1. Introduction

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This book is about the attitudes to the welfare state of ordinary people in almost thirty European countries. It addresses the subject from a comparative perspective, exploiting the significantly improved availability of data provided by the 2008 European Social Survey (ESS). A comparative perspective enables us to target our interest not only at the variations between individuals and social groups, but also at the differences between countries. Indeed, we seek to combine analyses at the micro level (variations between individuals, groups, etc.) with analyses at the macro level (between countries). With regard to country differences, the book embodies the notion of different welfare models or ‘welfare regimes’ across Europe (in a slightly geographically enlarged format), but also examines other country differences. The book is linked to analyses of policy challenges and policy change in modern welfare state theory and addresses, inter alia, new social risks and perceptions of risk, challenges linked to changing family structures, and the more general impact of immigration and heterogeneity. In so doing, the book will hopefully be of relevance not only to scholars and others interested in research on political attitudes or welfare attitudes, but also to those interested in the changes in modern welfare policy.

Public attitudes to welfare is not an entirely new field of research, and national surveys on welfare state attitudes were first conducted in the 1970s. Nevertheless, in a complete overview of English-language literature concerning public support for the welfare state, Shapiro and Young (1989) were able to list only 186 relevant worldwide references prior to 1989. Most of these early studies were based on single country and cross-sectional surveys, most of them were rather explorative in design, and few of them had any relationship with broader theories concerning welfare states and welfare state change.

The lack of adequate data constituted a serious constraint, and in the absence of data about attitudes, theories concerning the welfare state – or concerning the impact of social change – frequently had to rely more
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on assumptions than on empirically tested propositions. Looking at research from three decades, we find references to the ‘legitimacy crisis of the welfare state’ (Habermas, 1975) or at least to ‘tax-welfare backlash’ (Wilensky, 2002); and we find plausible but weakly founded presumptions that welfare arrangements are almost indiscriminately popular, or at least that retrenchment will almost certainly encounter serious popular resistance (Pierson, 1994). In this volume we will show that welfare attitudes are much more nuanced and complicated.

Over the last two decades, the situation regarding data has improved dramatically: not only at the national level, but also cross-nationally. Both time series and comparative data immediately offer the opportunity to question the impact of macro-level factors more closely associated with welfare state variations and welfare state change. In order to study attitude formation a comparative perspective is important, as comparing attitudes in different institutional settings may shed light on the causes and processes behind attitudinal patterns (Svallfors, 2010). The comparative opportunity for research on welfare attitudes came about in the 1990s with the establishment of large-scale, comparative datasets of increasing quality: the Eurobarometer; the International Social Survey program (ISSP); the European Value Study (EVS); the World Values Survey (WVS); and from 2002, the European Social Survey (ESS). The most comprehensive comparative means with which to examine welfare attitudes to date is the 50 question module ‘Welfare Attitudes in a Changing Europe’ in the 2008 ESS developed by Svallfors et al. (2008). With only one exception, all the chapters in this book are based on data from this module.

In addition to being time and space dependent, support for the welfare state has increasingly become recognized as multidimensional. It is not just a question of being ‘for’ or ‘against’ the welfare state, and we should therefore speak of support for different aspects of it. To note just a few: there are different policy fields; there are questions of the scope vs. the design of welfare systems; and there are questions of their performance. There are even positive and negative aspects in attitudes concerning welfare policies. All this implies that studying welfare state attitudes must include perceptions of collective policy problems as well as perceptions of individual risks, as these make up part of the foundations on which attitudes are formed.

To address these issues more systematically, we must turn to the question of the different aspects or sub-dimensions of welfare state attitudes (including values and perceptions), as well as to the different theoretical perspectives on these attitudes.
The Welfare State and Welfare State Change

We could perhaps take our starting point from the classical definition of the welfare state provided by Asa Briggs (1961, p. 228):

A welfare state is a state in which organized power is deliberately used (through politics and administration) in an effort to modify the play of market forces in at least three dimensions – first, by guaranteeing individuals and families a minimum income irrespective of the market value of their work or their property; second, by narrowing the extent of insecurity by enabling individuals and families to meet certain ‘social contingencies’ (for example, sickness, old age and unemployment) which lead otherwise to individual and family crisis; and third, by ensuring that all citizens without distinction of status or class are offered the best standards available in relation to a certain agreed range of social services.

Although this definition of the welfare state is rather old, it is well suited to current research interests. It has the advantage of being rooted in a macro-level, historical perspective. Moreover, it has the advantage of underlining the different dimensions of the welfare state that are also reflected in attitudes. In particular, it directs attention to the fact that the welfare state is a matter of protection against risk, it is about equality and solidarity, and it is also about services. These three aspects are useful for our purposes in this volume. In the following we discuss each aspect in more detail and also bring in an additional aspect, namely the importance of the impact and performance of the welfare state.

Old and New Risks and Perceptions of Risk

With regard to the question of risk, several new developments and new challenges are pertinent. European welfare states face large challenges around restructuring employment due to globalization and technological change. In addition to the classical need for protecting income against the risks of unemployment and other adverse life events, new challenges are posed by under-employment. In relation to changes in the family structure, we face new risks of insufficient service provision, and in relation to the ‘marketization’ of welfare provision (and more broadly to the ‘mixed economy of welfare’) we find new risks concerning the insufficient quality of services for some people. More accurately, at least we find new perceived risks, where risk perception is an important and under-researched dimension in its own right. How do these risks
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and perceptions of risk vary across countries, how are they related to welfare institutions and other macro-level factors, which groups currently perceive extraordinary risks, and how are perceptions of risk linked to welfare state attitudes in a more narrow sense? These are some of the questions to be addressed regarding the risk aspect of welfare state research.

Migration, Diversity and Solidarity

Historically, the welfare state is not only a product of modern governments, but to some extent was actually an element in the process of nation-building in the country that took the first steps, namely Germany. With regard to solidarity, although this could have several bases, it has been demonstrated that one of the criteria for ‘deservingness’ is ‘identity’, in other words that people who are ‘like us’ are considered more deserving among Western populations (van Oorschot, 1998). Due to globalization and immigration, heterogeneity and multiculturalism could constitute challenges to the solidarity underlying the modern welfare state. Indeed, racial and ethnic diversity has been suggested as a key factor in explaining why the US failed to develop a comprehensive welfare state similar to European ones (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004). The ESS data allow us to address these issues from different perspectives. Immigration and the interface between migration policy and welfare policy have been among the most conflict-ridden issues for welfare policy in European societies, and undoubtedly the issue that has contributed most to party political change. Even though political manifestations have attracted immense interest, we still have only a rather scant picture of the underlying processes concerning solidarity and welfare state attitudes.

Welfare Services and Changing Family Structures

The struggle to maintain a traditional family structure based on the idea of one breadwinner has traditionally been one of the distinguishing elements of what are termed the Conservative or Christian Democratic welfare regimes of Continental Europe (Esping-Andersen, 1990; van Kersbergen, 1995). Today, it is hardly premature to state that this battle has been lost. Instead, insufficient child and family care has become a new social risk (cf. above), and attitudes to governmental responsibility for childcare have become an important, but rather under-researched, aspect of attitudes to the welfare state in general. How do attitudes divide social groups, on what bases are attitudes formed, and to what extent
do attitudinal variations follow the ‘classical’ divisions between welfare regimes?

Impact and Performance of the Welfare State and Other Issues

Among the aspects of welfare state attitudes that were not anticipated by Briggs’ original definition are the matters of impact and performance. In the first place, the welfare state has a very significant impact on the entire economy. In an era of supply-side economics, economists have often been critical of incentives, and more broadly of the distortions to market efficiency resulting from taxes, benefits, regulations, etc. Reaching well beyond any particular economic ‘schools’, economists and others have been concerned about the economic sustainability of the welfare state vis-à-vis globalization and competitiveness, and vis-à-vis ageing populations, healthcare innovations and other factors that could make it increasingly difficult to meet the future costs of welfare. More generally, it has also been suggested that trust in the performance of the welfare state and in the fairness of distribution of the costs and benefits could be key variables in the overall assessment of mature welfare states (Rothstein, 1998; Goul Andersen, 2008).

Linked to these issues are the pertinent questions of how people will react to the sometimes rather serious cutbacks to be implemented in the wake of the financial crisis or deep recession of several European economies around 2010, and how they will react to the long-term challenges of economic sustainability facing the welfare state. Unfortunately, we do not have adequate comparative data on the reactions to the crisis (some of these remain to be seen at the time of writing). However, we are able at least to address the issue of trust in the performance of the welfare state.

The impact of the changing social structure is reflected in the standard background variables used throughout the chapters of this volume. Moreover, we consider the effects of an additional changing factor which is often neglected in research in this field. This factor is religious change and secularization. The impact of religious feelings, and of changing or declining religious commitments, on support for the welfare state could be expected to influence people’s general views on society and particularly attitudes on social policies. Indeed, several scenarios are imaginable, since the Church may have been committed to helping the poor, but certainly not always committed to (state) welfare. This question is addressed in a separate chapter of this volume.

This is certainly not an exhaustive list of the relevant issues from the perspectives of social policy or welfare state change, but the issues above do constitute a relatively broad sample.
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WORLDS OF WELFARE

The historical development of European welfare states has varied between countries and there have been numerous attempts at classification, or at identifying ideal-typical models. The most prominent among these, and the most often used point of reference, are the three models of welfare regimes identified by Esping-Andersen (1990). Using underlying political forces as labels, Esping-Andersen distinguished between what he defined as the liberal model, the conservative model and the social democratic model. Questioning the labelling of the dependent variable derived from the presumed independent variables, or questioning the causal link, others have proposed labels that refer only to the dependent variable. However, nearly all attempts end up with very similar classifications or ideal-typical models. Although the models are, strictly speaking, ideal typical (the characteristics of which are mixed in existing welfare states), countries are usually classified as belonging to one type or another.

The models can be briefly characterized as follows. The liberal model, as exemplified by the USA, Canada, Australia and (slightly more ambiguously in the past) the United Kingdom, is characterized by relatively little involvement of the state in the provision of social welfare. Social security is a matter of individual responsibility, and means-tested schemes predominate in order to ensure that welfare benefits are mainly directed at those who cannot provide for themselves. To varying degrees, the private provision of social welfare is an important alternative. The conservative model, as exemplified by Continental European countries such as Germany, Austria, France and the Netherlands, is based on the industrial achievement-performance model, or on merit. The key purpose of welfare is to provide security and income replacement for citizens (originally male breadwinners) in order to maintain their previous status. Social security benefits are strongly related to work effort and financed by mandatory social contributions from employers and employees. Traditionally, these welfare states were based on the idea of subsidiarity and on the central role of the family in individual well-being. Institutions have provided incentives for a one-breadwinner family model, although the struggle to maintain the traditional family structure was irreversibly lost in the two decades following Esping-Andersen’s (1990) seminal work. Finally, the social democratic model, which is prevalent in the Nordic countries, secures a high level of mainly tax-financed social welfare for all citizens. State involvement in the provision of healthcare, education and welfare services is high; particularly with regard to childcare, care for the elderly and other care obligations taken over from the families. Hence, public sector employment is very high.

The three-fold typology has mainly been criticized or extended on
two points, as far as European welfare states are concerned. First, a number of scholars (e.g. Ferrera, 1996) have argued that the conservative (Continental European) model should in fact be divided into two, as the Southern European or Mediterranean model constitutes a particular type of its own. In particular, it differs by its emphasis on the family, by insufficient or absent minimum social security provisions in the form of social assistance, but by the provision of universal healthcare. Further, the typology was defined prior to the break-up of the Socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. Although the new regimes have to a large extent been inspired by their neighbours in building new welfare states for a capitalist society, they could reasonably be categorized together as an Eastern European model. Even though the theoretical foundations for this distinction are not perfectly clear, it has obvious pragmatic purposes.

Nevertheless, for purely analytical purposes it is beneficial to use a categorization of countries into the types used for analysis throughout this volume. In the analyses in the following pages we simply need a classification of countries that can be used as a background variable. Although it is certainly not our purpose to become involved in a vigorous discussion about the correct classification of welfare states, we nevertheless suggest two additional regimes (Eastern European and Southern European), in addition to those distinguished by Esping-Andersen (1990). Our practical classification for these additional categories is as follows.

The Eastern European regime consists of Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. This group of countries is probably the most heterogeneous, since after the collapse of socialism in Europe, countries included in the original Leninist category of welfare states started to develop in their own directions (see Beblavy, 2010). In many cases, these countries have nothing else in common other than their joint history as members of the Soviet Bloc. In the following analyses, we indicate separately where our classification may have a distorting effect on the results.

The group of Southern European countries consists of Cyprus, Greece, Portugal and Spain. This group comes close to the conservative model, but as will be seen later in this volume, some attitudinal differences can be found between the Southern and Central European models.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO THE WELFARE STATE

Naming the contemporary challenges to the welfare state could easily result in an extensive list. We therefore focus only on some of them. We
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have seen that due to new risks added to the old ones, the welfare state faces increasing problems in delivering social security. At the same time as state economies have changed from a position of slow growth to one of more or less permanent financial crisis, they are accumulating debt that is becoming increasingly unmanageable in many countries. In the nineteenth century the (warfare) states spent around 25 per cent of public budgets on military provision, while social expenditure amounted to about 5 per cent. Today this position is reversed, and on average half of government expenditure is on welfare, whereas military budgets amount to about 5 per cent (Castles et al., 2010, p. 6).

Basically, the problems of the welfare state may be divided into three intertwined aspects: economic, demographic, and ideological. The economic sustainability of the welfare state is often questioned, because expenditure on health services, unemployment compensation and other benefits increases more rapidly than state income. Increasing globalization has led to increased competition and rapid structural changes in Europe, giving rise to high rates of unemployment. Globalization has also resulted in the increased migration to Europe of people from other cultures. This places additional strain, both on welfare expenditures and potentially also on popular support for the welfare state, as migration decreases the homogeneity of European populations.

The demographic problems of European welfare states are two-fold. The proportion of older people is increasing due to a combination of an unbroken linear trend in increased life expectancy and a decline in birth rates. The result is that the increasing costs of pensions and care for the elderly have to be covered by a constant or diminishing work force.

Economic problems are usually accompanied by ideological shifts. In the 1970s, stagflation and increasing unemployment caused by oil shocks had already stimulated an ideological turn to the political right, with an increased trust in market solutions and less governmental interference in society and the economy. The same happened in the 1990s, but currently (and especially due to the fall of communism in 1989) belief in the benefits of a free market has also found acceptance within social democratic parties. A greater reliance on market solutions and individual freedom has come at a price. The long-standing trend towards decreasing income inequality has been broken and since the 1990s, income inequalities have increased in most European countries, even in the Scandinavian countries that have most ardently defended social solidarity. These trends may also be reflected in the attitudes of the general public.

The welfare states in Europe were not the result of a grand plan, but emerged gradually due to many laws and regulations, both minor and major, that promoted the welfare of the populations. Today, politicians

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in all substantial European political parties endorse the welfare state, but in practical terms they take small steps to retrench the institutions. Many of these steps, including privatization, marketization and outsourcing, would have been politically impossible only a couple of decades ago in most European countries. In this respect, the ideological shift seems to have come to stay.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR WELFARE ATTITUDES

As noted above, the data used throughout this book is obtained from the European Social Survey, and all but one of the chapters use the Welfare Attitudes module included in the ESS Round 4. The 50 questions in the module follow the structure of a model of the main welfare attitudes dimensions and the expected (causal) relationships between them (Svallfors et al., 2008). These are illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Moving clock-wise from bottom left, the starting point of the model is that the risks and resources to which individuals and social groups are exposed are a function of their socio-economic and demographic positions within society. These are in turn affected by the institutional setting typical of each European country and, more generally, the overall economic situation. Risks and resources combined may create a set of predispositions

![Diagram of conceptual model of welfare attitudes]

Source: Adapted with some changes from Svallfors et al. (2008).

Figure 1.1 A conceptual model of welfare attitudes
(such as trust, and social and ideological values) which in turn form attitudes to welfare policies, or which may have a direct effect on welfare state attitudes.

The ESS module covers a broad set of attitudes to welfare policies. The module is divided in five parts. The first part covers the scope of the welfare state, or the extent of governmental responsibilities. The second part concerns the question of collective financing and attitudes to taxation. The third examines the perceived legitimacy of alternative welfare state models. The fourth deals with the personal evaluation of the welfare state service delivery. Is it efficient and just? The fifth concerns attitudes towards the target groups and individual recipients of welfare policies. Are the recipients seen as undeserving, or are their claims and rights considered to be legitimate? Many of the chapters here focus on explaining these attitudes to the welfare state in various ways.

Several chapters in this book examine the exposure to and perception of risks, as well as the consequences to welfare attitudes resulting from risks. In Chapter 2, Andersen and Ringdal examine how the objective and subjective perceptions of a broad range of welfare risks are related to institutional settings, such as social stratification within countries and the welfare regime and wealth of the particular country. In Chapter 3, Chung and van Oorschot address the issues of actual and perceived labour market factors in explaining the perceived risks of unemployment.

As illustrated in Figure 1.1, risks and resources may affect attitudes to the welfare state, either directly or indirectly, through a set of more general predispositions people have that contribute to forming their views of the surrounding society. These predispositions consist of trust in the institutions of the society they live in (especially welfare institutions) and interpersonal trust, as well as more general beliefs and social values. In Chapter 4, Finseraas and Ringdal examine the direct consequences of objective and subjective risks on attitudes towards the scope and design of the welfare state. Similarly, Ainsaar in Chapter 5 examines how having children in the family may directly influence welfare state attitudes in general, and more specifically Meuleman and Chung in Chapter 6 analyse how much people want to have governmental intervention in childcare.

The association between institutional trust and welfare state attitudes is analysed by Fridberg in Chapter 7. He links support for the welfare state to the perception of the legitimacy of its implementation, i.e. trust in the way the welfare state succeeds in its tasks. Two chapters examine the issue of the heterogenization of European populations due to immigration, and the possibly associated decline in national solidarity and cohesion. In Chapter 8, Ervasti and Hjerm try to disentangle the effects of objective ethnic heterogeneity, whereas in Chapter 9, Hjerm and Schnabel place
their focus on the effects of subjective cohesion on support for the welfare state. Kouvo, Kankainen and Niemelä in Chapter 10 examine how welfare benefits may contribute to social capital in the form of generalized trust in Finland and Europe. Ervasti turns to more general values in Chapter 11, by asking if there is a religious factor affecting support for the welfare state. The final chapter, Chapter 12, refers to the last box in Figure 1.1, namely the evaluation of task performance and the moral and economic consequences of the welfare state. In this chapter, Ervasti examines individual and group differences in terms of criticism of the welfare state.

A PReVIEW OF THE BOOK

As noted above, the first chapters deal with the determination and consequences of social risks. Alleviating social risks and uncertainty in human life have been the historical aims of the welfare state. In Chapter 2, Andersen and Ringdal analyse the variations in the perception of risk, both within and between European nations. They note that the dominance of different types of risks, as well as their main individual and societal determination, vary according to time and place. These trends have often been described as a move to a more individualized risk society, in which the traditional determination of risks as a function of class, age or gender is eroding. Nevertheless, Andersen and Ringdal focus on risks with very high relevance to social policy, namely unemployment, reduced work time, financial problems and lack of sufficient healthcare. Basically, the results of the analysis may be easily interpreted. The findings are summarized in two points. First, as opposed to the suggestion of the theory of risk society, risks are still linked to social class so that those higher up the ladder of socio-economic hierarchies perceive less risk than those lowest on the ladder; and second, the most developed welfare states are the most effective ones in terms of alleviating risks.

Chung and van Oorschot’s contribution in Chapter 3 concerns the risk of unemployment. More precisely, their task is four-fold. First, they question how European individuals subjectively perceive their employment security. Second, they analyse how perceived unemployment generosity and perceived unemployment rates affect the perception of unemployment risk. Third, they investigate how actual unemployment benefit generosity and actual unemployment rates impact the perceived employment insecurity of individuals. Finally, Chung and van Oorschot examine which is the more influential: the perception of risk or the actual state of affairs. The results of the analysis suggest that both the perceived and actual unemployment benefit generosity, as well as unemployment rates, are important
in explaining why an individual perceives their employment to be insecure. Chung and van Oorschot conclude that contextual factors have a notable effect on workers’ perceptions of employment security. People feel less secure in countries where unemployment rates are perceived to be higher and unemployment benefits are lower.

As described above, European welfare states face significant challenges due to increasing globalization and the connected restructuring of labour markets. These developments generate both winners and losers. In the fourth chapter, Finseraas and Ringdal focus on how the restructuring of global production and the labour market is reflected at the individual level. They examine whether those at risk of losing their current or future income are more likely to demand public welfare to a greater extent than others. Their aim is to find out whether employment in economically vulnerable sectors of global markets stimulates risk consciousness, and if this in turn translates into demands for a wider scope of welfare. This seems to be the case. Finseraas and Ringdal report that objective and subjective risks are associated with a preference for an extensive welfare state. Furthermore, risks are especially important in countries where inequality is the norm, and therefore where the potential consequences of income loss are harsher.

The next two chapters concern family and childcare issues, and thus move the focus of the book closer to the issue of service provision by the welfare state. In Chapter 5, Ainsaar looks at how the presence of children in the family affects welfare state attitudes. Families with children may be considered a vulnerable group. The question that Ainsaar poses is whether or not individuals with dependent children view the welfare state, and especially benefits and services targeted at families with children, more positively than others. The underlying grand theme in Ainsaar’s analysis is whether welfare attitudes reflect self-interest or unselfish solidarity. As the outcome, Ainsaar finds clear signs of self-interest affecting welfare state attitudes. Members of families with children tend to support more governmental responsibility for policies in favour of families with children, than for policies targeted at other welfare recipients. In contrast, individuals without children are more supportive of policies not related to young children.

One of the major changes in European countries is the erosion of the traditional male breadwinner regime. The increasing participation of women in the labour force is crucial for gender equality and for decreasing child poverty. Simultaneously, however, problems in the reconciliation of work and family life arise. In particular, the need for childcare facilities outside the home increases. In Chapter 6, Meuleman and Chung question to what degree Europeans support the idea that it should be the state’s
responsibility to provide childcare. Moreover they analyse what factors account for the possible variations within and between European nations in attitudes concerning childcare. Despite the generally high levels of support for governmental responsibility, Meuleman and Chung report a notable variation between European countries. Support for public childcare is lowest in Western and Central Europe and – somewhat surprisingly – highest in Southern Europe followed by the North. Individual-level variations suggest that those with a direct interest in childcare policies (i.e. women working long hours, individuals with young children, individuals of child rearing age and those with recent experiences of childcare responsibilities) are the groups most favourable towards public childcare.

In Chapter 7, Fridberg examines the effects of the perceived legitimacy of the particular welfare system on overall support for the welfare state. By legitimacy, Fridberg refers to individuals’ perceptions of how well or poorly the welfare system succeeds in performing its tasks. Fridberg’s starting point is that one of the preconditions for public support for welfare policies is that people consider the practical implementation of welfare policies to be working as intended, and beneficially to themselves, their families and the community or the country in which they live. This assumption is substantiated in the analysis. Fridberg shows that public support for a comprehensive and costly welfare state is clearly related to perceptions of legitimacy, and that dissatisfaction with the welfare system may undermine its popularity.

The following three chapters focus on interpersonal trust and cohesion in the welfare state. In Chapter 8, Ervasti and Hjerm concentrate on the effects on support for the welfare state of possibly declining interpersonal trust. Ervasti and Hjerm test the infamous anti-solidarity hypothesis, which suggests that as levels of immigration rise (and particularly as people more often than before see a disproportionate part of their taxes being directed towards newcomers whom they do not consider acceptable beneficiaries), resistance towards redistributive welfare state policies emerges. Interpersonal trust declines and welfare chauvinism emerges, and as a result, support for the welfare state deteriorates. Nevertheless, Ervasti and Hjerm show that the mechanisms between rising levels of immigration, and trust and support for the welfare state are much more complicated than the anti-solidarity hypothesis suggests. Some forms of interaction between the majority population and immigrants increase the positive evaluation of newcomers. In addition, negative sentiments towards immigration are not necessarily associated with less support for the welfare state. Although Ervasti and Hjerm are hesitant to draw final conclusions about the anti-solidarity hypothesis, they argue that the welfare state is not exposed to any corroding effect at the moment.
Chapter 9 continues with the theme of increasing heterogeneity. The question posed in this chapter by Hjerm and Schnabel is that of how much heterogeneity the modern welfare state can endure. Increasing demographic and cultural heterogeneity is often seen as a threat to the existence of liberal Western democracies, because it challenges the practically consensual support for its basic institutions and redistributive instruments. One manifestation of cohesion is national identity, defined by Hjerm and Schnabel as a subjective affiliation towards the ‘imagined community’. National identity is even more important than objectively defined homogeneity in explaining people’s acceptance of welfare policies. Higher levels of national identity will result in higher levels of support for taxation and redistributive policies.

In Chapter 10, Kouvo, Kankainen and Niemelä shift the focus from national cohesion and interpersonal trust, to the generation of social capital. They clarify whether the high levels of social capital typical of the Nordic countries are related to the universal social policies implemented in these nations. They find that the impact of the type of welfare state on the level of generalized trust is positive. However, this is not the whole story. The final conclusion of the chapter is that not universality alone, but a well-functioning combination of universality and targeted benefits, might be the most important bases for generalized trust.

Chapter 11 concerns the changing cultural preconditions of the welfare state in a way that has been neglected to some extent in previous studies, namely the influence of religion on welfare attitudes. In this chapter, Ervasti examines whether there is still a religious factor influencing public support in Europe for the welfare state. The European religious landscape has changed notably during the last decades. In public life, the importance of religiosity has diminished notably, especially in the Northern parts of the continent. Indeed, religiosity has turned into one of the most private issues in life. Simultaneously, secularization is an undeniable phenomenon in Europe. The largest religious group in present-day Europe comprises those who do not identify themselves with any denomination. However, a certain religious factor in support for the welfare state can still be extracted. Religiosity correlates positively with support for the welfare state, especially in Orthodox and Catholic countries.

The final chapter, Chapter 12, turns the issue of support for the welfare state upside down. Most previous studies show a relatively positive picture of the popularity of the welfare state. However, in Chapter 12, Ervasti points out that most surveys define the welfare state in quite positive terms. Despite many positive effects, such as reducing poverty and inequality, and providing services to help individuals in their everyday lives, the welfare state may also have certain adverse consequences. Quite
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often the welfare state is accused of aggravating economic success, generating perverse incentives and offering excessively easy access to benefits. Although in most analyses these alleged problems have been shown to be unimportant, the crucial matter is not always the actual success of the welfare state, but instead how the public perceives its success. These problems concerning the welfare state are quite frequently brought up in public policy discussion, in the media and in people’s everyday discussions. Ervasti’s aim is to find out how commonly Europeans see the negative sides of the welfare state. More precisely, how widespread is criticism in Europe, where does criticism exist and which background factors account for it? The outcome of the analysis is that Europeans both love and hate the welfare state simultaneously. The critique aimed at the welfare state is not always disruptive by nature.

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