

Deservingness, welfare state reform, and support for social security

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Abstract

Welfare states have been in transition since the mid-1980s. Due to these transitions, social security has become increasingly conditional and selective (Gilbert, 2004). Since the significance of deservingness perceptions increases as social policy designs become increasingly restricted (Gilens, 1999), this paper examines how deservingness perceptions influence the relationship between support for welfare state reforms and support for different social security recipients. Welfare state reforms are mainly guided by two ideological roots (compare Taylor-Gooby, 1997). First, we investigate whether the Dutch public also distinguishes two ideological principles underlying welfare state reforms. The results show that the Dutch public distinguishes two principles underlying welfare state reform support – the first tapping retrenchment, the latter tapping re-commodification. These welfare reforms are not equally applicable to all social security recipients. Citizens differentiate between deserving and undeserving recipients, some recipients are perceived as more deserving than others (Van Oorschot, 2006; Achterberg et al. 2009). Therefore, this paper examines secondly whether support for retrenchment and re-commodification depends on deservingness perceptions. The results show that the relationship between support for re-commodification and support for financially helping recipients does depend on deservingness perceptions based on the level of deviancy of recipients. The relationship between support for retrenchment and support for financially helping recipients is not related to deservingness perceptions based on the level of hardship social security recipients are dealing with.