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The Deserving and the Undeserving: "Heuristics" or "Automatism"?

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The Deserving and the Undeserving: "Heuristics" or "Automatism"?

Peter Grand, Guido Tiemann

December 14, 2020

Abstract
Recent contributions have cogently addressed the effect of public opinion on the construction and reform of social security systems. This contribution focuses on public sentiments concerning the conditionality of unemployment benefits. We exploit a vignette experiment that was embedded with Round 8 of the European Social Survey. Across the set of twenty-three different countries/ survey segments, respondents were randomly assigned different vignettes that characterize the age and family status of benefit claimants who turn down job offers due to lower payment or qualification levels or are unwilling to carry out unpaid community work in return for social transfers. Survey respondents are then inquired whether they support which level of sanctions or cuts to these benefit claimants.

Our empirical findings demonstrate that deservingness cues provide strong and robust causal effects. The observational controls, which pick up material self-interest and ideological standings, are also closely linked with the outcome variable. Eventually, these effects are conditioned by the respective national contexts.

1 Deservingness as "Heuristics" or "Automatism"?

Countless studies have highlighted the crucial role of public opinion for the formulation, discussion, and implementation of social policy. Political actors have regularly quoted public opinion or sentiment to justify reforms, most frequently retrenchments, of the welfare state that were deemed necessary to comply with "novel" concepts of distributional justice or to justify the recess or the conditionality of existing social protections. Given the significance of these discussions and reforms, social scientists have produced a wide range of explanations for the drivers and dynamics of welfare attitudes. Previous work has established that an individual's support for social transfers is likely affected by subject-related factors such as material self-interest, general or policy-specific political preferences. Other contributions have highlighted the additional effects of context-level predictors, which are most notably captured by key economic and social indicators and different institutional architectures of the welfare states (cf. Beramendi & Rehm, 2016; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Bobo, 1991;

Esping-Andersen, 1990; Groskind, 1994; Hall & Soskice, 2001; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Margalit, 2013; Rehm, 2009, 2011, 2016; Rueda & Pontusson, 2010).

Notably, some more recent work has switched from these subject- to object-related accounts and thus shifted the analytical focus from those who support or reject social transfers to (characterizations of) those who need and/ or claim them. Under the broad label "deservingness", social scientists from different disciplines have explored whether alternative, well-defined individuals are considered deserving or undeserving of societal support and/ or social transfers (cf., above all, the seminal paper by van Oorschot, 2000). Theoretical contributions have argued that the deservingness "heuristics" is informed by dimensions such as control over personal employment status (or lack thereof), the reciprocity of contributions and benefits, or identity-based notions which govern whether someone can identify with an unemployed individual or not. Relevant empirical studies have corroborated that individuals tend to support social transfers towards claimants they consider "unlucky", while they often reject similar efforts for those they accuse to be "lazy". For instance, an elderly woman who loses her job due to the bankruptcy of her employer is assumed to be regarded more deserving than a young unemployed man who quits a job since he did not like it (cf. Buss, 2019; Gilens, 2000; Petersen, 2012; Petersen et al., 2011; Sniderman et al., 1991; van Oorschot, 2000).

This study focuses on the stability, the interaction, and the conditionality of subject- and object-related accounts. Our pivotal research interest is to explore whether both subject-related concepts (i.e. indicators of material self-interest or political preferences) and/ or object-related predictors (attributions of deservingness as characterized by the vignette treatments) exert an impact on the outcome variable. Subsequently, we focus on the stability and interaction of both subject- and object-related predictors. Even though either perspective has been supported by ample and robust empirical evidence, their specific theoretical underpinnings, the relative empirical value of both (groups of) arguments, and their interaction have been contested by recent publications. Particularly, Michael Bang Petersen and his co-authors (2011; 2012, 2017) have picked up these issues and constructed two alternative understandings of deservingness:

The first perspective alludes to heuristics and "judgmental shortcuts" (Sniderman et al., 1991), which enable actors to form coherent opinions even in the absence of substantive political knowledge. The key example from political science is the inter-relation among substantive spatial policy positions and party identification: Even when voters know very little about specific issues and issue positions, they may utilize correlated phenomena such as party identification that enable them to act "as if" and thus to "vote correctly". Generally, ill-informed or not sufficiently sophisticated actors are supposed to rely on heuristics as "shortcuts" and consequently are able to behave value-consistent (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Lau & Redlawsk, 1997; Lau et al., 2008; Popkin, 1994).

The second perspective, which has been cogently advanced by Petersen and his co-authors, posits that reactions deservingness do not necessarily correspond with with personal values and preferences. From this perspective, deservingness cues do not provide functional shortcuts, but operate independently of substantive knowledge or individual sophistication levels and likely weaken or substitute the impact of judgments based on material self-interest, or value-based reasoning for any individual (Petersen et al., 2011). Thus, deservingness cues are supposed to operate automatically, i.e. opinion formation occurs rapidly, without substantial political knowledge or effort and unconnected with individual values or preferences once sufficient cues are provided (cf. Petersen, 2012; Petersen et al., 2011 and, more generally, Gigerenzer and Todd, 2000). Deservingness attributions are instead supposed to emanate from evolutionary history and psychology or are thought to be determined by "genetics" (Petersen, 2012).

These alternative, conflicting perspectives refer to three inter-related issues we highlight in this article. The key notion is to compare the empirical robustness of deservingness cues across different items, across individual voters who hold different values and preferences, and across national contexts that are characterized by different political and socioeconomic cultures and/ or institutions. Causal effects which are consistent across divergent contexts, likely refer to common, automatic effects. In contrast, divergent, context-dependent effects of deservingness cues underscore the context-dependency of deservingness attributions:

1. Our key data source is provided by Round 8 of the European Social Survey. We exploit data from a series of factorial surveys in order to explore the presence, robustness, and efficacy of deservingness cues. Survey respondents are presented with randomly assigned (sets of) vignettes that vary key dimensions of the deservingness concept such as control or reciprocity. In this step, we not only assess whether different vignettes impact on the likelihood of being sanctioned, but also consider whether the treatment effects are robust across different situational items and different countries covered by the ESS.

2. Building on these general insights, we introduce a range of observational controls that capture individual-specific effects such as material self-interest, general and specific values or preferences, and key demographic features of the respondents. To empirically examine the validity of the two alternative scenarios lined out above, we examine whether deservingness cues remain stable when we (1) include and/ or (2) interact individual-specific predictors.

3. Ultimately, the empiricl effects of deservingness attributions may be embedded with cultural and institutional context. However, applied empirical research has done little to explore the context-dependency of deservingness cues across heterogeneous national contexts. The study by Petersen (2012) that compared factorial surveys from

Denmark and the U.S. in a pairwise "most different systems design" (Przeworski & Teune, 1970) is only one of very few exceptions; the pairwise comparison of vignette experiments in Britain and the Netherlands by Kootstra (2016) is another.

2 Survey Experiment and Observational Controls

Empirical evidence that is both necessary and sufficient to tackle these complex issues is provided by a survey experiment which has been embedded with Round 8 of the "European Social Survey" (henceforth: ESS). We begin this conceptual section by briefly summarizing the key notion of "deservingness". Subsequently, we line out the translation of these theoretical foundations into the survey experiment which has been part of the parallel ESS-8 modules. We conclude by discussing the inter-relations among object- and subject-related predictors of public opinion.

2.1 Concept and Dimensions of Deservingness

The conditionality of social benefits and the considerations of the deservingness of transfer recipients have always featured prominently in political and public discussions of the welfare state. This is especially true for unemployment compensation, which has been introduced later than the other branches of social security, because *all* instances of unemployment have long been considered character faults, but any person without either employment or sufficient income has been regarded and labeled undeserving.

More recent studies in the diverse fields of political science, psychology, and sociology have demonstrated that individuals effectively apply deservingness cues as a fast mode of information processing and rapid opinion formation. Thus, not substantive policy knowledge, but rather simple cues account for public opinion concerning welfare states in general (Gilens, 2000), specific social security programs (Larsen, 2006, 2007; van Oorschot, 2000), and specific individuals within these programs (Petersen et al., 2011). Building on previous theoretical and empirical insight, the literature attempts to decompose attributions and perceptions of deservingness. Thereby, the concept is decomposed into five different deservingness criteria (cf. the seminal paper by van Oorschot, 2000 and, subsequently, the more recent contributions Buss, 2019; Fossati, 2018):

1. **Control**: The first dimension of this concept refers to the degree of control people have about their neediness, i.e. whether respondents are ready to blame a claimant for her situation or not. Comparatively, individuals who lose their job due to the bankruptcy of their employer are moreas likely to be considered deserving than those who quit a job because they did not like it.

2. **Need**: Notably, the greater the level of objective or perceived need for social transfers, the more likely claimants tend to be identified as deserving.

3. **Identity**: Another component of deservingness refers to the social closeness of the respondent and the claimants which, in turn, impacts on the degree of identification and/ or understanding among both. Socially "closer" claimants are generally considered more deserving.

4. **Attitude**: This dimension refers to the claimant's attitude to support and social transfer, the display, of gratefulness, and the compliance with regulations of social welfare in general.

5. **Reciprocity**: Eventually, claimants who have contributed to society and paid into social security for a significant time are regularly considered more deserving.

Of course, any "heuristics" or "automatism" and any derived constructions and images of deservingness neither need to be logic, reasonable nor just by whatever definition or standard. Previous research has, for instance, demonstrated that most people in a society are willing to grant more support, but less obligations to older than to younger claimants (who should usually do well at least in the criteria control and reciprocity). Survey respondents have also reacted to the family status of a claimant and tend to grant more rights and less obligations to claimants with kids than to those who are childless (likely based upon the criteria control and need). Eventually, surveyed individuals tend to sympathize with and tend to address the needs of claimants who resemble themselves. In contrast, they are significantly more likely to contest the deservingness of and impose sanctions on claimants from other ethnic groups or minorities (most likely based on the criterion of identity; cf. Buss, 2019; Kootstra, 2016).

2.2 Addressing Deservingness by a Factorial Survey

The ESS surveys consist of both a main questionnaire and supplemental rotating modules. Round 8 of the ESS reiterates a module on "Welfare Attitudes in a Changing Europe. Solidarities under Pressure" which had previously and in a more embryonic form been fielded in Round 4 (2008). Designed by a multi-national team led by Wim van Oorschot and Bart Meuleman, the rotating module addresses attitudes towards the welfare state, its conditionality, and the respondents' willingness to impose sanctions on claimants who turn down a job offer or reject unpaid work assignments for the "common good".

The novel iteration of the welfare attitudes module adds an experimental component to the design. Generally, survey experiments combine the merits of causal stringency in a controlled, randomized experiment with sufficiently large sample sizes to allow for the valid and reliable causal and statistical inferences. Specifically, the factorial survey at hand focuses

on the effects of different attributes of unemployed individuals seeking social transfers on the willingness to impose sanctions when they turn down a job offer. The encompassing design of the survey experiment and the rich data involved also allow us to explore both the interactions of treatment effects with observational controls and the conditioning effects of national socioeconomic and institutional contexts. Taken together, these design principles enable us to claim internal and external validity at the same time (cf. for additional details Auspurg & Hinz, 2014; Steiner et al., 2017).

In each of the twenty-three parallel survey modules, respondents have been randomly assigned to four different subsamples. Each subsample has been provided with a different survey vignette characterizing an unemployed person looking for work. Given that most of the parallel survey segments include 1,500 to 2,000 respondents, the randomized assignment procedure creates causally stringent, rich experimental evidence on deservingness attributions and the willingness to employ sanctions on claimants who appear unworthy of support. Throughout the text, we will index different treatments/ vignettes $\boldsymbol{T}$ by $j \in (0, 3)$:

T0: Imagine someone who is unemployed and looking for work. This person was previously working but lost their job and is now receiving unemployment benefit.

T1: Imagine someone in their fifties who is unemployed and looking for work. This person was previously working but lost their job and is now receiving unemployment benefit.

T2: Imagine someone aged twenty to twenty-five who is unemployed and looking for work. This person was previously working but lost their job and is now receiving unemployment benefit.

T3: Imagine a single parent with a three-year-old child who is unemployed and looking for work. This person was previously working but lost their job and is now receiving unemployment benefit.

These characteristics of diverse claimants can easily be linked to the five dimensions of the deservingness concept laid out above. The discrimination among younger and older claimants clearly alludes to dimensions such as "control" or "reciprocity". Likewise, the reference to single parents alludes to dimensions the dimensions "control" and "need". Regrettably, the limited set of vignettes included in the ESS-8 does not address the complete set of dimensions defined by van Oorschot (2000). The vignette deck provides us with very little leverage to systematically explore the "attitude" or the "identity" dimension. This is especially true for claimants with a migrant or refugee background.

Each survey respondent has been asked what should happen to a randomly assigned claimant's compensation in a series of three alternative, related scenarios that are captured by additional items. Throughout the text, we will index different situations/ items by $\boldsymbol{S}$ by $k \in (0, 3)$:

S0: (...) they turn down a job because it pays a lot less than they earned previously?

S1: (...) they turn down a job because it needs a much lower level of education than the person has?

S2: (...) they refuse to regularly carry out unpaid work in the area where they live in return for unemployment benefit?

There are a number of approaches to flesh out the concept of deservingness. The survey experiment embedded with the ESS-8 links deservingness with the respondents' readiness to impose sanctions on *one* of the randomly assigned, unemployed individuals (**T0**-**T3**) and in *each* of the three scenarios (**S0**-**S2**) described above. Thereby, the presence and the level of imposed sanctions are measured upon an ordered dimension which ranges from the loss of all benefits (**O0**), via the partial loss of benefits (**O1** and **O2**), to no sanctions, at all (**O3**):

O0: This person [**T0** ... **T3**] (in situation [**S0**, **S1**, **S2**]) should **lose all** their unemployment benefit.

O1: This person [**T0** ... **T3**] (in situation [**S0**, **S1**, **S2**]) should **lose about half** of their unemployment benefit.

O2: This person [**T0** ... **T3**] (in situation [**S0**, **S1**, **S2**]) should **lose a small part** of their unemployment benefit.

O3: This person [**T0** ... **T3**] (in situation [**S0**, **S1**, **S2**]) should be able to **keep all** their unemployment benefit.

Essentially, the outcome variable, i.e. the imposition and degree of sanctions, is an ordinal-scaled variable with four different categories (**O**). The factorial survey randomly assigns one of four vignettes, the treatments, to each survey respondent, and these vignette treatments (**T**) differ along two dimensions which are supposed to correspond with deservingness cues, namely age and family status of a benefit claimant. Each survey respondent is assigned only one vignette and then inquired to evaluate along a set of three different situations (**S**): when she turns downs a job offer due to lower salary, a lower required skill level, or refuses to carry out unpaid community work in return for social transfers.

Finally, a third dimension is constructed by the parallel survey segments of the ESS-8 which are fielded in twenty-three heterogeneous country contexts. The survey experiment at hand also adopts a straightforward comparative perspective. The parallel survey segments comprise of roughly 1,500 to 2,000 raw respondents, ranging from Iceland (with $N = 880$) to Germany (with $N = 2,852$), and altogether the ESS-8 dataset covers $N = 44,387$ respondents from twenty-three European countries with diverse socioeconomic contexts and institutional

regulations: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

2.3 Bringing In Subject-Specific Controls

Proceeding with our general argument, we turn from vignette treatments towards observational controls. While successful randomization per se does not require the systematic specification of further controls, their incorporation nevertheless enables us to compare the consequences of deservingness treatments with more conventional concepts established in the imminent literature. The inclusion of observational controls also allows us to arrive at more precise estimates of treatment effects and enables us to evaluate the potential conditionality of deservingness cues by analyzing the interaction of vignette effects and individual-specific predictors.

2.3.1 Socioeconomic Backgrounds and Individual Self-Interest

Predictors related to socioeconomic backgrounds and material self-interest are among the key explanatory factors applied in current research on welfare attitudes. Solely relying on observational data, the isolation and weighing of their specific impact is often a (too) demanding task, and social background does neither necessarily reflect egocentric instead of sociotropic motives, nor is it exogenous to ideological stances and policy-specific commitments (cf. Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Bobo, 1991; Groskind, 1994; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Margalit, 2013; Rehm, 2009, 2011, 2016; Rueda & Pontusson, 2010).

Class and Income

Theoretical and empirical studies have regularly highlighted that personal support for an encompassing, generous and unconditional welfare state is driven by socio-economic status, predominantly by class affiliation and individual economic and social interest. Key contributions have consistently demonstrated that income almost always has a negative effect on support for social redistribution or transfers. High income groups need to contribute much more to social welfare programs than less affluent citizens, but are less likely to ever be recipients of social transfers. Moreover, affluent citizens are also less likely to interact with poorer people and therefore often unable to understand or identify with the specific needs of less affluent strata of the respective society (Beramendi & Rehm, 2016; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Svallfors, 1997, 2004; Svallfors et al., 2012).

The ESS-8 includes sufficient information to capture each respondent's total income and break it down into income deciles.

Risk and Risk Exposure

Another closely related dimension of material self-interest concerns each individual respondent's (perceived) exposure to labor market risk. Respondents with a objective previous unemployment history, who had to rely on social transfers such as unemployment compensation before, are more likely to support encompassing, generous, and unconditional social transfers. Likewise, individuals who think they might lose their job and thus subjectively think they might be reliant on social transfers in the future, will in all probability favor strong social protections and are less likely to impose severe sanctions on the unemployed. It is also important to note that these effects may not only be driven by material self-interest per se, but previous experiences with unemployment and dependence on social support may also contribute to an increasing identification with unemployed benefit claimants (Rehm, 2009, 2011, 2016; Svallfors et al., 2012; van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012).

The ESS-8 includes items that capture both objective experiences and subjectively perceived risk of unemployment: Two dummy variables indicate whether a respondent is currently unemployed or has been previously unemployed. In addition, another item captures subjective unemployment risk on a four-point Likert scale ranging from one ("not at all likely") to four ("very likely").

Demographic Features

Turning towards key demographic controls, conceptual and theoretical approaches have emphasized the role of age for inclinations concerning the scope of social transfers, its conditionality, and preferences for cuts or extensions to specific social security programs. Eventually, empirical studies have also demonstrated that women are consistently more likely than men to favor redistributive politics and social transfers (Larsen, 2007).

The ESS-8 questionnaires address a range of demographic properties. Our demographic controls include age, broken down into four categories from 15-29, from 30-44, from 45-65, and beyond 65. The respondent's gender is introduced by a dummy variable, and we also include an indicator that assesses whether a respondent has a low, medium, higher, or tertiary education level.

2.3.2 Ideological Preferences

Both general ideological stances and more specific policy preferences are closely linked to social features of the respondents and their objective or subjective material self-interest. While ideological standings partly reflect objective socioeconomic backgrounds, political socialization, risk attitudes and exposure, or the influence of private and political networks, these effects never automatically and deterministically carry over to the formation of general and specific political preferences.

General Ideology

While the dimensionality of European party politics clearly remains a contested issue (König et al., 2017; Prosser, 2016, cf.), we argue that for most European countries general standings and/ or socioeconomic positions may still be cogently captured by a unidimensional left-right scale. Respondents that locate themselves on the political left are supposed to also prefer more rigorously regulated labor markets and thus the provision of encompassing and unconditional unemployment compensation. On the other end of the political spectrum, economic conservatives likely consider the provision of generous unemployment schemes an obstacle to the effectiveness of free market allocation, while social conservatives might be additionally concerned about the deservingness of unemployment benefit claimants and alleged moral hazard (Andreß & Heien, 2001; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Bobo, 1991; Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001; Gërxhani & Koster, 2012; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989).

The ESS-8 assesses general ideological orientations using a unidimensional, eleven-point left-right scale ranging from zero ("left") to ten ("right").

Specific Policy Convictions

More specific socioeconomic policy-positions are, of course, closely linked with social backgrounds, material self-interest, and more general ideological stances. Still they cover very diverse items concerning expected drawbacks of (extensive) social protection, for instance substantial financial burdens on individuals or businesses, the likely weakening of communitarian subsistence networks within a society, or even the emergence and downright gratification of widespread "laziness" (Gilens, 2000). In contrast, other voices stress the role of social welfare for the emergence and conservation of social cohesion and equality or underscore its role for the fight against poverty.

The ESS-8 covers a wide range of policy-specific statements. Responses are measured on five-point scales and range from one ("agree strongly"), two ("agree"), three ("neither/ nor") to four ("disagree") and five ("disagree strongly"). Substantively, the statements address whether social benefits or services (1) cost businesses too much, (2) lead to a more equal society, (3) make people lazy, (4) make people less willing to care for one another, (5) prevent widespread poverty, or (6) place too great strain on the economy.

2.3.3 Considering Context-Level Effects

From a similar, but more theoretically elaborate and sophisticated perspective, Rehm (2009, 2011, 2016) has emphasized the significance of objective labor market risk and subjective risk perceptions. Unemployment insurances do not merely redistribute income, but instead the correlation of economic disadvantage (low income) and economic insecurity (high risk) matters for welfare state support. Generally, unemployment insurances imply redistribution

from employed to unemployed individuals and also involve transfers from those who pay more to those who pay less or nothing. At the individual level, support for unemployment compensation thus increases with individually perceived unemployment risk, but decreases with income. Rehm (2016) indicates that this logic also implies a macro-level argument: societal support for encompassing unemployment is assumed to increase whenever labor market risk is evenly distributed so that a larger share of people is likely to be dependent on and benefit from social transfers.

3 Identifying the Deserving and the Undeserving

We now proceed from conceptual and theoretical foundations towards the presentation of empirical findings derived from the experimental and observational data provided by the European Social Survey. Initially, we introduce and justify an appropriate statistical model and estimation strategy to address they key concerns of this paper.

Our approach is designed to address the three leading questions of our analysis in a straightforward manner: We begin by exploring the presence, robustness, and magnitude of the multivalued treatment effects ($\boldsymbol{T}$) emerging from our set of four vignettes across the three situational items ($\boldsymbol{S}$) and across the 23 parallel national survey segments covered by the ESS-8. Subsequently, we consider our observational background/ control variables to arrive at more precise statistical estimates and to further explore the robustness of our findings across different (groups of) survey respondents. Ultimately, we also bring in national-level controls which capture more or less stable institutional contexts and the dynamics of macroeconomic indicators in order to account for contextual differences among the different national contexts.

3.1 Data Structures and Statistical Models

The above discussion illustrates that the setup for the empirical data analysis is necessarily quite complex. The outcome $\boldsymbol{O}$ is a categorical variable which characterizes a series of graded sanctions, which each respondents suggests whenever a person that claims unemployment compensation turns down a job offer due to lower payment ($S0$) or qualification ($S1$) or is unwilling to carry out unpaid community work in return for her social benefit ($S2$). Therefore, all three outcome variables O will be modeled as an ordinal-scale variable with four distinct, ordered categories ranging from $O1$ to $O3$, i.e. from no towards maximum sanctions.

Our key explanatory variable is given the perceived deservingness of a benefit claimant which is characterized by a series of three randomly assigned treatments ($\boldsymbol{T}$) which focus on her age ($T1$ and $T2$) and family status ($T3$). Some of the models presented below also include

a set of theoretically derived individual-level controls ($\boldsymbol{X}$) which, as lined out and justified before, address material self-interest, general and specific ideological orientations, and basic demographic and social features of the respondents. Eventually, our fully-specified models additionally control for stable institutional and dynamic macroeconomic features at the national level ($\boldsymbol{Z}$).

Besides the specification and definition of our outcome, treatment and control variables, we need to comment on and explain the complex structure of the dataset at hand. Consider that each of our $N = 44,387$ respondents is assigned one specific vignette ($\boldsymbol{T}$), but is asked to evaluate this vignette across the set of three situational items ($\boldsymbol{S}$) laid out in the questionnaires. To address these 133,161 suggested sanction levels, we have converted the dataset to a stacked format with each respondent being represented by three rows for the three situational items. Given that the grade of suggested sanctions for identical vignettes, but across different situations is clearly expected to be correlated for each individual respondent, we include a random intercept so as to guard against model misspecification and capture unmodeled variation at the individual level.

The data therefore is characterized by a hierarchical structure. Situations/ items are nested within individuals, and individuals are in turn nested within the country-level survey segments. We model these these hierarchical effects, and the implied contextual heterogeneity, by introducing random intercepts both at the individual and at the country level. In addition, the effects implied by the four survey vignettes ($\boldsymbol{T}$) and the the three situational items ($\boldsymbol{S}$) present within any hierarchical contexts and thus inserted as crossed random slopes at the country level. Substantively, this implies that we allow for variation of the vignette effects and the situational items across our set of 23 survey segments so as to evaluate and compare their country-specific effects and consequences.

Ordinal data may be conveniently modeled by "cumulative link models" (Agresti, 2019). In our case, we focus on an ordinal, four-point Likert scale with items ranging from "should lose" to "keep all" benefits. The cumulative model assumes that the observed categorical values $\boldsymbol{O}$ are functions of an unobserved, continuous variable $\bar{\boldsymbol{O}}$, which substantively resembles a latent propensity to impose (ever more severe) sanctions. In turn, the categorization of the latent variable is, with four scale points, achieved by $N - 1 = 3$ thresholds τ_c. Therefore, the probability to select sanction level c is given by

$$\Pr(O = c) = F(\tau_c) - F(\tau_{c-1})$$

In the next step, we model the continuous latent variable $\bar{\boldsymbol{O}}$ by a linear predictor η that includes the vignette treatments $\boldsymbol{T}$, the situational items ($\boldsymbol{S}$), and sets of observational controls taken from the individual (X) and the country levels (Z):

$$\bar{\boldsymbol{O}} = \eta + \epsilon = \alpha\boldsymbol{S} + \beta\boldsymbol{T} + \boldsymbol{\gamma X} + \boldsymbol{\lambda Z} + \epsilon$$

Wrapping up, the probability than an individual selects one of the four sanction categories is given by

$$\Pr(O = c) = \Phi[\tau_c - (\alpha \boldsymbol{S} + \beta \boldsymbol{T} + \boldsymbol{\gamma X} + \boldsymbol{\lambda Z})] - \Phi[\tau_{c-1} - (\alpha \boldsymbol{S} + \beta \boldsymbol{T} + \boldsymbol{\gamma X} + \boldsymbol{\lambda Z})]$$

The final step of our model involves the consideration of the complex, layered data structure described above. Recall that throughout the text, we index individuals by i, vignette treatments by j, situational items by k, and country- or survey-level context by l. Further, in an ordinal model, the (three) cut-offs τ_1, τ_2, and τ_3 are the equivalent of random intercepts and are allowed to vary at the individual and the country level. In addition, we specify crossed random slopes at the treatment and situational level:

$$\Pr(O = c) = \Phi[\tau_{c[i,l]} - (\boldsymbol{\alpha_l S} + \boldsymbol{\beta_l T} + \boldsymbol{\gamma X} + \boldsymbol{\lambda Z})] - \Phi[\tau_{(c-1)[i,l]} - (\boldsymbol{\alpha_l S} + \boldsymbol{\beta_l T} + \boldsymbol{\gamma X} + \boldsymbol{\lambda Z})]$$

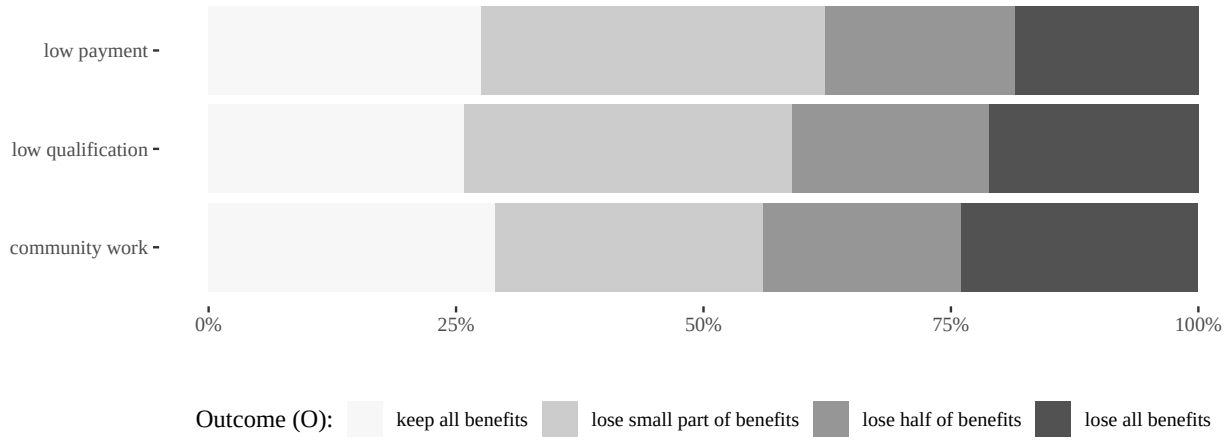
3.2 Describing a Complex Dataset

We begin the presentation of empirical evidence with some simple descriptive statistics so as to better explain the structure of the complex ESS-8 survey experiment and dataset. The brief set of descriptives presented below focuses on differences of the proposed level of sanctions that varies among vignettes ($\boldsymbol{T}$), situations ($\boldsymbol{S}$), and countries.

In general, it is important to note that the factorial survey does not pick up issues of deservingness per se, but addresses (the level of) sanctions imposed upon individuals who currently receive unemployment benefits, but turn down a job offer due to either lower wages or lower qualification levels, or refuse to carry out unpaid community work in exchange for the receipt of social transfers. Therefore, the ESS-8 survey experiment does not pick up attributions of "pure" deservingness, but is also sensitive to some general evaluation of the effectiveness of sanctions and depends on the individual willingness to impose them. Across the overall set of four vignettes, three situational items, and 23 survey segments, 27.4 percent of the survey respondents suggest that an individual should "lose all benefits", 31.7 percent believe she should "lose half of her benefits", and 19.7 or, respectively, 21.2 percent think the individual should "lose only a small part" or "keep all her benefits". Focusing on the highest level of aggregation, the scale is thus about evenly balanced.

Figure 1 illustrates that the aggregate level of suggested sanctions remains comparatively stable and is not strongly affected by the situational items laid out above ($\boldsymbol{S}$). Across the four vignettes and the 23 parallel survey segments, respondents are somewhat more inclined to impose harsher sanctions on unemployed who reject a job offer due to lower payment than those who reject an employment opportunity due to lower qualification. Note that the third situational item differs somewhat from these reasons, because it does not allude to a chance to escape unemployment, but refers to the rejection of unpaid community work while still

Figure 1: Suggested Sanction Levels Per Situation ($\boldsymbol{S}$)



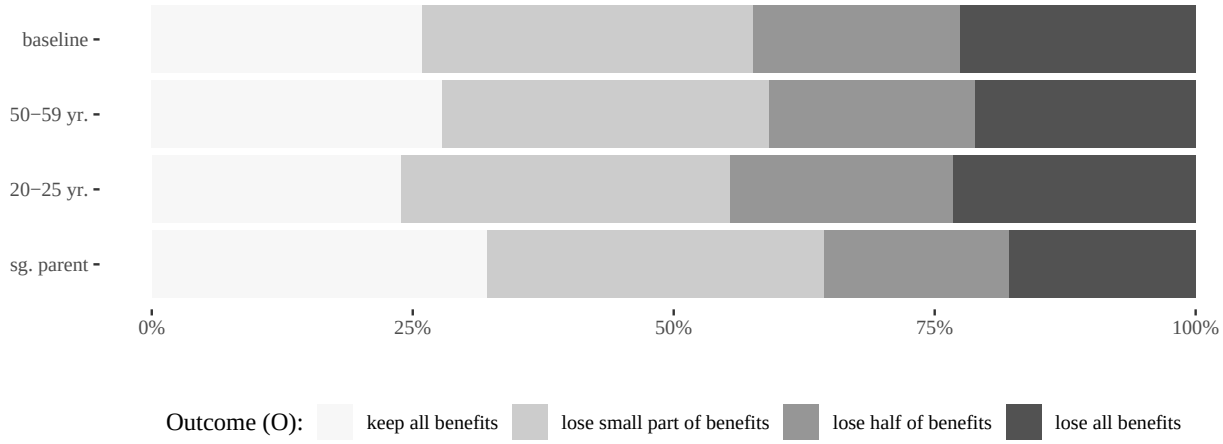
Notes: Suggested sanctions computed from the stacked dataset, broken down to situational contexts ($\boldsymbol{S}$). Situational items are defined as follows. S0: "(...) they turn down a job because it pays a lot less than they earned previously?"; S1: "(...) they turn down a job because it needs a much lower level of education than the person has?", and S2: "(...) they refuse to regularly carry out unpaid work in the area where they live in return for unemployment benefit?"

being unemployed. Remarkably, assigned sanction levels in this situation are higher than in the first two scenarios.

Proceeding towards the next layer of our dataset, Figure 2 provides some initial validation of the randomly assigned vignette treatments. The level of suggested sanction varies systematically with the four survey vignettes. When we adopt the vaguely defined first category ("some unemployed person") as a reference category, young benefit claimants are sanctioned more heavily, while old claimants and especially single parents are sanctioned at a lesser rate and less severely. Note that, as before, these raw frequencies do not discriminate among the three different situational items and among the twenty-three national contexts and therefore provide limited, prima facie evidence.

Finally, Figure 3 underscores the profound consequences of country-level context. Even a superficial inspection of the stacked bar charts demonstrates that the aggregate suggested sanction levels differ profoundly from one survey segment or national socioeconomic context to the other. In some countries covered by the ESS-8, e.g. in Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, or Slovenia, survey respondents on average suggest harsh sanctions against transfer claimants which are considered delinquent or non-compliant across a number of scenarios. In contrast, respondents from other countries prefer milder and/ or more nuanced sanctions imposed on similarly characterized individuals, most visibly in Germany or Russia. Below the line, the simple descriptive evidence refers to significant heterogeneity across various European countries, but these differences cannot easily be attributed to common context-level predictors such as varieties of capitalism or key macroeconomic indicators.

Figure 2: Suggested Sanction Levels Per Vignette ($\boldsymbol{T}$)



Notes: Suggested sanctions computed from the stacked dataset, broken down to situational contexts ($\boldsymbol{S}$). The four distinct vignettes are defined as follows. T0: "someone who is unemployed"; T1: "someone in their fifties who is unemployed"; T2: "someone aged twenty to twenty-five who is unemployed"; T3: "a single parent with a three-year-old child who is unemployed".

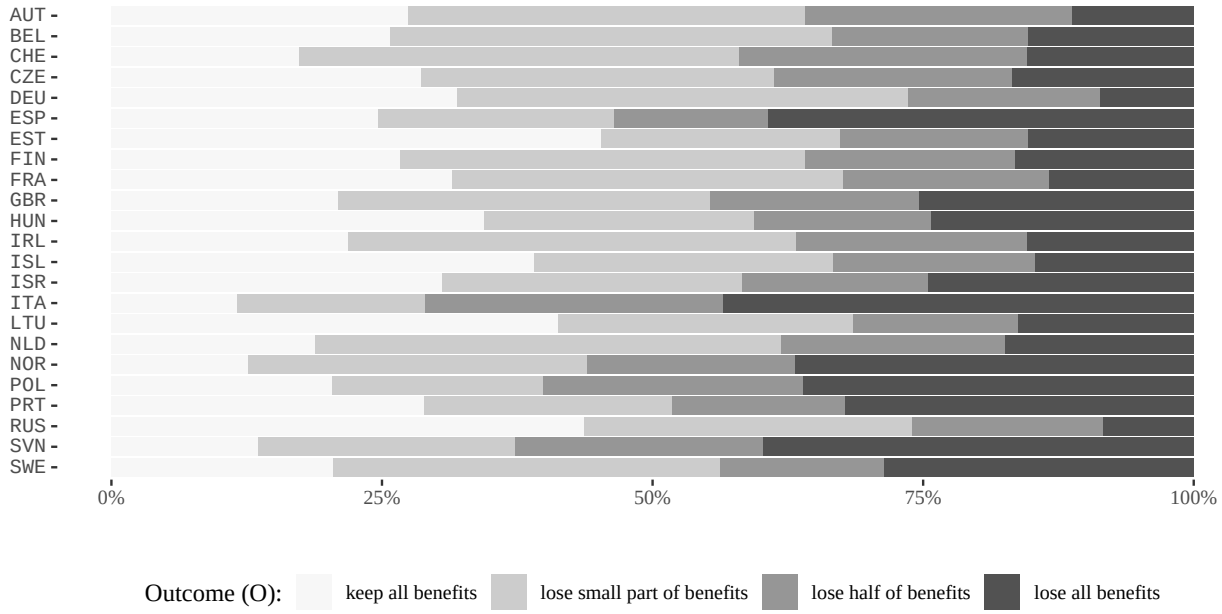
3.3 Randomized Multivalued Treatment Effects

We begin the presentation and discussion of the core survey experiment(s) by focusing on the isolated effect of our multivalued treatment variable ($\boldsymbol{T}$). The country-specific modules of the ESS-8 each include sufficiently many individual respondents to allow for successful randomization. Therefore, simple bivariate associations among the (grade of) sanctions the respondent considers appropriate and justified and multivalued treatment, i.e. the specific vignette she was presented, are supposed to yield unbiased estimates of the coefficients and/or treatment effects.

Figures 4, 5, and 6 characterize the perceived deservingness of specific groups of claimants by the severity of suggested sanctions, when an unemployed person turns down a job opportunity due to lower payment or less demanding qualification, or when she refuses to carry out community work in return for the payment of social transfers. For each of these items, we have selected the vaguely defined vignette "an unemployed person" as our reference category, and the obtained coefficients $\boldsymbol{\alpha}$ on the three binary treatment variables $\boldsymbol{T}$ assess departures from the reference vaguely defined reference. Since the outcome variable $\boldsymbol{O}$ ranges from severe to no sanctions, throughout this discussion positive values of α refer to less severe sanctions, while negative values indicate that the sanctioning of a specific vignette group becomes more rigid.

The empirical findings generally confirm key theoretical notions and empirical insights derived from deservingness cues laid out above (Petersen, 2012; van Oorschot, 2000). Generally, randomly assigned treatment vignettes tend to exert a strong and substantively meaningful impact on the willingness of the respondents to impose sanctions. Within each of the

Figure 3: Suggested Sanction Levels Per Survey Segment



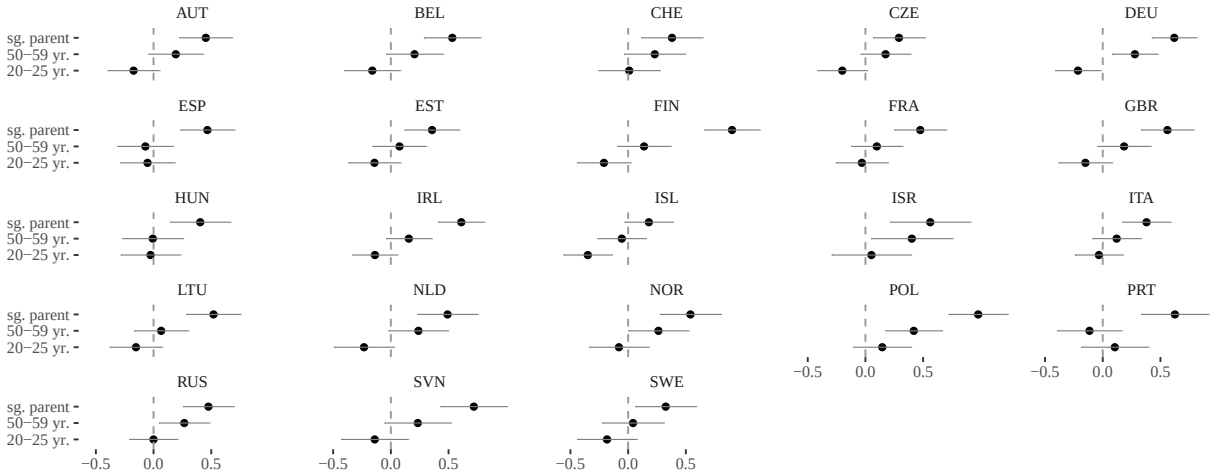
Notes: Suggested sanctions computed from the stacked dataset, broken down to country- survey-level contexts. Countries are identified by their ISO 3166-3 codes.

twenty-three parallel survey modules, respondents are least likely to impose severe sanctions on single parents who turn down a job offer or refused to do community service. Secondly, a majority of respondents also shies away from imposing too harsh sanctions on older unemployed who turn down job offers due to lower payment or qualification requirements. Thirdly, and almost across the board, respondents are, in comparison to the vague reference category, more willing to sanction younger benefit claimants in their early twenties. These attitudes clearly correspond to a number of dimensions included in the theoretical concept of deservingness, for instance the control, need and reciprocity criteria (cf. van Oorschot, 2000).

Below the line, the general likelihood that respondents are considered less deserving and are thus more in risk of being sanctioned in case of alleged non-compliance therefore is arranged like $T2 < T0 < T1 < T3$. This generic ordering can clearly be identified in all but three segments of the ESS-8 factorial survey. Only in Portugal and Spain, the two countries which were most severely plagued by youth unemployment, respondents were, on average, willing to impose stricter sanctions on older than on younger benefit claimants. Likewise, these country-level differences reflect the control dimension of the deservingness concept. With excessive levels of group-specific unemployment at the macro level, younger people are considered much less in control of their employment status.

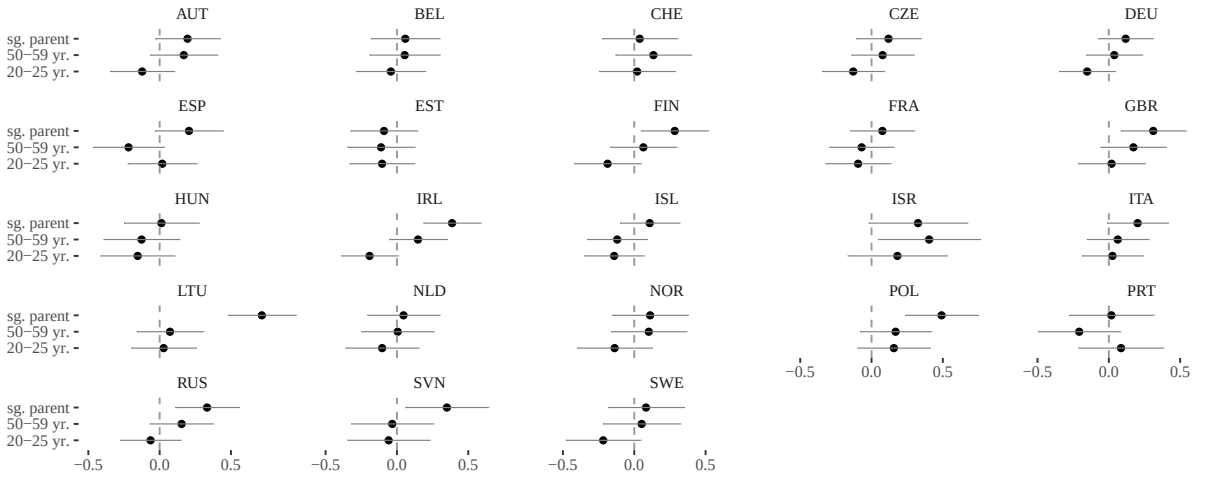
The survey experiment thus yields clear and robust findings concerning the deservingness of different groups of benefit claimants which are characterized by the randomly assigned vignettes. However, many of these effects are measured with considerable uncertainty and,

Figure 4: Job Offer Turned Down Due to Lower Salary ($S0$)



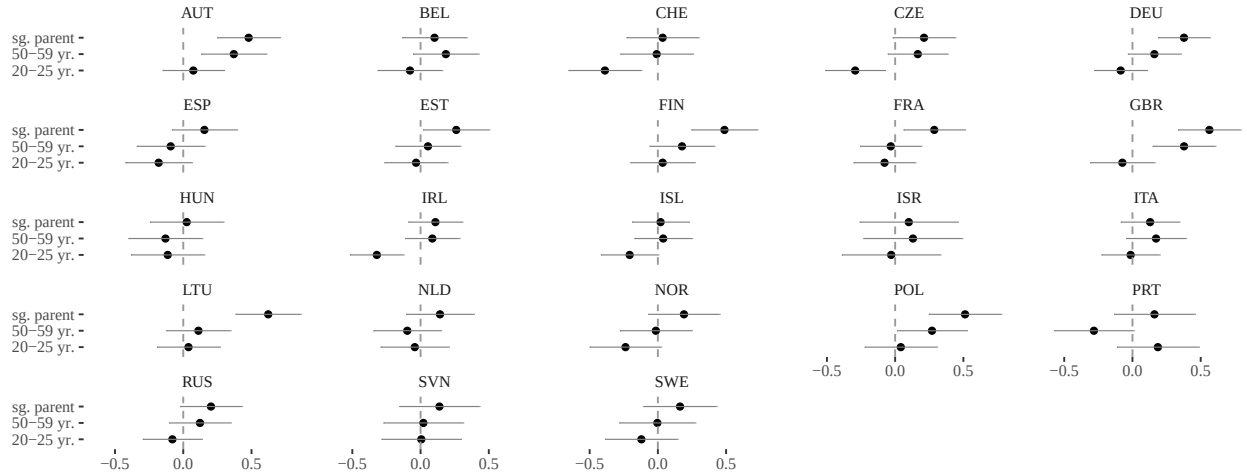
Notes: These coefficient plots summarize the regression coefficients on the vignette treatment $\boldsymbol{\alpha T}$ in a series of country-specific ordinal logit models. Throughout, we apply $T0$ as a reference category, while $T1$, $T2$, $T3$ are binary treatment indicators. The vertical lines represent a 95% error interval.

Figure 5: Job Offer Turned Down Due to Lower Qualification ($S1$)



Notes: These coefficient plots summarize the regression coefficients on the vignette treatment $\boldsymbol{\alpha T}$ in a series of country-specific ordinal logit models. Throughout, we apply $T0$ as a reference category, while $T1$, $T2$, $T3$ are binary treatment indicators. The vertical lines represent a 95% error interval.

Figure 6: Refused to Carry Out Unpaid Community Work ($S2$)



Notes: These coefficient plots summarize the regression coefficients on the vignette treatment $\boldsymbol{\alpha T}$ in a series of country-specific ordinal logit models. Throughout, we apply $T0$ as a reference category, while $T1$, $T2$, $T3$ are binary treatment indicators. The vertical lines represent a 95% error interval.

although there are sufficiently many respondents, do not achieve conventional levels of statistical significance within each survey module.

3.4 Integrated Multilevel Models

With randomly assigned vignettes, the multivalued treatment effects may per se be assessed without bias. Nevertheless, the inclusion of observational data, i.e. the insertion of controls for observed respondent characteristics, potentially leads to more precise estimates of treatment effects and enables us to consider interactions among vignette treatments ($\boldsymbol{T}$), observational variables ($\boldsymbol{X}$), and, in a latter step, macro-level context variables ($\boldsymbol{Z}$). These are the key research questions of this analysis.

Table 1 presents the effects of three fully-specified cumulative-link models which control for contextual heterogeneity by including random intercepts at the country level. Each of these models addresses a specific situation, i.e. an individual turns down a job offer due to lower payment or lower qualification requirements, or refuses to carry out unpaid community work in return for unemployment benefits. The integrated models illustrate that the basic treatment effects are maintained even when we include for a range of individual-specific predictor variables. For all three dimensions and models, respondents are willing to sanction younger benefit claimants somewhat harsher than individuals within the vaguely defined baseline category. In contrast, the average respondents are willing to assign lighter sanctions to older benefit claimants. Finally, single parents are less likely to be sanctioned and, if though, are imposed considerably lighter sanctions.

Turning towards the individual-specific predictors, there is solid and robust evidence for

Table 1: Job Offer Turned Down, Multilevel Models for Three Scenarios ($S0$, $S1$, $S2$)

	S0: Payment	**S1: Education**	**S2: Community Work**
Vignette Treatment:			
T0: unemployed	−. − −.−	−. − −.−	−. − −.−
T1: 50-59 yr.	$-0.13\ (0.03)^{***}$	$0.01\ (0.03)$	$-0.08\ (0.03)^{*}$
T2: 20-25 yr.	$0.15\ (0.03)^{***}$	$0.11\ (0.03)^{**}$	$0.10\ (0.03)^{**}$
T3: sg. parent	$-0.50\ (0.03)^{***}$	$-0.12\ (0.03)^{***}$	$-0.23\ (0.03)^{***}$
Material Self-Interest:			
– Unemployment –			
unemployment (currently)	$-0.22\ (0.06)^{***}$	$-0.20\ (0.06)^{**}$	$-0.14\ (0.06)^{*}$
unemployment (previously)	$-0.18\ (0.03)^{***}$	$-0.12\ (0.03)^{***}$	$-0.14\ (0.03)^{***}$
unemployment (perceived risk)	$-0.11\ (0.02)^{***}$	$-0.08\ (0.02)^{***}$	$-0.07\ (0.02)^{***}$
– Income –			
low income	−. − −.−	−. − −.−	−. − −.−
low to medium income	$0.08\ (0.04)^{*}$	$0.06\ (0.04)$	$0.05\ (0.04)$
medium to high income	$0.14\ (0.04)^{***}$	$0.12\ (0.04)^{**}$	$0.07\ (0.04)$
high income	$0.16\ (0.05)^{***}$	$0.08\ (0.05)$	$0.10\ (0.05)^{*}$
– Education –			
low education level	−. − −.−	−. − −.−	−. − −.−
medium education level	$-0.11\ (0.04)^{**}$	$0.02\ (0.04)$	$-0.08\ (0.04)^{*}$
high education level	$-0.05\ (0.04)$	$0.01\ (0.04)$	$-0.12\ (0.04)^{**}$
tertiary education level	$-0.07\ (0.04)$	$-0.19\ (0.04)^{***}$	$-0.19\ (0.04)^{***}$
General and specific Ideology:			
general ideology (left-right)	$0.04\ (0.01)^{***}$	$0.04\ (0.01)^{***}$	$0.03\ (0.01)^{***}$
– Social services –			
cost businesses too much	$0.02\ (0.01)$	$0.03\ (0.01)^{*}$	$0.07\ (0.01)^{***}$
lead to equal society	$0.04\ (0.01)^{**}$	$-0.00\ (0.01)$	$0.02\ (0.01)$
make people lazy	$0.26\ (0.01)^{***}$	$0.22\ (0.01)^{***}$	$0.23\ (0.01)^{***}$
make people less willing to care	$0.11\ (0.01)^{***}$	$0.10\ (0.01)^{***}$	$0.11\ (0.01)^{***}$
prevent widespread poverty	$0.05\ (0.01)^{***}$	$0.03\ (0.01)$	$-0.00\ (0.01)$
place to great a strain on economy	$0.12\ (0.01)^{***}$	$0.08\ (0.01)^{***}$	$0.05\ (0.01)^{***}$
Demographic Controls:			
– Respondent age group –			
age group (15-29 yr.)	−. − −.−	−. − −.−	−. − −.−
age group (30-44 yr.)	$-0.07\ (0.04)$	$0.11\ (0.04)^{**}$	$0.02\ (0.04)$
age group (45-65 yr.)	$-0.04\ (0.03)$	$0.13\ (0.03)^{***}$	$0.10\ (0.03)^{**}$
age group (> 65 yr.)	$0.13\ (0.05)^{**}$	$0.21\ (0.05)^{***}$	$0.10\ (0.05)^{*}$
female	$0.05\ (0.02)^{*}$	$0.04\ (0.02)$	$0.10\ (0.02)^{***}$
Thresholds:			
1|2	$0.47\ (0.17)^{**}$	$0.29\ (0.17)$	$0.33\ (0.15)^{*}$
2|3	$2.25\ (0.17)^{***}$	$1.93\ (0.17)^{***}$	$1.63\ (0.15)^{***}$
3|4	$3.35\ (0.17)^{***}$	$2.99\ (0.17)^{***}$	$2.65\ (0.15)^{***}$
Log Likelihood	−29605.87	−30212.74	−30372.74
N (individual)	23591	23388	23075
N (country)	23	23	23
Random Int. (country; σ^2)	0.35	0.32	0.23

$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

the verisimilitude of arguments which are based on material self-interest and on general and specific ideological orientation. Moreover, the evidence does not differ too much across the three scenarios ($S1$, $S2$, and $S3$). All three multilevel models provide ample support for the material self-interest hypotheses. Current or previous unemployment, or the mere subjective fear to be unemployed in the future all significantly and substantially reduce the willingness to impose sanctions. Likewise, respondents with high income are more in favor of imposing sanctions than, especially, those who are in the lowest income group, while respondents with higher levels of education, in contrast, tend to be less inclined to sanction.

Next, the ideological predictors are also closely linked to the level of sanctions suggested by the respondents: The further to the right a respondent locates herself, the more likely she is to suggest more severe sanctions in case of perceived non-compliance in all three scenarios. Turning towards the more specific items, especially those who think that the provision of welfare state benefits makes people lazy or less willing to care for others are more likely to bring forward substantial sanctions. The same holds true for those who believe that the provision of welfare sanctions produces undue burdens for the economy (although not necessarily for individual businesses). In contrast, there is only limited and partly contradictory evidence concerning the effects of positive attitudes to social welfare upon the willingness to sanction non-compliant unemployed people. Whether respondents believe that social service help to build a more equal society or effectively prevent widespread poverty, is not systematically linked with the dependent variable across the three scenarios/ the three models.

3.5 Country-Specific Context Effects

While these correlations clearly reinforce confidence in the robustness of our findings, we also need to address the origins of cross-country differences. Theoretically, we expect countries with liberal market economies to be more heavily leaning towards sanctioning, within social-democratic regimes, survey respondents should be less likely to impose substantial sanctions, and conservative/ continental welfare states are supposed to assume a middle ground (Iversen, 2005). Focusing on the ESS-8 data, the results are somewhat more complex. Within a number of diverse countries such as Italy, Norway, and Poland, survey respondents are likely to suggest harsh sanctions across all three situational settings. In contrast, another diverse group of countries, composed of France, Germany, and Lithuania, is characterized by significantly lesser sanctions on unemployed benefit claimants.

4 Conclusion

Voter attitudes towards the welfare state, its specific programs, or specific people which are supposed to "benefit" from the implied social transfers have always been of vital interest for discussions in the public and political spheres. the dynamics of public opinion have been utilized by some in order to justify changes or cuts to social transfers and welfare spending, and they have been applied by others as a general tool for evaluating the justice and legitimacy of existing or proposed systems of social security.

The first task in this paper was to evaluate the explanatory force of more two different strands of the literature on welfare states and public opinion. A series of more recent approaches has used deservingness cues heuristics to explore individual survey respondents' attitudes towards different groups of benefit claimants. These contributions often exploit factorial surveys so as to gain additional causal traction. In line with these contributions, the vignette experiment implemented in Round 8 of the ESS, demonstrates that respondents indeed react systematically to randomly assigned vignettes: older unemployed are considered to be more deserving than younger and are less likely to be sanctioned when they turn down job offer. In addition, the family status also matters: single parent without a job are still more likely to be considered deserving and, thus, less likely to be sanctioned in case of non-compliance (Buss, 2019; Petersen, 2012; Petersen et al., 2011; van Oorschot, 2000).

Another strand of the literature has tried to attribute welfare state attitudes to the respondents individual features. Relying on observational data derived from (comparative) survey projects, we found that items which assess material self-interest (Iversen & Soskice, 2001), general and specific ideological are closely linked to the willingness to attribute deservingness or to impose sanctions on allegedly non-compliant unemployed (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001; Gilens, 2000; Kootstra, 2016; Petersen et al., 2011).

Secondly, this paper adds to the existing literature by adopting a systematic-comparative perspective. Up to now, contributions to the literature were usually confined to small sets of selected interviewees, to survey experiments within individual countries (Buss, 2019; Petersen et al., 2011), pairwise comparisons (Kootstra, 2016; Petersen, 2012). To our knowledge, this is the first factorial survey that is able to probe the hypothesized causal effects across twenty-three heterogeneous polities. While deservingness cues had significant causal value in all of these contexts, our findings also demonstrate that it is conditional on economic, social, and institutional context.

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