

Abstract

One of the tasks of social policy is to support economic development. Governments invest in social policy to protect citizens from social risks (for instance, in the labor market). In this sense, economic policy and social policy are strongly linked. The different choices governments have with respect to social policy lead to variations in welfare states. Typically, scholars have divided welfare states into three groups: social democratic, liberal, and continental countries. This study examines citizens' attitudes toward social policy in 23 European countries, and especially within the three groups of welfare states. Attitudes toward social welfare are divided into two parts: respondents' opinions regarding national policy and their attitudes toward poverty. The study focuses on the connections between the type of welfare state and its citizens' attitudes toward social policy. The study also examines whether so-called situational factors (e.g., the level of income inequality, social expenditure, and social insurance) influence the social welfare attitudes of citizens. The data, which were gathered in 2012, are based on the European Social Survey's (N = 43,897) sixth round. The results show that the situational factors have an important role, especially in how citizens evaluate national social policy. However, simultaneous analyses of all the situational factors and social welfare attitudes suggest that the situational factors have only an indirect influence on attitudes toward poverty, such that respondents' opinions of national policy have a mediating role. In this sense, the results support a weak interpretation of the influence of situational factors on attitudes toward social welfare. Furthermore, the results show that attitudes toward social welfare are connected to the types of the welfare states, in this analysis, especially in the Nordic (particularly Finland, Norway, and Sweden) and liberal countries (particularly Great Britain and Ireland). In these countries, unlike others, respondents' opinions regarding national policy and attitudes toward poverty are positively related. However, according to a more detailed analysis, the Nordic and liberal countries can be separated from each other. The group of continental countries was excluded from the final analysis because it seemed not to be a coherent group, as the original welfare-state typology indicated.

Keywords: social policy, social welfare attitudes