, in particular education and social investment policies. More specifically, respondents were asked the following question:

Governments and political leaders like to propose new policy reforms in order to address important social issues. Please indicate whether you would strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following reform proposals:

- Giving the unemployed more time and opportunities to improve their qualification before they are required to accept a job.
- Expanding access to early childhood education and improving its quality.
- Investing more money in university education and research at universities.
- Forcing unemployed to accept a job quickly, even if it is not as good as their previous job.
- Increasing old age pensions to a higher degree than wages.
- Lowering the statutory retirement age and facilitating early retirement.

These six items refer – in varying degrees – to the different dimensions of welfare state support mentioned above. A principal component factor analysis reveals three factors (Garritzmann *et al.* 2018; see Table A1 in the [Online appendix](#) for our replication): (1) a first factor indicating support for social transfer policies, in this case mostly pensions (loading positively on items 5 and 6), (2) a second factor capturing support for social investment policies (loading positively on items 1, 2 and 3), and (3) a third factor revealing support for workfare policies (loading positively on item 4 and negatively on item 1). Across the sample of eight European countries, social investment policies receive the highest degree of support throughout, followed by support for workfare policies and lastly support for more generous social transfer policies. In the following analysis, we take each of the three factors (passive social transfers, social investment and workfare) as dependent variables.

As a second set of dependent variables and mostly for the purpose of testing the robustness of our main findings, we analyse support for different kinds of public spending. More specifically, respondents were given the following question:

In the following, I will name several areas of government activity. Please tell me whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Keep in mind that ‘more’ or ‘much more’ might require a tax increase.

Respondents were then asked to rate their degree of support for more government spending in the following areas: education, health care, unemployment benefits, assistance to the poor, labour market programmes

(i.e. active labour market policies such as training), old-age pensions, and support for families. Respondents could indicate their level of support on a 5-point scale (much less, less spending, the same as now, more, much more spending). Since we cannot assume a metric scale for these variables, we transformed them into dummy-variables indicating support for more or much more spending on the corresponding spending dimension.

Regarding the independent variables, respondents were asked for their vote choice if general national elections were held. We coded respondents as PRRP supporters, if they named one of the six PRRPs in our sample (*Alternative für Deutschland*, *Dansk Folkeparti*, *Sverigedemokraterna*, *Front National*, *Lega Nord* and the *United Kingdom Independence Party*). In order to not unnecessarily reduce sample size and allow for a comparison between PRRP supporters and our whole sample, the reference for our PRRP dummy is the whole rest of our sample, thus also including non-respondents, undecided and non-voters. Since this includes Ireland and Spain, two countries in which no PRRPs existed during the survey, we replicate our results later for the smaller sample excluding these countries. A further robustness check using party-families instead of the PRRP dummy then controls whether our results differ if only respondents to the question for vote choice are considered.

Additionally, we include a range of control variables in our analysis. First, we control for sociodemographic factors by including respondents' highest educational degree on the ISCED-scale, a dummy-indicator for gender, net-monthly household income in country-based quintiles and an indicator whether respondents are living with kids under the age of 10. To control for age, we use dummy-indicators for 10-year age bands and differentiate between individuals older than 60 who are retired or not retired (see Garritzmann *et al.* 2018 for choice and coding of control variables). In order to control for the robustness of our findings towards individual ideological orientation, we include two factors that measure social value orientation on a scale from green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) to traditional/authoritarian/nationalist (TAN) and economic left-right orientation respectively (see Garritzmann *et al.* 2018, Appendix for a detailed treatment; see Table A2 in the [Online appendix](#) for summary statistics).

The advantage of using the INVEDUC data is that it contains detailed data on social policy preferences along the three dimensions of social transfers, workfare and social investment policies. However, it also has limitations. Since the survey did not oversample supporters of PRRPs, the limited number of cases per country prevents us from distinguishing between PRRP voters from different milieus (i.e. petite bourgeoisie vs. working class). Also, while the total number of observations per country in the INVEDUC data is comparable to sample sizes of other comparative

surveys (such as the European Social Survey), the number of observations for PRRP voters in individual countries is somewhat limited (e.g. 58 in Germany and 33 in France). Therefore the focus of this paper is less on cross-country comparisons of PRRP voters (although we talk a bit about this below), but rather about comparing PRRP voters with the rest of the population for the whole of Western Europe (i.e. treating the INVEDUC sample as a stratified sample of Western Europe). In this case, the number of observations (439 PRRP voters out of a total of 8,905 observations) is sufficient to allow sufficiently precise estimates.

Apart from sample size, sample selection bias might interfere with our inferences. While random sampling and the application of register-based poststratification weights assures a representative analysis of the survey data (Groves 2006), PRRP voters might refuse to reveal their voting intentions during interviews. As Hooghe and Reeskens (2007) show in their study of right-wing voting in Europe, surveys might severely underestimate the proportions of right-wing voters due to social desirability bias. However, overreporting of PRRP voting intentions might also occur, as the survey situation might be used to voice disagreement with current politics, while avoiding possible consequences. In order to estimate potential biases arising from these effects, Table A3 in the [Online appendix](#) shows the shares of PRRP voters in our sample compared to results of PRRPs in European and national elections (Döring and Manow 2020). Results indicate an underestimation of vote shares compared to European elections but with the exemption of France, a rather good representation of national election results. While this is not a formal test of the extent of bias in the self-declared voting intentions in our data, it may serve as a starting point for a discussion of our results.

Empirical analysis

Descriptive analysis

We start the empirical analysis with a brief depiction of descriptive statistics. [Figure 1](#) displays mean values for the six PRRPs in our sample on the three factors and compare their pooled mean with supporters of other party-families, categorised according to the ParlGov-database (Döring and Manow 2020; see [Table A4](#) in the [Online appendix](#) for the coding of party preferences in our dataset). In order to compare mean estimates across party families, we compute one-way ANOVAs for each dimension and subsequently assess all possible comparisons via the Tukey method on the conventional $p < 0.05$ level of significance.

First, our descriptive results indicate that the most notable difference between PRRP supporters and the electoral constituencies of the remaining

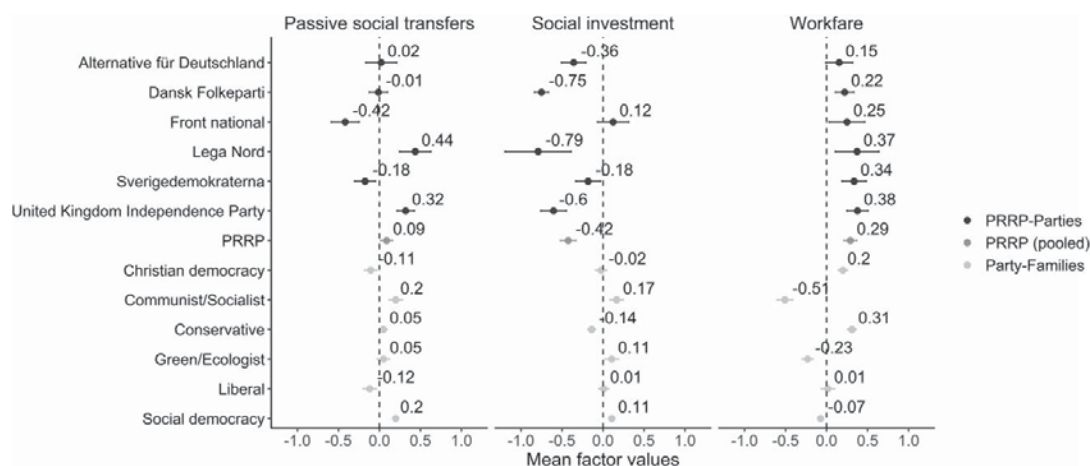


Figure 1. Mean estimates for the three dimensions of welfare support per group with design-based standard errors. Party families are classified according to the ParlGov-Dataset (Döring and Manow 2020).

party families is that the former are much less likely to support social investment reforms, which provides initial evidence in support of our third hypothesis. The distinctiveness of the preference profile of PRRP supporters becomes particularly apparent in this case. Whereas there is at least some overlap in terms of supporting levels between PRRP supporters and other electoral constituencies in the case of the other two dimensions (i.e. PRRP supporters are less ‘radical’), there is a significant gap in support for social investment reforms between PRRP supporters and *all* other parties. Admittedly, supporters of secular conservative parties are also sceptical of social investment policies, but much less so compared to PRRP voters. All other party supporters are either clearly in favour or neutral. Thus, even though social investment reforms are broadly popular across different socio-economic classes and electoral constituencies (Garritzmann *et al.* 2018), this broad coalition of supporters apparently and tellingly excludes supporters of PRRPs.

Second, supporters of PRRP are more likely to support workfare policies. In this respect, however, they do not differ significantly from supporters of other conservative or Christian democratic parties, whereas supporters of left-wing parties (socialist, social democratic or green) are clearly opposed to workfare policies and supporters of liberal parties adopt a neutral stance. Again, this is preliminary evidence in support of our first hypothesis.

Third, as expected in Hypothesis 2a, support among PRRP voters for social transfer policies is somewhat divided. On average and across all countries, PRRP voters tend to be more supportive of the expansion of social transfer programs compared to supporters of Christian democratic and liberal parties, but not as supportive as traditional mainstream left parties. Above, we argued (Hypothesis 2 b) that the aggregated effect of

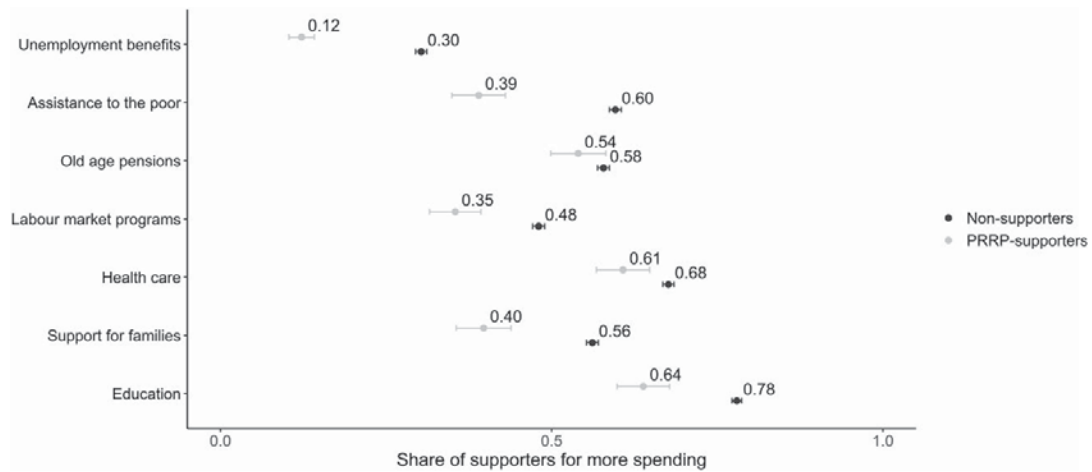


Figure 2. Estimated share of supporters for more spending on different welfare components for PRRP-supporters compared to non-supporters. Bars indicate design-based standard errors.

moderate support for social transfer policies could mask a significant degree of variation across different transfer programs. To further elaborate on this issue, Figure 2 shows average levels of support for more or less government spending in various areas of government activity as explained above. We present mean support for more or much more spending across spending domains between PRRP supporters and non-supporters in comparison, and analyse these differences using multiple t-tests with Bonferroni-adjusted p -values, again using the conventional $p < 0.05$ criterion.

Our results indicate that PRRP supporters, compared to non-supporters, are significantly less prone to support more spending in all areas except health care and old age pensions. This mirrors our conclusions drawn from the evidence presented above: Even though PRRP supporters are in the aggregate not particularly opposed to government spending on social transfers, there is considerable variation across spending programs. In line with our expectations, PRRP voters oppose spending related to social investment (education, support for families) and spending directed to the poor and unemployed (assistance to the poor, unemployment benefits, labour market programs). This opposition mirrors the preferences of supporters of conservative parties (against social investment) and of supporters of Christian democratic parties (against spending for the poor and unemployed) closely for the respective spending categories, leaving PRRP voters in stark contrast to supporters of leftist parties, who are more likely to generally support spending increases (see Figure A1 in the [Online appendix](#)). In short, PRRP voters oppose additional spending that benefits recipients they perceive as less deserving either because they do not comply with the notion of being ‘hard-working’ citizens (unemployed and social assistance claimants) or

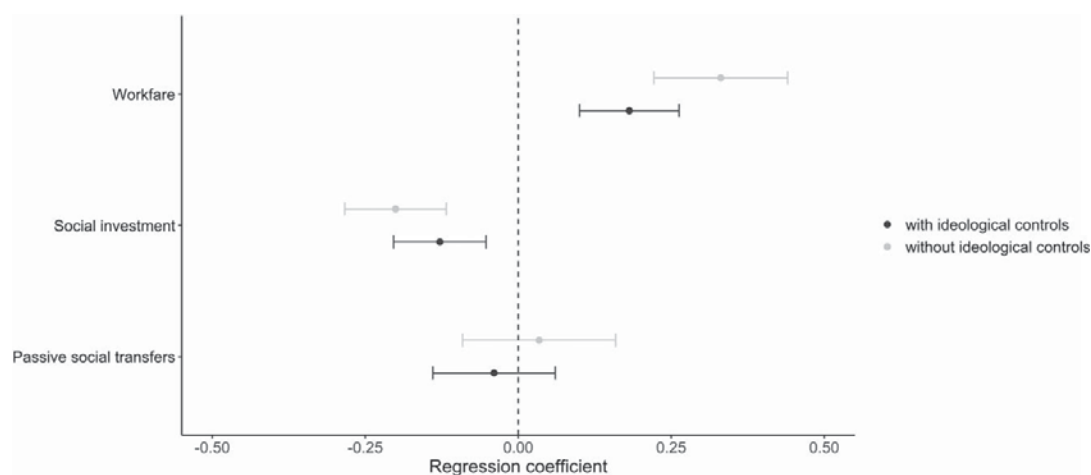


Figure 3. Results for linear regression analysis of welfare reform dimensions including sociodemographic controls and country dummies. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals based on country-clustered standard errors.

because they are believed to subscribe to different values (young families, the educated classes).

Multivariate analysis

In the next step, we perform a multivariate analysis to identify the determinants of support for the different factors. In all analyses, we control for additional micro-level variables, in particular educational background, income, gender, household composition (having small children at home) and age (cf. Garritzmann *et al.* 2018 for a similar set of covariates). To control for unobserved country-level cofounders and clustered observations, we include country fixed effects and country-clustered standard errors, respectively. Figures 3 and 4 display the results of this exercise. The figures only display the coefficient estimates and confidence intervals for the PRRP dummy variable; Tables A5–A7 in the Online appendix show the detailed regression results. Each row in the Figures represents two models: one in which the ideological control variables are included in addition to the other micro-level variables mentioned above, another one without ideological controls. The dependent variable for these two models in each row is given on the left hand side (i.e. the three welfare state policy dimensions in Figure 3 and the different spending items in Figure 4).

By and large, the regression analysis in Figure 3 confirms the findings from the descriptive statistics above. Supporters of PRRPs are significantly less likely to support social investment policy reforms, significantly more likely to support workfare policies and are not significantly different in their support levels when it comes to support for social transfer policies. In order to explore the robustness of our findings, we run models with and without additional controls for ideological predispositions. As

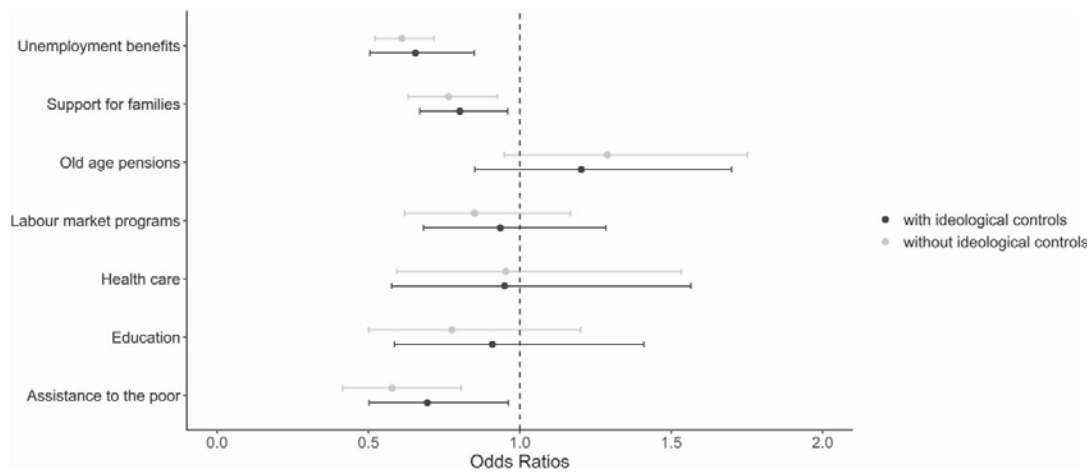


Figure 4. Logistic regression results for propensity to support more spending. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals based on country-clustered standard errors.

explained above, we include two variables that measure the individuals' ideological position on an economic left-right dimension as well as on the value-driven social dimension from liberal to authoritarian values. Of course, self-identification as a supporter of a particular party family is highly related to ideological predispositions. Hence, excluding ideological variables first, the PRRP dummy to some extent captures these ideological predispositions. However, we want to ascertain that the associations between party affiliation and policy preferences holds even if and when ideological predispositions are included (of course, we do not make any causal claims regarding the causal direction of the association between ideology and party support). Confirming previous analyses (Garritzmann *et al.* 2018), we find that a left-wing position on the economic dimension and a socially liberal position on the GAL-TAN dimension are positively associated with support for social investment reforms, whereas the opposite holds for support for workfare policies, which are supported by respondents on the economic right and those subscribing to authoritarian values. Support for passive social transfers is associated with support for an economic left-wing ideology and authoritarian values. Most importantly, we find that even when including ideological variables, the associations found above between party affiliation with a PRRP and policy preferences still hold, even though the magnitude of the effect is somewhat reduced (i.e. the confidence intervals do not cross the zero line in the case of social investment and workfare policies): PRRP supporters are still significantly less likely to support social investment reforms (Hypothesis 3), significantly more likely to support workfare policies (Hypothesis 1) and not different from other partisan supporters when it comes to support for social transfers (Hypothesis 2a).

Figure 4 shows models that identify the determinants of support for different types of public spending. As the dependent variables are binary, we use logistic regression models to investigate these associations and display the results as odds ratios (a value larger than 1 indicates an increasing probability of supporting spending increase, a value smaller than 1 indicates the opposite). By and large, the broad patterns of the descriptive statistics above are confirmed, although with some minor differences. We find that PRRP voters are less likely to support additional public spending on unemployment benefits, assistance to the poor and support for families. This holds even when including ideological control variables (i.e. the confidence intervals associated with these coefficient estimates do not cross the zero line). However, whereas the descriptive statistics above revealed a negative association between PRRP support and support for education and labour market programs, the multivariate regression analysis yields a non-significant effect. Taken together, the regression analysis therefore shows that PRRP supporters are particularly critical of social transfer programs that are geared towards those groups which are generally regarded as less deserving, i.e. the poor and unemployed (Hypothesis 2b).

Robustness checks

In the following, we present findings from a series of robustness tests. First, we test whether our results might be affected by the multi-level nature of our data and the small number of level-2 units of analysis (i.e. countries) in particular (cf. Stegmueller 2013 for a general discussion of this issue). Due to the limited number of countries (eight), standard multi-level modelling is not feasible in this case.² As an alternative, we apply country fixed effects and country clustered standard errors, as explained above. The downside of this approach is that it can lead to biased results if the number of clusters is small (cf. Bertrand et al. 2004; Esarey and Menger 2019). To overcome these issues, we use cluster bootstrapped t-statistics. This method applies the bootstrap procedure at the level of clusters by sampling these repeatedly and computing t-statistics for the regression coefficients on each repetition. The resulting sampling distribution of t-values then allows the concise estimation of confidence intervals for the regression estimates, hence overcoming the shortcomings of the only asymptotically (large number of clusters) correct conventional clustered standard errors (ibid.). Results in Figure A2 in the [Online appendix](#) show that our results are robust towards the small number of clusters present in the analysis.

Second, to further probe the results of our findings to the inclusion or exclusion of particular countries, we re-estimate our main regression models excluding one country at a time (Jackknife test). As Figure A3 in the [Online appendix](#) shows, our results are stable, independent of what country is excluded from the sample.

Third, as mentioned above, our empirical analysis is limited by the difficulties of sampling PRRP supporters. To assess whether our results are sensitive to sampling bias, we redo our analysis using design-based standard errors (cf. Groves 2006). The question whether to apply survey weights in regression modelling is a longstanding subject of debate, even though it is largely undisputed and widely used in descriptive analyses. While correct weights might assure unbiased estimates by controlling for the unequal selection probability of different social groups, the unnecessary application of them can result in an inflation of estimate variances. Since no standard, well-studied test of weighting-necessity exists and our results for PRRPs might be prone to sampling errors we use weighted regression models to allow for an assessment of potential bias (Bollen *et al.* 2016; cf. DuMouchel and Duncan 1983). Figure A4 in the [Online appendix](#) presents the results of this exercise, which mirror our previous models and hence point towards robustness of our findings for survey-nonresponse. However, we are unable to control for further biases arising from the survey situation, such as social-desirability bias and others.

Fourth, our results might be affected by the fact that out of the eight countries included in the INVEDUC survey, there are only six that had an established PRRP during the survey phase. In the analyses above, we included all eight countries nevertheless in order not to lose further observations. As a robustness check, we redo factor analysis for the sample, excluding Ireland and Spain (i.e. those countries without an established PRRP during the field period of the survey) and replicate our findings above, apart from the effect of assistance to the poor (see Tables A9 and A10 in the [Online appendix](#)). Since the mean support for assistance to the poor in Spain (0.79) and Ireland (0.66) is higher than the sample mean of 0.58, exclusion of these countries lowers the average difference between PRRP supporters and non-supporters. This might explain the null-results for assistance to the poor in the smaller sample. Apart from that, the main results of our analysis hold.

Fifth, we use the Schwander and Häusermann (2013) social class scheme to control for unobserved variation connected to occupational factors (c.f. Garritzmann *et al.* 2018) in addition to the other micro-level control variables mentioned above, which however does not strongly effect our findings (see Table A11 in the [Online appendix](#)).

Sixth, in Table A12 in the [Online appendix](#) we include party families instead of our PRRP dummy in the analysis, replicating the descriptive analysis from above in a multivariate setting. We find that PRRP supporters are significantly less supportive towards social investment compared to supporters of Christian democratic, green, liberal and social democratic parties and significantly more supportive for workfare policies than greens, Christian democrats and social democrats. We do not find any significant differences between PRRP supporters and other party families for passive social transfers, again pointing towards a ‘mainstream’ position of PRRPs on these parts. Results for spending items indicate a pronounced difference between PRRP supporters and social democratic and green voters with four out of seven items being significantly lower among PRRP supporters. Surprisingly, we find significant positive differences between PRRP supporters and Christian democrats, liberals and greens for pensions. By and large, however, our previous findings are confirmed.³

Conclusion

This paper has provided a detailed study of the social policy preferences of supporters of populist radical right parties (PRRPs). By doing so, it addresses a major research gap that has opened up between scholarship in party politics on the one hand, which tends to disregard the multi-dimensionality and complexity of welfare state policies and institutions, and comparative welfare state research on the other, which is only starting to take PRRPs seriously as partisan actors in contemporary capitalism.

Our multi-dimensional perspective has allowed us to qualify the pro-welfare view that PRRP voters broadly want more generous welfare benefits. Our finding thus resonates with recent studies looking at the supply-side of the radical right’s social policy platforms (e.g. Ennsner-Jedenastik 2016; Otjes *et al.* 2018; Rathgeb 2021). In fact, PRRP voters display a distinct preference for a particularistic-authoritarian type of welfare state, which distinguishes them from supporters of other party families. Different from mainstream right parties, they are less likely to oppose generous social transfers altogether, as they display moderate support for ‘deserving’ benefit recipients (i.e. the elderly). Different from mainstream left parties, PRRP supporters strongly support workfare policies and benefit cuts for the unemployed and poor, which mirrors their authoritarian ideology in tightening the screws for benefit recipients that are said to benefit ‘lazy’ free riders. Notably, PRRPs are clearly different from all other party families in expressing strong opposition to the promotion of social investment policies. Even though social investment policies such as investing in education, lifelong learning and caring policies

are strongly supported by broad majorities across European countries (Busemeyer *et al.* 2018), PRRP supporters are clearly not part of that broad coalition.

The broader implications of our findings are significant. A first point to take away is that whereas previous work mostly focuses on the size and overall generosity of the welfare state, our analysis shows that PRRP voters also would rather have a transfer-oriented welfare state under strict entitlement conditions than one directed at promoting social investment policies. Our analysis also reveals that PRRP voters pay particular attention to the question of deservingness due to their authoritarian values. On the one hand, this reinforces their preference for a transfer-oriented model of the welfare state, in which there is a clear connection between benefits received and contributions made. On the other hand, the central role of deservingness implies that PRRP supporters not only differentiate between natives and foreigners, but in fact also between those who are considered to be 'hard-working' and those that do not. Even though PRRPs are often portrayed as the voice of the 'left behind' demanding compensation from the 'corrupt elites' in popular discourse, our findings show that PRRP supporters strongly support policies that promote new social divisions and the further exclusion of the unemployed and the poor.

Our paper is only a first step towards a better understanding of the policy preferences of PRRP voters. In particular, our survey data does not allow to distinguish between different constituencies within the group of PRRP supporters. This kind of detail could potentially be added by country-specific studies and/or surveys that oversample PRRP supporters. Furthermore, our analysis displayed a significant degree of cross-national variation in preferences between different PRRPs in the area social transfers, which could be related to different institutional welfare state legacies and socio-economic country contexts (e.g. levels of unemployment). Given the limitations of quantitative survey data, we could not probe further into the origins of these differences. Further research could therefore complement our quantitative analyses with country case studies.

Despite these limitations, the 'big picture' emerging from our analysis is that the perceived decline in social status (Engler and Weisstanner 2020; Gidron and Hall 2017; Kurer and Palier 2019) does not necessarily turn PRRP voters into a political force against increasing levels of inequality, poverty, and precarity. In fact, already some fifty years ago, Lipset (1959) observed that economic insecurity can activate authoritarian predispositions rather than an opposition to the socially corrosive effects of capitalist market expansion. We therefore believe that our findings must be placed in the broader historical context about the intimate

relationship between the rise of authoritarianism and the demise of (neo-)liberalism (Polanyi 1957 [1944]). Only time will tell how authoritarian values not only shape voters' preferences, but also the welfare state itself.

Notes

1. The *Front National* was renamed *Rassemblement National* (RN) in June 2018, whereas the previously regionalist *Lega Nord* was renamed *Lega* in the 2018 elections as it ran a nation-wide campaign for the first time in its history. We use the previous names in this paper, because our data stem from the time before the rebranding had taken place.
2. In a recent study, Elff *et al.* (2021) show that correct inference from multi-level models is possible even with few level-2 entities when certain procedures are applied, namely Restricted Maximum Likelihood Estimation and adjusted t-tests. We present the results of this procedure in Table A8 in the [Online appendix](#) and find our main results supported.
3. In an additional analysis we added a variable that measures respondents' self-assessment of the rurality of their domicile in order to control whether our results might be partly due to a more rural background of PRRP-voters compared to other party families. Inclusion of this variable did not change our results.

Acknowledgements

We thank Silja Häusermann, Tim Vlandas, Catherine De Vries, Philip Manow, Alexandre Afonso, Niccolo Durrazzi, Lucio Baccaro and the participants of the Panel 'Reducing Dualization through Social Investment?' at the 2019 SASE Conference (New York, June 27–29) as well as two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

Funding

Gefördert durch die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) im Rahmen der Exzellenzstrategie des Bundes und der Länder – EXC-2035/1 – 390681379. This work was also supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG) under grant number 392405337.

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