

Race, Gender and Support for the Welfare State: A Comparative Experimental Approach

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Support for welfare in the US is both racialized and gendered. Indeed, the fact that many Americans think of welfare recipients as poor Blacks (and especially poor Black women) is a common explanation for that country's comparatively low support for redistribution. In this study, we extend existing work on how racialized and gendered portrayals of welfare recipients affect attitudes toward redistribution. The data for the analysis are drawn from a unique online survey experiment conducted in 2012-2013 with representative samples in the US (n=1600), UK (n=1200) and Canada (n=1200). Relying on a series of survey vignettes, we experimentally manipulate the ethno-racial background and gender of policy beneficiaries for five types of programs that include cash benefits: social assistance, unemployment, disability benefits, parental leave benefits and benefits for low-income seniors. In doing so, we seek to make two specific contributions. First, we extend the American literature to explore whether there is a racial and gender bias in other Anglo-Saxon democracies. Second, we draw on the larger welfare state literature to examine whether racial and gender cues matter differently for means-tested programs than for contribution-based programs. The parallel experimental design allows for an unprecedented comparative analysis of the underlying political-psychological sources of support (or lack of support) for redistributive policies across Anglo-Saxon democracies. The paper concludes by considering the implications of the results in light of the growing diversity of North American and European populations.

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Introduction

With the development of the modern welfare state in the 20th century, the scope of what governments provide for citizens has grown exponentially to include a vast social safety net. All industrialized nations implement a wide range of social welfare programs, including employment insurance for the unemployed, social security and pensions for the retired, health care and childcare for some if not all citizens, and financial assistance programs for the poor.

The underpinnings of popular support for these benefit programs have been of interest to both political behavior researchers and comparative welfare state scholars. From the former perspective, while popular support clearly has a foundation in citizens' ideological orientations and their self-interest, public perceptions of beneficiary groups may be equally (if not more) important to how average citizens judge public policies. As the sustainability and effectiveness of these programs come under increasing fire from various sectors, public perceptions of who benefits (and who does not) play an important role in understanding how citizens view these programs.

In spite of interest from multiple fields, there is thus far relatively little empirical work exploring the implications of perceptions of individual policy recipients for support for redistribution. In this paper, we look at the ways in which support for redistribution varies across (a) a range of programs — social assistance, unemployment insurance, old-age security, disability, and parental leave, (b) different hypothetical recipients, with variations in ethnicity, gender, and “deservingness,” and (c) the three countries of Canada, the UK and the US. We are particularly interested in the possibility that program type (means-tested vs. contribution-based) influences support for cash payments to individual recipients; and moreover, in the possibility that the presence of racial and gender cues is more important in means-tested programs. Our results are based on vignettes embedded in an online survey, in which we experimentally manipulate the ethno-racial background and gender of recipients. In doing so, we demonstrate that citizens in liberal welfare states do make distinctions based both on the type of policy and the attributes of individual beneficiaries. There are significant differences across countries as well: support for increased cash benefits is, of course, partly dependent on current levels of funding; but it is also the case that Britons are much more affected by the ethnicity of the recipient than are Canadians and Americans.

Public Support for Social Welfare Programs: A Comparative Perspective

Support for the modern welfare state tends to be fairly wide-spread (Tang 1997), yet we know that the level of support is far from universal. Support varies both across individuals, and across policy regimes. Where cross-regime differences are concerned, existing work tends to focus on Esping-Anderson's (1990) distinction between social-democratic, conservative and liberal welfare states. Universal programs, provided by social democratic welfare states like those in Scandinavia, "decommodify" welfare benefits, thus creating the broadest support for such programs. Program eligibility in this context is based on citizenship, not market participation, and benefits tend to be the most generous. In contrast, liberal regimes rely on private provision of welfare goods like health insurance and subsidies and tax breaks to the private sector to promote market force participation.¹ Unlike the social democratic model, benefits levels are lower and beneficiaries tend to be targeted and means-tested. In between these extremes, conservative states like Germany offer national programs that are primarily contribution-based.

The supposition in past work, then, is that social democratic regimes produce not only the most generous programs, but also tend to engender the highest levels of public support. And while levels of public support do not map perfectly onto Esping-Anderson's original country classification, significant differences in support for redistribution do exist across countries, even after controlling for individual level variables (Papadakis and Bean 1993; Andres and Heien 2001; Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Larsen 2008), and these differences do in general fit the expected pattern. Liberal regimes – especially the United States – show lower levels of support for redistribution of wealth (Papadakis and Bean 1993: 234-235; Shapiro and Young 1989; Larsen 2008), while social democratic regimes like the one found in Sweden garner widespread support. Furthermore, looking within countries, universal programs tend to be more popular among the public than means-tested ones targeted at vulnerable subpopulations (van Oorschot 2000, Rothstein 1998).

Public support for redistribution is thus partly related to equality of access (Rothstein 1998; Hasenfeld and Rafferty 1989; Bobo 1991; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Ove Moene and Wallerstein 2001; Johnston et al. 2010; Soroka and Wlezien 2008; Kam and Nam 2008; Wlezien and Soroka, N.d.). Universal programs that are accessible to everyone (for example, universal healthcare) or a group of people without distinction (i.e. education for children, old-age security for seniors) tend to be popular. Similarly, contribution-

¹ For a discussion of the different principles at play in different types of programs, see Clasen and van Oorschot (2002).

based programs like employment insurance also tend to receive support, since those who benefit have contributed financially. Means-tested programs, in contrast, are available only to those with demonstrated financial need. These programs are of no consequence for a considerable portion of the population; they tend in addition to be associated with various (negative) public stereotypes of the poor. Means-tested programs tend, on average, to receive lower levels of public support.²

The word “welfare” often describes programs that provide cash benefits to the poor on a means-tested basis, even though the term can be used to refer to a myriad of government programs (Ellwood 1988; Cook and Barret 1992: Ch. 1). The association of welfare with cash benefits for the poor is important for understanding public support for such programs. Poverty, especially in the US, is often evaluated in terms of individualistic values such as self-reliance (Hecl 1986; Iyengar 1990; Fraser and Gordon 1994; Misra et al. 2003; Somers and Brock 2005). There is a dominant, and according to Fraser and Gordon (1994: 325) even “pathological”, view of welfare programs as creating dependency on the state. Those who rely on welfare to support themselves are viewed as lacking in work ethic or moral character (Golding and Middleton 1982; Smith and Stone 1989; Henry et al 2004; Somers and Brock 2005). Furthermore, their use of social assistance programs is argued to breed such personal characteristics. By giving people something for nothing, so it goes, welfare is a disincentive to work and recipients become a drain on society.³

The logic of dependency is also reflected in differences in support for benefits versus services. Whereas cash benefits for the poor are viewed as handouts, services are viewed as more legitimate because (a) they encourage self-sufficiency, by providing people the tools to work, and (b) they are less open to moral hazard, that is, the misuse of funds by recipients.⁴ In short, support for means-tested programs aimed at the poor depend in part on what types of benefits are being discussed — variations in support for programs

² Interestingly, Sniderman and colleagues (1996) have shown that when targeted programs are framed in universal ways, they garner greater support.

³ It should be noted that little evidence of this culture of dependence is actually found among welfare recipients (Schneider and Jacoby 2005a).

⁴ Trends in support for welfare and services for the poor tends to move in parallel over time, public support for spending on welfare is consistently lower than support for spending on services for the poor (Harell, Soroka and Mahon 2008; Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

aimed at the poor depend on the types of benefits and programs that come to mind when citizens are asked to evaluate them (Huber and Paris 2013).⁵

Support also depends on who it is receiving these benefits. Some categories of people tend to elicit more sympathetic responses from the public than others, largely because they are viewed as both needing the aid and not being responsible for the situation that has caused the need (Iyengar 1990; Cook and Barrett 1992; Skitka and Tetlock, 1993; Applebaum 2001; Huddy et al. 2001; Henry et al. 2004). For example, citizens tend to be more generous toward the elderly and the disabled, who are viewed as being both in need and not responsible for their need, whereas working-age men, single (especially Black) mothers, and others associated with the “underclass” are viewed as less deserving because they are presumed to be responsible for their poverty.

In sum, we know that support for redistribution is most likely when citizens feel like they will (or at least may) use the programs associated with the welfare state. When programs benefit everyone, or when citizens are viewed as “earning” those benefits through their participation in the workforce, it is not surprising that support is more widespread. However, when benefits are targeted or particularistic, there is less support, not only because fewer people think they will ever benefit from such programs, but also because perceptions of beneficiaries tend to be negative and imbued with concerns about deservingness.

Race, Gender and Welfare

Immigration has led to increasing levels of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity across most of the developed world, just as immigrant-receiving countries have felt increasing economic pressures to rein in spending. At the same time, these societies have witnessed women increasingly moving into the workforce, changes in family structures, and shifting gendered divisions of labor across employment sectors — each of which has contributed to women disproportionately relying on particular welfare-state programs (Bock and Thane 1991; Brush 2002). While the racialization and feminization of poverty is well-documented, the extent to which such changes may lead to the erosion of support for some of the key institutions of the modern welfare state is often posited, but rarely directly tested.

The comparative welfare state literature makes clear that we should expect lower levels of support for redistribution in general in liberal regimes like the US, and that

⁵ Early work by Smith (1987) and Rasinski (1989) showed substantial differences between spending on “welfare” versus spending on “assistance the poor”. They argued that these frames were essential in understanding the gap.

individuals may be particularly hostile toward programs associated with redistribution. Cash benefits targeted at the poor may foster a stigmatization of recipients as being undeserving of help. When the benefitting minority are not only poor, but are characterized by other axes of oppression such as race, ethnicity or gender, this may exacerbate hostility toward such programs.

One account for this possibility focuses on intergroup dynamics. Social-psychological research has consistently pointed to people's tendency to favour their own group members, and to express hostility toward out group members (Allport, 1958, Blumer, 1958, Sherif et al., 1961, Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Within political science, these findings have formed the basis of large literature on how racial attitudes influence support for race-targeted policies (for an overview, see Bobo and Fox, 2003; for a critique of both approaches, see Sniderman and Carmines, 1997). Theories of modern racism, symbolic racism, subtle racism or racial resentment view attitudes toward race-targeted policies as an outward expression of inwardly held beliefs about the negative moral and social characteristics of an out group (Kinder and Sears, 1981, Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995, Meertens and Pettigrew, 1997). Competing social structural approaches tend to view hostile attitudes toward race-targeted policies as a reflection of real conflict between groups over scarce social and economic resources (Key, 1949, Blumer, 1958, Quillian, 1995, Esses et al., 1998, Bobo and Hutchings 1996, Sears et al., 2000). Prejudicial attitudes, from this perspective, are an outgrowth of economic interests, but the in-group and out-group distinction remains critical.

Both these perspectives, despite their different causal logic, point to perceptions of policy beneficiaries as important drivers of policy opinions. When policies are race- or gender-coded, we expect the logic of group dynamics to influence policy support. And indeed, this is what the literature tends to find. Past work indicates that perceptions of welfare and poverty are heavily racialized in the US.⁶ Americans tend to exaggerate the number of Blacks on welfare, and these beliefs are reinforced by a media system that disproportionately portrays the poor as Black (Golding and Middleton, 1982, Gilens, 1996, 2000). Furthermore, problems of unemployment and poverty are viewed as less likely to be of national significance, or to require a more societal level solution, when the "victims" of these issues are depicted as black people rather than whites (Iyengar and

⁶ Of course, work on race and policy attitudes is not restricted just to social assistance. There are related literatures focusing on affirmative action (e.g., Bobo and Kleugal, 1993, Krysan, 2000, Feldman and Huddy, 2005), on social security (e.g., Winter 2006, 2008), on crime (e.g., Peffley et al., 1997, Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997, Mendelberg, 2001, Peffley and Hurwitz, 2002, Gilliam et al., 2002, Frederico and Holmes, 2005), on speech restrictions (Harell, 2008, 2010a, 2010b), and on immigration (e.g., Pettigrew, 1998, Jackson et al., 2001, Green, 2007). As with welfare, for instance, media coverage of crime paints it as a disproportionately Black problem and consistent evidence suggests that when Blacks are portrayed as criminals, whites support harsher punishments.

Kinder 1987; Iyengar 1991). In fact, the stereotype of the “black welfare queen” has played a powerful role in welfare discourses, highlighting not only the racialized but gendered dimensions of welfare attitudes in the US (Gilens, 2000, Hancock, 2004). Not surprisingly, substantial evidence shows a negative relationship between attitudes toward Black Americans and support for welfare (Gilens, 1996, 2000, Nelson, 1999, Mendelberg, 2001, Schram et al., 2003, Frederico, 2005, Winter, 2008, although see Peffley et al., 1997, Sniderman et al., 1996).

Less is known about how gender attitudes influence such policy support, despite the documented gendered dimension of welfare attitudes in the US. Studies on gender gaps in public opinion consistently point to higher levels of support for the welfare state among women compared to men (Kaufman and Petrocik, 1999, Gidengil, 1995, 2005, Inglehart and Norris, 2000). While competing theories exist to explain this support, in part it has been linked to women’s self interest: they are disproportionately employed in, and benefit from, welfare state programs. Beyond self-interest, the welfare state has important gendered dimensions in the ways in which it promotes (or discourages) women’s engagement in the workforce (Orloff, 1993, Koven and Michel, 1993, Mink, 1998). For example, many welfare state programs, such as childcare, have specific policy legacies tied to gendered discourses about motherhood and femininity (White, 2002). In other words, there is good reason to view a host of welfare state policies as being targeted at women, and this perception may well influence citizen’s level of support.

There is also an emerging body of research showing that aggregate-level immigration has detrimental effects on support for redistribution. As countries become more ethnically and racially diverse, there has been increasing concern over how to ensure continued support for a shared social safety net (Luttmer, 2001, Soroka et al., 2006, Banting and Kymlicka, 2006, Banting et al., 2006, Crepaz, 2008, Harell and Stolle, 2010). Some argue that increasing ethno-racial diversity is changing the terms of debate on social welfare issues. For example, Faist (1995) argues that while welfare state support has always been racialized in the US, rising levels of immigration in Germany has led to a shift from a class-based to an ethnic-class based cleavage around support for the welfare state. And some cross-national evidence shows a negative correlation between immigration levels and support for the welfare state (e.g., Bommers and Geddes, 2000, Bloch and Schuster, 2002, Soroka et al., 2006, Bay and Pedersen, 2006). This is to be expected as debates around immigration in other countries are often racialized (e.g. Silverstein, 2005, Bulbeck, 2004; Harell, Soroka, Iyengar and Valentino 2012; Iyengar et al. forthcoming). While the racial dynamics in the US have been the focus of substantial research on race and welfare attitudes, then, the comparative welfare literature suggests that who benefits from social welfare programs may be equally important outside the US context (see, e.g., Harell, Soroka and Ladner, nd; Harell and Soroka, 2010).

In sum, new forms of ethno-racial diversity may indeed influence welfare state support — although there is thus far relatively little work synthesizing the aggregate-level and individual-level findings. In this study, we draw on these literatures to test (a) whether the public supports lower levels of cash benefits for means-tested programs compared to contribution-based programs, and (b) whether recipient characteristics (ethno-racial background and gender) have a greater impact in means-tested programs.

Data and Methods

The data used for this analysis are drawn from the Race, Gender and the Welfare State (RGWS) survey, which was fielded online in July 2012 in the US, Canada, and the UK (n=1200 per country). An additional subsample of 600 respondents was collected in the US in May 2013, bringing the total US sample to 1800.⁷ Each survey was fielded by YouGov-PMX, which uses a matching methodology for delivering online samples that mirror target populations on key demographics. For details on the sampling procedures and composition of the YouGov online panels, see Vavreck and Iyengar (2011).

These three countries were selected based on a “most similar” design logic. All three are considered liberal welfare states, each has significant levels of racial and ethnic diversity, and each has experienced significant economic retrenchment (albeit to varying degrees) in recent years. As such, they provide the clearest test of whether means-tested programs are more susceptible to public hostility as well as racial and gender bias. These countries also have the practical commonality of having large English-speaking populations, meaning that the survey instrument can be conducted in a common language in each country, minimizing the risk of inter-country differences resulting from survey instrument translation. (That said, in Canada the survey was conducted in both English and French to ensure national representativeness.)⁸

To examine racial and gender cues on support for redistributive policy, we developed seven experimentally-manipulated policy vignettes, based on what is referred to in the literature as a factorial design (Rossi and Nock, 1982). The policy vignettes are in

⁷ The additional US sample was identical to the original, except Asian beneficiaries in the vignettes were replaced with Hispanics, allowing for an additional ethno-racial cue for the US.

⁸ Approximately 22% of Canadians have French as their mother-tongue, concentrated primarily in the province of Quebec. Three graduate students at the Université du Québec à Montréal conducted the French translation. A single student translated each section, and then language and equivalence to the English survey were checked by two other students. In case of disagreement in word choice or phrasing, coder discussion ensued to see if agreement could be reached. Any case where the three coders were not unanimous after discussion were brought to the principal researcher who made a final decision.

essence short stories about individual policy recipients, including a photo, that describe the fictional recipients' situation and the amount they would be eligible to receive. The eligible amount is based on the actual average amount of support for a person in the described situation, based on benefits in place in each country as of 2012.⁹ The respondent is then asked what level the recipient should receive on a scale from \$0 to twice the eligible amount, where the starting point for the slider is in the middle of the scale, so that respondents can drag benefit levels up or down from the present amount. For the analyses below, we focus on the percentage change in support based on the amount offered in the vignette, allowing us to combine and compare results across countries and domains on a similar metric.

The vignette approach provides a useful alternative way to establish attitudes compared to traditional survey items, despite its less common use in political science. Vignettes allow people to make specific judgments that are often easier to report compared to feelings about abstract values (Alexander and Becker, 1978). They have the added benefit of being ideally suited to experimental manipulation because respondents can be randomly assigned to different versions of the scenario (as well as randomly assigned to the order of presentation to minimize sequence effects). This is especially important when racial attitudes are considered. Overt racial animosity has decreased over time, yet studies suggest that people continue to express more subtle forms of racism (Kinder and Sears, 1981). Given increasing social pressure to refrain from overt forms of racism, asking directly about racial attitudes can induce social desirability bias in responses. The online vignette has an additional advantage, in that it allows us to take advantage of visual cues not normally available in traditional survey methodology.

Our seven vignettes (presented in a random order to each respondent) include two means-tested programs, welfare and benefits for low-income seniors, and two contribution-based programs, unemployment insurance, and parental leave benefits. They also capture support for disability benefits, which are means-tested in the US and Canada, and a universal program in the UK. The analyses below rely on a combined analyses of all seven vignettes, and focus on the two main experimental treatments: (1) ethno-racial cue and (2) gender. Two vignettes also included a deservingness treatment, related to the reason benefits are required,¹⁰ also included in the analyses that follow.

⁹ Note that for parental leave in the US, no comparable public program exists. Here, we rephrase the vignette to say the recipient is eligible for a new parental leave benefits based on the approximate levels available under temporary disability benefits in the five states in the US that offer such programs.

¹⁰ We also varied marital status and sexual orientation in some vignettes. These treatments are excluded from the cross-policy analysis.

Appendix 1 provides the full text of one the vignettes, alongside the name/photo manipulations, as well as the text portion of the other six vignettes. Note here that the ethno-racial background and gender of recipients is cued in two ways. First, using a face morphing program (FaceGen Modeler), we start with a base photo and then apply ethnic morphs (White, Black, Asian, South Asian, Hispanic) and gender morphs. The morphed photos are then edited to add in shadows, age characteristics, and hair and clothing that are identical across morphs. In addition to the manipulation of the facial image, the vignettes vary the name of the recipient, using common ethnicized male and female names associated with each ethno-racial group. We rely on morphed photos because it is important that we control for other characteristics of the visual cue (such as attractiveness and likability) which are known to affect social judgments (see, for example, Eberhardt et al., 2004; Eagly et al. 1991). By beginning with the same base face and using identical hair and clothing, we largely eliminate these potentially confounding variables.

We confirmed the equivalence of the facial images by having a sample of 50 individuals rate the attractiveness and stereotypicality of each face. (Respondents were drawn from Mechanical Turk).¹¹ The results showed no significant variance across photos on either dimension.

In addition to the experimental treatments, we include several control variables in the analyses. Two scales capture attitudes towards (a) government action, and (b) view of recipients. The first is based on five questions which capture the general orientation of the respondent toward state intervention, scaled from 0 to 1 where higher scores indicate intervention.¹² The second scale runs from 0 to 1 and is based on two questions about the personal responsibility of welfare recipients, with higher scores indicated responses that view poverty as a societal problem rather than a personal failure.¹³ (Details on both scales are included in the Appendix.) We expect these to have direct positive effects on the level of cash benefits awarded by respondents.¹⁴

We also include a number of controls related to the vignettes. We control for the order in which the respondent see the vignettes (numbered 1 to 7). In addition, we include a

¹¹ Note the Hispanic faces in the US were collected later and were not included in the ratings.

¹² The government action scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .72

¹³ The welfare recipient scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .56

¹⁴ These controls are also essential because a check of the experimental treatment's randomization showed that the government action scale (in Canada) and the view of recipients scale (in the US) are not randomly distributed across experiment treatments — an consequence of a design that divides just 1200 respondents across 6 different treatments.

control for module order corresponding to whether the vignettes appeared at the beginning of the survey (0), before the other survey questions and an Implicit Association Test were completed, between the survey items and the IAT (1) or at the end of the survey (2). Finally, we include a control for the actual spending level in the vignette in USD based on purchasing parity power (PPP). This adjusts for actual differences in spending levels across policy domains, allowing us to assess whether higher current spending levels lead to a desire for lower spending overall.¹⁵ Finally, in the US, we add an additional dummy variable (Wave) to separate the respondents who completed the study in May 2013.

We present a pooled analysis where each respondent-vignette combination is a separate case. This allows for a panel estimation that is ideally suited for examining cross-policy attitudes as well as assessing the impact of ethno-racial and gender cues across domains. Essentially, each vignette is treated as a case in a repeated, or within-subject, experimental design. In total, we have 32,963 respondent-vignette pairs. All results are limited to white, non-foreign born respondents.

Results

Our data analysis involves three separate sets of pooled estimations, each geared at one of the issues discussed above: (1) the level of cash benefits for means-tested versus contributions-based programs, (2) the impact of “deservingness” on support for redistribution, and (3) the varying impact of race and gender across program types. We address each in turn below.

Means-Tested versus Contributions-Based Programs

Table 1 presents the results of mixed effects regression for each country, where the dependent variable is the percentage change in the cash benefit awarded (based on the actual benefit level defined in the vignette). For the time being, we limit our analyses to only white, non-foreign born respondents.

Our basic hypothesis is that citizens should be more likely to cut cash benefits to means-tested programs than to contribution-based programs. Unemployment insurance is a stereotypical example of a contribution-based program and we use this as our reference category in Table 1. Along with unemployment insurance, we also include

¹⁵ This would be in line with work on thermostatic responsiveness, e.g., Soroka and Wlezien 2010; though note that it is at odds with the literature on social welfare that focuses on positive rather than negative feedback, which suggests that systems that provide more social welfare engender support for more social welfare.

parental leave benefits, for which access requires prior contributions through paid labor in all three countries. In addition, disability benefits are contribution-based in two of our case countries, Canada (through the Canada Pension Plan) and the US (through Social Security); in the UK, disability benefits do not require previous contributions, nor evidence of low-income, and thus reflect what the literature considers a universal program. For means-tested programs, the most discussed means-tested program in the literature is clearly welfare, but we also include a second means-tested program in our analysis, low-income supplements for seniors.

[Table 1 and Figure 1 about here]

Results in Table 1 show the expected relationship between unemployment insurance and welfare: in all three countries, citizens cut benefits significantly more to welfare recipients than those on unemployment. That said, while the effect is present in all three countries, its size varies substantially across cases. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage change in cash benefits allotted across policy domains, holding the other variables in the model constant, and where the zero line in the figure represents current benefit levels in each domain. In Canada, while citizens are less generous to welfare recipients, the difference is relatively small in comparison to the large gaps that occur in the UK (23 percentage points) and in the US (33 percentage points). Even when we limit ourselves to relatively similar liberal welfare states, then, Americans seem particularly hostile to cash benefits described as welfare, although citizens in the UK come in a close second. In both these two cases, citizens (on average) support increases to current levels of unemployment benefits, while also supporting reductions in welfare benefits. Canadians are more generous to the unemployed and, to a lesser extent, to welfare recipients.

The distinction between contribution-based and means-tested programs breaks down when we examine other programs, however. We also see more stark cross-national variation. For instance, the low-income supplement for seniors elicits vastly different support across countries. In both Canada and the US, citizens gave 25 and 31 percent more, respectively, in benefits to low-income seniors compared to actual levels. In both cases, these are substantially larger increases than for any of the contribution-based programs, with the exception of disability benefits in Canada. Only in the UK did we find the expected negative change for this program, with a 14 percent decrease from actual levels, which is comparable to the result for welfare recipients. This is

particularly punitive behavior considering that the actual levels we specified in the UK were about half of the benefits provided in the US.¹⁶

Parental leave presents another interesting case. As a contribution-based program, recipients must be workers to access these benefits in Canada and the UK. In Canada, citizens tend to allocate cash benefits slightly higher than current levels, consistent with our expectations for a contribution-based program. In the UK, however, citizens tend to cut cash benefits. Indeed, the percentage change in benefits allocated actually represents the highest percentage change for any program in the UK, despite the fact that the benefit levels were not very different than those in Canada.¹⁷ US results are similar to those in the UK, though the US does not actually have a federal contribution-based program for maternity or paternity benefits, so respondents were presented with a recipient of a “new program in their state” which approximates benefits in the five states in the US that do have benefits administered through a state-based disability benefits program, similar to those found in Canada and the US. The US results are thus not directly comparable, yet they resemble closely the pattern in the UK.

In general, then, while support for unemployment and welfare benefits conforms with our expectations regarding means-tested versus contributions-based programs, the same is not true for other domains. In fact, when confronted with various types of policy beneficiaries, levels of support – measured in terms of financial support awarded to recipients – tend to vary as much within the two categories (means-tested, and contributions-based) as across them.

Deservingness

The basis of the distinction between contribution-based and mean-tested programs relies partly on the premise of deservingness. Because people pay into contribution-based programs, citizens feel entitled to use them. Means-tested programs, in contrast, are there for those in need without any requirement to contribute directly to the program, or even more generally to the tax base. As such, questions often arise in public discourses that legitimize more scrutiny of the individual beneficiary, and how his or her actions may have led to the need.

¹⁶ That being said, the UK residents tend to receive higher State Pension benefits compared to social security or Canada Pension Plan benefits in the US or Canada which may partly account for this discrepancy.

¹⁷ And furthermore, these benefits were already *lower* than current levels of benefits for female recipients because we used the average benefits for maternity and paternity leave.

Clearly, views about the causes of poverty have a powerful effect on generosity (Cook and Barrett 1992; Kluegel and Smith 1986; Applebaum 2001). In Table 1, those who view recipients' poverty as resulting from societal problems rather than personal laziness (captured by our *Views of Recipients* variable) consistently award more benefits, and these effects are rather similar across countries.

We are able to test the deservingness argument further thanks to an additional manipulation that was added to two vignettes, one on welfare and the other on disability benefits. The manipulation varies the reason recipients need aid. In the case of disability benefits, we vary whether the accident leading to the benefits was related to risky recreational activities (undeserving) versus work-related accidents (deserving). In one of the welfare benefits, we vary whether the lack of employment is due to childcare needs (deserving) or substance abuse (undeserving). (See Appendix for question wording.)

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 presents the regression results that include a variable for the undeserving condition, as well as an interaction between the undeserving condition and the policy domain (welfare is the reference). (The model here is almost identical to the one in Table 1, except in this case we focus just on the two vignettes with the deservingness manipulation.) As expected, respondents in the undeserving condition received substantial lower cash awards compared to those in the deserving condition, although this difference was smaller in the case of disability than in the case of welfare, at least in the UK and the US where undeserving welfare recipients received about 30 percentage points less in cash benefits than their deserving counterparts, compared to a 7 to 13 percentage point difference for disability benefits in the US and UK respectively. In Canada, the penalty for deservingness was invariant to policy, averaging about 18 percentage points. The disproportionate impact of deservingness in the welfare scenario is noteworthy, although clearly the deservingness treatment that was used for each policy domain differed. In the UK and the US, at least, the substance abuse scenario was treated particularly harshly.

The results thus suggest that the deservingness treatments do in fact capture one of the ways in which citizens distinguish between policy recipients. In vignettes where a "deserving" beneficiary is present, citizens in all three countries tend to give higher cash benefits than current levels, compared to the reference vignettes. Clearly, we have cued specific types of deservingness here, but the implication is that policy domains may evoke certain types of attributions in the absence of specifying information. If when people think of welfare recipients, they think of those with substance abuse problems

rather than families struggling to provide childcare, clearly general support for welfare will suffer.

Race, Gender, and Means-Tested versus Contributions-Based Programs

Along with personal circumstances, means-tested programs more generally are thought to stigmatize and stereotype recipients through a vicious sexist and racist discourse about personal responsibility. The Table 1 results above, already include the ethno-racial and gender treatments across the vignettes. The expectation, based largely on the US welfare literature, is that citizens will penalize minorities and women who deviate from the idealized white, male worker. In fact, we find only limited evidence of a racial bias in allocation of cash benefits. In Canada, the ethno-racial coefficients are negative but small, and with the exception of Asian, insignificant. In the UK, we do find a substantial and significant penalty for black policy recipients,¹⁸ but not for Asian and South Asian recipients. And most surprisingly given the emphasis on Black welfare recipients in the US, we find no evidence of a bias against black recipients, nor against Hispanics or Asian recipients when controlling for policy domain — and US respondents were in fact slightly more generous toward Native Americans than to whites. While racial attitudes clearly remain relevant to welfare attitudes, our evidence tends to suggest that when it comes to the question of how much to award individuals in benefits, racial cues are less powerful in the US.

Why is the impact of race so small in the US? One possibility is simply that race does not matter much for attitudes about redistributive policy, though this finding would be at odds with much of the existing literature. We can at this point think of two alternatives. First, our results may partly be due to the fact that individual judgments tend to be more positive than group judgments, a phenomenon known as the person-positivity bias (Iyenger et al, forthcoming). If person positivity is greater in the US, then it could account for the marginal impact of race; that said, it is unknown if the tendency toward person-positivity varies across countries. Second, it may be that race matters to support, but there is a good deal of heterogeneity in the impact of racial cues, particularly in the US. Our own past work with these data suggests that there is heterogeneity in the effect of racial priming; respondents with racist attitudes are very powerfully affected by the race of recipients (Harell et al. 2012). We do not model this heterogeneity here; doing so may shed light on what appear to be anomalous US findings. Finally, it may also be that racial primes only matter for certain types of

¹⁸ It is worth noting that the UK survey uses Blacks only for a welfare vignette. We do control of policy type in our model. That said, insofar as welfare produces particularly strong racial effects (and results below suggest that it does), the magnitude of the negative coefficient for Blacks in the UK will partly be a product of it being linked to the welfare vignette only.

policy domains where need must be determined (i.e. means-tested programs). We test this last possibility here.

With respect to gender, we find that women tend to consistently receive higher benefits than men. The size of this difference varies across countries, with female recipients receiving the greatest boost compared to men in the US, followed by the UK and Canada. This effect is not an artifact of including parental benefits as a policy domain in the model either. While parental leave benefits are especially gendered (Harell et al., nd), excluding parental leave vignettes from the estimation only slightly reduces the effect of the gender variable (not shown). The reason for this boost is open to debate. Women may be viewed as more deserving, because they tend to have higher levels of poverty than men or because they tend to be primary caregivers of children. (Casper et al. 1994). Traditional gender discourses also tend to view women as more virtuous in many ways, self-sacrificing, caring for others and less associated with violence or drugs (Gilligan 1982). It may also be that citizens tend to take a more paternal view of female citizens, justifying greater levels of support, where men are expected to be self-sufficient (Misra et al. 2007).

We find, then, some limited evidence of racial bias across policy domains. Gender differences are stronger, and appear consistently across countries. That said, we do not expect racialized or gendered discourses to matter equally across policy domains. Means-tested policy domains where recipients are viewed as more responsible for their personal situation may activate more easily stereotype attributions associated with specific groups of people. In other words, we expect that ethno-racial cues will matter more when respondents are deciding benefits for means-tested programs than for contribution based programs.

[Figure 2 about here]

To test this, we run separate models in each country that include an interaction term between the ethno-racial treatment and the policy domain. Figure 2 presents the results of this interaction. (The full models include all the other variables in Table 1, alongside all interactions between ethnicity and policy domains. Full results are not included here, but are available upon request.) Distinguishing estimates for each individual ethnic group is difficult in Figure 2, but all we want to highlight here is the degree to which they are spread apart (indicating significant effects of ethnicity), or clustered together (indicating no such effects). An asterisk indicates in each case whether the point estimates for any of the non-white categories is significantly different from the point estimate for Whites.

In the UK, we find a significant racial hierarchy in the level of benefits awarded for welfare, with whites receiving the highest level of benefits (which represents an increase from current levels) and blacks receiving the lowest (at or just below current levels). This is not the case in Canada and the US, where there is no evidence of a racial bias for individual welfare recipients. But the other means-tested domain — low-income supplements for seniors — also shows evidence of a racial bias, and this time the bias is present in all three countries. Whites tend to receive higher levels of benefits than other racial minority groups.

There is in contrast no hint of a racial bias for parental leave and disability benefits in any country, or for unemployment insurance in two of the three countries. The UK is the exception with respect to the contribution-based unemployment insurance, where there is weak evidence of racial bias ($p=.07$), where Whites receive significantly more than Asians.

In general then, Figure 2 reveals some support for the notion that means-tested programs promote racial differentiation of recipients, even after controlling for general attitudes state intervention and responsibility for poverty.¹⁹ When it comes to low-income supplements for seniors in all three countries, and welfare recipients in the UK, respondents are more generous toward whites. The other contribution-based programs showed little differentiation, with the exception of unemployment insurance in the UK.

This raises interesting questions about whether unemployment insurance in the UK has been framed in the media along similar lines as means-tested programs elsewhere. Clearly, the UK has perhaps gone the furthest in introducing a system of benefits for low-income people that ties employment to benefits with the creation of a Universal Credit that integrates unemployment insurance and low-income supplements while working. This shift to “welfare that works” has been accompanied by extensive public debate about the problems of the welfare system and unemployment system in the UK. One possible explanation for our results, then, is that in the UK, the distinction between EI and welfare in the public’s mind is less distinct, and both have been heavily framed in terms of personal responsibility in recent years that make stereotype attributions more likely. This, of course, requires further research.

¹⁹ Indeed, it is worth noting that all our findings here represent conservative estimates of the impact of ethnicity, since our models include a control for attitudes towards recipients. Attitudes towards recipients will surely be related to attitudes about race and gender; we leave this analysis for future work.

Conclusions

We have set out to explore sources of support for five large cash-benefits programs associated with the welfare state in three Anglo-Saxon democracies. Drawing on the larger comparative welfare state literature, we have focused in particular on whether the distinction between means-tested and contribution-based programs leads to consistent differences in support. Our results suggest that citizens across these three liberal welfare regimes tend to favor more generous unemployment benefits vis-à-vis current policy, while supporting reductions to current cash benefits for welfare recipients. However, when we expand the analysis to a broader range of policy domains, the distinction between contribution-based and means-tested programs becomes less powerful. This is true where overall levels of support are concerned, at least — because subsequent estimations reveal another way in which means-tested and contributions-based programs may differ. As we expected, the impact of racial bias appears to be strongest in means-tested domains.

At the heart of the distinction between means-tested and contributions-based domains is the question of the beneficiary's deservingness. Deservingness can be defined in many ways, but at its heart it captures willingness and ability to work, and in the case of the latter, the causes of the individual's inability to obtain work. We have measured deservingness in two ways, as it relates to stereotype attributions that rely on group-categories like race or gender, but also by focusing on the causes of financial need (deservingness treatment). When the causes of recipients' financial need are seen as more legitimate, support increases.

Our results make clear that the racialization of welfare is not a uniquely American phenomenon, nor is it as prevalent as earlier research has suggested, at least when racial bias is measured directly as differences in individual attributions of cash benefits (rather than through attitudinal measures of general racial prejudice). In future work, we will focus in more detail on the different effect of individual racial cues, compared to more general racial attitudes. Our past research suggests that racial prejudice does have a direct effect on attitudes toward redistribution, in particular by making people more susceptible to racial cues (Harell, Soroka and Ladner, nd; Harell, Soroka and Iyengar, 2012).

How do individual-level attitudes towards policy recipients matter to welfare state support? While it is true that citizens are not the ones approving specific recipients for benefits, we might expect that the sympathy that the average citizen has for various types of respondents may well translate into the way front-line workers respond to various types of beneficiaries. But this is not the effect we are most interested in; rather

we want to consider the possibility that the portrayal of policy beneficiaries as being from non-white groups can have a substantive impact on the ways in which the public thinks about, and in turn supports, means-tested programs. Our findings suggest that this intergroup thinking does not permeate every policy domain. We suggest that it is the intersection of policy domain with discourses around deservingness that cue, or not, more group-based stereotypes.

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Appendix 1: Vignette and Question Wording

Vignette 1: Unemployment Insurance

[X] is 39 years old and lives in [STATE/REGION/PROVINCE]. He has worked full-time in the accounts receivable department of Reliable Insurance for the past 3 years. His salary is [\$3600/£2300] a month before taxes. He is a single father with two children, ages 8 and 12. The company he works for decided to lay off some of its employees, and [X] lost his job. [X] would like to apply for Unemployment Insurance. The average benefit in this situation is about \$----- a month for up to 6 months.

Benefit amounts: USA: \$1300; UK: £300; CAD: \$1900

Vignette 2: Unemployment Insurance vs. Welfare

[X] is 35 years old and rents an apartment with her two children. She has worked in the food service industry since graduating high school in [BIGGEST CITY of PROVINCE/REGION/STATE]. Last year, she earned about [\$1600/£1000] a month before taxes. This year, she has not found suitable employment. She has no savings and has about \$2500 in credit card debt. [X] would like to apply for [unemployment benefits/welfare benefits]. The average benefit in this situation is about \$----- a month.

Benefit amounts: USA: \$600; UK: £1400; CAD: \$1100

Vignette 3: Disability Benefits and Deservingness

[X] is divorced. He is a single father with 2 children. He worked full-time as a machine operator for CCF Manufacturing for 7 years. He makes about [\$2800/£1750] a month before taxes. X has been suffering from chronic back pain caused by [an accident at work/a boating accident] last year, and is unable to work. [X] would like to apply for disability benefits. The average benefit in this situation is about \$---- a month.

Benefit amounts: USA: \$1100; UK: £600; CAD: \$800

Vignette 4: Low Income Supplement for Seniors

[X] is 68 years old and has worked on and off over his life in customer service. He is a widower and has three adult children. He is retired, and receives [\$500/£650] a month [in social security retirement benefits/from his State Pension/from her Canada/Quebec Pension Plan]. He does not have any substantial savings. [X]

would like to apply for the financial assistance for low-income seniors. The average benefit in this situation is about \$--- a month

Benefit amounts: USA: \$300; UK: £100; CAD: \$400

Vignette 5: Welfare and Deservingness

X is a single father (Aboriginal: He lives off-reserve with) of three children ages 3, 5 and 8. He has some high school education and is unemployed. He is not looking for work because [he has no childcare for his children / has not been able to hold a job because of substance abuse issues]. The children's mother does not provide any financial support. X has no savings and has a hard time paying the rent and bills on his 2 bedroom apartment. [X] would like to apply for welfare benefits through her state. The average benefit in this situation is about \$--- a month.

Benefit amounts: USA: \$700; UK: £300; CAD: \$1200

Vignette 6: Welfare and Couple Status

[X] is 41 years old and [lives alone, shares a small apartment with her spouse/with his/her same sex partner]. He dropped out of high school when he was 15 years old. He has worked previously cleaning hotel rooms and washing dishes at a local restaurant, but he has never held a job for very long. [X] has used the small amount of savings s/he over the past two month and is behind on his rent. [X] would like to apply for welfare benefits through her province. The average benefit in this situation is about \$--- a month

Benefit amounts: USA: \$700; UK: £600; CAD: \$600

Vignette 7: Parental Leave Benefits

X is 32 years old and s/he is [married/single]. S/he has been working full-time for the past 2 years S/he works for a small business designing websites, and s/he makes about [\$2400/£1500] a month. Recently, [X, X's wife, X's ex-girlfriend] found out that she is pregnant. The baby's [mother/father] works part-time in construction. X would like to apply for [a new parental leave benefit program in his state/for paternity-maternity pay benefits/parental leave benefits] that allows her/him to time off work after the birth of a baby. The average benefit in this situation is about \$--- per month for [up to 2 months/up to 8 months/up to 8 months].

Benefit amounts: USA: \$1200; UK: £700; CAD: \$1300

Government Intervention Scale: The Scale includes 5 items.

Which statement comes closest to your own view:

1. The free market can handle today's problems without government being involved (0)/ We need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems (1).
2. Less government is better (0)/ There are more things that government should be doing (1).
3. We should cut government spending (0)/ We should expand government services (1)
4. The government should see to it that everyone has a decent standard of living (1)/ The government should leave it to people to get ahead on their own (0).

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

5. Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off (0 strongly disagree, 1 strongly agree)

View of Recipients Scale:

Which statement comes closest to your own view:

1. Most poor people are poor because they don't work hard enough / Most poor people are poor because of circumstances beyond their control.
2. Most people on welfare could find a job if they tried / Most people on welfare have no other choice

Table 1: Treatment Effects on Cash Transfer Levels

	CA		UK		US	
Welfare	-4.89*	(1.93)	-22.60***	(1.47)	-32.94***	(1.66)
Disability	37.60***	(2.34)	-1.54	(1.75)	0.63	(1.57)
Low-Income Senior	22.82***	(2.83)	-23.33***	(1.79)	10.54***	(2.62)
Parental Leave	-4.82**	(1.63)	-28.63***	(1.60)	-35.05***	(1.46)
Black	-1.00	(1.08)	-15.49***	(1.84)	0.13	(1.06)
Asian	-3.68**	(1.24)	1.24	(1.39)	1.78	(1.37)
Aboriginal	-2.90	(2.40)			7.64**	(2.61)
South Asian			0.68	(1.25)		
Hispanic					-2.16	(1.77)
Female	3.73***	(1.01)	7.99***	(1.17)	12.12***	(1.02)
Government Action	25.17***	(3.75)	29.66***	(3.85)	30.25***	(3.15)
View of Recipients	17.02***	(2.76)	25.51***	(2.45)	32.24***	(2.85)
Current Spending (PPP)	.01***	(0.00)	-.06***	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)
Vignette Order	-0.37	(0.21)	0.15	(0.23)	-0.38	(0.53)
Module Order	1.85	(1.83)	4.04*	(1.80)	5.57	(5.49)
Wave					0.14	(2.07)
Constant	-26.64***	(4.37)	-2.69	(3.06)	-21.39***	(3.74)
Random Effects						
sd(constant)	3.17***	(0.03)	3.18***	(0.03)	3.32***	(0.03)
sd(residual)	3.46***	(0.01)	3.61***	(0.01)	3.64***	(0.01)
N (observations)	5530		6347		8406	
N (groups)	872		993		1328	

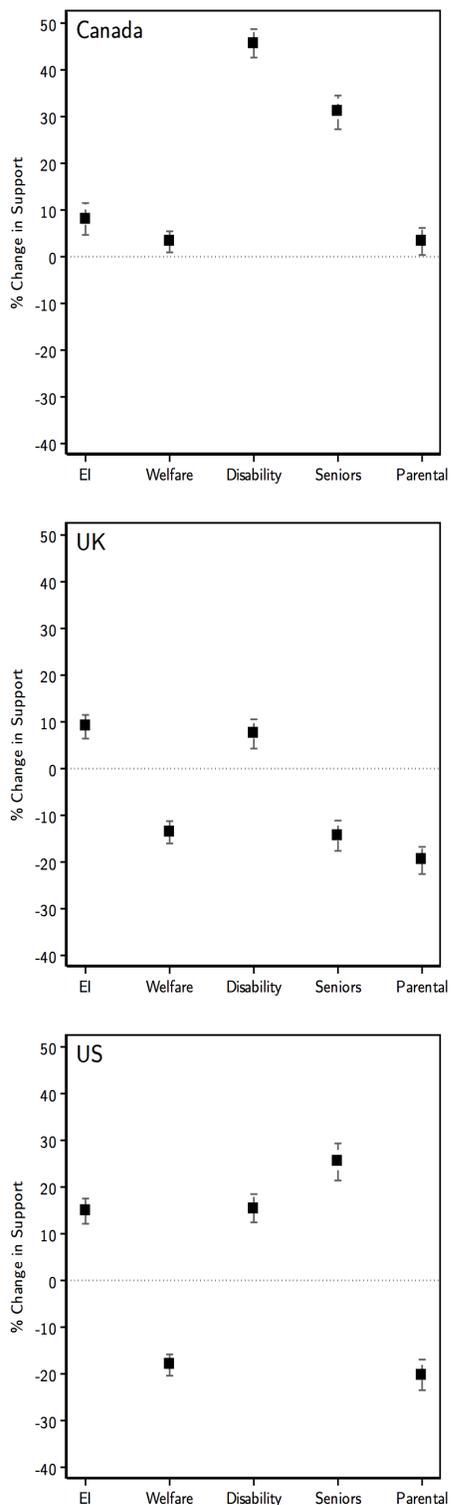
* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$. Cells contain OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Based on white, non-foreign born respondents only (unweighted). The dependent variable is percentage change in support based on the amount offered in the vignette.

Table 2: Treatment Effects on Cash Transfer Levels

	CA		UK		US	
Disability	37.082***	(3.292)	-6.327*	(3.073)	16.876***	(2.898)
Undeserving	-19.555***	(2.858)	-29.069***	(2.700)	-30.839***	(2.613)
Undeserving * Disability	3.957	(3.980)	21.997***	(3.821)	17.843***	(3.680)
Black	.543	(2.448)	-8.377**	(3.113)	.995	(2.241)
Asian	-6.957*	(3.212)	-4.406	(3.082)	-2.013	(3.249)
Aboriginal	-3.161	(3.273)			-2.127	(3.326)
South Asian			-3.462	(2.365)		
Hispanic					-3.103	(3.826)
Female	3.182	(2.854)	1.224	(2.696)	5.975*	(2.612)
Government Action	27.455***	(4.812)	39.557***	(5.194)	29.659***	(3.999)
View of Recipients	24.215***	(3.529)	30.744***	(3.309)	40.430***	(3.614)
Vignette Order	-1.184*	(.490)	-.604	(.459)	.492	(.883)
Module Order	.390	(2.357)	3.290	(2.444)	6.574	(7.203)
Wave					-0.08	(2.07)
Constant	-12.179**	(4.619)	-23.595***	(4.469)	-31.421***	(3.096)
Random Effects						
sd(constant)	3.129***	(.063)	3.346***	(.044)	3.325***	(.045)
sd(residual)	3.538***	(.026)	3.518***	(.024)	3.636***	(.021)
N (observations)	1584		1805		2351	
N (groups)	854		995		1265	

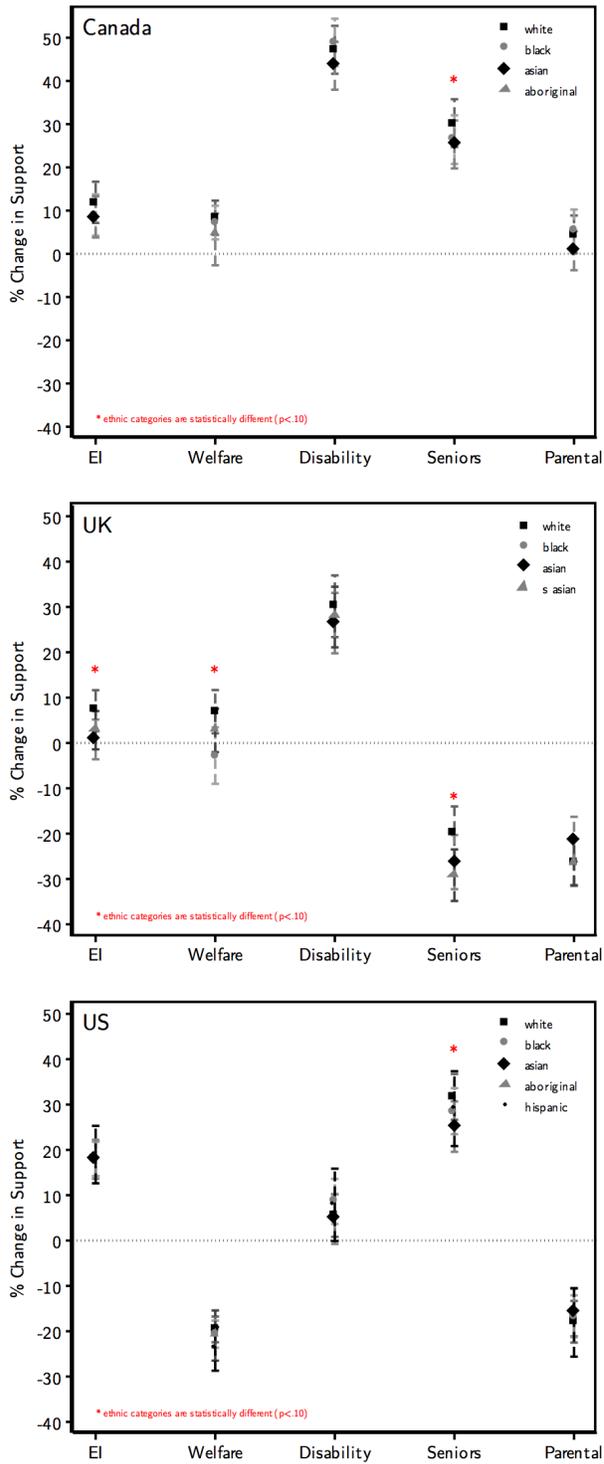
* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$. Cells contain OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Based on white, non-foreign born respondents only (unweighted); using two vignettes with deservingness primes, one on welfare and the other on disability benefits. Current Spending (PPP) is excluded since it is collinear with policy domain in these two-vignette models. The dependent variable is percentage change in support based on the amount offered in the vignette.

Figure 1: Mean Cash Transfer based on Program Type



Average within-respondent effects, based on unweighted RGWS survey, all vignettes combined, white non-foreigners only.

Figure 2 : Mean Cash Transfer based on Program Type and Ethnicity



Average within-respondent, within-vignette racial effects, based on unweighted RGWS survey, all vignettes combined.