

The Politics of (Fractured) Solidarity: A Cross-National Analysis of the Class Bases of the Welfare State

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Abstract

This article considers the politics of social solidarity from a cross-national perspective. In the analysis, we rely on four waves of international social survey data for our sample of Western nations, representative of different welfare state traditions. The time span is a 20-year period and the total country-wave sample comprises over 40,000 records. While there is popular support for governmental actions to protect citizens in old-age and sickness, views about the social rights of unemployed citizens are shifting. High-profile activating labour-market reforms are reapportioning the burden of risk in society. With the rise of right-wing populism in Europe and the USA, this article examines how interests change as citizens lose their stake in the means of security – revealing an ever more fragile and fractured social solidarity.

Keywords

Public opinion; Class; Social risk; Comparative social policy; Active social policy

Introduction

In light of recent welfare state reforms, and the pro-employment focus of active labour market policies (ALMPs) and programmes that help increase the employment opportunities for jobseekers (European Commission 2016), this article re-examines and connects welfare, stratification and political economy.

Theories about class mobilization have been influential for thinking about welfare state development over the long-term. ‘Power resources theory’ (PRT), for example, associated with the work of Walter Korpi and Gösta Esping-Andersen, served to illustrate how welfare states had developed (with varying degrees of success) from class interests (Baldwin 1990). With the onset of welfare retrenchment and cost control, however, PRT was challenged by the ‘new politics of the welfare state’ theory (Bonoli and Natali 2012 provide a review). This not only implied that class and partisan politics matter less in the face of short-term self-interest, but also that there is little further

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potential for social democracy to cater for working-class families in a growing context of ‘permanent austerity’. At the same time, it is claimed that ‘individualizing’ processes are eroding important aspects of solidarity in ‘risk society’ (as theorized by Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, referring to the manner in which modern society organizes in response to risk, see Beck 2007). Confronting these trends, Western welfare states are being reformed as they move from their traditional protection roles with the implementation of new ‘active’ (social investment-orientated) forms of social policy (Bonoli 2013; Hemerijck 2017). Empirical research, however, has yet to examine how the new policy agenda is reshaping solidarities in Western nations with very different welfare and solidaristic policy traditions (cf. Stjernø 2009).

The analysis presented here is supported by four waves of data on comparative welfare state attitudes taken from the International Social Survey Programme’s (ISSP) Role of Government (RoG) module. Using regression techniques, we consider preferences for risk protection across time, place and the public. We are particularly interested in cross-national attitudes and class-risk related variations and welfare effects in the data. Empirically, ‘class’ membership can be identified in surveys by questions related to occupation (defined here by the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero [EGP] class scheme, Leiulfsrud *et al.* 2010). The analysis follows multiple regression procedures for small-N comparisons (see Esping-Andersen 2007), relying on all four waves of the RoG module for our sample of eight Western nations (representing each of the welfare traditions in Esping-Andersen’s influential typology, see Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2011). The time span is a 20-year period and the total country-wave sample comprises over 40,000 records. Before describing the study methods and results and discussing their implications, we consider the scholarship that discusses social attitudes and the welfare state.

Public Attitudes and Social Reform

Attitudes to social policy interventions are extensively discussed in the research literature. We know that individual socio-demographic characteristics can influence the type and strength of support for social policy interventions. In the attitudinal data, social divisions and cleavages are often visible in relation to age (or life stage), gender, social class position and political orientation (Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003). Respondents may hold particular views and perceptions of relative ‘deservingness’ (Van Oorschot 2006; Jæger 2007), and aspects of ‘self-interest’ may also be apparent (Svallfors 2012). Elderly pensioners are often seen as being more ‘needy’ or ‘deserving’ than unemployed workers, for instance. Working-class voters tend to be more supportive of welfare state policies overall than their middle-class counterparts (Svallfors 1997). Nevertheless, class divisions are sometimes visible by social programme (Svallfors 2012). Attitudes towards labour market policies, for example, tend to exhibit a class profile, while the class profile of attitudes towards statutory interventions for health care and pensions are usually less pronounced.

Research often reveals significant cross-national variation in welfare state attitudes. However, the ‘institutional logic’ of welfare attitudes continues to

be debated. Not all studies claim to find the (expected) regime patterns (Larsen 2008 provides a review). Welfare states may foster and promote solidarity and they may also reflect it, or the lack of it (Stjernø 2009). The ‘policy feedback’ literature suggests that existing welfare institutions condition social policy preferences (Kumlin and Stadelmann-Steffen 2014). If welfare states have a tendency to produce and reproduce their own legitimacy, as Kumlin and Stadelmann-Steffen observe, then we might expect strong welfare regime effects from a comparative policy perspective, to reflect – at least in part – dominant welfare state ideology. As our point of departure, we might assume regime-related variation in the international survey data, as Jæger (2011) observes. However, in general, citizens in the Nordic countries may not be more favourable towards the welfare state or particular governmental programmes than citizens elsewhere. Besides, scholars now argue that once distinctive welfare regimes might have lost some of their distinctiveness under successive waves of ALMP reform (Lødemel and Gubrium 2014).¹ Research is therefore needed to shed fresh light on the social politics of ALMP reform. The RoG survey has many advantages for studying changing public opinion over the long-term since the data collection points track the welfare reform period across the advanced nations. According to Lødemel and Gubrium, the first international wave of ALMP reform occurred in the early-1990s, a second wave then followed in 1998–2008.

Interests can and do change, as social policy is fashioned and reformed out of political struggle (Baldwin 1990; Svalfors 2012). As the mature welfare states are transformed by ALMP policy, we need to know whether or the extent to which seemingly solidaristic forms of social policy are breaking down. On the one hand, we might expect class cleavages to diminish. The working-class vote appears to be in decline (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015) and notions of ‘class struggle’ (as opposition between ‘capital’ and ‘labour’) are said to be less apparent in political life today (Finseraas and Vernby 2011). New solidarities may weaken or cut across traditional class boundaries in response to ‘risk society’ and ‘individualization’ (Beck and Grande 2010 provide a review). In post-industrial society, ‘new social risks’ (cf. Bonoli 2013: 15–17) may weaken traditional class-based forms of solidarity (Esping-Andersen 1993; Armingeon 2006; Kananen *et al.* 2006; Taylor-Gooby 2011a). Increasingly, working-class groups may be less likely to offer support for expansive social provision and unemployment protection in particular (see recent trend analysis with data from the European Social Survey by Taylor-Gooby [2011b] and the British Social Attitudes survey by Deeming [2015]). On the other hand, however, we might expect class awareness and solidarity to increase, as Curran (2013) argues. Labour market flexibility and non-standard employment have meant increased insecurity and risk for low-skilled workers (Chaloff 2008; Pintelon *et al.* 2013). In these circumstances, manual workers may be more inclined than workers in non-manual occupations to support welfare rights that safeguard their own self-interest (particularly the ‘right to work’ and social security protection) – while middle-class and self-reliant groups may become untrustworthy of those at the bottom of society and this may be reflected in the survey data (Larsen 2013).

In the analysis, we want to know if class interests and welfare state solidarities are changing and, if so, in which ways? Are attitudes towards ‘need’ and ‘deservingness’ changing or are they stable across time? Are class preferences for ‘decommodification’ and less stratifying policies changing or are they stable over time? If class interests are changing and solidarities are under pressure, then what are the potential implications for welfare state futures?

Method and Data

The comparative analysis of social attitudes for our sample of eight Western nations relies on survey data from all four rounds of the RoG covering a 20-year reform period (ISSP Research Group 2008). The Nordic-style welfare states are represented here by Sweden and Norway, and the Bismarckian or corporatist welfare states by France and Germany. Then there are the market liberal economies and welfare states, represented by the USA, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. The total country-wave sample comprises over 43,000 respondents. Not all countries are present in the first and second waves, but they are in the third and fourth (see the Appendix and table A1). The RoG module has a number of advantages, some already alluded to. The data on welfare attitudes are of high quality and derive from national stratified random sample surveys based on citizenship conducted in each participating country (i.e. the data do not normally include residents who are not citizens). The questionnaire is repeated at regular intervals to allow cross-national comparisons across survey waves and time points that span the reform period of interest (i.e. waves I-1985, II-1990, III-1996 and IV-2006). Although information on individual identify is limited in mass social surveys of this kind (and the RoG does not capture reliable information on race and ethnicity), it does, however, provide occupational codes that are entirely consistent across nations and recent survey waves. In order to conduct the analysis, we assume that society is divided into different classes and that these classes have different political interests and may act as a class in terms of their interests in risk and social policy. Some people belong to ‘working-class’ occupations, while others are in ‘middle-class’ occupations. Empirically at least, class membership can be identified in surveys by questions related to occupation. We explore whether different class interests are still evident by analyzing survey data and we adopt the standard EGP class scheme that is widely used in comparative research (Leiulfsrud *et al.* 2010).²

The RoG module asks respondents a series of questions relating to social citizenship rights as theorized by T. H. Marshall, and welfare preferences for risk protection across different (traditional) welfare state functions and social groups. For example, respondents were asked whether it should or should not be the government’s responsibility to do the following:

- provide health care in the case of serious illness;
- provide a decent standard of living in old-age;
- provide a decent standard of living for unemployed people; and/or
- provide a job for everyone.

The respondents' opinions on these four questions are the object of our analysis. The response categories are 'definitely should be', 'probably should be', 'probably should not be', 'definitely should not be' and 'can't choose'. Here we are interested in cross-national trends within policy domains. Answers that government should ensure that these welfare functions are met correspond to a more traditional approach to social policy and funding, the right to health care, the right to a job, etc., in which the role of government is to minimize social risks in an attempt to meet needs. Following Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003), survey responses and attitudes towards the role of government and welfare rights were binary coded into positive (definitely should, probably should) and negative (definitely should not, probably should not). Logistic regression models for binary outcomes assess the socio-demographic characteristics that help to explain or predict pro-welfare state attitudes. Our key independent variables are age, gender, country and class, and class-related factors, such as unemployment, education, partisanship, and welfare state regime. The explanatory or predictor variables are 'dummy coded', e.g. 'unemployed' dummy variable, 'professional' dummy variable, 'right voter', etc. The odds ratios in tables 1–3 show the strength and the direction of the predictors and the reference category or 'base case' is always 1.00. Statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level or better are shown in bold. All study calculations are weighted to correct for differential and non-response bias in the survey data.

Responsibility and Rights

In the survey data, there is near universal support for the right to a decent standard of living in old-age (figure 1) and health care for sick people (figure 2). Attitudes towards 'need' or 'deservingness' appear stable across time. In the USA, for example, where public support is at its lowest in the sample, we still find that the overwhelming majority of Americans claim that these social programmes are functions of good government. The latest survey wave, for 2006, shows that 90 per cent of Americans believe in the right to a decent standard of living in old-age (figure 1). Similarly, 90 per cent of Americans (figure 2) appear to agree with Barack Obama that 'healthcare should be a right for every American'.³ The 2010 Affordable Care Act brought that right a step closer, although the political dynamics it engenders continue to challenge. Many Americans equate health care reform with higher taxes, and the Republicans are now looking to capitalize on this to repeal Obamacare. The point, however, is that just 10 per cent of the public in one of the most economically liberal market societies are sceptical about the state's role in this key area of welfare provision (see Jacobs and King 2012 on interest group politics and US health care reform).

We find significant cross-national variation in attitudes towards unemployment protection. Nearly one-half of all Americans in all four waves of the RoG module do not believe it is the government's responsibility to provide decent living standards for unemployed people (figure 3). A similar picture emerges in Australia. However, in the UK and New Zealand, solidarity

Table 1

Support for welfare rights (logistic regression)

Government responsibility (comparator: not state responsibility)				
	Aged (i)	Sick (ii)	Unemployed (iii)	Jobs (iv)
Age (comparator: 15–24)				
25–44	1.04	0.88	1.00	1.04
45–54	1.10	0.68	1.24	1.10
55–64	1.22	0.68	1.45	1.22
65–74	1.47	0.58	1.75	1.47
75+	0.81	0.55	1.55	0.81
Gender (comparator: Male)				
Female	1.47	1.26	1.25	1.47
Education (comparator: Degree)				
Below degree	1.44	1.26	0.86	1.44
No formal qualification	1.95	1.28	0.80	1.95
Labour force status (comparator: Employed)				
Unemployed	0.85	1.42	2.28	0.85
Economically inactive	0.95	1.47	1.17	0.95
Social class (comparator: Professional)				
Salaried white-collar worker	1.12	1.04	1.05	1.12
Skilled manual worker	1.43	1.80	1.21	1.43
Low-skilled manual worker	1.71	1.86	1.34	1.71
Political Party Allegiance (comparator: Centre-right, conservative)				
Centre, liberal	1.49	2.00	1.57	1.49
Centre-left	2.61	4.01	2.62	2.61
Wave/Year (comparator: III-1996)				
IV-2006	1.12	1.66	0.71	1.21
Country (comparator: USA)				
AUS	2.30	5.43	1.51	2.30
GBR	5.07	16.18	1.32	5.07
NZL	2.68	7.27	1.40	2.68
DEU	1.85	1.76	3.31	1.85
FRA	2.25	4.59	3.27	2.25
NOR	17.08	33.43	11.02	17.08
SWE	3.04	1.77	5.37	3.04
Nagelkerke R-Square	0.15	0.17	0.20	0.22

Notes: Statistically significant at the 0.05 level or better are shown in bold.

with unemployed workers has declined during the past two decades. One-half of the public surveyed in 2006 are now sceptical of this governmental role. Much has been written about Australasian and American ‘exceptionalism’ in welfare policy. Most of this literature focuses on the individualistic nature of liberal society influencing welfare state architecture. In the USA, ‘workfare’ policies that undermine collective solidarity have a long history (pioneered in the 1970s), where public support for the principles of collective security is

Table 2

Odds of reporting unemployed people have the right to a decent standard of living

Gender	Class	USA	AUS	NZL	GBR	FRA	DEU	SWE	NOR
Male	Professional	0.51	1.32	1.20	0.90	2.50	2.70	5.13	10.01
Female	Professional	0.71	1.81	1.65	1.24	3.44	3.71	7.06	13.78
Male	Salaried white-collar	0.63	1.62	1.48	1.11	3.08	3.33	6.34	12.36
Female	Salaried white-collar	0.87	2.24	2.03	1.53	4.25	4.58	8.72	17.01
Male	Skilled manual worker	0.73	1.87	1.70	1.28	3.54	3.82	7.28	14.20
Female	Skilled manual worker	1.00	2.57	2.34	1.76	4.88	5.26	10.02	19.55
Male	Low-skilled manual worker	0.79	2.03	1.84	1.39	3.85	4.16	7.91	15.43
Female	Low-skilled manual worker	1.09	2.79	2.54	1.91	5.30	5.72	10.89	21.24

Notes: Reference category is a professional American male aged 15–24.

Table 3

Changing solidities and class interests in welfare rights (logistic regression)

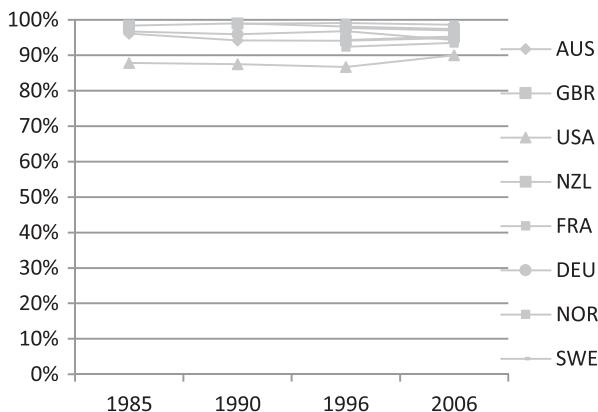
Government responsibility (comparator: not state responsibility)									
	Aged		Sick		Unemployed		Jobs		
	(i)	(ii)	(ii)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(iv)	(iv)	
	1996	2006	1996	2006	1996	2006	1996	2006	
Liberal group (comparator: Professional)									
Salaried white-collar worker	1.30	1.35	0.98	1.09	1.30	1.00	1.31	1.30	
Skilled manual worker	1.32	0.96	1.70	1.17	1.35	1.08	1.68	1.46	
Low-skilled manual worker	1.42	1.66	2.05	1.03	1.50	1.32	2.08	1.86	
Nordic group (comparator: Professional)									
Salaried white-collar worker	0.99	0.59	1.13	0.72	1.63	1.16	0.70	1.50	
Skilled manual worker	0.71	2.00	0.70	1.32	1.44	1.18	0.71	1.51	
Low-skilled manual worker	0.86	1.22	0.60	2.06	1.33	1.22	0.76	2.64	
Bismarckian group (comparator: Professional)									
Salaried white-collar worker	1.02	0.93	1.13	1.60	0.86	0.78	1.21	1.24	
Skilled manual worker	0.78	1.75	1.14	3.23	1.04	1.04	1.16	1.23	
Low-skilled manual worker	1.53	1.81	2.36	2.85	1.09	0.83	1.83	2.39	

Notes: Statistically significant at the 0.05 level or better are shown in bold.

found to be at its lowest in the study sample (Bertram 2016). In Britain, ‘welfare to work’ (as it became known) arrived later, in the 1980s and 1990s (with learning from the US experience, King and Wickham-Jones 1999). In office, the New Labour government under Tony Blair (1997–2007) pursued stricter work-conditionality policies in an effort to cut unemployment and spending on social programmes; as did the Labour-led government in New Zealand under the premiership of Helen Clark (1999–2008).

Figure 1

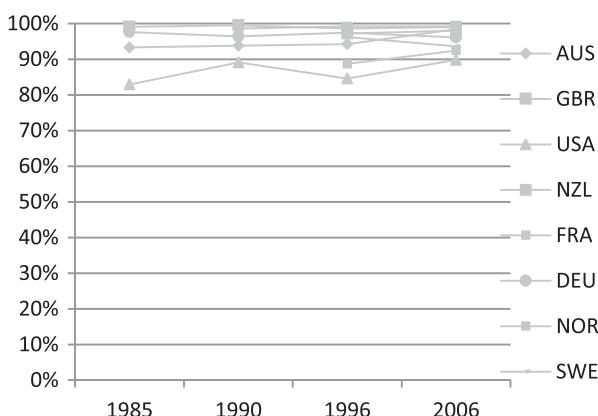
'Decent living standard for the old': Percentage claiming it should be the government's responsibility, by country and wave



Source: ISSP RoG I–IV (ISSP Research Group 2008).

Figure 2

'Health care for the sick': Percentage claiming it should be the government's responsibility, by country and wave

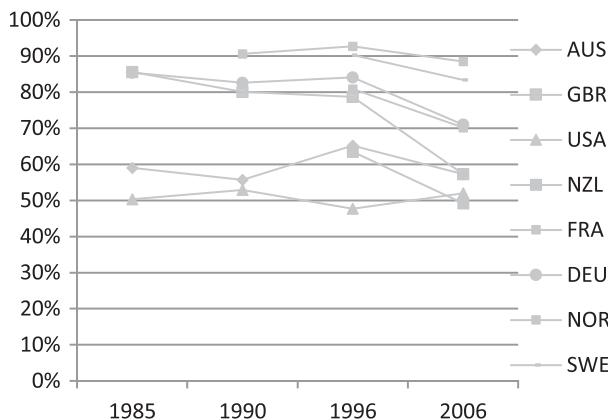


Source: ISSP RoG I–IV (ISSP Research Group 2008).

Universalistic solidarity for the working population emerges most strongly in the coordinated market economies of Continental and Northern Europe. In Nordic countries, for example, less than one-fifth of the public responding to the latest survey object to governmental action to protect the living

Figure 3

'Decent living standard for the unemployed': Percentage claiming it should be the government's responsibility, by country and wave



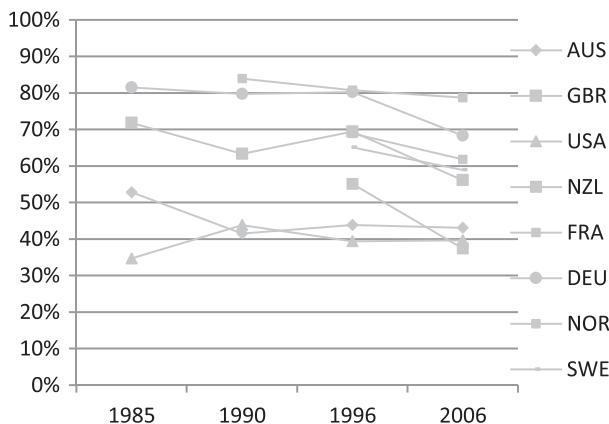
Source: ISSP RoG I-IV (ISSP Research Group 2008).

standards of unemployed workers: only 10 per cent did so in Norway (figure 3). In the Bismarckian social insurance welfare systems, we find less solidarity for workers compared to the Nordics (an effect of the contributory and solidarity model, Stjernø 2009). However, no more than one-third of citizens in France and Germany reject governmental action to help protect workers. By contrast, in the liberal market economies, there is currently little or no public consensus on the role of government in relation to unemployment protection (figure 3). In the last round, the surveyed public remains divided. One-half support the merits of collective provision for income maintenance to safeguard and protect citizens against unemployment risk, while the other half now favours self-insurance or some other form of individual adaptation to labour market flexibility and risk.

In the English-speaking nations as a whole, we find the public is increasingly sceptical about responsibilities of the state to ensure everyone has a job. Most people do not believe it is the state's duty to ensure that everyone has a job (figure 4). In the USA, negative attitudes have been fairly constant over all four survey waves; in the prototypical liberal regime such findings may not surprise (given the dominant *laissez-faire* ideology and weak human capital enhancement programmes for low-skilled workers, OECD 2013).⁴ The strongest levels of support for the right to work are found in the coordinated market economies of Northern Europe, where full employment and ALMPs have been favoured from as early as the 1950s (figure 4). The universalistic Nordic model of welfare entirely depended on employment maximization, and the state therefore played a key role in securing this goal. About four-fifths of the population in Norway and three-fifths of people in Sweden agree with state-led job-creation to ensure employment for all. Not far behind them come

Figure 4

'Jobs for everyone': Percentage claiming it should be the government's responsibility, by country and wave



Source: ISSP RoG I–IV (ISSP Research Group 2008).

the corporatist economies of France and Germany, both of which have strong ALMP traditions (Bonoli 2010). Here most citizens claim that the government should provide a job for everyone. The survey shows citizens in the liberal nations are increasingly sceptical about this form of governmental intervention in the market, however (figure 4).

In summary, we find remarkable agreement cross-nationally on the functions of state in market economies to ensure decent living standards in old-age and health care for sick people. There is near universal support in the sample of nations and the trend is stable across time. At the same time, we find public support for governmental actions to protect workers from unemployment risks is firmly divided in the liberal welfare states, thus revealing substantial cross-national variation. In the next section, we attempt to explain some of this variation and heterogeneity in attitudes, including, of course, class-welfare formations and linkages.

The Determinants of Public Attitudes towards Welfare State Programmes

In the analysis, people in the liberal market economies are least favourably disposed towards welfare rights and governmental action to help workers. However, even within these nations, some sections of society may be more critical of state intervention than others. Here we want to identify more clearly those groups, which either are in favour of or stand against collective forms of social policy and citizenship rights.

In the results (table 1), we observe the importance of class, education and political allegiance in shaping social attitudes. Also important here are national

contexts and time or survey-wave. Over the survey period, support for social policy appears to have increased significantly in the study sample, with the exception of social security policy to guard against unemployment risks. The number of people saying the state should provide a decent standard of living for unemployed workers has fallen significantly (column iii). There are strong gender and age gradients in the survey data; some are well known in this literature (Jæger 2007). Women are significantly more likely to support governmental action than men across all social programmes (columns i–iv). The results suggest there are generational trends in the data. Age gradients suggest that older adults are more inclined to support governmental action that ensures unemployed workers have a decent standard of living than younger adults (column iii).

Class is an important contributory factor in the models: working-class groups display much stronger preferences for unconditional social policy to guard against social risks, compared to middle-class citizens (table I, columns i–iv). Working-class representatives are significantly more likely to say that the state should provide a decent living standard for aged pensioners and health care in the case of serious illness, compared to white-collar professionals (columns i and ii). Representatives of working-class groups are also significantly more likely than middle-class professionals to say that the state should provide a decent standard of living for unemployed workers and intervene in the market in order to guarantee the right to work (columns iii and iv). Table I shows that pro-welfare state preferences are consistently strongest amongst low-skilled manual workers (columns i–iv). Manual workers, who face a different and altogether higher risk of unemployment, are significantly more likely to favour government intervention to support unemployed people. Other things being equal, the odds of a manual worker saying that the state should provide a decent standard of living for unemployed workers are 34 per cent higher than for a citizen in the professional class (column iii). Low-skilled workers, compared to professionals, also have nearly twice the odds of claiming that the state should ensure the right to work (71 per cent higher, as seen in column iv).

In the data, we find some support for regime theories, but the picture overall is less convincing. The highest levels of public support for governmental action (and social policy) are to be found in the more egalitarian countries, particularly Norway and to a lesser extent Sweden. At the extremes, for example, the odds of a Norwegian citizen claiming that the state should provide decent living standards in retirement are more than 17 times greater, compared to a US citizen (column i). In other words, the odds of a Norwegian favouring governmental intervention are 1,600 per cent greater than for the average American, after controlling for everything else. The equivalent odds of a Norwegian citizen saying that the state has a duty to provide health care for sick people are 33 times greater compared to a typical US citizen (column ii); the equivalent odds are 11·1 in favour of a decent standard of living for unemployed workers (column iii). Then the odds of a Norwegian favouring governmental intervention in the market to ensure that everyone has a job are 17 times greater compared to the average American (column iv).

It is evident that social policy enjoys high levels of support in some of the more encompassing welfare states, particularly in Norway where policies have been designed to promote solidarity. Less evident perhaps, is why support for

some aspects of social policy should be stronger in a country such as the UK, a ‘liberal’ welfare regime with policy designs that are more commodifying and stratifying than a ‘social democratic’ welfare regime such as Sweden (table 1). We have already noted the debate over the institutional logic of welfare attitudes. In the RoG survey data, support for governmental action is not always strongest in countries representing the social democratic regime and weakest in countries representing the liberal regime. The findings suggest that British citizens have strong social policy preferences and favour collective solutions to risk, a finding particularly evident in the fields of pensions, health and job-creation policies (table 1). For example, the odds of a British citizen claiming that the state should provide decent living standards in retirement are more than five times greater than for the average American; for a Swedish citizen the equivalent odds are just three times greater compared to the US reference group (column i). Differences over health care rights are even more pronounced. The odds of a British citizen claiming that the state should guarantee the right to health care are 16 times greater than for the average American; for a Swedish citizen the equivalent odds are only twice those of the US reference category (columns ii). Lastly, the odds of a British citizen favouring governmental action in the labour market to ensure that everyone has a job are five times greater compared with the average American. By contrast, Swedish citizens have only twice the odds of supporting government action in this policy arena compared to the US reference group (column iv). Enduring public support for welfare state institutions, it seems, can no longer be assumed in those countries with strong social democratic traditions (Davidsson and Marx 2013).

The Impact of Occupation Category

So far, we have looked at the social class effects generally, rather than their variations within and between nations. The results from the regression analysis can be used to estimate the relative odds of men and women in each class in each country favouring welfare rights. Table 2, for example, considers class preferences for social security policy that guards against unemployment risks for those aged 25–44. Here we see the odds of a low-skilled Norwegian female claiming that the state should protect the living standards of unemployed workers are now 21 times greater compared to the US reference category. The equivalent odds for a man are reduced but the magnitude of difference is still 15 times greater using the same reference group. The odds of a low-skilled female worker in Germany or France believing that government action is required to protect the living standards of unemployed workers are five times greater compared to the US reference group (table 2). The equivalent odds for a man are 4·1. Support for social policy that guards against unemployment risks is relatively low across the English-speaking nations overall and this finding is reflected in the class-based analysis (shown in table 2). Low-skilled female workers in Australia show the most solidarity with unemployed workers; the odds of respondents there claiming that unemployed workers should have the right to a decent standard of living are three times greater compared to the American reference category.

The final part of the analysis focuses on fractured solidarities. Out of the three welfare regime types, we find that class gradients and divisions are more evident in the 'liberal' group after controlling for other factors in the model (table 3). However, it is also the case that divisions and gradients have diminished here, particularly over the right to health care (column ii), but also for unemployment rights (column iii). These findings may surprise, because the 'decommodification' of labour power is said to enhance the agency of workers and undermines their capacity to be exploited. In other words, class cleavages and divisions appear to have reduced over the survey period in the English-speaking democracies when we might well have expected them to increase at a time of growing insecurity. All governments and politicians from across the political spectrum have pursued more punitive ALMPs that have had the greater impact on low-skilled and more precarious workers (issues to do with class fragmentation and precarization effects are beyond the scope of this article, see della Porta *et al.* 2015).

Class-welfare divisions are less evident overall in either the Nordic or Bismarckian nations (table 3) compared to the English-speaking nations, but there is some evidence of convergence as once-firm welfare alliances appear to fracture. In the corporatist group, working-class representatives in 2006 display much stronger preferences for health care rights than in 1996 (column ii). It is suggested that Germany's two-tiered health care system is leading to a much higher quality of care for the wealthy and is becoming more divisive, which is perhaps reflected in the opinion data (Busse and Blümel 2014). In France, as well, the increase in supplementary health insurance is creating a tiered health care system that appears more divided on class lines, despite full coverage policies (Chevreul *et al.* 2010).

In the Nordic group of nations, working-class interests in the means of security are becoming more visible, particularly in the right to work (column iv). As the postwar collectivist order was renegotiated during the 1990s with ALMPs, it appears to have exposed new divisions and fractures in cross-class welfare coalitions (Kananen 2014). In the early years of the 21st century, manual workers in the Nordic group, who face greater job insecurity than their middle-class counterparts, were significantly more likely to claim they should have a right to work than they were in the 1990s. Remarkably, the growing demand for citizenship rights has occurred against the general background of lower unemployment risks (unemployment rates were higher in both Norway and Sweden in 1996 compared to 2006). A similar pattern is also present in the corporatist group of nations. Low-skilled workers in France and Germany increased their demands for citizenship rights after the implementation of high-profile labour-market reforms (i.e. between the 1996 and 2006 RoG surveys, e.g. Hartz reforms 2003–05, Hinrichs 2010). These reforms also coincided with greater risk however (unemployment rates in both France and Germany were above the EU and OECD average during the 2000s).

Discussion and Conclusions

Within market society, the priority is given to free choices within that market, and many believe that society will function best when market principles are

extended to all areas of life. Such arguments might be applied to insurance against illness, unemployment, old-age and other risks that prevent citizens from earning a living. These have typically become areas of egalitarian welfare policy, security and citizenship rights enshrined in social policy. This is an increasingly contested political arena, however, that demands careful scrutiny as workers are buffeted and unsettled by new levels of risk and insecurity.

The article has examined changing attitudes towards welfare rights in different market societies over two decades. Leaving aside for the moment questions about the reliability of the cross-national survey data underpinning the analyses, we find that the traditional welfare functions of the state that ensure decent living standards in old-age and health care have not lost relevance during major periods of welfare reform. Attitudes towards social security and the idea that government should guarantee everyone a job appear to be changing, however, as further ALMP reforms bite. Here the survey data appear to indicate a shifting trend away from support and solidarity for once-key policy components of the welfare state. The patterns of change in social attitudes may be explained, at least in part, by declines in traditional class-based political parties and the changing point of political gravity towards the right. Increasingly, leftist parties appear electorally and ideologically depleted with the rise of populist parties in Europe and most recently the election of Donald Trump in the USA promising to stop job competition through migrants and refugees. Support for right-wing populism seems bound to rise as electorates continue to hold national politicians accountable for their growing sense of insecurity and socio-economic misfortune.

The findings suggest welfare regimes matter, to a degree. In general, support for less stratifying forms of social policy emerges most strongly in the Nordic world. Support for selective social policy and commodification is growing in the liberal world. The Bismarckian world is somewhere in between. From the analysis reported here, it certainly appears that solidarity with unemployed workers has declined in most contexts (except in the USA, where attitudes have been consistent across all four RoG waves). However, declines in welfare solidarity in the coordinated market economies of Continental Europe have been relatively modest in comparison to the market liberal states. The survey evidence suggests that, if most people were not opposed to the direction of recent labour-market reforms, they were certainly not in favour of them either. It is argued that the turn towards the neo-liberal ‘work-first’ or American model of activation marks a retreat from the security of the transfer-heavy welfare state in the Nordic (Kananen 2014) and Bismarckian nations (Hinrichs 2010). ALMPs are now being strengthened as Lødemel and Moreira observe, therefore it will be fascinating to see whether there are any ‘thermostatic effects’ (Wlezien 1995) in future rounds of the RoG in the (once) encompassing welfare states of Northern and Continental Europe. In Britain, there is little evidence of a shift in public opinion to support such thermostatic expectations for social security at present (Deeming and Johnson 2017, forthcoming).⁵

The class analysis is interesting, suggesting cracks have appeared in the social bases of solidarity in the Nordic and Bismarckian countries, following major social reforms – particularly evident in relation to citizenship rights to

work and health care. Solidarity appears more fragile and fractured. Old social risks such as unemployment are still real, as Crouch and Keune (2012) note, and social policy is not responsive to the protective and investment-orientated risk-taking functions required in the modern economy (Deeming and Smyth 2017). Class gradients and oppositions are more pronounced in the liberal market economies than in the Nordic countries, but appear to have softened (here real class differences and inequalities are substantially larger than elsewhere). Interestingly, class oppositions appear not to have increased in the liberal group at a time when we might this, following the intensification of 'work-first' ALMP reforms (table 3). This finding could suggest that the public are adapting to the new environment, becoming more self-reliant and accepting of risk (Keune and Serrano 2014). Will these trends continue?

With the growing trend towards the recommodification of labour and more punitive 'work-first' policies based on compulsion and sanctions and the control of unwanted behaviour, we must ask, will class antagonisms appear more (or less) pronounced in the next survey wave as a result? ALMPs are now being strengthened in many welfare states; in fact, Lødemel and Gubrium (2014) suggest that we are currently witnessing a new 'third wave' of ALMP reforms that started with the global financial crises of 2008. If policy (feedback) causes opinion, we might expect further declines in support for social security protection as a right as more self-reliant middle class citizens in market societies look to minimize their own personal risk exposures at the expense of others or become more supportive of the emerging social investment reform agendas which they and their children are more likely to benefit from (Häusermann and Palier 2017). There appears to be a growing political consensus around the merits of ALMPs and work intensification and growing public acceptance of these programmes, as ideas about the legitimacy of proactive social policy becomes more firmly embedded across nations.

Limitations and agenda for further research

In this study, we have examined the nature and distribution of welfare state attitudes using ISSP RoG data, with particular attention to the class-attitudes nexus. A number of cautions and suggestions for further research follow.

First, we might wish to test (or know the extent to which) this particular survey module is capturing or reflecting real and deep-seated value changes in Western societies and where issues of class and ALMP can be addressed directly. Qualitative comparative inquiry is likely to help in this respect. Qualitative research might also consider the ways in which both working-class and middle-class citizens conceptualize risk and policy preferences. Second, the RoG module focuses on the right to work, i.e. the 'direct' job-creation aspect of labour market policy. However, while spending on direct job-creation still accounts for the largest component of ALMP spending in the OECD, it is in decline, and spending on 'employment incentives' for employers is increasing. Future work might probe public attitudes to ALMPs more closely, including examining views on the use of employer incentives and public investment in training programmes (human capital and employability), as well as attitudes towards ALMPs. Conceptually, it is not

entirely clear where the ‘right’ to work or a ‘job guarantee’ by the state ends and a ‘workfare’ type of programme begins.

In the analysis, it is assumed (quite reasonably, given the selection) that no country has undergone a fundamental change of regime during the study period. Further work might wish to consider attitudes to risk in changing welfare regimes (Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland are perhaps cases in point, Obinger *et al.* 2010). National panel surveys might be able to shed more light on those individuals who have changed or modified their own views about risk and citizenship rights in light of recent reforms. Repeated cross-sectional survey data from surveys such as the ISSP RoG allow attitudes to be estimated only at the aggregate level (i.e. the attitude of each individual is measured at only one point in time, whereas in the panel survey the unit of analysis is an individual person).

Appendix

The ISSP is a continuing programme of cross-national collaboration providing cross-national and cross-cultural perspectives on key research topics in the social sciences. A repeated cross-sectional survey design is used along with sampling procedures in an attempt to ensure that views are nationally representative of all individuals aged over 15 who reside within private households in the participating countries. Table A1 shows the RoG study sample. Each national research organization funds all of its own survey costs. There are no central funds. The merging of the data into a cross-national data set is performed by the Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung, University of Cologne, in collaboration with the Analisis Sociologicos, Economicos y Politicos in Spain.

Table A1

Role of Government country-wave study sample

	Wave I (1985)	Wave II (1990)	Wave III (1996)	Wave IV (2006)	Totals
Australia (AUS)	1,528	2,398	2,151	2,781	8,858
France (FRA)	-	-	1,312	1,824	3,136
Germany (DEU) ^a	1,048	3,840	3,470	1,643	10,001
New Zealand (NZL)	-	-	1,198	1,263	2,461
Norway (NOR)	-	1,517	1,344	1,330	4,191
Sweden (SWE)	-	-	1,238	1,194	2,432
United Kingdom (GBR)	1,530	1,197	989	930	4,646
United States (USA)	677	1,217	1,332	1,518	4,744
Totals	4,783	10,169	13,034	12,483	40,469

Source: ISSP RoG I–IV (ISSP Research Group 2008).

Note: ^a Wave I of the RoG covered only West Germany; all of Germany from Wave II.

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Notes

1. ‘Welfare’, ‘activation’ and ‘ALMPs’ are terms invariably used to capture the so-called ‘activation strategies’ found in the advanced economies. Many distinguish between a Nordic-style ‘train-first’ approach focused on employability and an Anglo-American ‘work-first’ approach that emphasizes rapid job re-entry, although the level of neo-liberal ‘work-first’ convergence is a topic of much scholarly debate. ALMPs with vocational training were developed as early as the 1950s in Sweden, while liberal activation and ‘welfare’ (meaning work for your benefits) was at the forefront of US welfare reforms in the 1970s and 1980s. These particulars are well canvassed in the literature, see Bonoli (2013: 22–3) for example.
2. EGP classes were created using the SPSS-program developed by Ganzeboom *et al.* (1992), based on the ISCO-88 occupational codes available in the latest survey waves. The classed regression analysis presented here is restricted to RoG survey data from waves III and IV; fundamental changes to the way occupation is coded in the ISSP survey occurred after the second wave. In the first and second round, occupational coding is country-specific, as national statistical agencies employed their own class schemes. Unfortunately, country-specific data precludes reliable comparative trend analysis using class as the independent variable across all four waves for this sample of nations. Another approach to defining ‘class’ membership (rather than occupation position) might be to consider the respondent’s own perception of their position in the social hierarchy. Lack of consistency across the survey waves remains an issue however. While a question on ‘subjective social class’ appeared in wave III of the RoG, this was replaced in wave IV by a ‘Top - Bottom self-placement (10 point scale)’.
3. Barack Obama, Second Presidential Debate in Nashville, Tennessee. 7 October 2008.
4. In 2011, for example, public expenditure on ALMPs in Denmark was 2.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), around one percentage point in the Bismarckian nations and just 0.3 per cent in Australia and New Zealand. The USA had the lowest spend: 0.1 per cent of GDP.
5. According to the theory, support for governmental spending on social programmes is linked to public perceptions about whether spending is increasing or is in decline. As public spending declines support for public spending goes up and vice-versa.

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