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Age Stereotypes and Attitudes Towards Welfare State Arrangements for the Old: A Multilevel Analysis Across Twenty-Nine Countries

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This study investigates whether and how support for welfare state arrangements for the old relate to the stereotypes of the young and the old within society. It is hypothesized that the social status that these groups have in society affect these attitudes through different mechanisms, relating to the deservingness criteria that citizens apply. An empirical analysis of Round 4 of the European Social Survey (including 50,009 individuals from 29 European countries) shows that: (1) the social esteem of people over 70 predicts support for welfare state arrangements for the old; and (2) the social esteem of people in their 20s has a moderate effect on support for these arrangements. Hence, there is little support for a generational conflict.

Key words: population aging, welfare state arrangements for the old, age stereotypes, international comparison

Most countries experience population aging (Lutz, Sanderson, & Scherbov, 2008). This demographic development can have societal consequences, and many have argued that the changing age composition of countries will have an impact on the welfare state in the near future (Castles, 2004; Galasso, 2006). Oftentimes, this expectation focuses on the financial basis of the welfare state, since funding welfare state provisions becomes more difficult as the share of the population that depends on it increases, while the relative number of contributors

decreases. Whereas the issues concerning the financial basis are highly relevant for the sustainability of the welfare state, population aging may also have social and political consequences, as it can ignite a potential conflict between different generations (Walker, 1990), which may be particularly the case if social provisions are unequally distributed across age groups (Ozawa & Lee, 2011).

This conflict between the young and the old may not only affect the ability of citizens to support each other, which is part of the financial sustainability of the welfare state, but also their willingness to do that, which reflects the social and political support required to sustain the welfare state (De Beer & Koster, 2009). If aging really intensifies the generational conflict, it should be particularly visible with regard to age-related welfare state arrangements benefiting either the young or the old. Given that it is likely that the process of aging implies that a larger share of the population becomes dependent on such arrangements, from a welfare state sustainability point of view it is particularly interesting to investigate welfare state arrangements for the old. The present study addresses this issue.

The question of whether and why people support certain welfare state arrangements has been extensively studied in the field of welfare state attitudes (Svallfors, 2012). Although a lot of these studies focus on attitudes towards the welfare state in general, these mechanisms and conditions also provide answers to the question why individuals would be in favor of specific provisions, such as arrangements for the old. The different perspectives that these studies have on welfare state attitudes are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and in many cases they complement each other, leading to the following insights.

First, there are theories that mainly emphasize *characteristics of the benefactor* by investigating how individual factors such as self-interest, altruism, and people's ideological positions relate to welfare state attitudes (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Svallfors, 1997; Van Oorschot, 2002). The second set of theories focuses on the *characteristics of the beneficiaries* by looking at the impact of factors such as deservingness criteria, beliefs about neediness, and perceived levels of misuse of welfare state provisions on attitudes towards welfare state arrangements (Gilens, 1995, 1999; Halleröd, 2004; Van Oorschot, 2006). A third approach explains welfare state attitudes by taking the *relationship between*

citizens and the government into account, for example by focusing on levels of institutional trust and legitimacy in relation to welfare state attitudes (Bay & Pedersen, 2006; Edlund, 2006; Levi & Stoker, 2000; Pettersen, 2002). And, a fourth set of theories examines how conditions in the *social context*, such as welfare state regimes, social structures, and national level conditions affect welfare state attitudes and solidarity (Andress & Heien, 2001; Bean & Papadakis, 1993; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Blomberg & Kroll, 1999; Jæger, 2006; Janmaat & Braun, 2009; Koster & Kaminska, 2012; Larsen, 2008; Lipsmeyer & Nordstrom, 2003; Mau & Burkhardt, 2009).

Based on these prior studies, an explanation of people's attitudes towards welfare state arrangements for the old includes factors such as the age of respondents (reflecting self-interest explanations), the opinion about elderly people (reflecting deservingness criteria), the extent to which people believe that the government can overcome generational conflicts (reflecting institutional trust), and the age composition of the country (reflecting relative positions of the young and the old). Together, these explanations provide a relatively complete picture of the conditions influencing attitudes towards welfare state arrangements for the old.

Nevertheless, there is one part of the explanation that received very little attention in the literature on welfare state attitudes. Taking into account that contributions to welfare state arrangements produce a collective good (Hart & Cowhey, 1977; Olson, 1971), the question is how support for such goods depends on the relationship between the benefactors (the contributors). The literature about collective action acknowledges that the willingness to contribute to a collective good is related to the interdependence of the actors involved (e.g., Oliver, 1984) and this notion may be relevant for the explanation of welfare state attitudes, as well.

Before theorizing how interdependence among benefactors affects attitudes towards welfare state arrangements for the old, one conceptual difference between the two research traditions should be clarified. Studies of collective action tend to concentrate on goods that benefit the whole group, meaning that they focus on situations of two-sided solidarity where benefactors and beneficiaries are not necessarily clearly distinguished (De Beer & Koster, 2009; Hechter, 1987). Welfare states, however,

also provide arrangements that do distinguish benefactors from beneficiaries, especially if those provisions benefit specific groups. This means that both one-sided and two-sided solidarity are important in the production of such a collective good. What is more, welfare state provisions can be conceptualized as a combination of solidarity between different groups, namely (1) solidarity between the benefactors and the beneficiaries and (2) solidarity among the benefactors that produce the collective good (De Swaan, 1988).

Since the issue concerning solidarity between benefactors and beneficiaries has been addressed extensively in previous studies, the focus in the present study is on the second issue: the level of solidarity among the benefactors. It does so by advancing and testing a model that is closely related to the one presented by Rothstein (2001). In Rothstein's model, support for the welfare state is conceived of as a combination of two social dilemma situations that the individual citizen faces, namely one dilemma concerning the trustworthiness of the government (revolving around the question: "will the state deliver what it promised?"), and one concerning the trustworthiness of all other citizens (where the individual tries to answer the question: "will fellow citizens contribute and not misuse the provisions?") (p. 222). The model presented in this study argues that the second dilemma in fact consists of two separate dilemma situations by making a distinction between groups of benefactors and beneficiaries. In research about welfare state attitudes, this particular aspect of welfare state arrangements remained largely implicit.

This analysis aims at extending the existing literature on welfare state attitudes, both theoretically and empirically. The first section develops a social esteem theory of solidarity to understand attitudes towards welfare state arrangements for the old. This theory is grounded in theories of collective action, assuming bounded rational actors that do not make their decision in isolation but are influenced by the choices of others. These individuals are, for example, affected by social structural conditions such as norms, customs, and information (Ostrom, 1998). The following two propositions underlie this theory: (1) individuals are willing to contribute to a collective good if they believe that others are willing to contribute as well; and (2) the perceived social esteem of a group benefiting from the collective

good provides information about the willingness of others to contribute to that collective good. The first proposition is based on the theory of contingent consent (Levi, 1997). While contingent consent theory usually concentrates on levels of trust in fellow citizens and the state, the model proposed here focuses on a different mechanism that is formulated in the second proposition, namely the social esteem that citizens believe that fellow citizens assign to the group of beneficiaries. Hence, the emphasis is not on the trustworthiness of other citizens but on the informational cues that individuals receive concerning the likelihood that their fellow citizens will support a welfare state arrangement benefiting a specific group.

Applying these propositions to the topic of people's attitudes towards welfare state arrangements for the old leads to the prediction that individuals are more in favor of such arrangements if they believe that fellow citizens assign a higher status to elderly people. This prediction is empirically examined by investigating how status perceptions about two age groups (people in their twenties and people of seventy and older) is related to people's attitudes towards welfare state arrangements securing a reasonable standard of living for the old. The empirical data are taken from Round 4 of the European Social Survey (ESS, 2008) and include information about 50,009 individuals in 29 European countries.

Attitudes Towards Welfare State Arrangements for the Old

Attitudes Towards the Welfare State

Welfare state attitudes reflect the opinions that citizens have towards welfare state arrangements. Two defining characteristics of these arrangements are that: (1) they are collective means to cover individual risks, requiring individual contributions; (2) the government organizes both the collection and the distribution of the financial resources. Hence, welfare state arrangements consist of formal institutional mechanisms to secure the rights and obligations of citizens regarding who pays what and who receives what. These two core characteristics distinguish welfare state arrangements from other means of risk management such

as private insurances (e.g., the market) and social support within communities or families (Bowles & Gintis, 1996). While private insurances consist of voluntary contributions from individuals using the market mechanism, welfare state arrangements rely on obligatory contributions that are collected through the tax system. And, while the organization of community and family support is to a large extent voluntary and informal, welfare state arrangements are formal institutions.

The market, communities, and the government provide means to cover individual risks, as each of them produces a certain level of social protection. From a policy perspective, covering individual risks through the government is preferred if it leads to comparatively better outcomes compared to the market or the community (Koster, 2009; Lindbeck, 2006; Williamson, 1981). Once set in motion, the resulting policies can become path-dependent and self-sustaining over the course of time (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Rothstein, 1998). In addition to the macro explanation of why governments try to correct market and community failures, the literature on welfare state attitudes takes a micro perspective by investigating to what extent and why citizens prefer government intervention to assist others rather than (or in addition to) using market or community mechanisms, hence emphasizing the role of public opinion in the process of legitimizing social policies (Brooks & Manza, 2006; Burstein, 1998).

With regard to welfare state legitimacy, it is useful to make a distinction between universal and targeted arrangements. While the first kind of welfare state system relies on comparatively generous entitlements that are available for everyone, the latter consists of restricted arrangements that benefit specific groups (Korpi & Palme, 1998; Lewin & Stier, 2002). Based on a self-interest explanation of welfare state support, it may be assumed that a universal welfare state receives more public support than targeted arrangements as it satisfies the needs of more individuals.

Nevertheless, public support can diminish both in universal and in targeted welfare states, but for different reasons. Since universal provisions are more extensive, they are more costly and may therefore be harder to sustain. What is more, since they are based on a system providing support to a relatively large share of the population, some groups can benefit

from them, even if citizens are not in favor of it. Thus, if these arrangements (also) benefit groups that are regarded as undeserving, public support for the universal welfare state may decline (Bay & Pedersen, 2006).

In contrast, welfare state arrangements that are targeted at specific groups can create a stronger division between contributors and beneficiaries. Also, for targeted arrangements it holds that if the beneficiaries are regarded as deserving, the public will be in favor of such provisions. Nevertheless, since fewer citizens benefit from the provisions, overall support may be lower compared to universal provisions and needs to be more strongly based on other motivations than self-interest, as these provisions depend more strongly on the willingness of citizens to pay for provisions from which they do not directly benefit from themselves. As a result, public support for targeted welfare state provisions can diminish if the distance between these two groups becomes too big.

Welfare State Arrangements for the Old

Clearly, welfare state arrangements for the old are neither universal nor targeted as such. These arrangements can be organized as universal provisions (meaning that every citizen above a certain age receives benefits) or can consist of targeted provisions (only the elderly poor receive benefits). Nevertheless, in both cases they are selective in the sense that they benefit one particular group in society at a certain point in time (“the old”), while they are paid for by another group (“the young”). Of course, when the welfare state arrangements are universal, chances are higher that the group of benefactors is entitled to receive the benefits as they pass a certain age limit, compared to the situation in which these provisions are only targeted at the elderly poor.

Even though this holds true, receiving these benefits in the future is not guaranteed for at least two reasons. First, it is not sure whether the benefactors will reach the required age. And, second, even if they do reach that age, it is not certain whether the same provisions will still be available. Both uncertainties mean that benefactors may contribute to a universal welfare state arrangement from which they do not necessarily benefit themselves. This means that welfare state arrangements for the old

imply that there is a distinction between benefactors and beneficiaries, at least at the present point in time. And, the question that follows from this observation is why the benefactors would be willing to support the beneficiaries, given this distinction.

As was outlined in the introduction, there are several ways of theorizing the willingness of benefactors to support the welfare state. Most of the existing approaches focus on the benefactor, or include factors such as characteristics of the beneficiaries, the government, or the wider social context. Adding these factors to the explanation makes the model more detailed, but it still does not fully account for the theoretical idea that the contributions of benefactors may be interdependent (Levi, 1997; Rothstein, 2001; Scholz & Lubell, 1998). To do that, it is necessary to include and investigate the assumption that the willingness of citizens to support a certain group depends on the willingness of fellow citizens to support that group. This theoretical notion leads to an additional explanation of welfare state attitudes.

Instead of arguing that the welfare state requires solidarity between benefactors and beneficiaries, such a theoretical model states that solidarity among benefactors is also needed. As such, this conceptualization reflects the core of collective action theories, assuming that individuals do not make their decision in complete isolation. Instead, these theories show that the preparedness of individuals to contribute to a collective good depends on the (perception of) behavior and attitudes of others, for example, by emphasizing the role of interdependent choices (Granovetter, 1978, 1980; Oliver, 1984; Oliver, Marwell, & Teixeira, 1985), conditional cooperation (Fisbacher, Gächter, & Fehr, 2001; Frey & Meier, 2004), norm conformity (Ostrom, 1998, 2000), fairness (Arneson, 1982; Elster, 1989; Gould, 1993), and trust between individuals (Scholz & Lubell, 1998).

Social Esteem and Solidarity

These collective action theories focus on the social structural conditions under which individuals are willing to contribute to a collective good. Usually, this applies to goods from which the contributors can benefit themselves once they are produced. This means that situations in which individuals are faced with the question whether or not to contribute may run the risk that others may free-ride on their contributions. As a result, in such

a situation individuals are interested in gathering information about the behavior and attitudes of others; for example, they may try to monitor the actual contribution to the collective good of other individuals or find out whether others are trustworthy (Dawes, 1980).

The situation is slightly different when regarding welfare state arrangements for the old as a collective good that is produced by one group in society while benefiting another group. The question that the individual contributors face in this situation is not so much whether the other contributors are trustworthy individuals, but it may be much more informative to know the opinions of other individuals about the group of beneficiaries. Therefore, if a person believes that fellow citizens have a positive image of the other group and believe that they are viewed as deserving, they may be expected to be more willing to contribute to that collective good. As such, it is assumed that the collective good problem among the contributors can be solved indirectly; namely, individuals are willing to contribute if they believe that others will contribute as well. The social esteem of the group of recipients provides an informational cue for individual citizens about the likelihood that others will contribute, and hence decreases the influence of concerns about those who are perceived as free-riders. In addition, the reputation of the beneficiaries may be upheld by norms of reciprocity and fairness that further increase the likelihood that each benefactor is willing to contribute.

From this theoretical argument, it follows that individual support for arrangements that benefit others is affected by the perception of benefactors about the esteem that others assign to the beneficiaries. The social esteem of the group reflects the reputation that a group has within society and provides information about the likelihood that fellow citizens will be willing to support provisions from which that group benefits. These theoretical considerations lead us to the first hypothesis about support for welfare state arrangements for the old. *The higher the perceived social esteem of older age groups, the more support for welfare state arrangements for the old (Hypothesis 1).*

The first hypothesis states a direct relationship between the social esteem of the elderly and support for welfare state arrangements for the old. An additional hypothesis is derived from the theoretical model. Apart from assuming that a positive

perception about the social esteem of the old leads to stronger support for welfare state provisions for the old, it may also be expected that the esteem of other age groups should not be related to support for welfare state arrangements for the old. According to the theory proposed in this article, support for these arrangements is related to perceptions about the old, and not about the esteem of the young. What is more, it can even be expected that there is negative relationship between the social esteem of younger age groups and support for welfare state arrangement for the old.

Given that the budget of governments is restricted, they will not have the means to offer extensive provisions to all age groups in society. This means that governments need to make choices about how to allocate their budget, and as a consequence, if the budget for the provisions of one age group increases, the budget for another group decreases. Therefore, the benefactors may face a choice regarding their support for welfare state provisions for different age groups. This argument can be regarded as an extension of the median voter model applied to the provision of old age arrangements (Galasso, 2006; Hollanders & Koster, 2011). According to this model, government spending on welfare state arrangements for the old increases as the population ages. While this could mean that the overall level of government spending increases, this is often not the case. If it is not possible for governments to spend more, they need to reduce spending in other domains. This is not to say that the young cannot enjoy these provisions, but that they have to wait until they belong to the older age group. In that sense, the distribution of age-related government provisions can also be seen as the outcome of a potential conflict between generations. Now, if the social esteem of younger age groups is high, the model predicts that the benefactors are willing to support welfare state arrangements favoring this age group. As it is not possible to support all age groups in society evenly, given budget restrictions, stronger support for the welfare state arrangements for the young results in less support for provision for the old. Hence, according to this model, more social esteem for the young should result in less support for welfare state arrangements for the old. The following hypothesis reflects this expectation. *The higher the perceived social esteem of younger age groups, the less support for welfare state arrangements for the old (Hypothesis 2).*

Methods

Data

Data for this study come from the European Social Survey (ESS, 2008), which has been conducted every two years since 2000. Round 4 of this international comparative survey contains information that allows us to test the hypotheses. The total dataset investigated here includes the responses of 50,009 individuals in 29 European countries.

Measures

The dependent variable of this study, *support for welfare state arrangements for the old*, is measured by asking respondents about their opinion concerning the following question: "How much responsibility do you think governments should have to ensure a reasonable standard of living for the old?" The answer categories range from 0 (meaning that the respondents indicate that it should not be the governments' responsibility) to 10 (indicating that it should be entirely governments' responsibility according to the respondent). Hence, a higher score reflects more support for welfare state arrangements for the old.

The dependent variables in this study measure the respondent's perceptions of the *perceived social esteem* of people in their *twenties* ("the young") and people *over seventy* ("the old"). These variables are measured as follows. Respondents are asked to what extent they think that most people in their country view members of the two age groups "as friendly," "having high moral standards," and "with respect." These questions do not ask about the opinion that respondents have about these two groups, but instead measure how they think that their fellow citizens see people in their twenties and those over seventy. Each of these questions is measured on a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (not at all likely to be viewed that way) to 4 (very likely to be viewed that way). As shown in Table 1, the six items can be reduced to two dimensions, namely one concerning the social esteem of people in their twenties and one measuring the social esteem of people over seventy. Two variables are constructed, one measuring perceptions about the *social esteem of people in their twenties* (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79) and one measuring the

social esteem of people over seventy (Cronbach's alpha = 0.73). The *difference in social esteem* is computed by subtracting the score on the first variable from the latter, hence indicating how much more esteem someone believes that those over seventy have compared to those in their twenties.

Table 1. Factor Analysis of Social Esteem Items

Item	1	2
Social esteem of people in their 20s		
Most people view those in their 20s as friendly	0.768	0.178
Most people view those in their 20s as having high moral standards	0.863	0.051
Most people view those in their 20s with respect	0.843	0.103
Social esteem of people over 70		
Most people view those over 70 as friendly	0.193	0.744
Most people view those over 70 as having high moral standards	0.023	0.836
Most people view those over 70 with respect	0.109	0.798
Eigenvalue	2.539	1.492
Proportion of variance accounted for	42.312	24.861
Cronbach's alpha	0.78	0.72

Source: European Social Survey Round 4

n = 50,009 individuals in 29 countries

Varimax rotation. Factor loadings > 0.30 in bold.

To take into account that people's attitudes towards welfare state arrangements for the old may be influenced by other factors, the analyses controlled for the following background variables: *gender* (0 = male; 1 = female), the respondent's *age* (in years), *years of education*, and the *main activity* of the respondent (a variable measuring whether the respondent is in paid work, education, unemployed and looking for work, unemployed and not looking for work, permanently sick or disabled, retired, community or military service, housework, looking after children, or other). Furthermore, ideological position is controlled for by including a variable measuring *left-right self-placement* (0 = left; 10 = right). Finally, since perceptions of social esteem may be related to people's own views about the two age groups, two control variables were added measuring *feelings about people in their 20s* and *feelings about people over seventy*. These variables are

measured by asking respondents the question: "Overall, how negative or positive do you feel towards people in their 20s/over 70?" (0 = extremely negative; 10 = extremely positive).

Method

The empirical analysis takes into account that the data have a nested structure (individuals are nested in countries). To provide as much insight as possible, the data are analyzed with two different methods. First, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis is conducted. In this analysis, country dummy variables are included to take into account that the measures of individuals in one country are not independent. These dummies are included in the analysis, but are not reported in the tables to save space. Second, the data are analyzed using multi-level modeling (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). While this method can be used to investigate whether contextual effects at the national level explain individual support for welfare state arrangements (e.g. Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Jæger, 2006; Koster, 2010), it is also a means to take the nested structure of the data into account without explicitly focusing on these contextual effects. Because the present analysis aims at understanding how individual perceptions affect support for welfare state arrangements, and not whether these national circumstances matter, no contextual effects were added to the model. Instead, by conducting a multilevel analysis, it is acknowledged that responses from individuals living in the same country are not independent from each other, without explicitly adding explanatory variables at the national level. A random intercept model was estimated using the MLwiN software package. MLwiN is specifically designed to perform multilevel analyses. It enables researchers to fit different kinds of multilevel models. The Centre for Multilevel Modeling at the University of Bristol developed this software package. For the present analyses, version 2.24 was used (Rasbash, Steele, Browne, & Prosser, 2005).

In both regressions analyses, four models are estimated. An empty model is calculated that serves as a baseline to which the next model is compared (Model 0). This next model includes the control variables (Model 1). Then two models are calculated that include the variables testing the two hypotheses. In the OLS regression analyses, the adjusted R^2 is used to assess the

explained variance of the variable. In multilevel models, it is not possible to calculate the explained variance. Instead, for each model the $-2 \log$ likelihood is estimated. The deviance (the difference between the $-2 \log$ likelihood of two models) indicates to what extent the fit of the model improves after including the variables. Because the dataset is very large, the significance levels may be inflated. To deal with this, the significance level is set at $p < 0.0001$.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 2 provides an overview of the mean scores on support for welfare state arrangements for the old, the perceived social esteem of people in their twenties, and the perceived social esteem of people over seventy per country. What is particularly noteworthy is that the mean level of support for government responsibility for the old is relatively high ($m = 8.49$). This shows that, on average, people are in favor of the government taking action to secure the standard of living of the old. For each country in the sample, the average score on this variable is above the theoretical mean of the scale. The lowest levels of support for welfare state arrangement for the old are found in Switzerland ($m = 7.23$) and Germany ($m = 7.60$) and the respondents in Latvia ($m = 9.29$) and Ukraine ($m = 9.39$) are most in favor of the idea that the government ensures a reasonable standard of living for the old.

Comparing the average scores on the scales measuring the perceived social esteem of people in their twenties and social esteem perceptions about people over seventy, Table 2 shows that the social esteem of the older age group is perceived to be higher than the status of the younger age group ($m = 2.20$ for people in their twenties and $m = 3.06$ for people over seventy). This difference is consistently found for all countries in the sample. Furthermore, the average perceived social esteem of the two groups varies across countries. The mean perceived esteem of people in their twenties is the lowest in the UK ($m = 1.74$) and the highest in Israel ($m = 2.64$). In Slovakia, perceived social esteem of people over seventy has the lowest value ($m = 2.81$), while in Hungary the perceived social esteem of this group has the highest value ($m = 3.36$).

Table 2. Country Means of Support for Welfare State Arrangements for the Old, Perceived Esteem of People in their Twenties, and Perceived Esteem of People over Seventy

Country	Support for welfare state arrangements or the old ^(a)	Perceived social esteem of people in their twenties ^(b)	Perceived social esteem of people over seventy ^(b)
Belgium	7.87	2.14	2.95
Bulgaria	9.13	2.02	3.02
Switzerland	7.23	2.08	2.85
Cyprus	8.94	2.56	3.19
Czech Republic	8.22	2.27	2.82
Germany	7.60	1.91	2.92
Denmark	8.31	2.17	3.07
Estonia	8.66	1.97	3.04
Spain	8.84	2.43	3.28
Finland	8.43	2.27	3.20
France	7.94	2.26	2.95
Great Britain	8.53	1.74	3.07
Greece	8.92	2.52	3.25
Croatia	8.70	2.32	2.91
Hungary	8.79	2.00	3.36
Ireland	8.47	2.23	3.35
Israel	8.93	2.64	3.09
Latvia	9.29	2.37	3.05
Netherlands	7.73	1.98	3.14
Norway	8.66	2.19	3.20
Poland	8.60	2.25	3.05
Portugal	8.85	2.55	3.16
Romania	8.04	2.14	2.82
Russian Federation	9.22	1.84	2.86
Sweden	8.49	2.21	3.13
Slovenia	8.34	2.41	3.08
Slovakia	8.37	2.06	2.81
Turkey	8.22	2.48	3.15
Ukraine	9.39	1.90	3.07
Mean	8.49	2.20	3.06

Source: European Social Survey Round 4

n = 50,009 individuals in 29 countries

(a) Item: "How much responsibility do you think governments should have to ensure a reasonable standard of living for the old?"; ranging from 0 (should not be the government's responsibility) to 10 (should be entirely governments responsibility).

(b) Scale score; ranging from 1 to 4.

Regression Results

The results of the OLS regression are reported in Table 3, and Table 4 contains the results of the multilevel regression. As Table 4 shows, 8 percent of the variation in support for welfare state arrangements for the old is due to differences across countries (Intraclass correlation = 0.079). This means that country-level characteristics may play a role in understanding support for these arrangements, but most of the variance is due to variance within countries. The first models reported in Table 3 and 4 investigate the effects of the individual-level control variables. The two analyses yield similar results. The size of the parameters differs only slightly (the only real difference appears in the model with the esteem variables; in the OLS regression, feelings about people in their 20s becomes significant, while it remains not significant in the multilevel regression). The OLS regression shows that about 6 percent of variation in attitudes towards welfare state arrangements for the old is explained by the control variables. The multilevel analysis shows that adding these variables improves the fit of the model (Deviance = 2,030.478; $p < 0.0001$). Both models show that support for welfare state arrangements for the old is higher among women, older people, those who are lower educated, and people who are permanently sick or disabled. People placing themselves on the right side of the political scale are less in favor of government responsibility. These outcomes are in line with previous research findings of general support for the welfare state (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Gërzhani & Koster, 2012). Furthermore, support for welfare state arrangements for the old is positively related to the feelings towards people over 70; the more positive feeling people have, the higher the support for these arrangements.

The second models reported in Table 3 and Table 4 test the two hypotheses. These models investigate how support for welfare state arrangements for the old relate to the perceived social esteem of people in their twenties and to perceived social esteem of people over seventy. The results from the OLS regression show that these two variables explain an extra percent of variance in welfare state attitudes towards provisions for the old (which is statistically significant at the 0.0001 level). The multilevel model (Table 4) shows that the fit of the regression

Table 3. OLS Regression Analysis of Support for Welfare State Arrangements for the Old

	(1)		(2)	
	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)
Female	0.100 **	(0.017)	0.110 **	(0.017)
Age	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)
Years of education	-0.022 **	(0.002)	-0.021 **	(0.002)
Main activity				
Paid work	0.005	(0.066)	-0.004	(0.066)
Education	-0.110	(0.073)	-0.114	(0.072)
Unemployed looking for work	0.148	(0.077)	0.133	(0.076)
Unemployed not looking for work	0.152	(0.091)	0.156	(0.091)
Permanently sick or disabled	0.268	(0.085)	0.256	(0.084)
Retired	0.074	(0.070)	0.079	(0.070)
Community or military service	0.227	(0.206)	0.223	(0.204)
Housework, looking after children	-0.102	(0.071)	-0.112	(0.071)
Other	---	(---)	---	(---)
Left-right self-placement	-0.034 **	(0.004)	-0.036 **	(0.004)
Feelings about people in their 20s	0.019	(0.005)	0.027 **	(0.005)
Feelings about people of 70 and older	0.199 **	(0.005)	0.165 **	(0.005)
Perceived status people in their 20s			-0.046 **	(0.011)
Perceived status people of 70 and older			0.285 **	(0.013)
Intercept	6.715	(0.091)	6.899	(0.130)
Adjusted R ²	0.060		0.071	
R ² change			0.011	
F Change	190.011 **		256.878 **	

Source: European Social Survey Round 4

n = 50,009 individuals in 29 countries

Unstandardized coefficients are reported

The models include country dummies (not reported)

*p < 0.01; ** p < 0.001

Table 4. Multilevel Analysis of Support for Welfare State Arrangements for the Old

	(1)		(2)	
	b	(s.e.)	b	(s.e.)
Female	0.065 **	(0.017)	0.074 **	(0.017)
Age	0.001	(0.001)	0.001	(0.001)
Years of education	-0.021 **	(0.002)	-0.020 **	(0.002)
Main activity				
Paid work	0.002	(0.074)	-0.009	(0.072)
Education	-0.090	(0.080)	-0.088	(0.078)
Unemployed looking for work	0.100	(0.084)	0.093	(0.082)
Unemployed not looking for work	0.081	(0.098)	0.092	(0.095)
Permanently sick or disabled	0.261	(0.091)	0.255	(0.089)
Retired	0.064	(0.079)	0.067	(0.076)
Community or military service	-0.043	(0.211)	-0.029	(0.203)
Housework, looking after children	-0.022	(0.069)	0.023	(0.076)
Other	---	(---)	---	(---)
Left-right self-placement	-0.043 **	(0.004)	-0.045 **	(0.004)
Feelings about people in their 20s	0.005	(0.005)	0.016	(0.005)
Feelings about people of 70 and older	0.186 **	(0.005)	0.155 **	(0.005)
Perceived status people in their 20s	-0.064 **	(0.011)		
Perceived status people of 70 and older	0.264 **	(0.013)		
Intercept	7.352	(0.128)	6.829	(0.130)
Deviance	2030.478 **		433.970 **	
Variance country level	0.221		0.213	
Variance individual level	2.718		2.691	
Intraclass correlation	0.075		0.073	

Source: European Social Survey Round 4

n = 50,009 individuals in 29 countries

Empty model: -2log likelihood = 166277.870; Intraclass correlation = 0.079

*p < 0.01; **p < 0.001

model significantly increases after adding these two variables (Deviance = 433.970; $p < 0.0001$). Perceived social esteem of people in their twenties is negatively related to support for welfare state arrangements for the old ($b = -0.046$; $p < 0.0001$ and $b = -0.064$; $p < 0.0001$, respectively) and perceived social esteem of people over seventy is positively related to this welfare state attitude ($b = 0.285$; $p < 0.0001$; $b = 0.264$; $p < 0.0001$). These findings support the two hypotheses derived from the social esteem theory of solidarity. First, support for welfare state arrangements for the old is positively related to perceived social esteem of the elderly. Secondly, levels of support are negatively related to the perceived social esteem of the young.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study extends previous investigations of public attitudes towards welfare state arrangements. Besides the existing explanations that focus on characteristics of the benefactor, characteristics of the beneficiaries, the relationship between citizens and the government, and the social context of individuals, the study presented here shows that the relationship between beneficiaries matters. The theoretical approach and empirical outcomes have a number of theoretical and practical implications that may be further expanded in future research.

Theoretically, the proposed model has the following implications. First, it shows that the welfare state can be thought of as a number of collective action problems that need to be solved to generate support. While this has been previously noted, for example in the literature about contingent consent (Levi, 1997; Rothstein, 2001), the approach taken here differs from these earlier accounts in one respect. The main addition to the previous work is that the collective action problem among citizens can be further elaborated by distinguishing the group of benefactors from the group of beneficiaries. As a consequence, the attention shifts from the social dilemma involving all citizens to the dilemma faced by the contributors to the collective good.

A second addition and extension concerns the approach of the relationships between citizens. While earlier accounts emphasize generalized trust, the model investigated in this study focuses on more specific information about the attitudes that fellow citizens have toward the group of beneficiaries. Instead

of concentrating on the deservingness criteria that citizens themselves apply (Van Oorschot, 2006), people also seem to take into account the criteria that their fellow citizens apply. At least, this is what may be derived from the social esteem model.

The empirical findings imply that future research on welfare state attitudes (and attitudes towards government policies in general) need to be more specific about who is willing to contribute to what and how informational cues can explain such solidarity. With regard to the existence of multiple social dilemmas, a further extension of Rothstein's (2001) model may be required to fully capture the relevant relationships. Distinguishing between the government, benefactors, and beneficiaries also means that it is not only the question whether the benefactors view the government as a trustworthy actor, but also raises the question of under what conditions the beneficiaries believe that the government will act in their best interest. Taken together, it is suggested that future work should investigate these different social dilemmas, as well as qualitative and informational aspects of the relationships between the different actors.

There are several issues that could not be examined in the present study and that need to be addressed in future studies. One of the main assumptions of the model is that social esteem perceptions serve as informational cues to solve collective action problems. Although this is also suggested in previous research, other (additional or alternative) mechanisms play a role. For example, while the information argument holds that the costs for contributing decrease, this rational approach to solidarity can be complemented by arguments concerning imitation or the customs that citizens follow within society.

What is more, additional research can examine whether information, imitations, and customs provide the basis for norms and sanctions that can further strengthen the willingness to contribute to a collective good. Determining which of these mechanisms explains the willingness to support welfare state arrangements requires other data than what was investigated here. These data can be gathered using a survey across countries like the one investigated here, but it is worthwhile to consider other data-gathering techniques, such as (vignette) experiments to distinguish the different mechanisms and investigate their relative importance.

This study started with the question of how to explain attitudes towards welfare state arrangements for the old. The investigation shows that, apart from the existing explanations, the social esteem of the elderly explains these attitudes. The practical implication of this finding is that, from the perspective of social policy, governments may have the means to generate support for provisions aimed at securing the living conditions of the old. While a common strategy would be to generate such support by emphasizing the value and importance of such provisions, governments can also choose to focus on mechanisms that help to overcome social dilemmas. The feasibility of such a strategy is cannot be answered with the present study and requires additional research examining the effectiveness of such interventions. From a social research perspective on welfare state arrangements for the old, the present study shows that the future of such provision not only depends on whether it serves the best interest of individuals, whether the elderly are viewed as deserving, and whether the governments is regarded legitimate, but also on the social esteem of the elderly.

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