

Abstract submitted to stream 16, 'Welfare State Attitudes and Economic Crisis', ESPAnet 2010

Title: Poor, ignorant or egoistic? Understanding differences in attitudes toward public spending

There is an ongoing debate about whether public opinion is mainly characterized by internal coherence, consistency and sophistication or whether it is typically lacking such structure. The aim of this paper is to investigate whether individuals' attitudes towards public spending are coherent by using a survey data set containing 'unpriced' as well as 'priced' survey questions. One battery of 'unpriced' questions ask whether the respondent thinks that the amount of tax revenue that goes to a specific program should be increased or decreased. The second battery of 'priced' questions focus on the same policy areas but instead ask whether the respondent is *personally* willing to pay more in tax in order to increase spending. Using Latent Class Analysis and combining these two sets of survey questions makes it possible to determine whether people's attitudes tend to be consistent across the two different types of questions, or whether inconsistent attitude patterns arise when 'unpriced' and 'priced' questions are used simultaneously. Spending on five different social policy areas are investigated. The empirical section is divided into three parts, the first one exploring the patterning of attitudes by way of LCA, thereby addressing the principal question of whether individuals' attitudes towards public spending tend to be consistent or inconsistent. Five attitude clusters are identified, one displaying significant inconsistency. Secondly, OLS regression is used in order to explore how structural position and economic circumstances affect the likelihood of belonging to different attitude patterns. The aim here is to study the structural determinants underlying membership into the different attitude clusters identified, with an emphasis on the cluster displaying 'inconsistent' attitudes. The last part of the empirical analysis further investigates the attitude clusters identified by linking them to other sets of attitudes related to the welfare state.

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