

Egoism Contextualized: Self-interest and Public Support for Social Security Provision

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Abstract:

Self-interest is a prominent explanation of why individuals support public responsibility for social security provision. Yet, most existing research analyzes data from large-scale comparative surveys (e.g., ISSP, EVS, ESS) which provides only limited and “snapshot” information on individual-level characteristics that might predict support for public social security provision. This paper uses data from the NLSY97, an extremely comprehensive, longitudinal study of a sample of US respondents born 1980-1984, to provide a detailed analysis of self-interest determinants of welfare attitudes. The availability of longitudinal data allows me to distinguish between effects on welfare attitudes arising from contemporaneous status (e.g., being unemployed now) and “history” (e.g., number of unemployment spells in the past). Furthermore, the paper considers factors such as objective health, cognitive ability, personality traits, and family background which have not been included in previous research as “contextualizing” factors that help to explain individual-level support for public responsibility for social security.