Poor, ignorant or egoistic?

Explaining differences in attitudes towards taxes and public spending in Sweden

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Introduction

In most contemporary Western democracies, political struggles over taxation and social spending priorities dominate domestic politics. Indeed, knowledge about the major political parties' preferences in these matters provides us with key information when defining the political landscape in a country. The prominent position of the welfare state in national politics is understandable. In the Scandinavian countries, the tax revenue is at present as large as nearly half of the gross domestic product. Even in less ambitious welfare states such as the USA and Canada, the total tax revenue constitutes about a third of the GDP. Needless to say, in all western countries, the lion's share of the tax revenue is used for financing social insurance programs and social services.

The impact of the welfare state on the everyday life of citizens is substantial but varies in effect across social groups; some collect more social benefits than others; tax levels differ between income groups; and some social strata are more dependent on the services of the welfare state than others, just to mention a few areas where social cleavages may translate into conflicting political preferences. Making a judgement based on these premises, it is tempting to assume that the welfare state should occupy an equally prominent position in the political minds of citizens as it does for political parties. After all, rational voters should be interested in both knowing and trying to influence how tax money are collected and spent.

However, a review of the available empirical evidence - mostly from the USA - suggests that the issue of whether citizens are well-informed and have real political preferences is hotly contested. This paper focuses on a key issue in this “non-attitudes” debate: the “something for nothing” syndrome – that there often exists a discrepancy between what people want and what they are willing to pay for. The study is based on Swedish nationally-representative data using two sets of specially designed item batteries on preferences for public spending across a range of social policy areas. As we will argue below, Sweden represents an interesting test-case for understanding cross-national differences in the quality of mass public opinion.

Previous research: political non-attitudes

Some fifty years ago, after a careful analysis of the American citizenry, Converse (1964: 213),

initiated the non-attitudes debate by arguing that the fragmented, ill-informed, and incoherent political attitudes that he had observed "are not a pathology limited to a thin and disoriented bottom layer of the *lumpenproletariat*; they are immediately relevant in understanding the bulk of mass political behaviour." Some thirty years later, Bartels (1996: 184 check) summarized the situation of the field and argued that "the political ignorance of the American voter is one of the best documented data in political science." Drawing on evidence from the USA, citizens with non-attitudes seem to constitute about half to two thirds of the electorate (Zaller 1992: 30ff).

The image portrayed by Converse and his followers has however met strong opposition as well. Convincing arguments and accompanying empirical evidence against the thesis are brought forward by, among others, Inglehart 1990; Page & Shapiro 1992, 1993; Wlezien 1995; Soroka & Wlezien 2005; Brooks & Manza 2007).[1] It is, however, important to note that most of these studies more or less accept that individuals may have irrational and inconsistent attitudes. The “key innovation” (Brooks and Manza 2007: 147) for the study of policy-public opinion linkages is “social aggregation” (Page & Shapiro 1992); to limit the appropriate level of analysis to the aggregate level as the collective body of public opinion is supposed to behave rational and behaves understandably (but see Kinder & Herzog 1993: 372). Nevertheless, even in the light of this modification, there are some issues that are still unresolved.

For the opponents of the thesis, a particularly troublesome and persistent empirical finding to account for is the widespread lack of understanding of tax policy and the basic functions of the tax system and its connections to social spending. In fact, these are the areas where the public seems to have tremendous difficulties to possess informed and well-defined political preferences. In *The Psychology of Taxation*, Lewis (1982: 71) resignedly concludes, “we have to accept that attitudes towards taxation and public expenditure are based on something less than perfect knowledge on the part of taxpayers. More realistically, attitudes should be examined for what they are - a product of myth and misperception.” Bartles (2005: 21) goes even further: ““public opinion” about tax policy is a very fragile concept (...) to the extent that it exists at all (...).”

[1] For an overview of the non-attitudes debate and its tremendous influence on the field in the USA, see Kinder (1983).

Other scholars are quite pessimistic as well. Relying on collected evidence (Lewis 1978; Citrin 1979; Beedle & Taylor-Gooby 1983), Steinmo (1998:xi) states that "those who have carefully studied the public's attitudes, perceptions and knowledge of taxes and tax policy have generally found that citizens are indeed remarkably misinformed and/or confused." The results reported by Roberts et al. (1994) travel in the same direction: ignorance is widespread. Respondents favour the principle of progressive taxation but reject it in concrete applications. In a thorough analysis of the tax reform in California, Sears and Citrin (1985: 260) note that there is a "striking invariance in the disjunction between opinions about taxing and spending. The desire to get something for nothing is well entrenched among a substantial portion of the citizenry in all segments of society. There remain tiny extremes whose general attitudes about the role of government are tightly bound to reactions to one specific effort to harness the public sector. But for most people the connections are loose."[2] Bartles (2005: 21), analyzing public attitudes towards the tax reforms under the Bush administration in 2001 and 2003, comes to a similar conclusion: "survey results as these make it clear that most ordinary citizens are remarkably ignorant and uncertain about the workings of the tax system and the policy options under consideration, or actually adopted, in Washington." In relation to the policy-public opinion linkage, Steinmo (1993: 195), rhetorically asks, "if citizens are poorly informed about taxes – even their own taxes – how can they be expected to provide guidance to political leaders? The answer, I submit, is that citizens provide little guidance indeed."

A recurrent theme in most of the above works is the *something for nothing* (hereafter SFN) phenomenon: many voters prefer increased social spending and lower taxes simultaneously, and the provided explanation is in the spirit of Converse: (American) citizens are generally ill-informed, insensitive to tax policy implications on welfare programs, and, to paraphrase Bartels (2005: 21), "oddly disconnected from (or misconnected to) a variety of relevant values and material interests."

While the SFN segment of the population is usually interpreted as politically confused and ignorant citizens, a second, less widespread, interpretation is that citizens are generally rational and simply assume that someone else will pay the extra taxes needed for financing

[2] But see Welch (1985) suggesting that the SFN segment may be considerable smaller if alternative sources of financing increased spending are presented to the respondents.

the increase in social spending (Hadenius 1986: 123; Key 1961). For those still believing that citizens are reasonably well-informed and understand complex policy issues, this argument - that the SFN segment is a group of free riders - provides a comfortable retreat.[3]

Objective of the paper and analytic strategy

The objective of this paper is to make an attempt to identify the segment of citizens possessing the SFN mentality. We will also analyze its social base and how it deviates from groups of citizens holding consistent attitudes towards the welfare state. [A third part will analyze whether SFN attitudes are differently connected to other relevant values and attitudes towards the welfare state. Not included in this version] The overall objective is to get an informed view on the SFN group of citizens; are they mainly a group of ill-informed voters with incoherent attitudes (hereafter in the analysis denoted "confused") or do they possess the same qualities in terms of coherence as other groups of citizens supporting the welfare state, where the only exception is that they are not prepared to pay for the extra costs of increased social spending? (In the analysis denoted "free-riders.")

As previously noted, the above debate originated in the USA, and still continues to be a salient but rather isolated US-phenomenon. In Sweden the issue about public non-attitudes has never been particularly salient, and accordingly there are not many studies explicitly examining the prevalence of non-attitudes in the public. However, from a comparative perspective there are reasons to believe that the occurrence of non-attitudes towards taxes and spending is considerably lower in Sweden compared to the USA. Borrowing insights from the historical institutionalism school (Rothstein & Steinmo 2002; Thelén & Steinmo 1994; Rothstein 1998) and the power resources approach (Korpi & Palme 1998, 2003; Korpi 1980, 1983, 2006) the argument is that cross-national variation in non-attitudes may fruitfully be sought among factors related to the welfare state and the rhetoric of associated organized interests – political parties, unions, and employer organizations – surrounding issues of taxation and redistributive welfare policies.

More concretely, the argument takes into account the prominent levels of taxes and social spending in Sweden, and the clear grouping or organized interests along the social class axis

[3] We have to admit that we do not believe that such an interpretation would fare well with the data presented in Sears and Citrin (1985) and Bartels (2005) but from the analytical perspective of this paper, the argument is interesting.

– factors that are all conducive to the salience of redistributive politics in public and political debates. Strategies pursued by business interests and right-wing parties aiming at cutting taxes and decreasing redistribution have routinely been challenged by left movement counter-arguments defending the current state of affairs by arguing the necessity of taxes to secure the quality of welfare policies and to achieve redistributive goals. Compared to the Swedish polarized environment of prosecutors and defenders, the milieu surrounding tax politics in the USA appears as less antagonistic, since virtually all organized interests tend to act as prosecutors, and when it comes to social spending rhetoric, "politicians do their best to spread the illusion of costless progress" (Sears & Citrin 1985: 259; Peters 1991; Steinmo 1993; Lipset 1996).

A closely related factor of importance is the extent to which the welfare state can be considered to have a major influence on citizens' everyday life. Owing to the residual character of the American welfare state, experiences at the grassroots level of public welfare policies are likely to be more common among Swedish citizens than among the American citizenry. Finally, the tax system is often conceived of as very technical and difficult to grasp (Peters 1991). However, in comparison with the fairly standardized system in Sweden, the American tax system appears to be substantially more complex and particularistic (Steinmo 1993). It is therefore plausible that the higher transparency of the Swedish tax system facilitates a more accurate public understanding of the functioning of the tax system.

In general, scattered empirical evidence does not collide with the above suggestions. Milner (2002), applying a comparative perspective, found that countries with welfare states equalizing material as well as intellectual resources have higher level of politically well-informed citizens. In a comprehensive comparative study of political attitudes, Granberg and Holmberg (1988) found more coherent and tightly integrated patterns – particularly concerning welfare state related attitudes – in Sweden compared to the USA. Similar results are observed by Svallfors (2004). Edlund's (1999a: 128) examination of attitudes towards state redistribution reports again similar findings and concludes that perceptions of progressive taxation as a redistributive instrument are far more common among Swedish voters compared to the American electorate. Other studies related to the non-attitude thesis are in the same direction. In relation to attitudinal stability, Niemi and Westholm (1984) found that political attitudes were less stable in the USA than in Sweden. A panel

analysis of attitudes towards the Swedish "tax reform of the century" shows little support for the non-attitudes thesis. Rather than finding fragmented attitude patterns in flux, the results show that the structure of attitudes is characterized by stability and coherency to a significant degree on both the aggregate and the individual level. It is suggested that attitudes are sometimes being remodelled, but this remodelling often consists of marginal changes rather than a major change of form (Edlund 1999b). In terms of knowledge of the tax system, studies indicate that Swedes in general have rather good knowledge about the tax system and its general rules (Vogel 1970; Hadenius 1986). Finally, in an analysis of how citizens understand the concept of progressive taxation, Edlund (2003) suggests that "it is difficult to find any evidence (...) supporting the non-attitude thesis that citizens do not understand the concept of progressive taxation." In summary, there are good reasons to suggest that the Swedish welfare state institutions and the surrounding political environment may be exercising substantially stronger educational as well as ideological influences on the relationships between taxes and social spending in the public at large compared to the USA.

After this review of the different approaches to public attitudes relating to taxing and social spending follows a description of the data, methods and measurements applied. The empirical section is divided into three parts, the first one exploring the patterning of social spending preferences by way of Latent Class Analysis, thereby answering the principal question of whether the presence of the SFN syndrome is common in the Swedish electorate. Secondly, OLS regression is used in order to explore the individual-level determinants connected to different attitude patterns. [The last section of the empirical analysis further investigates the attitude patterns revealed by linking them to broader sets of attitudes related to the welfare state. Not included in this version.] We will thereby analyze the social base of SFN sentiments as well as the relation between SFN attitudes and other sets of attitudes related to the welfare state. Finally, the main findings are summarized along with a concluding discussion.

Data, method and variables

From a methodological as well as a substantive perspective, it is clear that the larger the share of citizens holding the SFN attitude, the harder to correctly estimate the true political support or opposition for increased social spending. The strategy applied in this paper to

identify SFN sentiments is to use two different types of survey items measuring social spending preferences (Confalonieri & Newton 1995; Lewis 1982). One set contains "priced" items emphasizing the cost of public spending while the other set do not explicitly connect an increase in public spending with tax raises. The difference between the two sets of survey questions is thus that the "priced" questions urge the respondents to consider their own tax contribution when financing increased public spending. It is emphasized that an increase in public spending comes with a price in terms of the respondent having to pay more in tax in order to finance increased spending. Conversely, there is no mentioning of the respondent having to pay more in tax in the "unpriced" survey items. These items simply ask whether the amount of tax revenue that goes to a particular social policy area should increase, stay the same or decrease. The first step of the analysis aims at finding out whether attitude patterns are consistent across the two different types of questions, or if there exists a significant discrepancy between the answers to "unpriced" and "priced" questions, respectively?

One of very few data sets containing both "unpriced" as well as "priced" survey questions about public spending is the 1998 Living Conditions Survey administered by Statistics Sweden. The sample used here is representative for the adult (18–79 years) Swedish population and consists of 5324 respondents (response rate: 76.7 per cent). The dependent variable – social spending preferences – is constructed with two sets of items and a total of ten indicators each capturing public spending preferences in relation to a particular social policy. The five areas included are the following: "medical and health care" (items A1, A2), "support for the elderly" (items B1, B2), "support for families with children" (items C1, C2), "employment policies" (items D1, D2) and "social assistance" (items E1, E2). The first battery of questions (items A1 – E1) contains "unpriced" items on increasing or decreasing public spending without encouraging respondents to think of their own tax contribution when financing these social policies. The second battery of "priced" questions (items A2 – E2), on the other hand, explicitly encourages respondents to think of their own tax contribution when financing social policies. The wording of the first battery of questions is as follows: "Taxes are used for different purposes. Do you think that the amount of tax revenue that goes to the programmes that I mention should increase, stay the same, or decrease?" The response categories are "increase", "stay the same", "decrease" and "don't know". These

have been coded so that three categories are distinguished: “increase”, “stay the same or decrease” and “don’t know”. The second battery of questions asks the respondent to state whether s/he is personally willing to pay more in tax in order to increase spending on a specific programme: “Would you be personally willing to pay more in tax if the money went to any of the following areas …?” The response categories for the second question battery are the following: “Yes, absolutely”, “Yes, presumably”, “No, presumably not” and “No, absolutely not”. These categories have been collapsed so that those favoring increased spending (“Yes, absolutely” + “Yes, presumably”) are separated from those answering “no” (“No, presumably not” + “No, absolutely not”) and “Don’t know”.

In order to identify the social base associated with different attitude patterns a number of independent variables measured at the individual level are used. These variables have been identified by earlier research as important predictors for social spending preferences and include gender, age, class, household composition, employment sector, income and economic problems. The class variable distinguishes 6 categories according to the EGP classification (Erikson & Goldthorpe 1992). Income is measured as quartiles according to household income. Employment sector separates public employees from those working in the private sector. The main methods applied in the analysis are Latent Class Analysis and OLS regression.

Patterns of social spending preferences

SFN sentiments are in the following analysis identified as those respondents expressing a preference for “increased spending” on items A1-E1 but not on the corresponding item A2-E2. In order to explore the patterning of such responses across “unpriced” and “priced” items, a number of latent class models are tested against the data. Using LCA has the advantage of allowing nominal categories to be estimated thereby possibly identifying “ideal types” without restricting attitude patterns to be linear (see Hagenaars and Halman 1989). Eight LCA models are reported in Table 1. Small L^2 and low BIC values indicate representative or “good” models. The L^2 value of Model 1 indicates the maximum association between indicators that can be explained by any latent class model and thus represents the baseline model for model-comparisons. After running several explorative models we selected the 6-cluster model, which reduced the L^2 value by 71 percent, as representing the data. Adding

additional clusters did not provide any valuable extra information and did only negligibly reduce the L^2 value.

[Table 1 about here]

Which "ideal types" can be identified when social spending preferences are simultaneously measured with "unpriced" as well as "priced" survey questions? Is there a segment of the Swedish public wanting "something for nothing"? The characteristics of each of the six cluster are reported in Table 2. The table shows the probability (0-100) for indicator response "Increase" and "Don't know" for each cluster (the probability for the third response category, "Decrease or stay the same", is thus given by subtracting these probabilities from 100). For example, the probability for indicator response "increase" on the first indicator A1 (medical and health care) is 93 per cent for cluster 2 which can be compared to 19 per cent for cluster 4. The probability for the third indicator response, "decrease or stay the same", is therefore 6 per cent (100 – (93+1) = 6) among cluster 2 respondents. The size of each cluster is also reported in the table along with a discrepancy measure (DM) which captures the average degree of inconsistency between "unpriced" and "priced" questions for each cluster. It is calculated as:

DM = ((|A1-A2|) + (|B1-B2|) + (|C1-C2|) + (|D1-D2|) + (|E1-E2|)) / 5

It is evident from Table 2 that four distinct clusters of social spending preferences can be identified (clusters 1-4). In clusters 5-6, we find respondents with comparatively high probabilities to answer don't know. Although the structure of the indifferent responses is not similar across these clusters, their small sizes effectively prevents the execution of more in-depth analysis. Here, they will be treated as two groups having no particular preference about public spending. Returning to clusters 1-4, it seems that three of these are characterized by a relatively high degree of attitudinal consistency across both types of survey questions whereas one cluster appears to lack such consistency. The largest cluster (size: 35.6%), cluster 1, consists of respondents expressing strong support for increased public spending on universal programs such as "medical and health care" and "elderly care" regardless of question battery. However, these respondents express considerably less support for increased spending on "selective" programmes such as support for families with children, employment policies and social assistance. Another large group of respondents

belong to cluster 2. These respondents clearly express consistent and the overall strongest support for increased social spending. Compared to other clusters, cluster 2 has the highest probability to be in favor of increased spending on all ten indicators. Within this cluster, the probability of favoring increased spending ranges between 75 and 99 per cent on all indicators, except on E1 (social assistance). Respondents belonging to cluster 4 generally express the lowest level of support for high public spending and are, furthermore, consistent in their spending preferences across "unpriced" and "priced" items. The third cluster identified is of particular interest since the social spending preferences of these respondents clearly lack the consistency found within clusters 1, 2 and 4. When focusing on the first battery of indicators, A1–E1, cluster 3 respondents show great similarity with those respondents belonging to cluster 1 and 2 in their relatively strong support for increased social spending. However, this similarity vanishes completely when the second set of "priced" indicators are studied. Cluster 3 respondents now express the lowest level of support for increased spending compared to all other clusters. Respondents belonging to cluster 3 thus appear to dramatically reevaluate their support for social spending when faced with questions highlighting the fact that increased public spending come with a price. The respondents belonging to this cluster clearly hold attitudes well in line with the SFN thesis.

[Table 2 about here]

A look at the discrepancy measure presented in Table 2 confirms the inconsistency characterizing the social spending preferences of cluster 3 respondents: the mean of the absolute difference between each paired items is 31 for cluster 3, compared to 6 for clusters 1 and 2. The probability of favoring increased spending thus differs on average by 31 percentage units across all five pairs of indicators for cluster 3 respondents. This difference is most staggering when it comes to "support for the elderly", indicators B1 and B2; when asked an "unpriced" question, the probability to answer "increase spending" is 93 per cent which can be compared to only 3 per cent when the "priced" questions is used. A considerable degree of coherence can be found among cluster 1, 2 and 4 respondents. Since these clusters constitute 36, 33, and 9 per cent, respectively, of the sample it seems that Swedish mass opinion on public spending is characterized by coherence rather than incoherence. Considering the remaining 22 percent of the sample, the two small indifferent clusters (5 and 6) make up 7 per cent of the respondents and the SFN pattern in cluster 3

constitutes about 15 per cent of the sample. The latent class analysis has without doubt identified an interesting category whose social spending preferences seem to suggest that they want “something for nothing”.

How should the ambivalent SFN pattern associated with cluster 3 respondents be understood; as pure free riders that assume that someone else should pay the necessary extra taxes financing the increased social spending, or as ill-informed, ignorant, and confused citizens possessing political non-attitudes? How this segment of “something for nothing”-attitudes relates to a number of individual-level characteristics will hopefully provide us with some clues.

Associations between structural determinants and cluster membership

In the following analysis cluster 3 (labeled “SFN”) will be focused and contrasted with cluster 1 (labeled “universal only”), cluster 2 (labeled “encompassing”) and cluster 4 (labeled “sceptics”). The reason for this is because of the similarities cluster 3 respondents display in relation to the other clusters when “unpriced” and “priced” indicators are viewed separately. On the former, respondents of cluster 3 share similar attitudes as the ones belonging to cluster 1 and 2 while the latter set of questions instead reveal a striking similarity with cluster 4 respondents. The aim is now to study how individual background characteristics and economic factors are related to the probability to belong to these different clusters. The determinants underlying membership into cluster 3 will of course be of particular interest.

A number of OLS regressions will estimate the impact of gender, age, class, household composition, employment sector, household income and economic problems on the probability to belong to these various clusters. Initially, traditional background characteristics are included in Table 3. The bivariate estimates as well as the estimates derived from the multiple regressions are displayed in the table. How do various structural determinants impact on the probability to hold such ambivalent social spending preferences as the ones characteristic of cluster 3 respondents?

Overall, the results for clusters 2 and 4 indicate the significance of gender, class, and employment sector and are in line with previous research on social spending preferences (see e.g. Edlund 2006; Svallfors 1996; Svallfors 1999). For example, an increase in cluster 2

membership probability is associated with belonging to the working class and working within the public sector. The opposite relationship between these structural determinants and cluster membership probability can be observed for the “sceptical” respondents belonging to cluster 4. These respondents express the lowest levels of support for increased spending among all clusters and are typically men belonging to the service class. These clusters are of less interest in the subsequent analysis and serve primarily as contrasting cases for comparisons against the ambivalent respondents of cluster 3.

[Table 3 about here]

Which individual background characteristics are associated with cluster 3 membership? Table 3 shows that the SFN sentiments of cluster 3 respondents are primarily determined by gender, age and household composition. Interestingly, the typical determinants predicting welfare state support such as social class and employment sector does not increase or decrease the probability to belong to cluster 3. The probability for women to belong to cluster 3 is 5,5 per cent higher compared to men. When it comes to age the pattern identified suggests that the youngest and oldest age groups are significantly overrepresented in cluster 3 compared to the middle aged groups. The variable “household composition” is further indicating that “singles with children” are the ones having the highest probability to belong to cluster 3.

The patterns associated with cluster 3 membership lean toward an interpretation of the segment as being in economically vulnerable positions. Those of young or old age might well be more exposed to economic uncertainty compared to the middle aged, as might also be the case for women compared to men. This picture is further strengthened when the impact of household composition is examined. Here “singles with children” stand out as having about 7 per cent higher probability to belong to cluster 3 compared to “couples”. The estimates associated with “couples with children” and “singles” also stand out from “singles with children” but these are not statistically significant at the 95 % level. The next step in the analysis therefore incorporate two economic variables in order to examine whether the gender, age and household differences found have something to do with differences in economic vulnerability.

New models for clusters 1-4 are therefore presented in Table 4 incorporating two variables measuring income as well as whether respondents are experiencing economic problems. Income is measured as quartiles according to household income and "economic problems" is measured by way of the following survey question: "Going by your current household income, are you able to make ends meet?" One hypothesis might be that the gender, age and household differences disappear when "economic vulnerability" is sufficiently measured and included in the model. If the age and gender differences found have something to do with economic vulnerability these differences should then be significantly reduced in Table 4. This, of course, also applies for the impact of household composition. When examining Table 4 it is evident that this is not the case, the differences based on gender and age have not been significantly reduced by including the variables "income" and "economic problems". These differences remain virtually constant when table 3 and 4 are compared. Taking the economic situation of the respondents into account clearly does not explain why women as well as the young and the old tend to hold SFN attitudes. However, the variable "household composition" is no longer statistically significant indicating that differences between respondents according to their household composition were mainly due to economic differences.

[Table 4 about here]

Although the economic situation of the respondents cannot explain differences between men and women or between different age groups, Table 4 however shows that the occurrence of economic problems distinctly increases the probability to belong to the SFN segment. The difference between those respondents experiencing economic problems and those having no problems making ends meet is about 9 per cent. In a bivariate model (not shown) the variable "income" is statistically significant, but do not reach significance when "economic problems" is included. Having a low income thus impacts on cluster 3 membership probability, but it is mainly a matter of low income categories experiencing economic problems. These results thus imply that the ambivalent social spending preferences found among respondents in cluster 3 – expressing strong support for increased social spending on the "unpriced" indicators (A1–E1) while at the same time expressing very low levels of support for increased spending on the indicators asking whether they personally are willing to pay more in taxes (A2–E2) – is linked to economic vulnerability.

However, including the economic variables in table 4 do not render the differences associated with “gender” and “age” statistically insignificant which would have been expected if these differences were entirely due to economic vulnerability. These substantial differences thus remain a puzzle to explain.

Concluding discussion

This paper has examined public preferences for social spending with an explicit focus on the presence of non-attitudes. The analysis shows that this type of attitudes is not dominant in the Swedish citizenry; indifferent respondents admitting that they do not have any specific preferences constitute about 7 per cent of the electorate. A second group of respondents (15 per cent of the sample) that may fall within the limits of the non-attitude concept is those holding the “something for nothing” attitude (SFN). However, this segment does not easily fit into the non-attitudes concept. As indicated by the structural determinants associated with the SFN pattern, it seems more appropriate to view them as free riders in economically vulnerable positions, rather than ignorant and politically confused citizens. However, this position does not perfectly explain the observed patterns as the increased probability of women as well as of the young and old vs. men and middle-aged, to belong to the SFN segment stand firmly holding economic vulnerability constant. So, a part of the SFN segment may be seen as free riders in non-vulnerable economic positions or politically confused citizens. Our analysis so far is, sadly, not capable of discriminating between these two competing interpretations. This is unfortunate, because whether citizens holding the SFN mentality are in reality free-riders or confused voters may carry different implications on political representation and support. From a non-attitudes perspective the SFN segment would be interpreted as a volatile proportion of the electorate whose voting preferences may be particularly sensitive to the dynamics of political campaign articulations. Rational free riders, on the other hand, are not likely to be open to political persuasion or as sensitive to the type of political rhetoric applied as confused voters.

Another implication of the findings in this paper, which fare rather well with previous Swedish empirical evidence, is that socio-political context may matter for the presence of non-attitudes. Compared to previous US evidence, referred to above, reporting very low levels of consistent attitudes and rather large fractions of different types of non-attitudes patterns, the results reported in this paper, along with previous Swedish evidence, suggests

that national political institutions and associated organized interests may influence the degree of public understanding of the functioning of the tax system and other welfare state institutions. In our view, to focus on such macro-social factors in the search for explaining the non-attitudes phenomenon provides a fruitful alternative/complement to approaches arguing for a stricter focus on socio-psychological traits and abilities on the individual level (Lewis 1982; Kinder 1983; Zaller 1992). Indeed, individual circumstances matter, but so do national contexts.

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Table 1. Model fit for eight Latent Class Models.

		L^2	BIC (L^2)	df	L^2-reduction %
Model 1	1-cluster	26191.568	–17987.4	5165	0.0
Model 2	2-cluster	16129.145	–27870.2	5144	38.4
Model 3	3-cluster	11121.402	–32698.3	5123	57.5
Model 4	4-cluster	9485.649	–34154.4	5102	63.8
Model 5	5-cluster	8467.177	–34993.3	5081	67.7
Model 6	**6-cluster**	**7602.651**	**–35678.2**	**5060**	**71.0**

Table 2. Public spending preferences. Probability (0-100) for indicator responses **Increase|Don't know** by cluster membership. 6-cluster model from Table 1.

	Cluster						
Indicators	1	2	3	4	5	6	% in tot. sample
A1	78|01	93|01	89|02	19|02	46|38	24|68	76|05
B1	78|01	95|01	93|02	20|02	48|38	23|76	77|05
C1	36|03	78|04	55|06	11|01	26|48	10|79	49|08
D1	46|04	80|02	59|04	18|03	21|56	19|70	55|08
E1	10|07	41|11	19|16	03|05	07|67	02|87	21|14
A2	90|00	99|00	02|00	12|01	27|70	40|00	68|03
B2	92|01	99|00	03|00	13|01	24|75	41|03	69|04
C2	53|02	96|01	04|00	08|01	10|87	25|04	53|05
D2	41|02	84|02	07|00	08|02	05|88	22|06	45|06
E2	27|02	75|03	02|00	02|01	00|92	18|04	35|06
Cluster size %	35.6	33.2	14.5	9.3	4.6	2.8	
DM	6	6	31	3	8	18	

Table 3. Social spending preferences. Cluster membership probability (0 – 100) by individual structural location. OLS regression. Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Variable values equal to 0 are reference categories.

	Cluster 1 *Universal only*		Cluster 2 *Encompassing*		Cluster 3 *SFN*		Cluster 4 *Sceptics*	
	Bivar.	Mult.	Bivar.	Mult.	Bivar.	Mult.	Bivar.	Mult.
Gender								
Men	**4.12**	**3.04**	–1.83	1.06	**–4.50**	**–5.50**	**4.78**	**4.07**
Women	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Age								
18-29 years	**3.76**	4.17	–0.17	–2.94	–1.16	0.16	0.43	0.09
30-49 years	**4.24**	**4.98**	**5.24**	2.57	**–4.98**	**–6.69**	**2.71**	2.51
50-64 years	**3.76**	2.41	**6.84**	**5.05**	**–5.80**	**–5.40**	2.10	1.13
65-79 years	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Class								
Self-employed	**6.54**	**7.02**	**–8.58**	**–8.79**	0.88	2.86	**4.13**	**3.48**
Service class I	**5.24**	**4.02**	**–8.86**	**–11.89**	**–3.58**	–0.69	**11.87**	**10.96**
Service class II	**3.59**	3.11	–1.33	**–3.57**	–0.21	1.18	**4.62**	**4.47**
Routine non-manuals	**5.06**	**4.95**	–2.05	–2.75	0.72	0.91	–0.52	–0.23
Skilled workers	–1.76	–2.50	**4.92**	**4.08**	0.28	1.69	–0.06	–0.87
Unskilled workers	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Household comp.								
Couples	**11.15**	**11.42**	**–5.96**	–2.63	**–6.19**	**–7.45**	1.35	1.36
Couples with children	**10.26**	**8.22**	–4.89	–2.51	**–5.93**	–4.21	1.97	0.59
Singles	**8.21**	**8.39**	**–10.18**	**–6.53**	–3.79	–5.02	2.17	3.01
Singles with children	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Employment sector								
Private	**3.48**	2.60	**–5.16**	**–5.75**	0.42	2.11	1.17	0.70
Public	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Intercept		**18.80**		**41.94**		**24.71**		1.76

Estimates in **boldface** = $p < 0.05$.

Table 4. Social spending preferences. Cluster membership probability (0 – 100) by individual structural location and economic vulnerability. OLS regression. Cell entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Variable values equal to 0 are reference categories.

	Cluster 1 *Universal only*	Cluster 2 *Encompassing*	Cluster 3 *SFN*	Cluster 4 *Sceptics*
Gender				
Men	2.45	0.14	**–4.90**	**4.33**
Women	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Age				
18 – 29 years	**5.36**	**–6.62**	0.80	0.33
30 – 49 years	**5.50**	–0.30	**–6.16**	2.55
50 – 64 years	2.48	2.41	**–4.64**	0.87
65 – 79 years	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Class				
Self-employed	**6.59**	**–9.00**	3.56	2.83
Service class I	1.65	**–11.34**	1.74	**9.57**
Service class II	1.83	**–4.06**	2.65	**3.36**
Routine non-manuals	**4.26**	–3.16	1.42	–0.71
Skilled workers	–3.05	**4.01**	2.02	–0.89
Unskilled workers	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Employment sector				
Private	2.44	**–5.47**	2.44	0.34
Public	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Household composition				
Couples	**8.13**	–2.13	–3.52	–0.83
Couples with children	6.12	–2.22	–2.11	–0.64
Singles	**7.33**	–5.54	–3.25	1.46
Singles with children	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Income				
High	**4.56**	–2.12	–2.42	1.87
Medium/high	3.58	3.45	–1.54	–1.57
Low/medium	**4.93**	1.90	–1.27	–1.80
Low	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Economic problems				
No difficulties making ends meet	**8.28**	2.47	**–8.83**	1.77
Some difficulties making ends meet	**6.81**	–0.93	**–4.97**	1.44
Difficulties making ends meet	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Intercept	**11.75**	**43.47**	**27.30**	2.98

Estimates in **boldface** = $p < 0.05$.