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Macro Factors and Public Opinion

An Investigation of Economic Left–Right Attitudes in
Advanced Industrialized Democracies

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, April 2011

Norwegian University of Science and Technology
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Paper III: Education and the Zeitgeist: Government Positions and Public Opinion on Income Distribution

Paper IV: Issue Ownership, Unemployment and Support for Government Intervention

Paper V: Welfare Attitudes and Social Expenditure: Do Regimes Shape Public Opinion?

Acknowledgment

This thesis draws on the lessons of a wide array of academic research on public opinion to provide a cohesive and thorough examination of the link between macro factors and economic left–right attitudes. The beginning of the work with this thesis goes back to the fall of 2007 when I was appointed as a research scholar at Trondheim Business School (TØH). This dissertation is the result of my work here and my affiliation to the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor Ola Listhaug for his invaluable support and guidance in my work. Listhaug helped to get this thesis under way. His patience, wisdom, and practical-mindedness have been inspiring and have led to vast improvements in the final product. Very special thanks go also to my brother Jo Jakobsen for having such unfaltering faith in my ability in the field of political science, and to him and his family for supporting me when the going got tough. I have also received much advice from Henning Finseraas, and his thesis together with the dissertations of my brother, Toril Aalberg, Terje A. Eikemo, and Zan Strabac have been valuable sources of influence for me.

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Trondheim, November 2010,

Tor Georg Jakobsen

Introduction

The topic of this dissertation is the economic left–right attitudes of people in advanced industrialized economies. My overall objective is to examine the extent to which macro-level factors – such as state policy, elite opinions, unemployment, and regime type – influence these opinions. More specifically, I examine both individual and aggregated economic left–right attitudes using different sets of survey data in combination with nation-level data. This thesis comprises five research articles that shed light on the macro-micro relationship in opinion research, where the link between the policies of regimes and the opinions of citizens is at center stage. It contributes to the existing literature by investigating the influence of country-level characteristics, often in interaction with other factors, on individual-level opinions. The analyses presented cover the time period 1985–2007.

The purpose of this dissertation is to increase our knowledge about the underlying determinants of people’s economic left–right attitudes; the focus is to investigate how the characteristics of countries affect these opinions. Country-level characteristics are either institutional types of welfare policies, the size of government sector, elite views, or economic factors related to employment, unemployment, or general economic development. In many instances in life, people’s attitudes, consciously or unconsciously, are influenced by those of their surroundings. The common denominator for the hypotheses and research questions under scrutiny in this thesis is that they seek to see how these macro factors influence public opinion toward questions like privatization, individual responsibility, income distribution, government intervention, and competition. In short, I test if the public will adjust their beliefs to stay in accordance with the values of their society. Papers I and II look at public spending, and addresses whether or not there is a link between state policy and attitudes regarding government influence, the main hypothesis being: *Confidence in institutions will indicate how disposed a person is to adjust or react against the economic policies of her regime.* In Paper III I examine the link between elite and mass opinion investigating the hypothesis: *A person will adjust his or her opinions to coincide with the perceived temper of the time.* Paper IV investigates the interplay between country-level unemployment, political position of the government, and attitudes about government intervention in the economy, with one of the hypotheses being: *Public opinion will to shift to the left in times of high unemployment combined with a leftist government.* In Paper V I test whether welfare regimes tend to reproduce their legitimacy in quantitative terms, asking the following research question: *Are there cross-country differences in welfare attitudes depending on regime-characteristics?*

The main conclusion drawn from the research articles is that there is indeed a link between characteristics of countries and individual-level opinions. However, I find that this link is conditioned by public responsiveness to these macro factors. Public responsiveness can be confidence in institutions or ability for critical thinking, as demonstrated in Papers I, II, and III. Paper IV shows that the effect of nation-level unemployment on attitudes is conditioned by which political parties are in government. In Paper V it is demonstrated that the institutional arrangements of a country can play a part in forming the opinions of its citizens. All in all, this thesis contributes to the study of economic left–right opinions and finds that country-level characteristics, whether they are government spending, elite views, unemployment, or institutional arrangements, do play a part in the formation of peoples attitudes. At the individual level, a robust finding is that belonging to the upper socio-economic strata is associated with holding rightist views on economic questions.

This doctoral thesis is a contribution to the literature relating to both theory and methods. Theory-wise I contribute to the research tradition by employing theories from several disciplines in order to derive the hypotheses and research questions posed. Research on economic left–right attitudes has traditionally been characterized by the use of theories rooted in sociology and political science. This dissertation draws on both of these research traditions as seen in the use of critical social theory in Paper III, regime theory in Papers II and V, issue ownership theory in Paper IV, and rational choice theory in Papers II and III, as well as drawing on the literature of social psychology when employing cognitive dissonance theory in Papers I and II, and through the use of the concepts of conformity and identification in Paper III. When investigating public opinion, account must be made of political, social, economic, psychological, cultural, and historical factors. As a political scientist, I focus on the importance of explanatory variables but also maintain it to be valuable to take into account the interrelations between different factors. I show that by combining and drawing on different theoretical traditions, I can test, supplement, and improve on existing research on macro-level factors' influence on individual level economic attitudes.

Many studies¹ have used the regime theory of Esping-Andersen (1990) as a starting point for explaining national variations in economic opinion. No common support for a regime effect on individual redistributive attitudes is found. Method-wise, I improve on the operationalization and measurement of this country level measure. In Paper II, I argue that there are two important reasons for the lack of clear-cut success in efforts in the research field

¹ See section “Regime characteristics” for overview.

to establish a link between regime characteristics and public opinion towards economic left-right issues. First, the regime categorization is too broad. In other words, the differences within the regime categories are too large to find support for the regime hypothesis when investigating individual level opinions. I improve on this by including a new measure – namely GOVERNMENT OUTLAY. This variable is related, but not identical to the regime types, and is better suited for quantitative analysis. In Paper III, I employ a macro-variable based on the party programs of the incumbent. Paper IV investigates national unemployment data. In Paper V, I test Esping-Andersen’s regime characteristic on aggregated (national means) welfare opinions. The conclusion drawn from Papers II and V is that the regime classification is useful, but that the variation in economic opinion from one regime category to another is not larger than the in-group variation.

Second, I argue that previous models have not been correctly specified. My contention is that with regards to macro-level factors, conditional effects exist that have been overlooked in the literature. This is shown in Papers II, III, IV, and to a certain degree in Paper V. It is often the case that a causal claim implies a set of conditions that needs to be satisfied before a suggested cause is sufficient to bring about its effect; the magnitude of relationships often varies among different categories of people, and is also dependent on context. Thus, the use of conditional hypotheses becomes beneficial. These are easily tested in my models by including the product of the two variables in question into the regression equation. Let us assume that the effect of variable X on Y is dependent on a person’s value on a third variable, Z . The regression model for the population would thus be:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 Z_i + \beta_3 X_i Z_i + e_i$$

where i stands for individual. This equation implies that if X increases by one unit while Z remains constant, then Y will change by $\beta_1 + \beta_3$. However, my argument in Papers II and III is that a macro-level effect is dependent on a person’s value on an individual-level variable. We then have what is called *cross-level interaction*. This term refers to the interaction between higher level and lower level variables, and for the population can be expressed:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_j + \beta_2 Z_{ij} + \beta_3 X_j Z_{ij} + e_{ij} + u_{1j} Z_{ij} + u_{0j}$$

where j stands for country and ij means individual i in country j . X is here a country-level variable. The use of multilevel analysis enables us to test for macro-level variables' effect on individual opinion, to check for cross-level interactions as well as taking into account that people are nested in countries (that the units of analysis are not statistically independent). In Paper IV, where there are three nested levels in the data, the effect of one macro-level variable is dependent on the value of another macro-level variable:

$$Y_{ijk} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{jk} + \beta_2 Z_{jk} + \beta_3 X_{jk} Z_{jk} + e_{ijk} + u_{0jk} + v_{0k}$$

where j represents country-year and k is country. The interpretation of an interaction effect composed of one continuous (X) and one dichotomous variable (Z) is relatively straight forward. We can think of two lines for the effect of X , one for each value of Z . This can be illustrated in a conditional effect plot. However, when the interaction comprises two continuous variables (as is the case in Paper II) the interpretation becomes more difficult to comprehend. To assist in this interpretation I have constructed bar charts where I show predicted values of Y for different values of both X and Z (see Paper II, pages 313 and 316). Paper V looks at the interplay between two macro-level measures and aggregated welfare attitudes illustrating this relationship in a graph. My argument here is that regime types can be identified by looking at the social expenditure and welfare attitudes of a given country (in other words, Y is identified by X given the country's value on Z).

Even though conditional hypotheses are commonplace in political science, my contribution is to apply these to questions regarding macro factor's influence on individual level opinion (Papers I, II, III, and IV). My argument is that macro-effects are often "camouflaged" through interaction effects. Papers II, III, and IV use multilevel modeling to address conditional hypotheses. Paper V uses standard OLS regression to test the direct effect of regime type on aggregated opinion, as well as looking at the interplay between these two variables and social expenditure. By using more quantifiable measures, employing multilevel analysis, and modeling interaction effects I am able to assist the reader in a better understanding of the link between macro factors and people's economic left-right attitudes. In sum, the use of a multidisciplinary theoretical approach to construct hypotheses and research questions and the use of methods that are well suited for testing these, represents a contribution to the literature. The common theme and nature of the dependent variables, the investigation of macro-factors as independent variables as well as the use of theory and

methods described above, binds the five separate papers that constitute this dissertation together as a whole.

Public opinion on economic questions is important in advanced industrialized democracies because the people are the ultimate source of power. With this in mind, a country's government should take public opinion into account when deciding which type of economic policy to pursue. Thus, public opinion is an important piece of the political landscape. It influences a country's policy through several mechanisms. First, people's opinions are decisive when they cast their votes in elections, where they usually vote for those parties or candidates who express a political view with which they agree. Second, they influence parties and governments through opinion polls. There are also other ways in which citizens can get their views expressed, such as through organizational participation, demonstrations, or lobbying. Economic left–right attitudes are thus a part of the basis for orientation of a given country's economic policies.

However, an individual's attitudes are also influenced by his or her surroundings. When studying public opinion, it is important to be aware of the relationship between macro factors and the opinion of the individual. Public attitudes are often rooted in a value structure, and this in turn is influenced by national contexts like a country's institutional organization, policy, level of unemployment, or general economic development. There are several ways in which these macro variables can exert influence on public opinion: through education and socialization, where the individuals are taught to respect the dominant norms and values of society; through media, where newspapers, TV, radio, and the internet function as the connecting link between elites and members of the public; and directly, for example by an increase in purchasing power, or if an individual becomes unemployed. Granted, the features of society are also influenced by its citizens. A country's history shapes its institutions, and the people elect the government. However, one sole citizen does not influence his surroundings as much as his surroundings influence him. Thus, the main focus of this thesis is how features of society influence citizens with regard to economic questions.

Left and right or liberal and conservative can be called ideological labels. They are abstract symbols that can encompass a wide spectrum of perceptions, like general societal values, specific societal values, social change values, ways to achieve social change, political ideologies, social groups, and political parties (Fuchs & Klingemann 1990). In other words, the left–right dimension can have different meanings to different people and is in itself only a spatial archetype. This thesis investigates one specific aspect of this scope, namely the *economic* left–right dimension. The importance of this dimension in the total left–right

spectrum varies from one country to another. For example, in some countries religious cleavages play a substantial part. However, in most countries economic opinions constitute the most important decider of where a person stands politically. These are in part a product of the labor vs. capital contention, which is one of the basic structures of conflict in a society (Lipset & Rokkan 1967). The economic left–right dimension can be divided into three main sub-dimensions: (a) state intervention and regulation of the economy; (b) taxes and redistribution; and (c) the welfare state. My definition of economic left–right attitudes is as follows: leftist opinions are synonymous with pro-collectivism, favorability of state responsibility, and support for income equality. Rightist attitudes, on the other hand, consist of a preference for individualistic values and income differences, and being negative toward government intervention in the economy. I thus investigate values of social inequality, government responsibility, and competition. These dimensions constitute what I denote as economic left–right attitudes. The same set of opinions is also in the literature sometimes defined as welfare attitudes.

“Public opinion” is a very general term and can be divided into three categories; *ideals, perceptions, and policy attitudes*. Ideals point to the basic values held by the public. In other words, ideals represent a lasting idea of what is desirable. Perceptions pertain to a person’s view of reality, and attitudes refer to normative judgments of actual situations or policy implications (Aalberg 2003: 5f). The dependent variables used in this dissertation can be categorized under the perceptions and policy attitudes headings. This thesis finds itself at the intersection of several scholarly disciplines. It is a work in political science that borders on sociology, makes use of theories from social psychology, and addresses research questions that are of interest to economists. My intention is that this doctoral thesis will promote an interdisciplinary approach to the study of public opinion. There is a gap in the literature concerning the macro–micro link regarding people’s attitudes. Granted, some researchers have explored individual macro-level variables such as regime type, unemployment, or policy. Yet, my contribution is to do this within the confines of a doctoral thesis, with an interdisciplinary approach to theories, testing several measures, employing different datasets, and introducing new operationalizations and model specifications. By doing this I aim to contribute to the literature on comparative public opinion. This dissertation consists of one theoretical and four quantitative articles. I make use of multilevel modeling in three of the five papers, and in two of these I argue that there is a cross-level interaction effect, that is, that the effect of a macro variable on public opinion is dependent on a person’s value on an individual-level variable. In addition, for one of the papers the main macro-level effect is

conditioned by the value of another macro factor. By using multilevel modeling and allowing the effects of one variable on another to be differentiated according to the value on a third variable, I aim to extend the boundaries of knowledge and contribute with new knowledge to the study of public opinion. The common theme for all the articles is that there is a link between macro factors and individual opinion on economic issues.

The study of economic opinions can be given a number of motivations. Questions about the economy are at the center stage of both the public and the political debate. The economic dimension is regarded as the main political bone of contention. Put simply, economics is about the distribution of wealth. This is the bottom line of all the analyses presented here. State intervention, privatization, individual responsibility, and government redistribution of income, all pertain to the same concept: How should the goods (money) in a society be distributed? This is a question that is at the center of the debate about what principles the governing bodies of a country should adhere to. It is raised from time to time in wage negotiations, election campaigns, debates about taxes, and even in questions about war and peace.

Of the five articles (see Table 1 for overview), two present a social psychological explanation of the mechanisms that link the size of government outlay to opinions on privatization and individual responsibility. The first of these provides the reader with a background to Festinger's (1957) theory, and its application to opinion studies. Briefly, his *cognitive dissonance theory* describes the state of psychological discomfort that arises when an individual behaves in a manner that is inconsistent with that person's beliefs or prior actions. In the second paper this same theory is applied to data from the World Values Survey. The focus of the third paper is on the relationship between governing parties and public opinion on income distribution where data from the European Social Survey is analyzed. The theme of the fourth paper is related to that of the third. By employing data from the International Social Survey Programme the association between unemployment, government, and public demand for government intervention is examined. In the fifth and final paper I perform a test of Esping-Andersen's (1990) regime theory, looking at the link between regime types, social expenditure, and welfare attitudes.

Before presenting the articles I provide the reader with some background and context within which to place this thesis. First I give an overview over research on public opinion toward economic questions. I then present the methodology and methods that I have applied as well as an overview of the data used, before introducing the reader to the five articles that constitute my dissertation.

Table 1. Overview of the four quantitative articles

	Paper II	Paper III	Paper IV	Paper V
Main data set	World Values Survey	European Social Survey	International Social Survey Programme	World Values Survey
Dependent variables	Private ownership Competition Individual responsibility	Income distribution	Government intervention concerning jobs, industry, and spending on unemployment benefits	Generalized welfare attitudes
Individual-level factors	Gender Age Income Political interest Confidence in institutions	Gender Age Income Education Political interest Confidence in institutions Life satisfaction Voted government	Gender Age Unemployed Trade union member	n/a
Macro-level factors	Government outlay Human Development Index	Government positions on economy Human Development Index	Unemployment rate Leftist government	Regime type Social expenditure

Note: Paper I is not listed as it is a theoretical contribution.

Research on economic left–right attitudes

This thesis places itself within a growing body of scholarship which studies the economic left–right opinions of people. This is a sub-field of electoral research, its main characteristic being that one investigates attitudes rather than actual voting behavior. However, opinions are decisive for people’s electoral behavior. This is especially true for opinions along the economic dimension. Several collaborative cross-national surveys emerged in the 1980s allowing researchers to compare attitudes of citizens in different countries. This helped to direct the research focus toward macro-level factors and their influence on individual attitudes, rather than a sole focus on individual-level explanations. The development and improvement of statistical techniques, like multilevel modeling, also rendered possible more comparative research on public opinion.

There is a tradition for research on welfare attitudes, and many have attempted to answer the question of what are the determinants of people’s economic left–right opinions. One approach is to focus on citizens as rational actors who wish to maximize their utility. This argument stems from Downs’ (1957) economic theory of democracy. Persons with a high income would thus be expected to hold more rightist views than their poorer counterparts. To control for income is a necessity in most studies of public opinion involving questions related to redistribution of wealth. Many researchers in this field of study find that rational self-interest exerts significant explanatory power on economic attitudes (e.g., Hadler 2005; Hasenfeld & Rafferty 1989; Hayo 2004; Jæger 2006b; Kaltenhaler & Ceccoli 2008; Kaltenhaler, Cecooli, & Michta 2006; Larcinese 2007; Linos & West 2003; Lipsmeyer & Nordstrom 2003; Mau 2003; Papadakis 1993; Pfeifer 2009) and this is related to the economic voting argument proposed by many (e.g., Berelson, Lazarfeld, & McPhee 1954; Duch & Stevenson 2006; Goodhart & Bhansali 1970; Martinsson 2009; Orriols 2010; Tibbits 1931; Tillman 2008). Both Duch and Stevenson (2006) and Pfeifer (2009) argue that socio-economic traits impact the vote or opinions depending on national contexts. Kumlin (2004) states that self-interest influences a person’s political ideology, with those who gain personally from the welfare state being more likely to favor state intervention. However, the Downsian argument has been challenged by some. Freire and Lobo (2005), for instance, argue that ideology is a more important factor than economics. This argument is supported by van Oorschot (2010), who also emphasizes people’s perceptions of the deservingness of welfare target groups. Recent findings by Muuri (2010) suggest that in Finland, where there is a large support for social welfare services and social security benefits, there is a growing criticism

among women, pensioners, and unemployed, who supposedly stand to benefit the most from welfare policies. Some of this can be explained by the fact that many elderly and unemployed cannot afford the client fees associated with social welfare services, and thus the criticism is directed against the performance of the welfare state rather than the welfare principles in themselves.

Education, on the other hand, consists of different components, the most important of which is self-interest. Those with higher education are often rewarded both economically and with regard to status. We can thus assume that these will hold rightist views on issues pertaining to economics or distribution of income. The opposite is also true; those with little education are more inclined to choose a leftist stance on the same issues. However, education also has another component – the aspect of critical thinking. Critical thinking can lead to a reaction and resistance against hegemonic opinions, for example, those prevailing within the government party(ies) in a given country. Education may function as a “protection” against uncritical acceptance of the dominant viewpoints. Those with higher levels of education are assumed to be better trained and equipped to learn and to filter political information than those with lower levels of education (Eveland & Scheufele 2000; Liu & Eveland 2005). In other words, education will – following the self-interest argument – first and foremost have a “right-turn” effect on public opinion. Yet, because of the critical thinking aspect this effect should be less prominent in countries whose governments are associated with the political right. The effect of education on attitudes toward redistribution is explored in the third paper of this thesis.

Gender is also an element in the formulation of public opinion. Women are often more pro-redistribution of income than men (Aalberg 2003; Kaltenthaler, Ceccoli, & Gellenny 2008). One reason for this might be that early life experiences of women differ from those of men, thereby contributing to a gap between their political values. Women are taught an ethic of caring, and are therefore predisposed to think more socially and have less focus on individual gain (Jelen, Thomas, & Wilcox 1994; Studlar, McAllister, & Hayes 1998).

With regard to the influence of age on how the public feels about economic issues there is a tendency that the older a person is, the more economically leftist his or her opinions will be. This can be explained with the help of Inglehart’s (1977, 1990, 2008) argument that the new generations are acquiring more post-materialistic values. Changing upbringing environments for the younger generations makes them more concerned with other values than earlier generations who grew up under harsher conditions. For these new generations, who have had their needs for material safety satisfied during their upbringing, new non-material

needs arise. This can function as an explanation for why younger people have more individualistic (rightist) attitudes and values than older people who will be more in favor of materialistic values such as equality and redistribution of income (leftist attitudes). Inglehart's view is shared by Ester, Halman, and de Moor (1993) who state that as countries advance economically, the values of their inhabitants shift in the direction of individualization. One could also argue from the self-interest argument, that is, the older population should be more likely to support public programs for the elderly.

Regime characteristics

One branch of research on public opinion has focused on regime characteristics and its influence on people's opinions. Here the welfare state has center stage. All countries must in some way provide their citizens with protection against the risks of modern life in order to secure continued economic growth and political stability. Thus, the state must play a role in promoting the social well-being of the individual. In most countries there is general support for and acknowledgement of the positive social consequences of the welfare state, especially with regard to the area of health care (Wendt et al. 2010). The importance of the welfare state in post-World War II Europe had been underlined by Titmuss (1958) and Myrdal (1960). Their works helped to define the pioneering welfare states of the United Kingdom and Sweden. Wilensky (1975: 57) argued that the "economic level is the root cause of welfare state development," that is, the level of spending on health and welfare programs increased with the level of economic development. In general, the participation of left parties has contributed to the development of welfare states (Korpi 1989). Some of the groundwork for the regime theory was undertaken by Korpi (1980), who started the task of developing a theoretical framework for the comparison of social policies in the industrialized nations.

In 1990 Esping-Andersen published his book *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Here he categorized welfare regimes according to three types: Liberal, Conservative, and Social-Democratic. The countries are grouped according to their level of decommodification, social stratification, and employment. Decommodification refers to the extent the individual's welfare is dependent on the market; social stratification pertains to the importance of class structures and divisions in society; and employment is concerned with the private-public mix. In the Social-Democratic regime citizens experience a high degree of decommodification, which is less extensive in the Conservative regime. In the Liberal welfare regime the state plays only a marginal role in social policy. Esping-Andersen's (1990, 1999) classification provided a platform for the regime theory branch of public opinion research.

Many researchers have drawn new boundaries and added additional regime types, including a Southern Mediterranean type.

The basis for regime theory in the study of public opinion is that a country has a distinctive set of institutions which also implies that there are collective patterns of social justice beliefs. Solidarity and social justice principles are rooted in welfare-state institutions which shape public discourse and individual attitudes (Hall 1986; Jæger 2006a; Mau 2004; Rothstein 1998). In addition, each regime type gives its citizens a personal welfare state experience, which in turn influences individual political orientations (Kumlin 2004). This implies that there are institutional feedback effects in which, following their creation, the regime institutions start to influence the surrounding political landscape. This effect can, for example, be seen in national health care. Jordan (2010) finds support for health care to be greater in countries with hierarchically organized health care systems than in those where the system is decentralized. However, the regime effect is not necessarily uniform across countries, as each country has its own history and unique welfare state trajectory. The regime hypothesis states that institutional arrangements between the state, markets, and family will lead to systematic variations in opinion regarding economic questions (Arts & Gelissen 2001; Bean & Papadakis 1998; Blekesaune & Quadagno 2003; Korpi 1980; Linos & West 2003; Svallfors 1997). Even before Esping-Andersen's (1990) book was published, Taylor-Gooby (1985) found support for the welfare state in the United Kingdom to be stable and enduring, while Smith (1987) highlighted the difference in ideology between countries belonging to different welfare systems. Several tests of the regime hypothesis followed in the wake of Esping-Andersen's (1990) book (e.g., Andreß & Heien 2001; Arts & Gelissen, 2001; Bean & Papadakis 1998; Brooks & Manza 2007; Gelissen 2000; Jæger 2006a, 2009; Jordan 2010; Larsen 2006, 2008; Lipsmeyer & Nordstrom 2003; Matthews & Erickson 2008; Mehrtens 2004; Papadakis 1992, 1993; Papadakis & Bean 1993; Svallfors 1997, 2003). There is no uniform conclusion made by this literature. Both Bean and Papadakis (1998) and Andreß and Heien (2001) find between-country differences regarding redistribution and welfare state attitudes. Mehrtens (2004) shows a noticeable ideological rift depending on regime type, though Sweden and the United Kingdom are anomalous cases that differ from their respective regimes. This is confirmed by a comparison of attitudes in Sweden and the U.K., which reveals no signs of strong leftism in the Swedish population compared to the British population (Svallfors 1993). Larsen (2006, 2008) argues that regime characteristics influence attitudes, and that regime values tend to reproduce themselves. This claim is supported in a comparison of the USA and Norway undertaken by Edlund (1999). Brooks and Manza (2007)

follow in a similar vein, arguing that mass opinion is a consequence of social policy-making. Prolonged left-wing incumbency often means higher levels of social spending and contributes to opinion formation by generating support for the existing welfare arrangements (Jensen 2010).

However, others find more mixed results when testing the regime hypothesis. Svallfors (2003) states that in-group variations are as large as between-group variations. Arts and Gelissen (2001) argue that values of solidarity and justice are matters of priority to all welfare states. Jæger (2006a, 2009) finds mixed support for the relationship between welfare regimes and support for redistribution. Others find little or no attitudinal differences between the regime types (e.g., Gelissen 2000; Lipsmeyer & Nordstrom 2003). According to Papadakis (1993) there is a bivariate relationship between regime and attitudes, but this is not robust when other factors are included in the analysis. Some argue that it is the political principles reflected in national constitutions that matter for attitudes toward welfare policies (Iida & Matsubayashi 2010). All in all, the literature gives no unambiguous conclusion to whether or not there is a regime effect on public opinion toward redistribution or welfare provision. This question is addressed in Papers II and V.

Country differences in economic left–right attitudes

One early study is that of Free and Cantril (1968), who analyzed Gallup poll data, categorizing the opinions of Americans according to their support for social and economic welfare programs, and for Federal intervention into state and personal matters. They found most Americans to be “Operational Liberals,” but also discovered that about half could be labeled “Ideological Conservatives.” With the increasing availability of survey data, several studies emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Coughlin (1980) presented a variety of survey data on public attitudes toward welfare policies for eight Western industrialized countries. He found support for social-policy principles to be most favorable in Sweden, while being weakest in the USA. Judge, Smith, and Taylor-Gooby (1983) investigated public opinion in the United Kingdom, discovering that the pro-privatization social policy of the Thatcher government is supported by the public, but that this finding coexists with public enthusiasm for state welfare.

Concerning Eastern Europe, Hayo (1997) presents evidence that people in Hungary and Poland are satisfied with the speed of transformation to a market economy compared to Czechs and Slovaks. However, Listhaug and Aalberg (1999) show that egalitarian values are persistent in the former communist nations of Eastern Europe. Public support for the creation

of a market economy in Eastern Europe is smaller for the poor, elderly, female, and less-educated people living in rural areas (Hayo 2004). Lipsmeyer and Nordstrom (2003) find opinions on welfare responsibility to be generally European rather than Eastern or Western. However, post-communist countries in Europe have a greater desire for funding welfare spending than do their western counterparts (Lipsmeyer & Nordstrom 2003). In their examination of attitudes toward state intervention in Germany, Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007) found East Germans to be more pro-state than West Germans. This is due in large part to the direct effect of communism. A similar study performed by Svallfors (2010) show that while there are differences between the two regions of Germany, over time there is a convergence of attitudes as those of the East approach those of the West.

In a study of the Nordic countries Listhaug (1990) finds no support for the claim that leftism is dominant in the views of the public. He argues that the failing support for leftism is partly caused by the achievements of egalitarian politics because the Nordic countries have already achieved many of the egalitarian goals, and thus people's appetite for more of the same has been satisfied. This argument is supported by Pfeifer (2009). Aalberg (2003) finds that the citizens of Sweden and Norway show quite strong support for egalitarian principles, while Americans are at the other end of the scale. The Scandinavian countries do not stand out at either end of the scale when it comes to opinions about means like taxation and regulations. Empirical evidence from Sweden suggests that there is no link between distrust in the institutionally capacity of the welfare state and anti-welfare state sentiments (Edlund 2006). At the political level there is a relatively high degree of stability in partisan support for welfare state expansion and investments in social justice in the Nordic countries, while market-type solutions to social problems have become more salient, especially for parties belonging to the political right (Nygård 2006).

Concerning unemployment as a factor determining attitudes, Fraile and Ferrer (2005) investigate public support for cuts in unemployment benefits in OECD countries. They find both the generosity of unemployment protection and the seriousness of the unemployment problem in a given country to play a part in forming opinions. Citizens living in Social-Democratic or Conservative welfare regimes show a lower propensity to accept unemployment protection retrenchment compared to those who live in Liberal regimes. In addition, people living in countries where the unemployment rate is high show a lower disposition to accepting cuts in unemployment protection spending than those living in countries where the level of unemployment is low. An earlier study by Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003) shows that an increase in unemployment at the national level leads to an

increase in support for the welfare of the unemployed. Blekesaune's (2007) study confirms this finding. There is also a connection at the individual level. Temporary employment and part-time employment increases an individual's subjective economic insecurity (Burgoon & Dekker 2010). If a person is exposed to risks in the labor market he will tend to demand redistribution (Rehm 2009), which is similar to the finding that increased financial strain is associated with stronger support for state responsibility for economic provision (Blekesaune 2007).

Another relevant question is the following "to what degree does inequality in a society foster opinions for reduction in the same inequalities?" Kaltenhaler, Ceccoli, and Gelleny (2008) state that what people think about income inequality in their society is largely a product of their underlying ideas about politics and society rather than an expression of self-interest. Finseraas (2009) state that country-level inequality is positively associated with demand for redistribution, a result to a large degree driven by persons with high incomes. This finding stands in opposition to those made by Moene and Wallerstein (2001), Larcinese (2007), and Lübker (2007). The former state that greater inequality increases support for welfare benefits to the employed, but decreases support for benefits to those without earnings. The latter two claim that an increase in income inequality does not increase political demand for redistribution. This stance is also supported by Kenworthy and McCall (2008). Jæger (2008) demonstrates that the left-right orientation has a causal effect on support for redistribution. In the West, acceptance of inequality is interwoven with right-wing orientation (Thorisdottir et al. 2007).

One factor that can influence people's attitudes toward the welfare state is immigration. There is a weak negative effect between the perceived presence of immigrants and native population support for the welfare state. However, this weak mean effect differs substantially from country to country (Senik, Stichnoth, & Van der Straeten 2008). There is also evidence that hostility toward immigrants reduces the preferred level of redistribution, a finding that is to a large degree at play in Social-Democratic countries. However, believing that immigration reduces average wages or takes jobs away from the indigenous population is positively related to preference for redistribution, especially in the Conservative regime category (Finseraas 2008). In addition, national identification is associated with reduced support for income equalization (Shayo 2009).

Some studies are similar to my thesis, in that they consider what I would call cross-level interactions – that is, where there is an interaction between a variable at the individual level and the national context, as is done by Senik et al. (2008) (mentioned above). Linos and

West (2003) fall into the same category as they identify cross-national differences in different factors' influence on the social bases of support for redistribution. The difference between married and unmarried people is small in Social-Democratic countries; the insider/outsider cleavage² is decisive in Conservative countries; while class matters in Liberal regimes. Contrarily, in a study of attitudes toward welfare policies among different classes in Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom, and the USA, Svallfors (2004) finds that class differences are most pronounced in Sweden. Also Busemeyer, Goerres, and Weschle (2003) state that national characteristics matter with regard to the impact of age and income on attitudes toward welfare state policies.

In summary, the literature shows that there are differences between countries with regard to economic left–right opinions. Where there are differences between countries, there are also macro factors at play. Some studies have explored the possibility that the effect of one individual-level variable may depend on the national context. This is related to what I do in Paper III when investigating the effect of education which differs according to the views expressed by the political elites. I also argue that the effect of a variable at the national level depends on people's values on an individual-level variable (Papers I & II), and also that two national context variables interact, as seen in Paper IV. Thematically, Paper V fits into the ongoing regime debate, as does Paper II. Paper IV investigates unemployment as an explanatory factor, thus following up the thread from Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003), and Blekesaune (2007), and in addition bringing the concept of issue ownership into the equation.

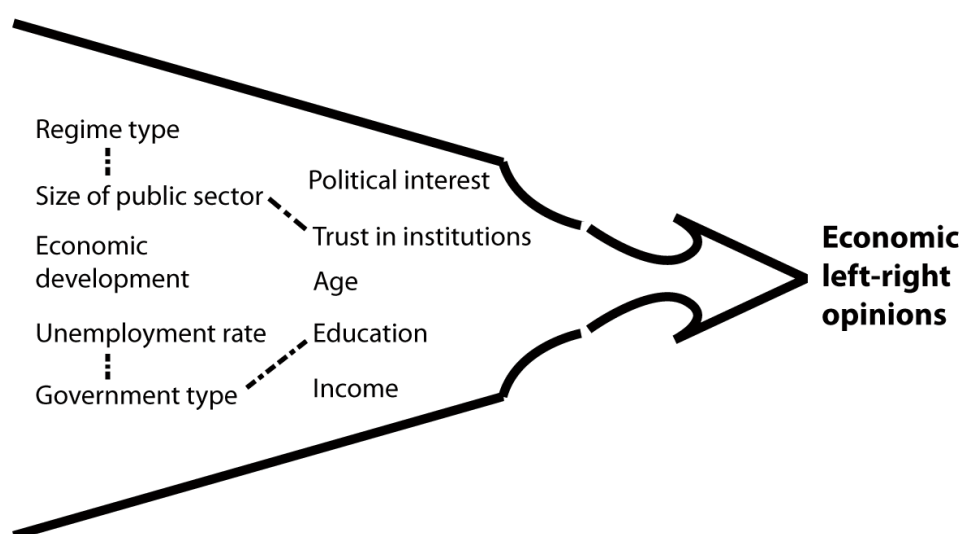
The present thesis

In this dissertation I take a closer look at some of the macro–micro connections with regard to public opinion on economic questions. Campbell et al. (1960) presented their “funnel of causality.” They use a funnel as a metaphor to present those factors which influence voting behavior. The axis of the funnel consists of the time dimension and variables influencing a person are presented as a chain of causation that ends up in the stem of the funnel. Figure 1 is inspired by Campbell et al.'s metaphor. In my variant of this “funnel of causality” we look at how people's economic attitudes are formed. We find the individual-level factors closest to the opinion-forming process (represented by the large arrow). My main point with this doctoral thesis is to investigate those factors that lie behind the individual-level causes, namely macro-level factors. I seek to give a better understanding of the factors situated at the

² Insiders are those who enjoy stable and protected employment.

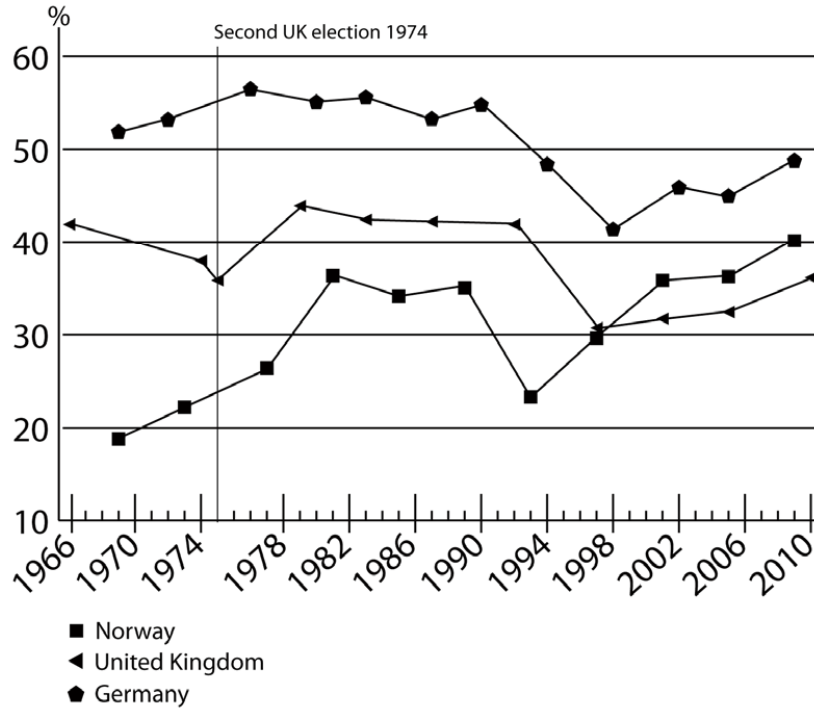
mouth of the funnel and explain how these influence individual-level opinion. That is, macro factors which directly, or through interaction with variables situated closer to the narrow end, influence public opinion on economic left–right questions. My goal is to analyze and describe how these variables that are at the nation-level can influence people’s attitudes toward economic questions. Some of these factors have a direct influence, while others influence by way of interacting with another variable (as we can see from the dotted lines in the funnel).

Figure 1. Funnel of causality



The attitudes under scrutiny here are prone to change, even in a relatively short time period (as opposed to ideals, which are assumed to be relatively stable). These attitudes can also manifest themselves in voting behavior. Of course, electoral results are more prone to swings than people’s attitudes and perceptions, as is shown in Figure 2. This figure shows the election results for political parties that are considered to be to the right on the economic political spectrum in countries belonging to the Liberal (U.K.), Conservative (Germany), and Social-Democratic (Norway) regime types. We see from the figure that for Norway and the United Kingdom there was a rise in these parties’ popularity in the 1980s, which coincides with the popularity of New Public Management reforms, a time period which saw the renaissance of the market in the western industrialized countries. Noteworthy from the figure is that the line for Germany falls after the German unification, and the 1993 election in Norway was influenced by the upcoming referendum about EU membership. The 2000s see a rise in these parties’ electoral support juxtaposed with the low point of the 1990s.

Figure 2. Election results for economically rightist parties in three different regimes



Note: United Kingdom is represented by the votes for the Conservative Party. The line for Germany defines the votes for the CDU/CPU collapsed with the votes for FDP. Norway includes the Conservative Party and the Progressive Party (formerly known as ALP).

Methods

In this dissertation I make use of statistical methods. According to King, Keohane, and Verba (1994: 8), the goal of scientific research is to make conclusions that go beyond the collected data. With large- N studies it is possible to make generalizations about the causal effects of different phenomena (if one has established the direction of causality). However, this presupposes the availability of data, whether the data consists of a sample of a population or, the whole – or bordering on the whole – population, as would often be the case when using states as the units of analysis. The approach used in this thesis is called inferential statistics. This may be used for predictions and hypothesis testing and is now commonplace in the studies of public opinion.

As a tool of the positivist tradition,³ inferential statistics is a way of identifying patterns and regularities in the observable world. Statistics involve the systematic collection of data with the aim of achieving knowledge by induction, that is, making inferences from observed regularities to general theories. This systematic inductive use of statistics can be traced back to John Graunt, Sir William Petty, and Hermann Conring (Moses & Knutsen 2007: 71f). In the 17th century they brought the use of descriptive statistics to science. The least-squares method was introduced by Carl Friedrich Gauss at the turn of the 18th century. Yet, the phrasing of social science questions in variable terms did not occur until the 19th century. Francis Galton introduced the correlation coefficient, the scatter plot, and also *regression analysis*, the prime tool of modern social science statistics (Moses & Knutsen 2007: 76ff). Karl Pearson carried on Galton's work, and later Émile Durkheim placed statistics in the center, finding covariance between suicide and religion, in addition to other variables. Before Durkheim introduced the use of statistics into the social sciences, researchers relied on a more philosophical procedure, based on reasoning and facts of experience (Ellwood 1931). This can be illustrated by an event that took place in Norway in the 17th century.

In 1612 a following of more than 300 mercenaries left Aberdeen in Scotland and sailed across the sea, eventually reaching the coast of Norway. Their plan was to cross the Norwegian interior in order to join their Swedish employers in the Kalmar War.⁴ The Scotsmen went through Romsdalen, and after a while they reached the valley of Gudbrandsdalen, located in the heart of the Norwegian inland. When the entourage had reached the narrowest part of the valley, they discovered an unaccompanied, but armed, Norwegian farmer. The Scottish mercenaries, led by their Captain George Sinclair, pursued this lone peasant. Suddenly the peasant was out of sight. All the Scotsmen could see was a secluded linden tree. There was no place there to hide, except for in the tree. The Norwegian could not have reached the sides of the valley without being noticed. The only logical explanation was that the farmer was covering himself in-between the branches of the linden. Thus, Captain Sinclair concluded that the peasant had climbed up and was hiding in the tree.

The conclusion made by Sinclair was, of course, a valid scientific inference. This is because the Scotsmen's background experience assumed that the farmer had no other means

³ The positivist tradition holds that the world consists of regularities and that everything can – at least in principle – be demarked, described, measured, compared, explained, and used to make predictions (Moses & Knutsen 2007: 29; Sohlberg & Sohlberg 2001: 39).

⁴ The Kalmar War (1611–1613) was fought between Sweden and Denmark. The root of the war was the Swedish wish to establish a trade route through northern Norway (Norway was then a part of the Danish kingdom).

of escape than to climb up the linden, taking into account that, as far as the mercenaries knew, no man could fly or disappear into the ground. In the same manner as Captain Sinclair reached this conclusion, the great thinkers of all sciences have reached their conclusions. One has a background experience which one uses as a basis when interpreting the facts. All in all, science involves a large degree of systematized common sense.

Yet, in today's social science tradition many researchers would not have accepted Sinclair's conclusion. They would have demanded further evidence, preferably with 95 percent certainty. Today's quantitative researcher would likely have insisted that Sinclair's men had thrust pointed sticks or spears through at least 19/20 of the linden, to ensure that one with enough statistical significance could conclude whether the frightened peasant actually was hiding in the tree. One would not have trusted the Captain's experience and common sense alone, one now wants numbers and facts on the table before deciding whether or not the Norseman is hiding in the linden or not.

Well, Captain Sinclair was of course right in his conclusion, even though this was not based on numbers or tests of significance. Yet, this was of little help, as about 500 Norwegian farmers came down from above the path, ambushing the mercenaries. The whole incident ended with the defeat of the Scottish troops, the death of George Sinclair, and the tragic fate of the surviving Scotsmen in a barn in the deep interior of Norway. Still, this is not what is important with this story. The main point is that the social sciences need to be receptive to all facts, and also to all methods in which one can discover facts that can be useful for understanding social or macro-level processes.

In this thesis I make use of sampling theory, generalizing my findings from the sample to the population. I am also undertaking analyses employing countries as the units of analysis. For this purpose I employ stochastic model theory. When one follows sampling theory one should get perfect prediction when investigating the whole population. Yet, when following stochastic model theory we are generalizing from the observation made, to the process or mechanism that brings about the actual data (Aaberge & Laake 1984: 165; Gold 1969: 44; Henkel 1976; 85f). We begin with a nondeterministic experiment, which implies that the results of the experiment will vary, even if we try to keep the conditions surrounding it constant. This enables us to make sense of the use of confidence intervals and significance, even if we are looking at the entire population.⁵ If there is a lack of statistical significance,

⁵ "In using stochastic models, we consider the collected data being generated from a stochastic experiment. Then, the probability model is specified by the probability of the possible outcomes of the experiment. Such a

then it is an indication that the association produced by nature is no more probable than that produced by chance (Gold 1969: 44).

Using statistical methods, social scientists are able to make generalizations about the empirical world, whether operating with samples of a population, or the population as a whole. There are many pitfalls to avoid before making statistical generalizations. One must define the population correctly, taking into account what the sample should constitute, and which time period to investigate. The researcher needs to be aware of the context and disposition of their data, which are the assumption that underlie statistical models (John 2002). Sampling error is not the only source of error encountered in survey data. Other problems include interviewer variability, non-response, problems connected to the questionnaire etc. (Groves 1989). Cross-cultural comparability is of importance for my dissertation, as it deals with comparative research on attitudes. In doing this kind of research one assumes that the questions posed in the surveys have the same implication in the different countries.

It is commonplace to operate with *p-values*, which denote the probability of being mistaken when we reject a null hypothesis (which proposes that there is no relationship between two measured phenomena). The closer a *p-value* is to 0; the more certain we can be of not rejecting a true null hypothesis when accepting our own alternative hypothesis. Even so, one also needs the backing of sound theory to say something about the relationship between variables. Statistical correlations should not be mistaken as being causal explanations. As such, observed relations must be interpreted with basis in theories about human action (Bay 2000; Elster 1989, 1998). The results from a regression analysis essentially only provide us with correlations between variables, just as Hume (1740) tells us that we can only observe patterns and regularities, not causality. Hume emphatically states that science needs to be careful with regards to causal claims:

I assert it to be the very same with that betwixt the ideas of cause and effects and to be an essential part in all our reasonings from that relation. We have no other notion of cause and effect, but that of certain objects, which have been always conjoined together, and which in all past instances have been found inseparable. We cannot penetrate into the reason of the conjunction the objects acquire an [sic] union in the imagination (Hume 1740: Book I, Part III, Section VI).

formulation allows us to generalize from the data to the mechanism that generates the data” (Aaberge & Laake 1984: 185). Henkel (1976: 86) refers to this mechanism an “unspecified random process.”

Although I agree with the positivist assumption that there exist patterns in nature which may be observed, I also acknowledge the argument that the proxies of what I am measuring are not optimal. Since I do not have direct access to what I am measuring (public opinion), I must rely on survey questions that are vulnerable to many types of measurement errors. The statistical method is suitable for making generalizations that go beyond the collected data, and can thus assist the researcher in identifying patterns and regularities in the observable world. However, there are caveats connected to this choice of method. One of the most pronounced problems is that regression analysis only provides us with *correlations* between variables. Statistical methods exist that can determine causality, but these are not easily applicable and they often presuppose longitudinal data. Therefore, one needs the backing of sound theory to say something about the causal relationships between the variables. When it comes to assessing causal relationships the experimental method is considered the best option available for scientists. This method allows the researcher to manipulate the environment in which causal relationships are tested, thus reassuring us that the relationships discovered are real and not a result of contextual influence (Moses & Knutsen 2007: 53). In the present thesis I make use of theories based on the experimental method.

This study is concerned with providing a deeper understanding of public opinion toward economic left–right issues by employing statistical methods, presenting descriptive statistics, and estimating regression models. Public opinion is a wide notion that includes ideals, perceptions, and policy attitudes. This dissertation focuses on cross-level effects, investigating how policies, the economy, norms, and values of a country influence the public, regardless of whether the country embraces individual or collective values. I argue that country-level factors hold explanatory power over individual-level opinion.

Multilevel modeling

Multilevel analysis has been a core analytical technique in this thesis. Since my main argument is that variables observed at the state level influence variables at the individual level, the use of multilevel analysis, or hierarchical models, is beneficial. Such models involve data that are ordered hierarchically, that is, some units of analysis are considered a subset of other units. In the case of this dissertation, individual respondents are a subset of countries. The object of a multilevel analysis is to account for variance in a dependent variable measured at the lowest level, by investigating information from all levels of analysis (Steenbergen & Jones 2002: 219). There are both theoretical and statistical reasons for using this approach.

From a theoretical point of view I am concerned with the relationship between the individual and society. I argue that a person is influenced by the features of his or her society. Observations that are close in space are likely to be more similar than observations far apart. Thus, respondents from the same country share more similarities with each other than they do with respondents from different countries, due, among other things, to shared history, experiences, and environment.

This implies a statistical reason for using multilevel modeling. Such a shared context is a cause of dependency among observations. This intra-country correlation changes the error variance of ordinary least squares regression models, which represents the effect of the omitted variables plus the measurement errors, assuming that these errors are unrelated (Kreft & de Leeuw 1998: 9). If the individual-level dependent variable is influenced by country-level variables, the observations at the lowest level are not independent, that is, they are clustered. If one violates the assumption that errors are independent, this will cause the estimated standard errors to be too low, and the *t*-statistics to be too high (Steenbergen & Jones 2002: 220). Hox (2002: 3) also warns against the danger of interpreting aggregated data at the individual level. In addition, multilevel modeling is an answer to the criticism that proponents of the qualitative method often raise against statistical research – more specifically, account has to be made of the context of the individuals when studying these. This is actually one of the advantages of multilevel analysis. By including nation-level factors in the regression equation one allows for the context surrounding the individuals to be accounted for.

Data on public opinion and country characteristics

Here I present a summary of data sources used. One of the hallmarks of this dissertation is the combination of survey and country-level data. Two of the papers (Papers II and V) use data from the World Values Survey (WVS). WVS is a worldwide investigation of socio-cultural and political change, the latest survey covering more than 60 countries. The survey is funded locally through scientific-funding bodies in each participating country. Its history spans back to 1981, when its predecessor, the European Values Survey, was extended so as to include countries outside Europe. The chairman of the WVS Executive Committee is Ronald Inglehart from the University of Michigan. WVS gathers data from personal interviews of representative samples of the populations in the different countries. It focuses on individuals' values and attitudes on important areas of life, including family, religion, moral, work, and

politics. The undertaking of a given WVS survey is called a wave. A total of five waves or rounds of the WVS have been carried out. After the first survey there was an interval of 10 years, and further waves came at intervals of approximately five years. This thesis employs data from the last four waves of the World Values Survey (1989–1993, 1994–1999, 1999–2004, and 2005–2007).⁶

Paper III employs data from the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2004 (ESS Round 2; Jowell et al. 2005). This survey has several similarities to the WVS. However, it only encompasses European countries. The ESS is funded through the European Commission, the European Science Foundation, and scientific national funding bodies in each country. The project is led by Roger Jowell at the Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University, London. It is a biennial multi-country survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior patterns of its countries' populations. The data collection is based on personal interviews in more than 30 nations. Like the WVS, the ESS is a repeat cross-sectional study. A total of four surveys have been performed, the first fieldwork commenced in 2002.

The International Social Survey Programme's (ISSP) study "Role of Government" is used for the analysis in Paper IV. The ISSP is an annual cross-national survey program on topics that vary from year to year. It now includes more than 40 countries in its survey. We⁷ use the "Role of Government Module," which was performed in 1985, 1990, 1996, and 2006. The aim of this module is to assess citizens' opinions on the functions of their national governments – what governments should and should not be doing. It is divided into four topics: civil liberties, government and the family, government and social inequality, and economic intervention. It is the latter topic we have used in our article. The data used in Paper IV are distributed by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services. ISSP and NSD are not responsible for the analysis of the interpretation of data presented in this thesis.

In addition to survey data, I have also made use of country-level variables in this doctoral thesis. Paper II uses data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2005) on government outlays. The data are the actual general government outlay in percent of nominal GDP. In Papers II and III I use data from the Human Development Index (HDI) which are based on the Human Development Report. An index used to rank countries according to their development, the HDI is made up from GDP per

⁶ The data sets used in this dissertation are made available through the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). Neither Ronald Inglehart, WVS, nor NSD are responsible for the analyses or interpretations made in this thesis.

⁷ Paper IV is co-written with Ola Listhaug.

capita, life expectancy, and education. The report is published by the United Nations Development Programme (2010). Paper III also employs data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006) for its main explanatory variable. This dataset uses political texts to provide estimates of party positions, voter preferences, and government policy from election programs collected systematically from more than 50 countries. The Manifesto Research Group was formed in 1979 by Ian Budge and David Robertson at the University of Essex. Their work resulted in the manifesto data that measure party policy positions in each election as stated in the party programs. In Paper IV we use data on unemployment taken from the *Key Indicators of the Labour Market Database* from the International Labour Organization (2009). The same paper uses a variable denoting whether a country has a government that is situated to the left of the political spectrum. We have made our own assessment of what constitutes the left side of politics in each country (for details, see the appendix of Paper IV). Lastly, Paper V employs Esping-Andersen's (1990) regime classification of industrialized countries as the main country level measure. In addition, I also use data relating to gross social expenditure as a percentage of GDP, obtained from the OECD (2008). The *OECD Social Expenditure Database* provides data on trends and composition of social expenditure within the different OECD countries.

Main conclusions of the thesis

The present thesis investigates the relation between macro-level factors and people's economic opinions controlled for and sometimes in interaction with individual characteristics. Public opinion is an important part of the political landscape. It influences the politics that are executed through several mechanisms. First and foremost, the opinion of the electorate as expressed through the ballot box, is decisive. Further, public opinion influences the parties and the government through opinion polls. People can also use other methods to get their views made known to decision-makers, such as organizational activities, demonstrations, or through lobbying. As the papers show, macro-level factors do influence public opinion on economic left-right issues, often through interaction with other variables. In addition, socio-economic characteristics are strong predictors of left-right attitudes.

Paper I: The Conditional Adjustment Hypothesis: Two Ways of Dealing with Dissonance

The first paper of this dissertation is a book chapter which is published in Sofia K. Ogden and Ashley D. Biebers' (eds.) *Psychology of Denial*. Here I present the theory behind the

conditional adjustment hypothesis. In brief, the hypothesis states that confidence in institutions will indicate how disposed a person is to adjust to or react against the economic policies of his or her regime. It is derived from Listhaug and Aalberg's (1999) *adjustment hypothesis* in combination with Festinger's (1957) *theory of cognitive dissonance*. I use the chapter to present the social psychology theory of cognitive dissonance and look at how this can be applied to the study of public opinion. Both political science in general and the study of public opinion in particular, are known for adopting theories from other research traditions. Festinger's theory has achieved great popularity in many fields of study, and has previously been employed in research on public opinion and voting behavior by, among others, Osgood (1960), Morwitz and Pluzinski (1996), and Anderson, Mendes, and Tverdova (2004). The theory of cognitive dissonance outlines how a psychological state of discomfort can be solved when one experiences inconsistency of having conflicting thoughts. When this dissonance appears, a person will try to reduce it by employing one out of two strategies: (a) the cognition of one's own behavior may be changed through a change in actions; or (b) through acquiring a new understanding of what is proper behavior.

The main message of this paper is that it is essential not to rely on statistical analyses alone, but one must also have a strong theoretical reasoning at hand. I argue that the use of Festinger's theory strengthens the causal claims of statistical analyses since it is based on the experimental design, which the positivist tradition ranks as ideal with regard to making causal claims. This paper gives a presentation and elaboration of the theories employed in the second paper, which is an empirical test of the conditional adjustment hypothesis.

Paper II: Public versus Private: The Conditional Effect of State Policy and Institutional Trust on Mass Opinion

In the second paper, which is published in the *European Sociological Review*, I apply data from 25 OECD countries taken from the World Values Survey. I investigate how the size of government spending, quantified as total government outlay, together with people's level of trust in institutions influence attitudes towards privatization and individual responsibility. Public spending is a relevant factor when investigating these sorts of opinion. If we follow Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, a person will feel a psychological state of discomfort when experiencing the inconsistency or *dissonance* of having conflicting thoughts. A person's attitudes are therefore likely to change following the psychological stress caused by inconsistency between that person's opinions and the policy carried out in the country of residence. The person concerned will then try to reduce this dissonance to achieve consonance

with regards to his opinions. There are, as mentioned, two ways to achieve consonance. The first option is that the person alters his attitudes so they are in line with those values that are prevalent in his country. However, there is an alternative way to achieve consonance. The person who experiences dissonance can also change his “knowledge” (Festinger 1957, p. 6). In other words, if that person’s attitudes are in conflict with the prevailing norms and viewpoints, then he could look for other ideals than those of his country to get support for his own stance. If, for example, a person who resides in a social-democratic country is in favor of privatization, then that individual will experience psychological uneasiness. He will then, as already indicated in the paragraph on Paper I, have two options: (a) to adjust his attitudes and become less favorable towards privatization; or (b) to look for other sources of inspiration than his own country, such as a more liberal regime like for example the USA. Choosing option (b) is far from impossible in today’s globalized and technologically advanced world as one has easy access to foreign media and information from other countries.

The important question is who chooses solution (a) and who chooses (b). The argument in Papers I and II is that trust in institutions is the decisive factor. More precisely, trust in regime- and opinion-forming institutions that are separate from the parliament and the executive. A person with a great deal of trust in institutions is more likely to accept his country’s prevailing values. This way an American citizen with trust in American institutions will also have trust in his country’s political and historical heritage. This implies that he is more receptive to his country’s politics, which in the case of the USA means relatively little government interference in the economy and relatively large emphasis on individual responsibility. On the contrary, an American who lacks confidence in institutions, and thus also lacks trust in “the American way,” will to a smaller degree be influenced by his country’s politics. However, this person will still experience psychological stress considering that his opinions are at odds with those of his surroundings. To accommodate this stress he is expected to choose option (b), which implies finding other sources for inspiration if he does not share the American ideals. An example of such a person is the film-producer Michael Moore, who is dissatisfied with at least parts of the American ideals, and thus looks to other countries for inspiration, such as Canada or the United Kingdom.

In a country with a large *public* sector, an individual with a high level of trust in the country’s institutions will be more negative towards privatization and individual responsibility than a person with a lower level of trust. For a country with a large *private* sector, the effect will be the opposite: strong trust in institutions will imply a more positive attitude towards market forces and personal responsibility. From this line of argument we get

the conditional adjustment hypothesis. The results from Paper II show that there is no direct effect of the size of the public sector on people's attitudes towards privatization and individual responsibility. The reason for this is that the conditional adjustment hypothesis possesses explanatory power; trust in institutions implies that a person holds leftist opinions in countries with a large public sector, while the opposite is true for countries with a small public sector. Thus, the effect of the size of the public sector is differentiated according to a person's level of trust.

Paper III: Education and the Zeitgeist: Government Positions and Public Opinion on Income Distribution

Paper III is published in the *European Political Science Review* and looks at the effect of the political elite on public opinion towards redistribution. Here I investigate 23 countries, combining data from the European Social Survey and the Comparative Manifesto Project. The latter data set provides a measure of government policy positions on economic left-right issues, consisting of statements in the party program of governing parties about their positions on free enterprise, economic orthodoxy, market regulation, economic planning, privatization, and state control over the economy. This measure functions as a proxy for political elite opinions to which the public is exposed to through the media and other channels of information. Three hypotheses are tested. The first hypothesis concerns the direct influence of the political elite on mass opinion. A country's political elite are in an advantageous position when it comes to opinion formation, since they comprise both lawmakers and the executive power. In addition, the elite views can be perceived as being the dominating views in a society. People's perception of support for a certain way of thinking can lead them to "jump on the bandwagon." I find covariance between the views of the elite and the public. However, this effect is not robust when controlling for whether or not the individual voted for the government. If a person voted for one of the ruling parties, then he often shares the same opinions as those expressed in that party's program. But this is not the same as saying that those people are influenced by the parties, because the causal direction goes both ways (i.e., people vote for those parties which reflect their viewpoints).

The second hypothesis tests the self-interest argument, and it is shown that people belonging to the upper socio-economic strata (operationalized through income and education) on average hold more rightist views on income redistribution than the rest of the population. Likewise, those with low income or little education are generally more in favor of redistribution. This is because people tend to support solutions that are in their economic

interest. The third and final hypothesis tests whether or not there is a cross-level interaction between elite opinion and education. The argument here is that education consists of different components, the most important of which is self-interest. However, there is also another component – critical thinking. Habermas (1968) argued that self-reflective knowledge reduces a person's dependence on accepting the truth as told by the established elites. In other words, one goes from being a “socialized team player” to becoming an “unbiased observer” (Habermas 1968: 237). Critical thinking can lead to a reaction against and opposition to hegemonic values, for example those expressed by the governing party(ies) of a given country. Education functions as a “protection” against uncritical acceptance of the dominating views. Those with higher education are assumed to be better equipped to filter political information than those with basic education. In sum, education will first and foremost have a rightist effect (more opposition toward redistribution) on people's opinions. However, due to the critical thinking aspect, this effect will be less pronounced in countries with a rightist government. The data render support for this argument: the rightist tendency for persons with higher education is significantly lower if their government is economically conservative.

Paper IV: Issue Ownership, Unemployment and Support for Government Intervention

I have written the fourth paper together with Ola Listhaug, and it is forthcoming in *Work, Employment and Society*. The statistical analysis and the main part of the writing have been done by me. Listhaug has contributed to the introduction, theory, discussion, and conclusion. Here we examine the relationship between unemployment and public demand for government intervention in the economy. Work is one of the cornerstones of people's lives, and to be employed is important for one's financial situation. The importance of a job is especially prominent in troubled times, such as in the wake of the recent financial crisis. In a study of people's attitudes towards welfare politics, Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003) find that an increase in unemployment at the national level leads to more support for welfare benefits for the unemployed. Blekesaune (2007) reaches the same conclusion. He argues that in times of economic downturn, people want the state to take more responsibility. Similar findings are presented by van Oorschot (2006).

We use data from the International Social Survey Programme – that is, the “Role of Government” survey – and investigate 23 OECD countries. Our dependent variables are three questions about government intervention in the economy and spending on unemployment benefits. The results show that a person's support for government intervention rises if he experiences personal unemployment. However, the effect of aggregate unemployment was

found to be conditioned by what type of party is in government. Even in times of economic depression, a government situated to the left may be perceived to be more competent with regards to economic questions than their right- or center oriented counterparts. According to the *clientele hypothesis*, a government situated to the left on the political scale will not be punished even though it cannot solve the unemployment problem. The underlying logic of this hypothesis is that the electorate assumes that the incumbents are better suited to handling unemployment than the opposition. This is called *issue ownership*.

Transferred to the study of public opinion, one may assume that people's economic attitudes will make a shift to the left in times of high unemployment combined with a leftist government. This is associated with the fact that in times of economic hardship, unemployment will rise to the top of the political agenda, and on this issue parties to the left have issue ownership. If these same parties are in government, they will use this position to push economic issues onto the political agenda, thus further influencing people's opinions. If a leftist party is in office, it will have better control over the channels of communication. Our findings suggest that there is an issue ownership effect. High unemployment combined with a leftist government leads the citizens to be more in favor of government intervention in the economy. There is no significant effect of unemployment on people's attitudes if the government is centrist or rightist.

Paper V: Welfare Attitudes and Social Expenditure: Do Regimes Shape Public Opinion?

My doctoral thesis concludes with the fifth paper, which examines the link between regime types, social expenditure, and welfare attitudes. It is published in *Social Indicators Research*. This paper has Esping-Andersen's (1990) regime typology as its point of departure. As already mentioned, his classification divides the countries into Liberal, Conservative, and Social-Democratic categories. In addition to Esping-Andersen's three regime types I also include an Eastern European and an Asian category in my analysis. I use data for 19 OECD countries taken from the World Values Survey for my country-level analysis, and I examine two research questions. The first investigates the direct influence of regime type on attitudes regarding income equality, government responsibility, and whether or not competition is harmful – this I denote as *welfare attitudes*. I found that the countries that belong to the Liberal regime category generally hold more rightist views than those belonging to the Conservative regimes, while the Social-Democratic countries are located in-between these two. The attitudes of people in Eastern European, and Asian countries did not differ significantly from those characterized as Liberal or Conservative regime types. This finding is

explained by the tendency for Liberal countries to favor private solutions for social risks, while the Conservative regime type places less emphasis on individual values and instead emphasize the importance of the church, family, and workplace.

The second research question asks whether we are able to trace the contours of the different regime types by investigating the social expenditure and welfare attitudes of the OECD countries in this study. Social expenditure is an important instrument of welfare state redistribution, and it can be argued that as well as with public attitudes, this expenditure is determined by the institutional arrangement (regime type) of the state. Results show that by plotting countries according to their aggregated welfare attitudes and social spending, we can observe the contour of three of the welfare regimes, namely the Liberal, Conservative, and Social-Democratic. The Eastern European countries, however, do not group together in the graph. Previous efforts to test the regime hypothesis on public attitudes have proven less fruitful. My contribution with this fifth paper is a simple, yet nuanced view of the regime classification, by simply looking at the interplay between social expenditure and welfare attitudes.

Conclusion

This dissertation gives a systematic and extensive comparative investigation of attitudes along the economic left–right dimension. Its main contribution is, as already mentioned, to explain the link between macro factors and public opinion, using theories from several research areas and disciplines. It looks at the interplay between different factors, and emphasizes the importance of individual-level variables such as trust in institutions and education. In the present thesis I argue that macro-level factors do influence micro-level attitudes, but in some cases these effects are disguised as the effects differ depending on an individual’s value on another variable. The sum of my five papers represents a contribution to the advancement of knowledge in public opinion research as it casts new light on the macro–micro link when it comes to opinion studies. In this study I have discovered some of the underlying causes of people’s opinions about questions concerning private ownership, competition, individual responsibility, redistribution, government intervention in the economy, government responsibility, and income equality. My argument is that both characteristics of the society and the individual are decisive of people’s response to these questions. I firmly believe that this dissertation represents a useful contribution to the academic literature on economic left–right opinions. There is a gap in the literature with regards to the systematic study of the

macro–micro linkage. In this respect, my theoretical reasoning and analyses presented in the five papers is of value.

To end up this introduction I will summarize the main conclusions from the five papers included herein. The common denominator of the articles is the theme of the dependent variables, as well as the presence of country-level explanatory variables. All the articles investigate and explain what the determinants of economic left–right opinions are. In Papers I and II I argue that these are influenced by the size of the government sector and use experimentally-based social psychological theory to show how this effect is dependent on people’s trust in institutions. Paper III looks at the effect of government policy statements and education – and concludes that there is little direct elite influence, although self interest and critical thinking plays a major role. In Paper IV it is shown that there is a combined effect of unemployment at the nation level and the economic policies of the government. Paper V argues that there is a link between regime type, social expenditure, and economic opinions.

Future research should include comparisons of public attitudes in different countries, as well as more focused research on individual opinions. Questions that might be raised are whether or not we can observe a Europeanization of opinions, or whether there are still substantial cross-national differences. There is room for both quantitative (comparisons of different countries) and qualitative (going deeper into the causes of economic attitudes on a single country) studies, as well as for experimental studies (in order to be better able to make causal claims). One could also, for example, undertake a case study of how the public reacts to a local privatization project, studying opinions both before and after the undertaking. It could also be interesting to follow time trends of changes in mass opinion. In addition, emphasis should be placed on the importance of carrying out comparative surveys, such as those which have been advantageous to this dissertation.

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PAPER I

**The Conditional Adjustment Hypothesis:
Two Ways of Dealing with Dissonance**

Tor Georg Jakobsen

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PAPER II

**Public versus Private:
The Conditional Effect of State Policy and Institutional Trust on
Mass Opinion**

Tor Georg Jakobsen

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PAPER III

**Education and the Zeitgeist:
Government Positions and Public Opinion on Income
Distribution**

Tor Georg Jakobsen

European Political Science Review (2011) 3(1): 103–124

Education and the Zeitgeist: Government Positions and Public Opinion on Income Distribution

Tor Georg Jakobsen

Abstract

Despite a sizeable literature on the elite mass linkage, few of these studies are cross-national. In this paper I apply multilevel ordered logit models to investigate public opinion toward redistribution in 23 European countries. I test whether these views depend on: (1) the policies of the government (i.e., the bandwagon effect) and (2) personal interest, as indicated by income and education. Briefly, the bandwagon effect appears when people's perception of strong support for one line of thinking leads to their adopting this reasoning. The self-interest argument states that those who would benefit from a redistributive policy are likely to support it. In addition, I argue that higher education has a dual nature, consisting of an interest in providing one's own self-interest as well as a critical thinking component. Elite opinion is quantified from the party manifestos of incumbent parties and tested against data from the European Social Survey. I find no significant direct effect of political elite views on public opinion. On the other hand there is strong support for the self-interest argument, yet the rightist tendency for higher educated persons is significantly smaller if their government is economically conservative. This finding is attributed to the critical thinking argument as well as to the reasoning that higher education makes people better able to filter political information, thus countering the bandwagon effect.

Keywords: public opinion • income distribution • education • critical theory • multilevel

Introduction

*The French people have opted for change ... I shall be implementing this change because this is the mandate I have received from the people and because France needs it.*¹

The above were the words of then president elect Nicolas Sarkozy in his victory speech in a Paris concert hall. Sarkozy's passage is illustrative of the first question under scrutiny in this paper: is public opinion influenced by the temper of the times? Many studies have investigated the link between elite and mass opinion. Yet few cross-national studies explore this proposed connection. This article focuses on the influence of government and political leadership, measured through the party manifestos of governing parties, on public opinion toward income distribution. By investigating individuals in 23 European countries my aim is to shed some light on the comparative element: do the political elites of different countries influence their citizens to adopt their own opinions? A given government, despite belonging to a certain spectrum of the political landscape, can also play a unifying role. This impersonation may function as a guiding star for the attitudes of some of its citizens. For example, in 1997, after 18 years in opposition, the "New" Labour Party won the election in Britain. In his speech outside Downing Street Prime Minister Tony Blair made the following remark: "Above all, we have secured a mandate to bring this nation together, to unite us – one Britain."²

Political elites are in a particularly important position considering that they consist of lawmakers and the executive. In addition, elite views can be perceived as the prevailing opinion of a given society, thus leading people to hold similar beliefs. A simple bivariate model with elite opinion plotted against countries' mean values on attitude toward redistribution shows some support for this *bandwagon* effect, indicating that there is indeed a link between the opinions of the political elite and those of the public. Yet, when employing a multilevel ordered logit model controlling for other factors, this apparent effect proves to be spurious. This is due primarily to the introduction of a control for whether or not a respondent voted for one of the ruling parties. My starting point is that the governing parties' policy toward income distribution at time t influences the views of individuals at a later time. However, I acknowledge that the views individuals hold toward income distribution may have

¹ *BBC News* (2007), 'Nicolas Sarkozy: Victory speech excerpts,' May 6:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6631125.stm>

² *Prime Minister's Office* (1997). Speech outside Downing Street 2 May 1997.

been instrumental when electing the governing party, hence raising the question of causal inference. I circumvent this by regressing individual views at time t on the policy stated in the party programs of the preceding election. Party policies toward economic questions are also known to be relatively stable over time.

In addition to testing for a direct bandwagon effect, two more hypotheses are also examined in this paper. Firstly, there is firm support for the self-interest argument: that is, persons belonging to the upper socio-economic strata are found to hold more rightist opinions on wealth distribution. The third hypothesis is more intriguing. Based on critical theory, I argue that highly educated persons tend to react against elite values. This hypothesis is tested by a cross-level interaction term, and the results support this proposed relationship. Education is shown to have contradictory effects. On the one hand, it can strengthen opposition to income redistribution because education increases one's income. On the other hand, it can also lead to a reduction in a person's dependence on "accepted truths," hence spurring a reaction against elite values.

The elite–public link

The dependent variable of this study is an ordinal question about whether or not the government should reduce differences in income level. Attitudes toward income inequality are an important dimension of people's left–right political orientations, linking it to the main cleavage in party politics. The left–right continuum has often been given economic meaning. In this respect, income inequality, as opposed to equality, is a measure of economic conservatism. Capitalism deepens the divide between the rich and the poor. Thus, economic conservatism indicates acquiescence to economic inequality (Thorisdottir *et al.*, 2007, p. 179).

There are several schools of thought concerning the analysis of democracy and elitism, or the opinion–policy relationship. For simplicity, these competing theories can be classified in two main schools (Petry, 1999). First, the *democratic responsiveness model* is based on Dahl's (1967) pluralist conception of the formation of mass opinion. This faction sees public opinion as an independent force capable of directly or indirectly influencing political decisions. The public's influence is channeled through several policy linkages, such as political parties, interest groups, and the courts. This model thus predicts that there will be consistency between public opinion and the policies implemented in a society. Followers of the democratic responsiveness school include Page and Shapiro (1983), Brettschneider (1996), and Monroe (1998). The other main approach to explaining the opinion–policy relationship is the *democratic frustration model*. Researchers in this school hold a more elitist

view, contending that ruling elites play a greater part in policy decisions. The democratic frustration school is followed by scholars such as Lindblom (1977) who sees market mechanisms and authority structures as instruments of social coordination and control. In those cases where mass opinion differs from that of the ruling elite, the elite view will prevail, thereby leading to predictions of inconsistency between opinion and policy (Brooks, 1985). Followers of this direction in opinion-research include Rose (1967), Lindblom (1977), Manley (1983), and Brooks (1985, 1990).

Simply put, I follow the latter line of argument. My *a priori* assumption is that mass opinion reflects the dominant values of the ruling elite because of its influence on opinion formation and also due to socialization (Brooks, 1990, p. 513). Dahl (1982) admits that given the sheer size of government, the average citizen is not capable of exerting much influence over it. According to Zaller (1992), individuals establish their views based on political information. This information is to a large extent determined by political elites, and is made available through mass media, which is considered to be the primary source of popular information about political issues. There exists a rich literature on how to make causal inferences about the relationship between media coverage and knowledge. This includes observational studies, laboratory experiments with simulated media coverage, and studies with media content that make between-subject comparisons.³ Barabas and Jerit (2009) state that policy-specific information can influence the degree to which people emphasize certain social and political issues. Ginsberg (1986) argues that elites have the resources necessary to control public opinion. More recent research has found a relationship between political discussion and political knowledge, though some evidence suggests that this is channeled through information-processing behaviors (Eveland, 2004). Following this line of reasoning, the starting point of the present article is that the government and political leadership may influence public opinion.

The Zeitgeist of an era?

Public opinion research is described as “a mode of interpreting and expressing the soul of a people, the temper of the times, the Zeitgeist of an era” (Alpert, 1956: 494). In many instances in life, people, consciously or unconsciously, follow societal norms. As a result of psychological pressure, and in order to reduce social anxiety, a person will behave in a certain way. If the surroundings follow one set of behavior, the individual in question internalizes this

³ Please see Barabas and Jerit (2009) for an overview of this research.

and takes this set of actions for granted (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984). Socialization and interaction contribute to internalizing norms and values. Formal and informal sanctions attached to some types of behavior lead us to behave in a certain way, often in accordance with what the majority perceive to be correct. The concepts of *conformity* and *identification* also apply to political opinion. People have an ability to perceive what the majority think, leading them to remain silent rather than express divergent views and thereby risk sanctions such as social isolation. Yet, one does not only alter one's actions or opinions to avoid sanctions, but also to achieve positive feedback. This, together with what Noelle-Neumann (1984) calls the "spiral of silence," contribute to making the dominant public opinion a *Zeitgeist* powerful enough to form a general public opinion.

This novel argumentation draws on the literature of social psychology. One can separate public conformity *without* private acceptance and public conformity *with* private acceptance. The first – compliance – represents an aspect of social conformity, and occurs when an individual accepts influences because he hopes to gain some sort of reward or to avoid punishment. The latter is deeper, and forces an individual to re-evaluate his or her opinions. This *identification* implies that the individual adopts what he or she perceives to be the prevailing opinion, confirming the opinion both publicly and privately (Kelman, 1958). This line of argumentation is related to the *adjustment hypothesis*, which states that members of the public will adjust their beliefs to stay in accordance with the values of their society (Listhaug and Aalberg, 1999; Aalberg, 2003), as well as to Stimson's (1991) argument that mass opinion can be identified as policy moods. One might even use the term *bandwagon effect* – that is, that the perception of strong support for one line of thinking may lead a person to "jump on the bandwagon." There are examples of countries where a wish to adjust to perceived public values influences personal opinions toward redistribution (Corneo and Grüner, 2002). In a recent study, Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007) find different preferences for redistribution among East Germans and West Germans, the former being more in favor of redistribution and state intervention. They hold this to result largely from exposure to Communism. However, over time there is a convergence in attitudes, where Eastern Germany becomes more similar to Western Germany (Svallfors, 2010). Some research on the bandwagon effect exists in the election studies literature. An analysis of exit polls in Britain between 1979 and 1987 shows some support for the notion that voters will favor a party that has been doing well in opinion polls (McAllister and Studlar, 1991). Yet others argue for another driving force, namely the underdog effect. Butler (1996), however, states that

evidence for both phenomena is vague and inconclusive, and that no systematic pattern can be detected.

To summarize the literature review, the options on the table in the context of this paper are: (a) there may be a direct effect where government (majority) opinion leads the public to identify with the values of the political elite, namely an identification effect; (b) there is a compliance effect – that is, the public still cling to their private values yet desist from displaying them in public; and (c) there is neither an identification nor a compliance effect. From this reasoning I deduct the following hypotheses:

H_{1a}: There is no effect of incumbent party preferences on public opinion toward redistribution.

H_{1b}: A person will adjust his or her opinions to coincide with the perceived temper of the time.

Hypothesis H_{1b} is thus a test of the bandwagon (Zeitgeist) effect. If supported, this would suggest that we are dealing with an identification effect – that is, the public incorporates and adopts surrounding values (option a). If rejected, the effect is not direct. One explanation in the latter case could be that the “spirit of the times” only leads to compliance; an alternative explanation is that there is simply no identification or compliance effect (alternatives b and c). In the case of options b and c, the null hypothesis (H_{1a}) will not be rejected.

Education: self interest versus critical thinking

The self-interest argument states that those who would benefit from a rightist redistributive policy are likely to support it. People belonging to the upper socio-economic strata can be expected to hold rightist views on economic questions, since individuals will generally opt for solutions that best promote his or her own self-interest (Downs, 1957). This is confirmed in several empirical studies (e.g., Edlund, 1999; Svallfors, 2004; Jæger, 2006; Konrad and Spadaro, 2006). The best proxy for the self-interest argument is income. Following this line of thinking, those with high income would quite naturally be more negative toward income redistribution.

Konrad and Spadaro (2006) explore the empirical relationship between perceptions about personal abilities and attitudes to income distribution. Their findings suggest that education and wealth play a part, with the poor and uneducated asking for more redistribution.

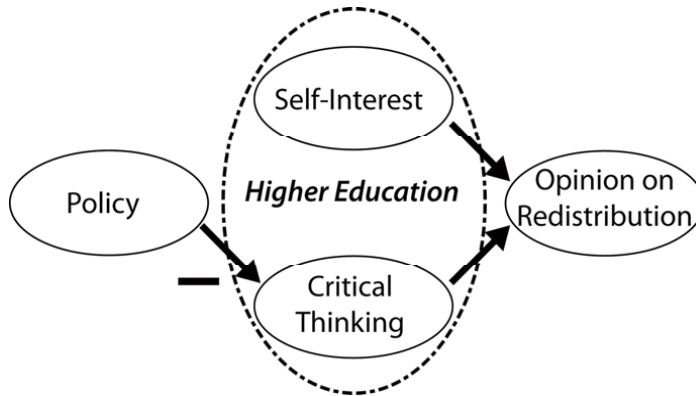
Education, I hold, consists of several constituent components, the most important being self-interest. Since more highly educated people are often rewarded in both monetary and status terms, this group can be assumed to harbor rightist views. The opposite is also true: less highly educated individuals are likely to prefer redistributive policies. Yet, there is another factor associated with education, namely *critical thinking*. Habermas (1968) presented his critical social theory as a form of self-reflective knowledge, which reduces a person's dependence on accepting the truth as told by the established elites. In other words, turning from a *sozialisierte Mitspieler* into an *unparteiische Beobachter*, and thus understanding that: “[w]irklich ist, was unter den Interpretationen einer geltenden Symbolik erfahren werden” (Habermas, 1968, p. 237). This reasoning has since gained a foothold in education theory (see Giroux, 1983a,b). Critical thinking may lead to reaction and resistance against hegemonic opinions, for example, those proclaimed by incumbent political parties. It has been found to mediate state effects of schooling on political attitudes (Fairbrother, 2003), as well as having a direct effect regarding moral economic issues (Eriksen and Fallan, 1996; Fallan, 1999). In his critical theory, Habermas highlighted the growth of the mass media, which pacifies the general public, making it more prone to elite influence. Education might serve as “protection” against uncritical acceptance of dominating views. Those with higher levels of education are assumed to be better trained and equipped to learn and filter political information than those with less education (Eveland and Scheufele, 2000; Liu and Eveland, 2005).

This is illustrated in figure 1. The minus sign indicates that people are likely to react against the dominant policy through the critical thinking mechanism. The self-interest part of education is expected to carry more weight than the critical thinking part. Thus, from the self-interest argument I deduct the following hypothesis:

H₂: A person belonging to the upper socio-economic strata holds rightist views on income redistribution.

In other words, I expect both income and education to be positively associated with conservative economic opinions. Even so, I still reckon the critical thinking argument to yield some explanatory power, which can be tested using multilevel models. This effect is expected to be present when examining the conditional effect of education and the specific economic policy-statements of a given country. In line with Downs (1957) a highly-educated person

Figure 1. The two components of education



Note: This figure shows the reactionary effect of policy on education, represented by the minus sign. The self interest effect is expected to outweigh the effect of critical thinking.

would be assumed to hold rightist opinions regardless of national policy-statements. But, as is deduced from critical social theory, this rightist effect would be less pronounced in countries where the dominant political opinion is against redistribution, as the critical thinking component comes into play. This is also illustrated in figure 1: there is a reactionary effect of policy on education, which is decisive for redistribution opinions. If the hegemonic opinions are rightist, then critical thinking will lead a person to hold more leftist attitudes. Thus, a new hypothesis emerges:

H3: The rightist effect of education on economic left–right opinions is smaller in countries where the political elites are negative towards redistributive policies.

Processes other than self interest and critical thinking can be argued to be at work here. Education has a general liberalizing effect, yet this is most noteworthy when investigating other dimensions of the left–right continuum, like social tolerance and nationalism. In addition, the cognitive mobilization thesis assumes that party attachments are used as a solution for under-informed persons who wish to cast a ballot with minimal cognitive effort. Education as well as the mass media contribute to increased knowledge among the citizens, thus leading to fewer votes being cast for the same party across elections. This is achieved through the cognitive mobilization of the voters (Dalton, 2007). However, a recent finding by Albright (2009) suggests that cognitive mobilization actually increases the probability that a person shows attachment to a specific party.

Party programs as a measure of government policy

This analysis will investigate whether there is covariance between party programs and people's economic left–right opinions. For my country-level explanatory variable – ECONOMY – I rely on data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge *et al.*, 2001; Klingemann *et al.*, 2006). I use a measure of government policy positions on economic left–right issues consisting of statements made about party positions on free enterprise, economic orthodoxy, control of the economy, market regulation, economic planning, privatization, and state control over the economy. I have created an additive index from these statements (as advised by Finseraas, 2010).⁴ This index functions as a proxy for the elite opinions the public is exposed to through media and other information channels. Weights are applied based on the proportion of parliamentary seats held by each party in a government.⁵ Taking into account that the form and interpretation of party programs differ from country to country, and in order to reduce undue influence from outliers, I have chosen to log-transform this variable.

The basis of the country-level measure is the election programs of the governing parties of each country studied. These programs are representative statements for the whole party, and their coding can be regarded as complementary rather than overlapping with other methods for determining party positions, like expert surveys (McDonald *et al.*, 2007; Volkens, 2007). One strength of the manifesto approach is its capacity to identify changes in different parties' competitive strategies, whereas expert surveys have a tendency to place most parties at given left–right positions over time (Volkens, 2007, p. 109). The Comparative Manifesto Project data is regarded as a reliable source of comparative data on party positions, and have accordingly been employed in several recent studies (e.g., Koch, 2007; Manow *et al.*, 2008; Finseraas, 2010; Walgrave and Nuytemans, 2009) as well as in tests of its validity and reliability (e.g., Franzmann and Kaiser, 2006; McDonald *et al.*, 2007; Netjes and Binnema, 2007; Volkens 2007). Yet, even though variables drawn from these data are regarded as valid and plausible, one must take into account that different measures of party positions are not directly interchangeable (Ray, 2007).

It is important to stress that elite thinking is not equivalent to the election programs of governing parties. The political parties are influenced by political context, the nature of the constitution, and also by opinion polls. Schmidt (2002) highlights governments' ability to gain agreement for their view through political discourse, which is understood as both a set of ideas and an interactive process. Whether or not people respond to the political elite depends

⁴ For a listing of the statements included in the measure, see Appendix A.

⁵ As advised by Budge *et al.* (2001) and Klingemann *et al.* (2006).

on the success of the legitimating discourses. Also, more consensual polities might tend to generate manifesto policies that are directed at constructing support across a range of groups and parties, while majoritarian polities, such as the United Kingdom, may tend to have more simple class splits in manifesto statements. Nevertheless, party manifestos are a useful and quantifiable measure which can be used to test the hypotheses presented in this article.

One obvious drawback of using Manifesto Data to construct an explanatory variable is that of *endogeneity*. Economic opinions influence votes, and to a large degree this is separate from partisan bias (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2008). It can, with good reason, be argued that people's attitudes on income distribution affect party programs through two principal mechanisms. Firstly, voters elect the government, and secondly, the political elite use opinion polls to test public opinion on important issues. Contrary to this, recent research shows that political parties do not easily adapt to popular wishes or real-world impulses (Walgrave and Nuytemans, 2009). Even so, I have taken two precautionary measures to avoid or minimize the endogeneity problem (in addition to my theoretical argument linking elite-influence to public opinion). Temporality is essential for making causal inferences. This analysis includes the introduction of a time lag on the main explanatory variable. The Manifesto data are from the party programs of the election prior to the survey (which was conducted in 2004). The year of the previous election differs from country to country. In addition, I include a control for whether or not a person voted for one of the parties in government in the previous election. The data employed are hierarchically nested, and I include a random slope coefficient for this control, allowing the effect to vary from country to country. I present an additional model replacing the random slope coefficient with an interaction term composed of VOTED GOVERNMENT and lnECONOMY. This, together with the time lag, helps control for the part of the dependent variable that would explain the Comparative Manifesto data. The VOTED GOVERNMENT variable functions as a moderator, that is a "variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable" (Baron and Kenny, 1986, p. 1174).

Data and variables

The analysis presented here is based on the second round of the European Social Survey (ESS), containing individual-level data from 2004 (Jowell *et al.*, 2005).⁶ There are 23 countries and 30,683 individuals included in the study. The dependent variable in this paper is

⁶ The data are provided by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD).

a five-point ordinal scale pertaining to individual opinion on income distribution. The respondents in the ESS survey were asked to comment on the following statement: “Government should reduce differences in income levels” with the reply categories ranging from “agree strongly” to “disagree strongly.” Thus, high values on the dependent variable indicate rightist economic opinions. The individuals in the survey are nested in countries. To test the hypotheses presented here, I therefore rely on multilevel modeling. This choice of method allows me to model outcomes as a function of independent variables at both the individual and country levels.⁷

The first theoretically important individual-level variable is SCALE OF INCOMES (1–12). This is the main measure of the self-interest argument from which the second hypothesis is drawn. HIGHER EDUCATION is a dummy variable denoting whether or not the respondent has attended at least the first stage of tertiary education.⁸ In addition, five control variables are included in the analysis. Gender is operationalized through the dummy variable WOMAN. Women are expected to be more favorable to income distribution than men (Aalberg, 2003). Inglehart (1990) argues that post-materialism leads to more individualistic values, that is, younger people should hold more rightist redistribution values than members of the older generation. I employ AGE to control for generational effects, along with a squared age term to capture any nonlinear relationships with the dependent variable (AGE SQUARED).⁹ INSTITUTIONAL TRUST (0–30), LIFE SATISFACTION (0–20), POLITICAL INTEREST (0–1), and VOTED GOVERNMENT (0–1) are also included to provide a good model fit.¹⁰ The effects of the latter two variables are allowed to vary from country to country.

I have also included two country-level measures. The first – the natural logarithm of the economy measure described in the section about party programs – is in effect a measure of the political elite (see Table 1 for values). As a control measure for country level variation I use the Human Development Index (HDI) for 2003. This is a composite variable made up of three constituent parts: GDP per capita; life expectancy; and education (UNDP, 2005). I have also tested the models by including a nation level control for the extent of inequality in each country (the GINI index). The effect of this variable was not statistically significant. I also found no significant difference between former communist states and other countries with regard to their score on the dependent variable.

⁷ Country-level characteristics account for around 10 percent of the variance in the dependent variable.

⁸ The results from the models are robust according to other coding schemes of the education variable.

⁹ The results for the other variables do not change significantly when running the models without age squared.

¹⁰ INSTITUTIONAL TRUST and LIFE SATISFACTION are aggregated measures. For factor loadings and a measure of reliability, see Appendix E. Descriptive statistics for the variables included in the analysis are found in Appendix D.

Table 1. Government positions on the economic left–right dimension, high values indicate rightist positions

	ECONOMY	lnECONOMY	Income Distrib.
Denmark	12.72	2.93	2.31
Slovakia	6.03	2.49	2.30
Switzerland	5.18	2.41	3.01
Portugal	4.76	2.38	2.18
Estonia	4.31	2.33	1.99
Norway	4.18	2.32	2.34
Sweden	4.03	2.31	2.58
Iceland	2.85	2.18	2.42
Spain	2.83	2.18	1.79
Netherlands	2.69	2.16	2.02
Austria	1.47	2.01	1.56
Hungary	1.02	1.95	1.82
Slovenia	0.46	1.87	2.60
Germany	-0.59	1.69	2.25
Greece	-0.95	1.62	2.40
Luxembourg	-1.08	1.59	2.35
Ukraine	-2.31	1.31	2.24
Ireland	-2.36	1.29	2.01
Czech Rep.	-3.42	0.95	1.68
Finland	-3.57	0.89	2.92
France	-3.91	0.74	2.10
Belgium	-4.96	0.04	1.80
Poland	-5.00	0.00	2.18
<i>Mean</i>	<i>1.06</i>	<i>1.72</i>	<i>2.17</i>

Note: Taking into account that the form and interpretation of party programs differs from country to country, I have chosen to log-transform the ECONOMY variable to reduce undue influence from outliers. Since one cannot use log transformation when there are values on the variable that are equal to or below zero, I have added the score 6 to all units before log-transforming the variable.

Results

The first hypothesis deals with the direct link between party manifestos and mass opinion toward redistribution. In figure 2 the governments' economic left–right positions are plotted against the mean values on INCOME DISTRIBUTION for each country in the analysis. We see from the figure that there is a positive linear tendency, though not a very steep one. Thus, the more economically rightist the incumbent party (parties) of a country is (are), the more negative toward redistribution is its population. With regard to the third hypothesis, figure 3 shows the same link, with the mean values for persons with and without higher education respectively. When looking at the two sub-groups, we see no co-variation between the party manifestos and the redistributive opinions of those with higher education. On the other hand, the positive linear trend is stronger for less educated respondents. The bivariate relation between party manifestos and redistributive values seemingly supports the first hypothesis,

Figure 2. The effect of rightist government on attitudes toward redistribution, mean values for countries

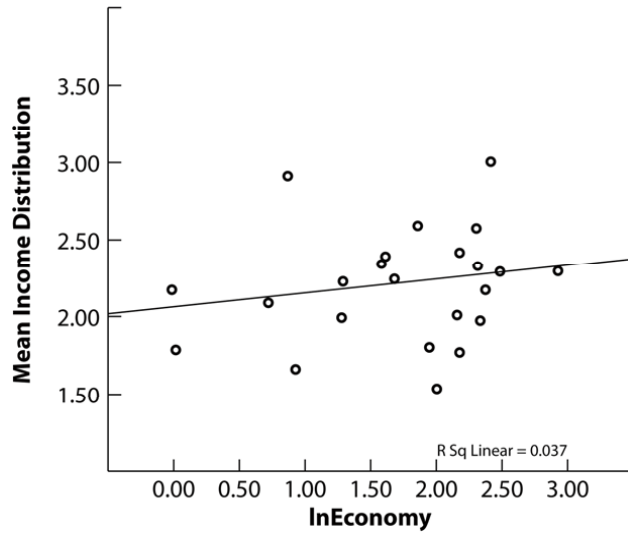
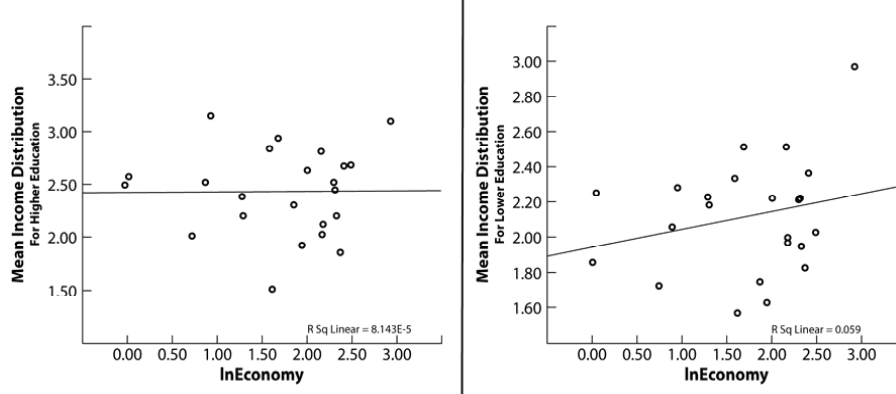


Figure 3. The effect of rightist government on attitudes toward redistribution, categorized into respondents with high education, and without high education, mean values for countries



at least with regard to persons without higher education. As expected, higher educated persons are on average closer to the conservative end of the left–right spectrum. Still, this is a very crude comparison of country means, without controls for other relevant factors. To combine information at the micro level (respondents) and macro level (countries), we need to apply

multilevel models. The models include the important control for whether or not the respondent voted for the incumbent parties, namely the VOTED GOVERNMENT variable. This article aims to identify predictors of opinion toward redistribution. Since I am employing an ordered logit model, the dependent variable can be described as:

$$[a] \quad y_i = \begin{cases} 1. \textit{Strongly_agree_}(left) & \text{if } y_i^* \leq \tau_1 \\ 2. \textit{Agree} & \text{if } \tau_1 < y_i^* \leq \tau_2 \\ 3. \textit{Neither_agree_or_disagree} & \text{if } \tau_2 < y_i^* \leq \tau_3 \\ 4. \textit{Disagree} & \text{if } \tau_3 < y_i^* \leq \tau_4 \\ 5. \textit{Strongly_disagree_}(right) & \text{if } y_i^* > \tau_4 \end{cases}$$

Note: y = observed ordinal response, y^* = underlying left–right opinion, and τ = cut-off points that divide y^* into ordinal categories.

I present three models in this paper. The first tests the direct link between party manifestos and public opinion toward redistribution. The second and third models investigate the suggested twofold nature of education on redistributive opinions:

$$[1] \quad \log \{\Pr(y_{ij} \leq m)\} = \tau_m + \beta_1 \textit{woman}_{ij} + \beta_2 \textit{age}_{ij} + \beta_3 \textit{age}_{ij} \textit{age}_{ij} + \beta_4 \textit{income}_{ij} + \beta_5 \textit{highedu}_{ij} \\ + \beta_6 \textit{lifesatis}_{ij} + \beta_7 \textit{insttrust}_{ij} + \beta_8 \textit{polintr}_{ij} + \beta_9 \textit{votedgov}_{ij} + \beta_{10} \ln \textit{economy}_j \\ + \beta_{11} \textit{HDI}_j + u_{0j} + u_{1j} + u_{2j} + e_{ij}$$

$$[2] \quad \log \{\Pr(y_{ij} \leq m)\} = \tau_m + \beta_1 \textit{woman}_{ij} + \beta_2 \textit{age}_{ij} + \beta_3 \textit{age}_{ij} \textit{age}_{ij} + \beta_4 \textit{income}_{ij} + \beta_5 \textit{highedu}_{ij} \\ + \beta_6 \textit{lifesatis}_{ij} + \beta_7 \textit{insttrust}_{ij} + \beta_8 \textit{polintr}_{ij} + \beta_9 \textit{votedgov}_{ij} + \beta_{10} \ln \textit{economy}_j \\ + \beta_{11} \textit{HDI}_j + \beta_{12} \ln \textit{economy}_j \textit{highedu}_{ij} + u_{0j} + u_{1j} + u_{2j} + e_{ij}$$

$$[3] \quad \log \{\Pr(y_{ij} \leq m)\} = \tau_m + \beta_1 \textit{woman}_{ij} + \beta_2 \textit{age}_{ij} + \beta_3 \textit{age}_{ij} \textit{age}_{ij} + \beta_4 \textit{income}_{ij} + \beta_5 \textit{highedu}_{ij} \\ + \beta_6 \textit{lifesatis}_{ij} + \beta_7 \textit{insttrust}_{ij} + \beta_8 \textit{polintr}_{ij} + \beta_9 \textit{votedgov}_{ij} + \beta_{10} \ln \textit{economy}_j \\ + \beta_{11} \textit{HDI}_j + \beta_{12} \ln \textit{economy}_j \textit{highedu}_{ij} + \beta_{13} \ln \textit{economy}_j \textit{votedgov}_{ij} \\ + u_{0j} + u_{1j} + e_{ij}$$

Using these model specifications means that the signs of the coefficients presented are turned to obtain the natural interpretation.¹¹ In the first and second equations the regression coefficients for POLITICAL INTEREST and VOTED GOVERNMENT are allowed to vary among

¹¹ The models are calculated using MLwiN, version 2.10.

the countries. The second equation comprises a cross-level interaction term (HIGHER EDUCATION*lnECONOMY) to test the third hypothesis. In the third equation there is in addition a cross-level interaction term consisting of VOTED GOVERNMENT and lnECONOMY, which implies that the effect of having voted for the incumbents varies according to the left–right positions of the country to which the individual belongs. VOTED GOVERNMENT is therefore not a random effect variable in equation three.

Before viewing the main regression models, we must remember the nature of the main explanatory variable, lnECONOMY. As already mentioned, this is a proxy for the hypothesized influence of the political elite on mass opinion. Party manifestos, however, are based on the wordings of the parties in government, and are not necessarily representative of the politics of the country in question. What one says and what one does can clearly be two different things. This can be illustrated in a simple correlation matrix, presented in table 2.

Table 2. Correlation matrix for ECONOMY, LnECONOMY, and GOVERNMENT OUTLAY

	Economy	LnEconomy
lnEconomy	0.921	-
Gov. Outlay	0.210	0.076

Note: Pairwise correlations. Estonia, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Ukraine are missing from the GOVERNMENT OUTLAY variable.

We see that lnECONOMY (where high values indicate rightist views) is actually positively correlated with the size of the government sector as proxied by total government outlay (OECD, 2005). One additional explanation for this apparent mismatch is that it takes time to increase or decrease the size of the public sector. In this paper I argue that what politicians state may influence public opinion regardless of their actual policies.

The three models of this analysis are presented in table 3. I have also performed a sensitivity analysis (see Appendix B), using a linear model. The results from the ordered logit model and the sensitivity model do not differ substantially. From model 1 we see that after including controls for other factors, there is no significant effect of political elites' left–right views on mass opinion toward redistribution. Thus, one cannot reject H1a, even though the sign is positive. So, after controlling for VOTED GOVERNMENT and other relevant independent variables, we find that there is *no significant effect of incumbent party preferences on public opinion toward redistribution*. There is no direct influence of government (or majority) opinion that leads the public to identify with the values of the political elite, and the bandwagon effect is not supported when investigating party manifesto data.

Table 3. Ordered logit model with attitude toward INCOME DISTRIBUTION as dependent

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>Std. E.</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Std. E.</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Std. E.</i>
Level-1 variables						
Woman	-0.261***	0.022	-0.262***	0.022	-0.261***	0.022
Age	-0.032***	0.003	-0.031***	0.003	-0.032***	0.003
Age squared	0.0002***	0.000	0.0002***	0.000	0.0003***	0.000
Scale of incomes	0.102***	0.001	0.101***	0.006	0.104***	0.006
Higher education	0.382***	0.028	0.682***	0.066	0.677***	0.066
Life satisfaction	0.046***	0.003	0.045***	0.003	0.045***	0.003
Institutional trust	0.023***	0.002	0.023***	0.002	0.023***	0.002
Political interest	-0.034	0.028	-0.033	0.028	-0.030	0.025
Voted Government	0.232**	0.106	0.233**	0.106	-0.321***	0.059
Cross-level interaction						
High Edu.*Economy			-0.173***	0.035	-0.165***	0.035
Vot. Gov.*Economy					0.304***	0.031
Level-2 variables						
lnEconomy	0.105	0.136	0.109	0.136	0.106	0.140
HDI 2003	-4.304*	2.222	-4.320*	2.227	-4.051*	2.296
Cut points						
τ 1	-4.115	2.010	-4.122	2.015	-3.867	2.077
τ 2	-1.984	2.010	-1.991	2.015	-1.759	2.077
τ 3	-0.993	2.010	-1.002	2.015	-0.784	2.077
τ 4	0.941	2.010	0.933	2.015	1.130	2.077
Random effects						
Intercept	0.219***	0.073	0.218***	0.072	0.327***	0.078
Political interest	0.014***	0.005	0.013***	0.005	0.010**	0.004
Voted Government	0.242***	0.076	0.244***	0.076		
Level-1 <i>N</i>	30,683		30,683		30,683	
Level-2 <i>N</i>	23		23		23	

Note: High values on the dependent indicate rightist attitudes toward redistribution. SCALE OF INCOMES ranges from 1–12, RELIGIOSITY from 0–22, LIFE SATISFACTION from 0–20, and INSTITUTIONAL TRUST from 0–30. WOMAN, HIGHER EDUCATION, and POLITICAL INTEREST are dummy variables. High values on lnECONOMY indicate that the government holds rightist economic views. Levels of statistical significance are indicated by asterisks: * significant at 10 percent; ** significant at 5 percent; ***significant at 1%. The probability values are calculated using a two-tailed test.

The second hypothesis – *A person belonging to the upper socio-economic strata holds rightist views on income redistribution* – is confirmed in all three models. The income proxy – SCALE OF INCOMES – is positive and significant, and it is also the most robust determinant of economic left–right attitudes. Further backing the self-interest argument, HIGHER EDUCATION is also positive and significant in all models. I argued that self-interest is an important component of education, expecting this variable to be positively associated with conservative economic opinions.

The third hypothesis – *The rightist effect of education on economic left–right opinions is smaller in countries where the political elite are negative towards redistributive policies* –

is also confirmed. This becomes apparent in models 2 and 3, which show a negative and significant interaction effect of education and party manifestos. One must, however, bear in mind that the effect of \ln ECONOMY is not significant (neither positive nor negative) for persons with higher education.¹² It is, in fact, the rightist effect of education (which is a level-1 effect) that is significantly lower (yet still rightist) for highly educated persons that live in economically conservative regimes. This finding is in line with the reasoning that those with higher levels of education are better equipped to filter political information (Eveland and Scheufele, 2000; Liu and Eveland, 2005) and that another factor associated with education plays an important part, namely that of *critical thinking* (Giroux, 1983a,b; Fairbrother, 2003).

I also control for other characteristics that influence people's economic left-right opinions. Women and older generations are, as expected, more in favor of redistributive policies than men and younger generations respectively. Persons with high scores on LIFE SATISFACTION and INSTITUTIONAL TRUST hold more rightist opinions than their less satisfied and less trusting counterparts. The effects of political interest and whether or not one voted for one of the incumbent parties vary depending on country of residence. The interaction term composed of VOTED GOVERNMENT and \ln ECONOMY, which was introduced in model 3, shows that the governing parties' followers are very much in line with their respective parties' policy statements. Individuals who voted for economically conservative incumbents are significantly more rightist than those who voted for more economically leftist incumbents.

Discussion

In this paper I have introduced party programs as a measure of elite influence on mass opinion. This variable was constructed using data from the Comparative Manifesto Project. The central finding of this article is the dual effect of higher education on public opinion. My aim has been to contribute to elite-public opinion research by carrying out a cross-national investigation spanning 23 European countries, employing multilevel ordered logit modelling. Three hypotheses were tested, the first pertaining to the direct influence of the political elite on mass opinion. This is based on the concepts of conformity and identification, as well as literature on the bandwagon effect. Testing the robustness of the self-interest argument, the second hypothesis also functions as a lead-up to the third and final question: whether or not

¹² The coefficient of HIGHER EDUCATION only captures the effect of this variable on INCOME DISTRIBUTION when \ln ECONOMY is zero, just as the coefficient of \ln ECONOMY only captures its effect on the dependent variable when HIGHER EDUCATION is zero. By switching reference category on HIGHER EDUCATION, I found the effect of policy on higher educated people to be slightly negative (as can be read from models 2 and 3) and not significant.

there is any cross-level interaction effect between policy-elite opinion and education, my argument being that education is not only a measure of self-interest. It also includes a critical thinking component which would reduce the rightist effect of higher education in countries where policy elites are economically conservative.

Summarizing the results, this study has shown that there is little direct effect of incumbent party preferences on public opinion toward redistribution. Although a positive tendency is discernible, its effect is not statistically significant. This non-finding is in accordance with parts of the literature (e.g., Butler, 1996). There is no evidence for either the bandwagon or the underdog effect, after controlling for whether or not the respondent has voted for an incumbent party. Much of the explanation for this is attributed to the highly relevant VOTED GOVERNMENT control, which can be said to function as a moderator variable. It was included in the analysis based on the argument that economic opinions influence the vote. Unsurprisingly, the models show that those who voted for the incumbents agree with their policy statements. The self-interest argument stands out as the most robust finding of this paper: people belonging to the upper socio-economic strata are generally more opposed to redistribution than low-income people. This finding is in line with most empirical literature on redistributive opinions. Both INCOME and HIGHER EDUCATION are strong positive predictors of rightist attitudes.

Last, the novel theoretical argument of this paper was the proposed mixed effects of the two components of education. Higher education, I argue, is not only a measure of self-interest, but also includes a portion of *critical thinking*. Education increases critical thinking which again can lead to reaction and resistance against hegemonic opinions. As expected, education was associated with conservative economic views. Yet, by introducing a cross-level interaction term, I tested my third hypothesis: *the rightist effect of education on economic left-right opinions is smaller in countries where the political elites are negative toward redistributive policies*. Models 2 and 3 supported this. I attribute this finding partly to the critical thinking argument. In addition, the reasoning that higher education makes people better able to filter political information should also work as a counter force to the bandwagon effect.

This study investigates the link between political elites and the public, without finding evidence of a direct link between the opinions of these groups. The new contribution to the literature is primarily the conditional effect between the political elite views and schooling. Education, I argue, is of a twofold nature, an argument that is supported by the results from the present analysis. It may seem, as was the intention of Habermas and others, that education

actually does promote critical thinking with regard to the economic left–right orientations of the public. The ruling political elite may play a part in influencing its citizens, yet the evidence presented here does not support this claim. There is a bivariate effect, however, but this can be explained largely by partisan bias. I believe it is of importance for both political science in general, and the study of public opinion in particular, to address questions pertaining to the link between macro factors and micro level attitudes. In this paper I have showed that there is interplay between the policies of governing parties and education. Some caveats concerning this study nonetheless deserve mentioning, first and foremost the problem of endogeneity and the nature of the party manifesto variable. Even so, I hope that this paper has contributed to shed some new light on the elite-public link.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Variables included in the ECONOMY measure

Economic Position: Per401 Free enterprise: Positive – Per403 Market Regulation: Positive – Per404 Economic Planning: Positive – Per412 Controlled Economy: Positive + Per414 Economic Orthodoxy: Positive + Per4011 Privatization: Positive + Per4012 Control of Economy: Negative – Per4132 Privatization: Negative

Appendix B. Sensitivity analysis: model with INCOME DISTRIBUTION (1-5) as dependent, random slope

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	<i>b</i>	<i>Std. E.</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Std. E.</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>Std. E.</i>
Intercept	4.001***	0.963	4.001***	0.962	3.913***	0.965
<i>Level-1 variables</i>						
Woman	-0.140***	0.011	-0.140***	0.011	-0.140***	0.002
Age	-0.014***	0.002	-0.014***	0.002	-0.014***	0.002
Age squared	0.0001***	0.000	0.0001***	0.000	0.0001***	0.000
Scale of incomes	0.054***	0.003	0.054***	0.003	0.054***	0.003
Higher education	0.351***	0.034	0.351***	0.034	0.355***	0.034
Life satisfaction	0.020***	0.002	0.020***	0.002	0.020***	0.002
Institutional trust	0.009***	0.001	0.009***	0.001	0.009***	0.001
Political interest	-0.005	0.014	-0.005	0.014	-0.005	0.014
Voted Government	0.121**	0.056	0.121**	0.056	-0.139	0.108
<i>Cross-level interaction</i>						
High Edu.*Economy			-0.084***	0.018	-0.086	0.018
Vot. Gov.*Economy					0.141**	0.056
<i>Level-2 variables</i>						
lnEconomy	-0.005	0.065	-0.007	0.064	0.037	0.067
HDI 2003	-2.406**	1.064	-2.403**	1.063	-2.392**	1.067
<i>Random effects</i>						
Level-1 residual	0.937***	0.008	0.936***	0.008	0.936***	0.008
Intercept	0.054***	0.019	0.054***	0.019	0.053***	0.018
Political interest	0.003***	0.001	0.003***	0.001	0.003***	0.001
Voted Government	0.067***	0.021	0.068***	0.021	0.052***	0.016
Level-1 <i>N</i>	30,683		30,683		30,683	
Level-2 <i>N</i>	23		23		23	
-2 Log Likelihood	85,271.106		85,250.237		85,243.860	

Note: Units are weighted to achieve equal *N* for each country. High values on the dependent indicate rightist attitudes toward redistribution. SCALE OF INCOMES ranges from 1-12, RELIGIOSITY from 0-22, LIFE SATISFACTION from 0-20, and INSTITUTIONAL TRUST from 0-30. WOMAN, HIGHER EDUCATION, and POLITICAL INTEREST are dummy variables. The level-2 variable ECONOMY is log transformed. High values indicate that the government holds rightist economic views. Levels of statistical significance are indicated by asterisks: * significant at 10 percent; ** significant at 5 percent; ***significant at 1%. The probability values are calculated using a two-tailed test.

Appendix C. Tolerance values for the explanatory variables

Variables	Tolerance
Woman	0.940
Age	0.035
Age squared	0.034
Scale of incomes	0.441
Higher education	0.880
Life satisfaction	0.735
Institutional trust	0.763
Political interest	0.829
Voted government	0.946
Economy	0.945
HDI 2003	0.473

Appendix D. Descriptive statistics for individual level variables

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
INCOME DIFFERENCE (1-5)	44,388	2.170	1.048	0.803	-0.033
WOMAN (0-1)	45,464	0.534	-	-	-
AGE	45,355	45.196	18.211	0.214	-0.836
SCALE OF INCOMES (1-12)	33,171	6.04	2.793	0.003	-0.957
HIGHER EDUCATION (0-1)	45,121	0.193	-	-	-
LIFE SATISFACTION (0-20)	45,143	14.283	3.939	-0.878	0.609
INSTITUTIONAL TRUST (0-30)	42,959	14.776	6.281	-0.265	-0.498
POLITICAL INTEREST (0-1)	45,429	0.453	-	-	-
VOTED GOVERNMENT (0-1)	45,587	0,274	-	-	-

Appendix E. Principal component analysis from the European Social Survey (2004-data), using varimax rotation

	Trust in Instit.	Immig- -ration	Relig- -ion	Trust in Individ.	Life Satisf.	Political Interest	Public- Private
Trust in politicians	.842						
Trust in polit. parties	.827						
Trust in parliament	.803						
Trust in legal system	.731						
Satisfied with govern.	.718						
Satisfied with democr.	.683						
Trust in the police	.631						
Satisfied with econom.	.587						
Trust in the U.N.	.560						
State of health service	.529						
State of education	.513						
Immigration dif. race		.866					
Immig. poor countries		.831					
Immig. same race		.776					
Immig. worse/better		.737					
Immig. cultural life		.709					
Immig. economy		.707					
How often pray			.874				
How religious are you			.847				
Religious attendance			.846				
Gays live as they wish			.356				
People advantage/fair				.769			
People helpful/selfish				.743			
People trusted/careful				.722			
How happy are you					.815		
Satisfied with life					.802		
Make up polit. opinion						.783	
Politics complicated						.763	
Interest in politics						.688	
Reduce income. diff.							.719
Placement on l-r scale							.689
Cronbach's Alpha	.798	.839	.889	.768	.827	.681	

Note: All factor loadings less than .40 are suppressed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is .893. Units are weighted to achieve equal *N* for each country. Chronbach's Alpha values for variables who's factor loadings are in bold. IMMIGRATION WORSE/BETTER, IMMIGRATION CULTURAL LIFE, IMMIGRATION ECONOMY, and MAKE UP POLITICAL OPINION have been turned to correspond with the other variables.

PAPER IV

**Issue Ownership, Unemployment and Support for Government
Intervention**

Tor Georg Jakobsen and Ola Listhaug

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PAPER V

**Welfare Attitudes and Social Expenditure:
Do Regimes Shape Public Opinion?**

Tor Georg Jakobsen

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