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HOW MANY WORLDS OF WELFARE STATE ATTITUDES ARE THERE? EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE OF CROSS-NATIONAL SURVEY RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT. The shape and scope of the welfare state in individual countries have been under consideration since the late 1970s. However, since the publication of *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990), discussions have been framed by the Esping-Andersen proposal, which has had an enormous impact on research regarding welfare regimes. This article aims to determine how many worlds of the welfare state can be distinguished in the European context. The empirical analysis is based on the newest data about welfare attitudes, taken from the European Social Survey Round 8. An extended typology by Gøsta Esping-Andersen was used to formulate our research hypotheses, which include Mediterranean and post-socialist countries as separate models. The conclusions obtained as a result of a cross-country multilevel analysis confirm the existence of (a) five worlds of welfare state attitudes and (b) significant differences in particular areas when assessing states' involvement in social policy in the adopted extended typology.

Keywords: welfare regimes, attitudes towards the welfare state, Gøsta Esping-Andersen, multilevel analysis, European Social Survey

Introduction

The issue of welfare and its organisation within the framework of state institutions has been a critical subject for social sciences and practical doctrines since at least the very emergence of nation-states. Discussions on the models of redistribution of the wealth of a given country have been accompanied by substantial literature and original theoretical approaches to the issue (e.g., Alcock & Craig, 2009; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Howard, 1997; Kleinman, 2002; Pierson, 1994; Timmins, 1995; Wilensky, 1974). Following Aidukaite (2009), we can define the welfare state as 'the state's involvement in the distribution and redistribution of welfare in a given country, taking, however, democracy and the relatively high standard of living as a

basis for the welfare state' (p. 24). The democratic thread namely, public opinion is an essential component of the reflection on the welfare state, which determines the possible avenues for political action of certain entities (political parties). The issue of social welfare, in turn, has led to an interest in the redistributive functions of the state (i.e., welfare state attitudes), apparent in people's attitudes and opinions, becoming over time an independent area of empirical research based on national and cross-national surveys (Brezna, 2021; Garritzmann, Neimanns, & Busemeyer, 2021).

One of the most frequently cited typologies of welfare states in the social policy literature is that proposed by Gøsta Esping-Andersen in *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990). Although this typology has been subjected to critical analysis at the level of theoretical assumptions and empirical verifications for 30 years, it is nevertheless an essential even indispensable reference point in studying welfare state regimes. The Danish sociologist distinguished three types of capitalist welfare states, namely the liberal (Anglo-Saxon), corporatist-statist (Christian democratic) and social-democratic (Scandinavian), based on the criteria of decommodification, the level of stratification and institutional configuration between public welfare programmes and those provided by the private sector.

In this paper, we try to answer whether, in the European context, based on the typologies of welfare state regimes, one can distinguish more than three classical models of attitudes towards welfare states. In other words, are there fundamental similarities and differences in attitudes towards welfare states within groups of European countries (corresponding to institutional solutions in the field of social policies)? In the context of the Esping-Andersen capitalist regimes of welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990), this question is crucial from a theoretical and empirical point of view, since both the Mediterranean model (included in the three classical types) and the post-communist (more precisely, post-socialist) model have not been distinguished. The latter was not considered in the Danish researcher's original work (1990) because, understandably enough, the data used did not include the post-transformation period in Central and Eastern Europe. However, in a later study (Esping-Andersen, 1996, pp. 1–31), he stated that 'divergent "post-communist regimes" would shift toward some of the main welfare regime types after fifteen years of transition' (as cited in Pöder & Kerem, 2011, p. 56). One should also note that several attempts to replicate the Danish researcher's results have been made (i.e., Powell & Barrientos, 2011; Scruggs & Allan, 2006a). However, Esping-Andersen's proposal remains one of the essential points of reference for researchers dealing with theoretical and empirical social policy issues. This paper verifies Esping-Andersen's thesis (on three types of regimes) by considering only welfare state attitudes. The empirical data considers 22 countries ($n = 41,830$) from the eighth round of the European Social Survey from 2016 (note, the ESS-2016 constitutes the most up-to-date survey on welfare attitudes that allows for the large-scale cross-national comparative analysis of European countries; no newer data are available). The survey of attitudes towards social policies is crucial in identifying public sentiments and opinions about the fundamental dimensions of social welfare. Political, socio-cultural, economic, and subjective dimensions constitute the multi-factorial relationships within mentioned regimes and their consequences (Gugushvili, Ravazzini, Ochsner et al., 2021; Gugushvili & Van Oorschot, 2021).

1. Welfare state attitudes and their dimensions

The relationship between the types of welfare state regimes distinguished by different starting criteria (Esping-Andersen mentions (a) the degree of decommodification, (b) the level of social stratification and (c) solidarity as a consequence of social policy) and the public attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of a welfare state represent a fairly

comprehensive topic. ‘Comprehensive’ does not mean ‘uncontroversial’ at all since researchers of welfare states’ attitudes have provided different theoretical and methodological explanations of this connection (see Andreß & Heien, 2001; Diermeier, Niehues & Reinecke, 2021; Larsen, 2008; Roosma et al., 2014; Sihvo & Uusitalo, 1995; Svallfors, 2003, 2012b; Toikko & Rantanen, 2017; Van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012).

Following Toikko and Rantanen’s (2017) so-called policy feedback theory (PFT), we assume that ‘the significance of the welfare state model is seen among citizens’ social-political attitudes’ (p. 202). Given the fundamental objective of the study and the literature review (see Breznau, 2016; Lipsmeyer & Nordstrom, 2003; Moretti & Whitworth, 2020; Tworzecki, 2000), and in line with the conceptual framework of our proposal (see Figure 1), we have formulated a central research hypothesis. Standing in opposition to Esping-Andersen’s typology, we assume the existence of five, not three, ‘worlds’ of welfare state attitudes:

Hypothesis 1. In the European context, welfare state attitudes in the Mediterranean and post-communist regimes (Central and Eastern Europe, CEE) differ fundamentally from those of the three classical types (liberal, conservative and social democratic).

Furthermore, since the primary research objective is to verify Esping-Andersen’s strong thesis that there are only three types of welfare regimes in terms of welfare state attitudes, his proposal has been extended, in the European context, by including two additional typologies: the Mediterranean (Gal, 2010) and the Central and Eastern European (Aidukaite, 2009, pp. 27–33; Andreß & Heien, 2001, p. 342). The Danish researcher’s typology is based on the decommodification, social stratification and solidarity, not including the question of attitudes towards these regimes of welfare states. Therefore, we attempt to apply the survey questions on the scope and responsibilities of welfare states to regimes by building on macro indicators, which we deem a heuristic and fertile research perspective.

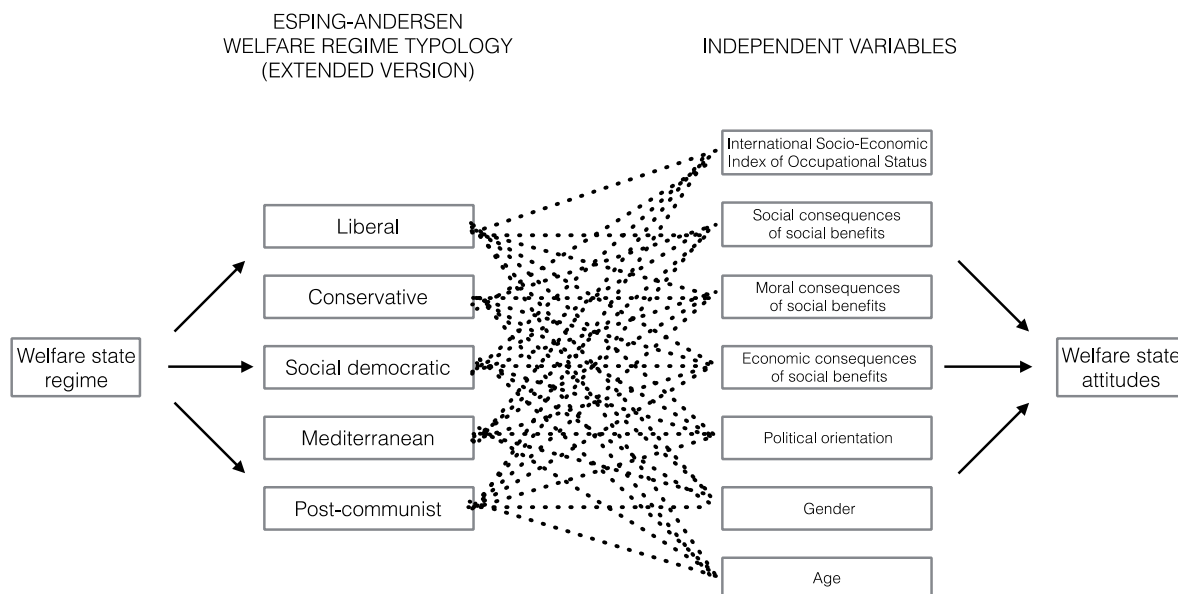


Figure 1. The conceptual link between welfare state regime and welfare attitudes
Source: own elaboration based on Baranowski, 2019, p. 12.

The following hypotheses (H2.1–H2.5) refer to differences between respondents and explain the variability across individuals within countries. In this sense, one of the most crucial determinants of attitudes towards the welfare state is the individual’s socio-economic position, since it differentiates the attitudes towards the redistributive function of the state (Kulin &

Svallfors, 2011; Pfeifer, 2009). Those with lower socio-economic status —whose economic stability is limited compared to respondents located higher in a social structure— should show more positive attitudes towards the state, ensuring decent living conditions. However, individuals' socio-economic situation might play the most decisive role in developing welfare chauvinism' (Svallfors, 2012b, p. 13). For this reason, we developed the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2.1. The higher the individual's socio-economic position, the lower the support for the welfare state scope and responsibilities.

In turn, within country-specific regimes, the location of a given person in a class structure based on, among other things, the employment positions and labour contract (Rose & Harrison, 2007), is an essential component that influences the respondent's attitude towards the scope of the welfare state (in the Scandinavian context, see Esping-Andersen, 2015).

Political orientation is another factor in welfare-related attitudes, which are a part of a broader range of political and economic views (Daniele & Geys, 2015; Gelepithis & Giani, 2022; Pastarmadzheva, 2021) in the context of the state's responsibility for citizens' fate and the extent of the state institutions' interference in the economy. As far as the direction of the dependence on the left-right scale is concerned, 'research has confirmed the straightforward expectation that people with left-wing or egalitarian sympathies are in favour of a strong welfare state (*overall positive* or *performance-critical* cluster) than people with a right-wing or conservative ideology (*overall critical* or *role critical* cluster)' (Roosma et al., 2014, p. 203). Nevertheless, the question of political auto-identification is associated with several difficulties in interpretation, resulting from the differences between countries in terms of left- and right-wing affiliations (Pjurko et al., 2011; Marcos-Marne, 2021), as well as from the ambiguous nature of the concepts themselves (one can identify oneself with a left-wing vision of the economy but be conservative in terms of morality and worldview). Therefore, political orientation is an additional explanatory variable, as attitudes towards and disputes over the welfare state have an active built-in democratic component.

Hypothesis 2.2. Those who identify themselves as left-wingers have a more favourable attitude towards welfare state scope and responsibilities.

The issue of perceiving the consequences of social benefits was broken down in the European Social Survey (ESS) questionnaire into the following categories: (a) social, (b) economic and (c) moral (Meuleman & Delespaul, 2020). These three dimensions of the consequences of social welfare solutions have been the subject of several empirical studies on welfare attitudes (e.g. Roosma et al., 2014; Van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012; Van Oorschot et al., 2012). In the broad sense of the term, surveys of public opinion are interested in respondents' attitudes towards the state's responsibility for crucial issues, such as poverty eradication, the organisation of aid institutions, or the impact on economic structures (Baranowski & Jabkowski, 2021; Christensen, 2021). At the same time, surveys try to determine individuals' attitudes towards the state's involvement in social problems in moral terms (cf. Ervasti, 2012; Karni, 1996; Van Oorschot, 2010).

Hypothesis 2.3. The perception of the consequences of social transfers differentiates attitudes towards the welfare state; hence, we adopted the following specific hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2.3a. Those who perceive the negative economic consequences of social benefits are less likely to support the welfare state (liberal welfare regime).

Hypothesis 2.3b. Those who perceive the negative moral consequences of social benefits are less likely to support the welfare state.

Hypothesis 2.3c. Those who perceive the positive social consequences of social benefits are more likely to support the welfare state.

Gender and age are present in the canon of research on welfare state institutions and public attitudes towards the welfare state (see Bambra et al., 2010; Baslevent & Kirmanoglu,

2011; Delsen & Schilpzand, 2019; Kanas & Müller, 2021; Koster & Kaminska, 2012; Suwada, 2021). Gender and age must be considered in the context of research on attitudes, taking into account the institutional environment, which takes the form of more or less paternalistic solutions for women and relatively extensive forms of support for older people (including pensions, together with the commodification level of social services). Therefore, we expect to confirm the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2.4. Women support the scope and responsibility of the welfare state at a higher level than men do.

Hypothesis 2.5. A positive attitude towards the state's involvement in social policy increases with age.

2. Data and methods

2.1. The European Social Survey

We make use of the data from the European Social Survey that is a cross-national study conducted biennially since 2002. Each round of the project focuses on various topics repeated in each round (core modules) and also contain questions from the special modules. One particular module incorporated into the ESS8, not repeated in later rounds of the project, focused on 'Welfare Attitudes in a Changing Europe' (see ESS (2016) for details). The ESS standardise research procedures to reach cross-national invariance of survey results (see Fitzgerald & Jowell, 2010, Lynn et al., 2007). For instance, the target population covers individuals 15 years and older who live in private households within country borders, irrespective of nationality, citizenship, language or legal status. Moreover, in each country the minimum sample size is 1,500 respondents (or 800 in countries with populations of less than 2 million inhabitants).

In our analysis we selected 22 European countries from ESS round eight (see Table 1). However, we excluded Israel as the only non-European country in a dataset.

Table 1. The list of countries participating in the ESS8-2016 and country-level values of *AttScope* latent variable

Country	Welfare regime	Population size ⁽¹⁾ million	Sample size	Response rate ⁽²⁾	<i>AttScope</i> ⁽³⁾ Mean (SE)
Austria	Chr. Dem.	8.70	2,010	52.5	7.71 (.045)
Belgium	Chr. Dem.	11.31	1,766	56.8	7.38 (.030)
Czechia	CEE	10.55	2,269	68.5	7.79 (.033)
Estonia	CEE	1.32	2,019	68.4	8.03 (.032)
Finland	Soc. Dem.	5.49	1,925	57.7	7.82 (.028)
France	Chr. Dem.	66.73	2,070	52.4	7.33 (.031)
Germany	Chr. Dem.	82.18	2,852	30.6	7.48 (.027)
Hungary	CEE	9.83	1,614	42.7	7.31 (.042)
Iceland	Soc. Dem.	0.33	880	45.8	8.48 (.041)
Ireland	Lib.	4.73	2,757	64.5	7.21 (.029)
Italy	Med.	60.66	2,626	49.7	8.19 (.031)
Lithuania	CEE	2.89	2,122	64.0	8.58 (.033)
Netherlands	Soc. Dem.	16.78	1,681	53.0	6.75 (.029)
Norway	Soc. Dem.	5.21	1,545	52.3	7.92 (.033)
Poland	CEE	37.97	1,694	69.6	7.71 (.040)
Portugal	Med.	10.34	1,270	45.0	8.37 (.041)

RECENT ISSUES IN SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Russian Federation	CEE	143.67 ⁽⁴⁾	2,430	63.4	7.86 (.041)
Slovenia	CEE	2.06	1,307	55.9	7.88 (.043)
Spain	Med.	46.44	1,958	67.7	8.22 (.037)
Sweden	Soc. Dem.	9.85	1,551	43.0	7.66 (.035)
Switzerland	Lib.	8.33	1,525	52.2	6.55 (.043)
United Kingdom	Lib.	65.38	1,959	42.8	7.11 (.032)

Source: *own compilation*

Notes: *Post-stratification weights (including design weights) have been applied in the analysis; Welfare regimes: Chr. Dem.: Christian Democratic, CEE: Central and Eastern Europe, Soc. Dem.: Social Democratic, Med.: Mediterranean, Lib.: Liberal;* ⁽¹⁾ *Source: Eurostat data for 2016 (population on 1st of January);* ⁽²⁾ *2nd version of response rate accordingly to AAPOR (2016) standard definitions;* ⁽³⁾ *Coding: scale from 0 “should not be governments’ responsibility at all” to 10 “should be entirely governments’ responsibility”;* ⁽⁴⁾ *Data available for 2014.*

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Dependent variable

In the ESS project, the measure of attitudes towards ‘welfare state scope and responsibilities’ (hereafter denoted as *AttScope*) refers to citizens’ preferences regarding the legitimate scope of government activities in the domain of pensions, unemployment benefits and childcare (ESS, 2016). People’s preferences regarding the legitimate scope of government activities were assessed by asking the respondents three questions: ‘*People have different views on what the responsibilities of governments should or should not be. For each of the tasks, please answer the following questions on a scale of 0 to 10: how much responsibility do you think governments should have to [1] ensure a reasonable standard of living for the old, [2] ensure a reasonable standard of living for the unemployed and [3] ensure sufficient child care services for working parents?*’. The options on the 11-point scale ranged from 0 (‘Should not be governments’ responsibility at all’) to 10 (‘Should be entirely governments’ responsibility’).

We utilised a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (MG-CFA) to construct the latent variable *AttScope* and evaluate the scale’s quality (Byrne, 2016). We provided information about the model fit statistics in the supplementary materials¹. The analysis provides evidence for cross-country configural and metric equivalence of *AttScope* scal (model fit indices: RMSEA = .014; NFI = .981; CFI = .983), not for the full or even partial scalar equivalence structures. However, one should note that the lack of scalar equivalence does not necessarily entail bias towards the average scores. Therefore, country means can still be reasonably compared under further restrictions (see Davidov et al. [2014] for a review). For instance, one should explain the individual, societal or historical sources of measuring non-equivalence across countries (Cieciuch et al., 2018). Our analysis indicates that the primary reason for not achieving scalar equivalence across countries is that people may understand specific questions differently across 22 European countries and may thus use the response scales differently when responding to survey questions. For example, the Nordic states’ more efficient social care

¹ All statistical procedures implemented within this paper are documented in an SPSS syntax-file, which works with a cumulative dataset (ESS8e02_1.sav) downloaded from the ESS website. For details on how we created the dependent variable and its level-1 and level-2 predictors, see the ESM1.sps syntax file (ISEI – Index; Ganzeboom original) and the ESM2.sps syntax file (PART A: Syntax for creating the @AttScope latent variable with metric equivalence restriction; Part B: Syntax for creating three latent constructs for assessing the consequences of social benefits; PART C: syntax for creating political orientation z-scores; PART D: Syntax for creating gender_recoded; PART E: Syntax for creating age_grand_mean; PART F: Syntax for creating @ISEI_grand_mean; PART G: Syntax for creating the welfare regimes).

systems could explain lower citizens' expectations of welfare state scope and government responsibilities.

In contrast, the post-communist past of Central and Eastern Europe explains the higher level of expectations of governments in this region (cf. Fenger, 2007; Lipsmeyer, 2003; Myant & Drahoukoupil, 2015; Svallfors, 2012a). The transformation of the system from true socialism to capitalism involved dismantling the existing institutions of the socialist welfare state oriented towards full employment (Ehnts & Höfgen, 2019). Hence, the expectations of social policy in capitalism were higher, which was also due to the social vacuum created after the liquidation of old socialist solutions (Ziółkowski, 2021; Kassner, 2021; Skivenes, 2021) while new ones were being developed. In other words, since the respondents had been socialised in a different economic and cultural background, they reacted to the survey question in a completely different but still reasonable and foreseeable way.

2.2.2. *Independent variables*

Our theoretical model assumes that attitudes toward welfare state scopes and responsibilities depend on the respondents' evaluation of the consequences of social benefits. Thus we used three constructs measuring: (a) **the perception of 'social consequences'**, measured by two questions: 'Using this card, please tell me: to what extent do you agree or disagree that social benefits and services in [country] [1] prevent widespread poverty and [2] lead to a more equal society?'; (b) **the perception of 'moral consequences'**, measured by two other questions: 'Using this card, please tell me: to what extent do you agree or disagree that social benefits and services in [country] [1] make people lazy and [2] make people less willing to care for one another?'; and (c) **the perception of 'economic consequences'**, measured by two more questions: 'Using this card, please tell me: to what extent do you agree or disagree that social benefits and services in [country] [1] place too great a strain on the economy and [2] cost businesses too much in taxes and charges?' Concerning all six questions, the same 5-point response options are used: 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neither agree nor disagree), 4 (Agree) and 5 (Strongly agree).

Supplementary materials contain detailed information on the MG-CFA model fit statistics and the syntax commands for creating the latent variables with configural and metric equivalence restrictions across all 22 countries. We do not consider the sources of scalar non-equivalence in this respect since the metric 'cross-country equivalence' hampers a direct comparison of regression coefficients. We standardised all three scales by calculating the z-scores across all countries. In our multilevel linear regression analysis for assessing the association of individual- and country-level predictors with the *AttScope* latent construct, we did not include all three variables since we detected some problems with the multicollinearity of the moral and social predictors². Therefore, the perception of the social and economic consequences of social benefits are present in the multilevel linear regression analysis as covariates of *AttScope*, with the absence of moral consequences.

The International Socio-Economic Index (ISEI) of Occupational Status is a tool for studying occupational status by considering the resultant of three variables: educational level, occupational position and earnings. The structure of the ISEI index is quite different from other classifications sometimes used in surveys to determine the position of an individual in the social structure, such as the European Socio-Economic Classification (Rose & Harrison, 2007), the Erikson-Goldthorpe-Portocarero Class Scheme (Bihagen et al., 2014), the Esping-Andersen Post-Industrial Class Scheme (Esping-Andersen, 1993), Erik Wright's Class Scheme

² For details, see ESM3.sps; PART B: Testing collinearity among the predictors of @Att_Scope.

Power/Control (Wright, 2016) and the Exploitation Model (Wright, 1985, 1997). Unlike other tools, the ISEI is primarily a continuous hierarchical scale and not a nominal variable, avoiding problems with the small number of social classes noticed in survey samples. In addition, the ISEI is based solely on occupational data abstracted from employment status, which is the basis for class position measures (Ganzeboom et al., 1992; Gravel, Levavasseur, & Moyes 2021). Our analysis centred the ISEI on its grand mean of 42.96 before including this predictor in the multilevel linear regression analysis.

Respondents indicated their **political orientation** by positioning themselves along a left-right 11-point scale. Interviewers were asked the following question: ‘*In politics, people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?*’ Before including ‘left-right political orientation’ in our regression analysis, we standardised its original values by calculating z-scores across all countries. However, one should note that the study on ESS data conducted by Piurko et al. (2011) revealed that the meaning of the political left-right continuum differs across countries. Thus, this question of left-right political orientation may tap different ideological dimensions across liberal, traditional and post-communist countries in Europe (Ibenskas & Polk, 2021; Kappe & Schuster, 2021).

We controlled the impact of **gender** and **age** on the dependent variable following the work by Baranowski and Jabkowski (2021), where gender was equal to 0 (women) and 1 (men), while age was centred on its grand mean. We also included an age-squared variable to evaluate the non-linear effect of age on *AttScope*.

We distinguished between five **welfare regimes**, i.e. Christian democratic (i.e. Austria, Belgium, France and Germany), Central and Eastern European (i.e. Chechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, the Russian Federation and Slovenia), social-democratic (Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden), Mediterranean (i.e. Italy, Portugal and Spain) and liberal regimes (i.e. Ireland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom).

2.2.2. Analytical approach

We implemented a multilevel regression analysis of individuals (level 1) nested within countries (level 2). The data were weighted using post-stratification weights (i.e., the linear combination of design and post-stratification weights). Since the dependent variable is a latent construct with quasi-continuous values ranging from 0 to 10, we specify several 2-level linear regression models (see Heck et al., 2013) to test the impact of all covariates and factors on *AttScope*. However, we started with a descriptive analysis of the cross-national differences in the country-level means of the *AttScope* latent variable. Next, we explored the overall associations of all variables with *AttScope* across the 22 countries. First, no predictors model (i.e. a null model with random intercepts across countries) was developed to partition the variance in the *AttScope* outcome into its within (level 1: individuals) and between (level 2: countries) components. Second, we established Model 1 by including all level-1 predictors. This model assumes the regression coefficients (slopes) to be constant across countries, although the mean values of *AttScope* (i.e. intercepts in a multilevel regression) vary from country to country. Finally, we examined the differences in the *AttScope* latent variable between groups of countries representing different types of welfare regimes (Model 2a: main effects) and the cross-group differences in the strength of associations of all independent variables with *AttScope* (Model 2b: interactions). The latter was accomplished by adding the type of welfare regime as a country-level (2nd level) nominal variable (Model 2a) and by adding the interaction of the type of welfare regime with all independent variables (Model 2b) into a 2-level regression analysis (the liberal model of welfare regime constitutes the reference category for this

analysis). However, one should note that it is common practice to develop multilevel modelling by adding both the individual-level characteristics of the respondents and the macro-economic characteristics of the countries. However, we intended to use the extended Esping-Andersen welfare regime typology as the only variable at the country level. The reasons for this were the concept of Esping-Andersen from the prism of the macro-indicators has been tested many times (see Scruggs & Allan, 2006), and our main goal was to verify the extended Esping-Andersen model purely in the context of public attitudes towards welfare state institutions.

3. Results

3.1. Cross-country differences in public attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of welfare states

Our analysis demonstrates that the mean value of the *AttScope* latent variable is above the scale midpoint of 5 in all countries participating in the ESS round 8 (see Table 1). An overwhelming majority of the population of the 22 European countries has considerable expectations for the scope and responsibilities of welfare states; that is, most respondents in all countries are convinced that it is the government's responsibility to take care of pensions, unemployment and childcare (Husson, 2019). However, there are still substantial differences across all 22 participating countries. For example, the mean values of *AttScope* ranged from 6.55 in Switzerland to 8.48 in Iceland and 8.58 in Lithuania.

This wide cross-country variation in the level of expectations towards welfare states' scope and responsibilities clearly shows the need to identify and describe the cross-national similarities and dissimilarities in the average level of the *AttScope* latent variable and the associations of the socio-political and demographic variables with public attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of welfare states. Hence, to verify Hypotheses H2.1, H2.2 and H2.3, we begin with an analysis of all individual-level effects on attitudes towards welfare states' scope and responsibilities across all countries. We will subsequently explore the differences between groups of countries representing different welfare regimes (namely Christian democratic, Central and Eastern European, social democratic, Mediterranean and liberal) to test whether the data supports our primary hypothesis, H1.

Table 2 presents the results of four multilevel linear regression models³, namely: the null model (no predictors model), Model 1 (individual-level predictors of *AttScope* included), Model 2a (individual-level predictors and the level-2 main effects of welfare regimes included) and Model 2b (Model 2a extended by adding interactions of welfare regimes with individual-level predictors). The null model provides a population estimate of the amount of variation in *AttScope* explained by the nested structure of the dataset (i.e. individuals nested within countries) using the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC). This coefficient describes the proportion of variation common to each country compared to the variation associated with respondents within countries. One can note from *Table 2* that the proportion of variance in *AttScope* scores between countries is 0.112 (for details, see the ICC in the null model). By incorporating the level-2 predictor (i.e. the type of welfare regime), we have reduced the unexplained cross-country variance in *AttScope* scores by 34.8% to 0.072 (for details, see the ICC estimates in Models 2a and 2b). However, the latter means that country-level characteristics other than the type of welfare regime may still lie behind the cross-country variability in the *AttScope* mean scores. We should also keep in mind that since we have only

³ The syntax commands for producing the results presented in Table 2 can be found in the ESM3.sps, PART C: Multilevel linear regression (level 1: individuals; level 2: countries).

22 countries in our multilevel model, any additional country-level variables would decrease the accuracy of the prediction of the regression parameters (see Harrell Jr., 2015).

Table 2. Associations of the individual- and country-level predictors with *AttScope* latent variable: 2-level multilevel linear regression models

Covariates and factors	Null model		Model 1		Model 2a		Model 2b	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Intercept (constant)	7.678***	.114	8.055***	.129	7.347***	.245	7.360***	.244
<i>Individual-level variables</i>								
Social consequences			.082***	.009	.082***	.009	.108***	.027
Economic consequences			-.274***	.009	-.274***	.009	-.318***	.025
Left-right scale			-.129***	.009	-.130***	.009	-.203***	.026
ISEI			-.006***	<.001	-.006***	<.001	-.006***	<.001
Gender (Female = 0)			-.114***	.017	-.114***	.017	-.112***	.017
Age			.016***	.002	.016***	<.001	.015***	.003
Age square			-.0001***	<.001	-.0001***	<.001	-.0001***	<.001
<i>Country-level variables (main effect)</i>								
<i>Welfare regimes</i>								
- CEE					.870***	.282	.851***	.281
- Christian Democratic					.495	.311	.484	.310
- Mediterranean					1.251***	.334	1.244***	.332
- Social Democratic					.751*	.298	.7405	.297
<i>Interactions of welfare regimes with individual-level variables</i>								
<i>* Social consequences</i>								
- CEE							-.033	.031
- Christian Democratic							.009	.034
- Mediterranean							-.114***	.038
- Social Democratic							-.032	.035
<i>* Economic consequences</i>								
- CEE							.059*	.030
- Christian Democratic							.070*	.031
- Mediterranean							.104***	.037
- Social Democratic							.001	.034
<i>* Left-right scale</i>								
- CEE							.113***	.030
- Christian Democratic							.033	.032
- Mediterranean							.115***	.035
- Social Democratic							.095***	.032
<i>* Age</i>								
- CEE							.006***	.002
- Christian Democratic							<.001	.002
- Mediterranean							.002	.002
- Social Democratic							<.001	.002
-2 * Log-Likelihood	109163.575		107556.264		107546.262		107570.685	
Number of parameters	3		10		14		38	
Variance (within)	2.243***		2.121***		2.121***		2.112***	
Variance (between)	.283***		.265***		.165***		.164***	
ICC	.112		.111		.073		.072	

Source: own compilation

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; β = estimates of regression coefficients; SE = standard error of β ; ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient.

3.2. Strength of effects by type of welfare regime

As shown in Table 2 (Model 1), all covariates are significant predictors of public attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of welfare states. In line with Hypothesis H2, the ISEI significantly differentiates attitudes towards a welfare state's scope and responsibilities. The relationship is negative; in other words, the higher the respondent is located in a social class hierarchy, the lower the degree of expectations towards the scope and responsibilities of the welfare state they demonstrate. Moreover, the estimates of the regression coefficients show that individuals who perceive the positive consequences of social benefits are more convinced that it is the government's responsibility to create welfare policies in a country. Simultaneously, the relationship is negative for those who perceive the economic consequences of social benefits as negative (this supports Hypothesis H2.3).

What is more, individuals who placed themselves nearer to the right side of the political spectrum had more negative attitudes towards welfare states' scope and responsibilities, which is in line with Hypothesis H2.2. The level of support for the statement 'It is the government's responsibility to take care of pensions, unemployment and childcare' is higher among females, supporting Hypothesis H2.4. Finally, we found that attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of welfare states are positively associated with age and negatively associated with age squared. The latter means that the positive effect of age becomes weaker among older people (hump-shaped relationship), as indicated by the negative coefficient of age squared (in line with Hypothesis H2.5).

3.3. Individual-level effects of public attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of welfare states

We also conducted a series of analyses to examine any significant differences between groups of countries representing different types of welfare regimes (i.e. Christian democratic, Central and Eastern European, Mediterranean and social democratic, with the liberal type set up as the reference category). Model 2a demonstrates significant differences in public attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of welfare states between liberal states and other groups of countries. Mainly, if we consider not only the results of the regression analysis but also the mean values of the AttScope latent construct (hereafter marked as ξ) in each group of countries, one can conclude that the mean value of the latent construct is lowest in liberal states ($\xi=6.97$; 95% CI of $\xi \in [6.47; 7.47]$), while in Mediterranean countries, the mean value is the highest ($\xi=8.21$; 95% CI of $\xi \in [7.72; 8.72]$). The groups of countries ordered by increasing mean value of AttScope are as follows: Christian democratic countries ($\xi=7.46$; 95% CI of $\xi \in [7.03; 7.89]$), social-democratic states ($\xi=7.72$; 95% CI of $\xi \in [7.34; 8.11]$) and Central and Eastern European countries ($\xi=7.84$; 95% CI of $\xi \in [7.51; 8.16]$).

Our final model (Model 2b) indicates how the particular effects observed in Christian democratic, Central and Eastern European, social democratic and Mediterranean countries differ from the reference category (i.e. liberal states). The interaction effects need to be compared with the overall effect of a particular variable reflecting their association with attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of a welfare state in countries classified as liberal. For example, suppose the regression coefficient's overall estimate for any variable of interest is positive and significant. In this case, the negative interaction indicates that the effect of the variable in countries from a particular type of welfare regime is weaker than in countries representing the liberal regime. Similarly, if the overall regression coefficient is negative and significant, a negative interaction indicates a more substantial effect, while a positive indicates a weaker effect.

Keeping in mind the way of interpreting the interaction effect model, one can conclude that the positive and significant impact of the perceived social consequences of social benefits on AttScope and the significantly negative estimate of the regression coefficient in Mediterranean countries indicate that this impact is substantially weaker in this group of countries than in liberal states. On the other hand, the strength of this predictor's effect in Central and Eastern European, Christian democratic and social democratic regimes does not differ significantly from that in liberal countries. Similarly, when one bears in mind the significant and negative impact of the economic consequences of social benefits on AttScope, the interaction effect model indicates that this effect is significantly weaker in the CEE, Christian democratic, and especially in the Mediterranean countries. Moreover, the impact of political orientation is also softer in the CEE, Mediterranean and social democratic regimes than in the liberal countries. Finally, we found the effect of age to be stronger in the CEE countries.

Moreover, since Model 2b contains only significant interactions of welfare regimes with the individual-level covariates, one can find the interaction effect of welfare regime negligible for the ISEI and gender, as they are absent in the presented model of analysis. However, the overall effect of the ISEI is significant both in Models 1 and 2a. In consequence, the negative relationship between the position of an individual in the social structure and attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of a welfare state is uniform across different types of welfare regimes. Similarly, the interaction effect for gender is not significant, with females having more positive attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of welfare states regardless of the type of welfare regime.

Discussion

Concerning the question 'How many worlds of welfare state attitudes are there?', through the lens of Esping-Andersen's typology, we can distinguish five such worlds in the European context. However, bearing in mind that our research was based solely on survey data, the consequences of the results should not be overlooked. For this reason, the extension of the three-part typology of the Danish sociologist—widely present in the literature on welfare states (see Arts & Gelissen, 2002; Bamba, 2007; Kammer et al., 2012)—has its tangible consequences. At the political level, we may interpret it as a necessity for further in-depth analysis of public opinion considering different models and, consequently, different social expectations in Mediterranean countries and Central and Eastern Europe. On the socio-cultural level, the issue of differences between countries in a given model becomes apparent in the shape of social policy institutions or reactions to the recent financial crisis (e.g. the Baltic states versus the Visegrád group countries). The economic level is connected to the possibility of financing social policies. However, most importantly, it also reveals citizens' attitudes towards social welfare, acceptable entrepreneurship models or the redistributive function of the state. There is also a subjective level of evaluation of individual welfare state solutions, combining the overlapping dimensions of the phenomenon under study.

The results of the ESS-based cross-country multilevel analysis confirmed our research hypotheses. First of all, the more positively a respondent perceived the consequences of social transfers, the more positive their attitudes towards the state's role were. The reverse correlation occurred for perceiving the economic consequences of social benefits as negative. Moreover, considering the social and economic consequences of social benefits, citizens of the Mediterranean countries differed in the strength of the impact of both covariates on public attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of welfare states compared to the strength in the liberal states (i.e. the association is weaker in the Mediterranean states). The strength of welfare

attitudes regarding the economic consequences of social benefits is also weaker in the CEE and Christian democratic countries. On the other hand, in the social democratic states, the impact of seeing positive social and negative economic consequences of social benefits on attitudes towards a welfare state had the same strength as in the liberal states.

One can also note that the results of the interactions between the individual-level covariates of welfare state attitudes and the different types of welfare regimes are consistent with the literature (e.g. Larsen, 2008), where the expectations of citizens in a liberal regime (i.e. the social and economic consequences of social benefits) do not coincide with the support for social policies. In other words, in a liberal regime, someone who sees less positive social and economic consequences of social transfers is more against state interference in this sphere than in the Mediterranean, CEE and Christian models. We also found that gender and the ISEI do impact attitudes towards the scope and responsibilities of welfare states. However, at the same time, the strength of the effect within different types of welfare regimes is constant. On the other hand, age plays the most crucial role in CEE countries, which can be explained by the structural problems of the region's economies (i.e. problems with the pension system)—mainly a low level of this senior benefit—resulting in more robust support for state involvement in social policy (see Aidukaite, Hort, & Ainsaar, 2021; Chłoń-Domińczak & Strzelecki, 2013).

Given the empirical premises for the differentiation of individual welfare state regimes, one cannot ignore the limitations of thinking in terms of models or the essence of survey research itself. Although we have devoted a great deal of effort to carry out statistical inferences based on the ESS data, we are aware of several limitations of our study. First, there is the question of whether we can judge the welfare state (and its influence on the attitudes of citizens) based on the characteristics of national surveys. And—on a more fundamental level—whether the failure to take into account the non-governmental determinants of the welfare phenomenon (e.g. the private sector, the third sector or non-institutional forms of support for people in need) does not disqualify the discourse on this topic (see Spicker, 2018). The fact that countries belong to the model (e.g. the Netherlands belonging to the social democratic regime) and the heterogeneity of particular regimes (e.g. Portugal and Italy belonging to the Mediterranean states), together with the phenomenon of emergence and variability in their area, are further theoretical challenges. Individual regimes of welfare states differ in terms of the acceptable level of interference of state institutions in the economic sphere, which translates into the attitude of citizens towards this activity (market attitudes in the liberal regime result in greater reservations about redistributive activities, while the opposite is true of the social democratic model). Methodological issues related to the survey's quality, nonresponse level, and the number of units analysed in the multilevel regression analysis complete the—still open—list of limitations. However, Esping-Andersen's typology on thinking about inter-country differences in the organisation of welfare states is so influential that any form of polemics and going beyond the three regimes of capitalist welfare states might have heuristic qualities and explanatory qualities power. The undermining at the welfare state level allows for a different view of the solutions and social problems in Mediterranean and post-communist countries.

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