TILBURG ♦ UNIVERSITY

Tilburg University

Popular explanations of poverty in Europe

Lepianka, D.A.; Gelissen, J.P.T.M.; van Oorschot, W.J.H.

Published in:
Acta Sociologica

Publication date:
2010

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal

Citation for published version (APA):
Lepianka, D. A., Gelissen, J. P. T. M., & van Oorschot, W. J. H. (2010). Popular explanations of poverty in Europe: Effects of contextual and individual characteristics across 28 European countries. *Acta Sociologica*, *53*(1), 53-72. http://hdl.handle.net/10411/15672

Popular Explanations of Poverty in Europe: Effects of Contextual and Individual Characteristics across 28 European Countries

Dorota Lepianka, John Gelissen and Wim van Oorschot

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://asj.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/53/1/53

Published by:
$SAGE

http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
Nordic Sociological Association

Additional services and information for *Acta Sociologica* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://asj.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://asj.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations http://asj.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/53/1/53

Popular Explanations of Poverty in Europe

Effects of Contextual and Individual Characteristics across 28 European Countries

Dorota Lepianka

AIAS, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

John Gelissen

Department of Methodology and Statistics, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands

Wim van Oorschot

Department of Sociology, Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands

abstract: In this contribution we describe and explain the differences in popular poverty attributions that exist within and between 28 European countries. On the basis of the existing literature we distinguish five predictors: awareness of the existence of poverty, personal experience of disadvantage, personal values, socio-demographic background and structural and cultural country-level characteristics. Using data from the European Values Survey (EVS) 1999/2000, we assess for most of these predictors the extent to which they relate directly to people's partial ranking of popular poverty attributions. The results of rank-ordered logistic regression models show that differences in popular poverty explanations relate directly to whether one lives in a country with a Catholic tradition and a high level of poverty, their (subjective) experience of disadvantage and personal values. Furthermore, we find that the size of the various associations depends on people's particular choices of poverty explanations.

keywords: Europe ◆ EVS ◆ poverty ◆ poverty attributions ◆ public opinion ◆ rank-ordered logit

Introduction and research questions

Since the beginning of the 1980s, following the emergence of the so-called 'new poverty' in European countries, policymakers and social scientists have become preoccupied once again with the issue of poverty. The economic crisis of the late 1970s led to the deterioration of living conditions to such an extent that even people ready and able to work were unable to find employment. 'New poverty' came to be seen as a danger that could strike everybody, including those who formerly enjoyed secure jobs and benefited from relative material stability. More recently, the poverty debate has been fuelled by the rise in the numbers of the 'working poor'. In several European countries, due to the retrenchment of welfare provisions and the dualization of labour markets, an increasing number of the full-time employed cannot achieve a

standard of living above 60 per cent of the median income, which is the European Union (EU) definition of relative poverty (e.g. Andress and Lohmann, 2008).

Among studies on the measurement, dynamics, causes and consequences of poverty, not much research has been done on public perceptions of the poor and lay attributions for living in need. This empirical void is surprising, considering the important role that popular poverty explanations play in legitimizing social inequalities and delimiting the boundaries of welfare state intervention in general (Kluegel et al., 1995; van Oorschot and Halman, 2000) and with respect to anti-poverty programmes in particular (Waxman, 1983). Moreover, most of the existing studies have been limited to a single national, usually Anglo-Saxon, setting. This specifically Anglo-Saxon – and in particular American – research tradition has fuelled the continuous prominence of poverty as a social and moral problem in American culture and its strong links with welfare policy (Handler and Hasenfeld, 1991; van Oorschot, 2007). In Continental Europe, there is surprisingly little empirically based knowledge about what Europeans believe to be the causes of poverty and what induces their particular modes of thinking. Even less is known about national differences in attributing poverty and the universality of associations between specific causal beliefs and their determinants.

This study sets out to fill this gap in several ways. First, on the basis of European Values Survey (EVS) 1999/2000 data, we describe the popularity of various poverty explanations among the European public. Second, we evaluate the antecedents of lay poverty attributions. This is of paramount importance: popular perceptions or opinions do not exist in a vacuum; they are affected by other beliefs and values held by the individuals, their background and stratification experience, as well as the wider opinion climate. While in previous studies various antecedents of lay poverty explanations have been identified, they have not been brought together within one study.

Third, we look closely at regional and national variations in popular poverty attributions. Our analyses encompass the largest number of countries examined in any of the previous studies conducted at the level of the individual. This permits testing of the hypotheses derived from the literature in a broader cross-national setting and assessing of effects of both individual and contextual variables on individuals' poverty attributions. To do this, we use the rank-ordered logistic regression model, which takes full advantage of the information included in the EVS data.

Types of popular poverty explanations

In every study on people's perceptions of the causes of poverty, one dimension explicitly returns. On the one side there is the individualistic view, according to which poverty is the product of factors operating at the individual level, such as personal traits and behaviour of the poor themselves. On the other, there is the social explanation, according to which poverty is a result of structural factors (economic, political and/or cultural) operating at the supra-individual, social level (e.g. van Oorschot and Halman, 2000; Gallie and Paugam, 2002). There are, nonetheless, empirical studies that provide evidence of a second fate–blame dimension in poverty attributions (van Oorschot and Halman, 2000). Here, poverty is seen either as the result of uncontrollable, impersonal and inescapable factors operating beyond the agency of any type, or as the (intended or unintended) outcome of actions and behaviour of individuals or groups. While the first view is fatalistic, the latter implies that some social actor(s) can be held responsible for poverty or even blamed for it. When formulating our hypotheses we follow the existing studies and focus predominantly on the core individual–social dimension. However, when assessing the determinants of poverty explanations we make full use of our empirical data and take into account also the second fate–blame dimension.

Individual-level correlates of popular poverty explanations

Lepianka (2007) distinguishes between five categories of antecedents of causal poverty beliefs: *awareness* of the existence of poverty, personal *experience* of disadvantage, *values* and wider beliefs, *socio-demographic* characteristics and (*national*) *contextual characteristics*. The place these antecedents occupy in the literature and their relative importance as predictors of causal poverty beliefs is not equivalent. While *socio-demographic characteristics* are included in all studies on poverty perception and attribution, their influence on poverty explanations seems to be secondary, mediated, among others, by experience and values. (*National*) *contextual characteristics*, on the other hand, are largely neglected: while various studies refer to them theoretically, contextual influences on individual poverty attributions have not, as yet, been examined thoroughly. Reference to *awareness, experience* and *values* is scattered throughout the literature. Some studies focus explicitly on experience (e.g. Nilson, 1981), others give priority to awareness (e.g. Lee et al., 1992); yet others emphasize specific values (Furnham, 1982; Feather, 1999). Below, we limit the discussion to three groups of antecedents: individual experience, personal values and contextual variables, i.e. the three groups of determinants that can be extensively examined with the EVS 1999/2000 data. Note that in this study we treat socio-demographic variables as control variables and do not discuss them in detail.

Experience

Individuals who experience disadvantage are more likely to favour external attributions than people who are spared such distress (Bullock, 1999). Given the (perceived) economic self-interest in redistribution as well as the psychological benefits of the actor–observer bias, such as avoidance of negative self-image (Kluegel and Smith, 1986: 83), this tendency seems natural. However, studies on poverty perceptions have also pointed to social groups who support individualistic poverty explanations despite personal experience of material need, probably in an attempt to create or sustain a (psychological) distance between themselves and the social stratum with which they do not want to be associated. Indeed, the closer people are to poverty, the greater their interest (financial and emotional) 'in blaming the poor and limiting their opportunities' (Nilson, 1981: 535). While, on the economic side, the poor must compete with each other for the same (scarce) jobs, housing opportunities and/or welfare benefits, on the emotional side they have to struggle for a respectable position clearly distinguished from the undeserving bottom rung of society (Nilson, 1981; Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Bullock, 1999). All in all, two alternative hypotheses can be formulated: one emphasizing the positive correlation between the experience of poverty and external poverty beliefs – especially structural or fatalistic attributions – the other expecting a negative association between the experience of poverty and external poverty beliefs.

The relationship between *subjective experience of disadvantage* and lay poverty explanations is much more unequivocal. Previous studies have established that individuals who consider themselves poor and/or identify with the poor on some social dimension(s) (e.g. income, race, gender or class) are more inclined to attribute poverty to structural reasons, whereas those who conceive the poor as 'the other' tend to blame the destitute for their miserable condition (e.g. Nilson, 1981; Kluegel and Smith, 1986). Thus, people who perceive their own circumstances as disadvantageous are more likely to attribute poverty to external situations, and especially structural causes, than those who feel (relatively) advantageous.

Values

References to values, value sets, wider beliefs or attitudes are present in almost all attempts to expound lay attributions for poverty. This is hardly surprising. As pointed out by Feather:

> The explanations that people hold for events are not neutral beliefs that are the end products of un-biased, rational information processing. They are linked to other beliefs, attitudes, and values within the total belief system in ways that give meaning and consistency to the events that occur. (1985: 885)

Values that are most frequently evoked as possible antecedents of poverty attributions encompass conservatism (conceptualized as right-wing political orientation), (Protestant) work ethic, post-materialism, sentiments about distributive justice and religious tradition.

Political orientation, often operationally defined as voting preference or party affiliation (Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Bullock, 1999) and/or self-ascribed position on a liberalism–conservatism (or left–right) scale (Lee et al., 1992; Appelbaum, 2001) has been shown consistently to influence poverty attributions. Research indicates that those with more conservative (rightist) political attitudes more often use individual poverty explanations, whereas persons with more liberal (leftist) political sympathies are more likely to draw on structural poverty attributions. We therefore predict that the more liberal persons' political orientation, the more likely they are to see poverty as a consequence of structural determinants; conversely, the more conservative persons' political attitudes, the more likely they are to blame the poor and their disposition.

The effects of *work ethic* are also consistent. Defined as endorsement of hard work, self-discipline and emphasis on individual activism as a basis for attainment, work ethic has been shown to be strongly related to negative attitudes to those in need (Feather, 1985; Furnham, 1985). Consequently, we hypothesize that greater endorsement of the work ethic is related to greater propensity to attribute poverty to individual idleness and lower inclination to view destitution as caused by factors external to the poor, and especially social injustice.

As far as *post-materialist values* (Inglehart, 1997) are concerned, previous research has shown that people emphasizing the quality of life and giving priority to self-expression (i.e. adherents to post-material values) are usually more perceptive of poverty in their environment, more likely to engage in personal contacts with the poor and more eager to see poverty as an outcome of structural factors and/or failures in the operation of society than those who focus on economic and physical security (i.e. share a materialist value orientation) (Riffault and Rabier, 1977; Eurostat, 1989). Thus, it is hypothesized that the greater the adherence to post-materialist values, the stronger the inclination to attribute poverty to societal/structural factors, and vice versa: the greater the support for material orientation, the more pronounced the preference for individual blame explanations.

The role of *religion* in shaping poverty beliefs is more ambiguous. On the one hand, it is frequently suggested that the impact of religion is indirect and mediated by national value systems (Brechon, 1999). On the other, it is claimed that a direct impact of religion – in terms of religious identity and/or individual level of religiosity rather than religious affiliation *per se* – on poverty beliefs is possible (cf. Scheepers and Te Grootenhuis, 2003). Proposing a general hypothesis as to the influence of religious identity on poverty attributions is therefore not easy. Nonetheless, given the confessional differences in constructing poverty – with Catholic doctrine viewing poverty as God's ordeal and a mark of grace and Protestant tradition linking poverty to immoral or even sinful behaviour (Kahl, 2005) – as well as a stronger Catholic preference for collective rather than individual responsibility (Procter and Hornsby-Smith, 1999), we predict that Catholics are more inclined than others to attribute poverty to reasons external to the poor and especially prone to endorse fatalistic beliefs. Protestants, on the other hand, tend to blame the poor and attribute poverty to their disposition more frequently than others. It can also be hypothesized that frequent churchgoers and people who consider themselves religious are more inclined to attribute poverty to fatalistic causes than those who consider themselves non-religious.

Relationships between poverty attributions and support for *normative justice beliefs* are also difficult to predict. Previous research has addressed the relationship between poverty attribu-

tions and a belief in just world and/or the association between poverty explanations and 'existential' justice beliefs, i.e. the public evaluation of how much inequality there is (Kreidl, 2000) rather than the normative question how much inequality there should be. However, considering the association between normative justice beliefs and support for welfare policies (Andress and Heien, 2001; Lewin-Epstein et al., 2003) on the one hand, and the relation between attitudes towards welfare and poverty attributions (Kluegel and Smith, 1986; Burgoyne et al., 1999) on the other, a direct relationship between justice norms (merit, equality and need) and poverty explanations can be expected.

According to the *merit* principle, whether or not people deserve their rewards is determined on the basis of their investment (e.g. education) or their achievement (Gijsberts, 1999). Individuals who adhere to this principle are likely to justify the existing inequality in the distribution of rewards and perceive the existing order as just (Schepelak and Alwin, 1986). Evidence exists that the more people support meritocratic principles, the greater income inequality they prefer (Gijsberts, 1999). Thus, we expect that the more people cherish equity, as a justice norm, the more inclined they are to view the poor as responsible for their plight and the less predisposed to blame poverty on the malfunctioning of the social system.

According to the principle of *equality*, everybody belonging to a particular social aggregate (e.g. nation-state) should receive equal apportionment of rewards on the basis of their membership and regardless of their contribution. Stronger adherence to this principle usually coincides with decreased tolerance for income inequality (Gijsberts, 1999) and increased support for redistribution (Lewin-Epstein et al., 2003). We therefore expect that individuals who adhere to this principle are more likely to attribute poverty to reasons external to the poor, and especially the malfunctioning of the social system, and to free the poor from personal blame.

Finally, the principle of *need* is based on the assumption that individuals vary in their ability to obtain resources that are necessary for their well-being. It rests on the values that emphasize the responsibility for the other and the duty to help, and seeks to amend (material) deficiency. People who cherish the principle of need have been found supportive of the policies of redistribution (Lewin-Epstein, et al., 2003). Therefore, we expect the adherents to this principle to be more likely to explain poverty by external/situational reasons rather than internal ones.

Contextual (national-level) correlates of poverty explanations

Gallie and Paugam (2002) point to three sources of cross-national differences in poverty attributions: (1) *socio-economic structure*, related to (objective) socio-economic conditions; (2) *welfare regime*, especially the type of social security provisions; and (3) *culture*, understood as a constellation of values, norms and attitudes shared by a society.

Socio-economic structure may determine the salience of poverty and inequality and thus influence poverty attributions. In general, higher unemployment rates and economic decline decrease respondents' inclination to attribute poverty to individual failings and increase the likelihood of viewing material destitution as caused externally (Gallie and Paugam, 2002). We therefore hypothesize that the better the economic performance of a country, the greater the inclination of its inhabitants to view poverty as self-inflicted.

The distinctiveness of the poor in a given nation might also be determined by the type of welfare regime. Poverty may be less salient in countries in which social security programmes are generous and universal than in countries where selective social policies aim at distinguishing between the (truly) needy and the non-needy. Welfare regime may, moreover, affect the national labour market strategies (e.g. creation of new jobs in socio-democratic and liberal welfare states versus protection of the existing labour arrangements in conservative regimes), shape the perception of the bargaining power of the poor (lower in socio-democratic and conservative welfare regimes with strong labour unions) and influence the propensity to view the needy as being in control of their destitution. At the same time, some characteristics of

welfare regimes may be more clearly related to poverty perceptions than others (Albrekt Larsen, 2005). In general, however, we expect that the tendency to blame the poor for their predicament is the strongest in countries with relatively low social spending or (highly) selective anti-poverty programmes. Presumably, these are also the countries in which the level of poverty is relatively higher than in the countries with high social spending and more encompassing anti-poverty programmes. This leads us to expect that in countries which have relatively higher levels of poverty people will attribute living in poverty to external explanations.

Finally, poverty attributions may be determined by national culture. The multiplicity of the definitions of culture makes the search for appropriate cultural variables challenging. However, most attitudinal studies refer to culture as a set of collective constructions of meaning: a system of ideas, values, norms and beliefs common to the majority of a population (van Oorschot, 2007). With respect to poverty attributions, we can pinpoint three relevant value-related variables: (historically) dominant religion, work ethic and (dominant) political ideology.

As already noted, the Catholic and Protestant doctrines differ in their construction of poverty and principles of poor relief. Assuming – after Kahl (2005) – a continued relevance of religious doctrines on the perception of poverty, we expect people who live in countries with a strong Catholic tradition to be less likely to blame the poor for living in need than people living in countries where this tradition is less strong.

Another value which we see as conducive to cross-national differences in causal poverty explanations is the (Protestant) work ethic. Furnham et al. (1993) noted the varying emphasis that different societies place on work, use of time and ascetism, and found the (Protestant) work ethic to be culturally based. From these findings we infer that people living in societies in which the work ethic is strong are more likely to explain poverty in terms of individual blame and less inclined to blame the social system than individuals living in societies in which the work ethic is not particularly endorsed.

We also expect that differences in causal poverty attributions will be related to the consensually shared notions of justice and solidarity. Previous research has shown that societies do not differ much in their adherence to the principle of merit; they do differ, however, with respect to the principles of equality and need (e.g. Gijsberts, 1999). Based on the predicted association between endorsement of equality and need, we hypothesize that those who live in a society in which the common good and social solidarity among fellow citizens is particularly valued will view poverty as caused by the social system rather than by individuals themselves (cf. Alesina and Glaeser, 2004).

Finally, taking advantage of the EVS data, we investigate the regional (East–West) differences in popular poverty explanations. Earlier research has found a greater inclination of Eastern Europeans, compared to Western Europeans, to attribute poverty to laziness (Kluegel et al., 1995; Kreidl, 2000) as well as a greater simultaneous support for seemingly conflicting beliefs (social injustice and laziness) in the East than in the West. We expect these direct relationships also to hold true for the current investigation.

Data

To investigate our expectations, data from the European Values Study are analysed. This is a large-scale, cross-national and longitudinal survey research programme that, since the late 1970s, aims at exploring the moral and social values underlying European social and political institutions and governing conduct. Since then, three waves have been fielded in (almost) all European countries. We use data from the most recent 1999/2000 wave. The data were collected through face-to-face interviews following standardized questionnaires administered among a representative national sample of adult population. Our research population consists of the inhabitants of 28 (national) entities, aged between 16 and 75 years: the citizens of France, United

Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Russia, Malta, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Belarus. For more details, see http://www.europeanvalues.nl.

Operationalization

Dependent variable

Causes of poverty: The survey items measuring respondents' poverty attributions consist of four substantial categories plus the options to choose 'none of these' or to state 'don't know'. Of these six answering categories, respondents could rank two alternatives. In our multivariate analysis the 'don't knows' are treated as system missing values. The survey item reads: 'Why are there people in this country who live in need? Here are four possible reasons. Which *one* reason do you consider to be most important? (1) Unlucky, (2) Laziness or lack of will power, (3) Injustice in society, (4) Part of modern progress; (5) None of these. And which reason do you consider to be second most important?' For the current analysis, we chose 'part of modern progress' as the reference category, mainly owing to its all-encompassing character, which separates it from the more decisive causal beliefs, such as 'laziness', 'social injustice' and 'unluckiness' (Lepianka, 2007).[1]

Independent variables

Objective and subjective experience of poverty: Unfortunately, the EVS data do not allow accounting for the multifaceted and dynamic character of poverty. Out of necessity, then, our operational definition of objective poverty is limited to the *current* experience of economic difficulty as measured by monetary income. Here, we used the national income variables included in EVS, recoded into three categories (1 = lower, 2 = middle, 3 = high). Following Inglehart et al. (2004: 408–11), the original income variable was recoded so that each category would comprise about one-third of the samples as closely as possible. Subjective disadvantage is operationalized by self-reported level of autonomy (scale 1 = no control over life to 10 = great deal of control) and the level of life satisfaction (scale 1 = dissatisfied to 10 = satisfied).

Values: Respondents' *political orientation* is operationally defined by their self-reported position on the political left–right continuum, from 1 = left to 10 = right. Work ethic is measured by a scale including five items: (a) 'to fully develop your talents you need to have a job', (b) 'it is humiliating to receive money without having to work for it', (c) 'people who don't work turn lazy', (d) 'work is a duty towards society', and (e) 'work should always come first even if it means less spare time', where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The scores on the scale are the mean values of a person's scores on each item (average Cronbach's alpha per country = 0.675, standard deviation = 0.037). We measure adherence to the three justice principles by the level of agreement with the following statements about what is important for a society to be considered 'just': (a) 'eliminating big inequalities in income between citizens' (= equality), (b) 'guaranteeing that basic needs are met for all, in terms of food, housing, clothes, education, health' (= need), and (c) 'recognizing people on their merits' (= merit), where 1 = not important at all and 5 = very important. *Religious affiliation* is indicated by dummy variables: Catholic, Protestant, Other (encompassing members of a free church, non-conformist, evangelical, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Orthodox); those who indicate that they are not religiously affiliated are taken as the reference group. In addition, frequency of attending religious services is measured on a scale from 0 = never to 8 = once a week or more. Support for *post-materialist values* is included in the analysis as a position on a materialist–post-materialist

continuum, where a higher score indicates a stronger adherence to post-materialist values. More specifically, people who opted twice for materialist values are assigned score 1; those whose first choice was a materialist and second choice post-materialist value score 2; those who chose post-materialist value as first and materialist value as second score 3; and those who picked post-materialist values twice are assigned score 4 (cf. Hagenaars et al., 2003: 55). Our scale is based on the respondent's first and second choices in the Inglehart's four-item materialist/post-materialist battery (Inglehart and Abramson, 1999).

Socio-demographic characteristics: Effects of socio-economic and demographic characteristics on poverty attributions are neither uniform nor unequivocally acknowledged. Hence, we treat socio-demographics as control variables, whose role in explaining poverty attributions is, by and large, secondary. EVS allows the inclusion of the following socio-demographic characteristics: *age*, measured in years; *sex* (0 = male, 1 = female); *employment status* measured by four dummy variables (employed, self-employed, unemployed and others who are not gainfully employed); and *level of education* measured by three dummy variables: low (including inadequately completed elementary education to compulsory education and basic vocational qualification), medium (ranging from secondary intermediate vocational and general qualification to full secondary maturity level certificate), and high (including higher lower and upper-level tertiary certificate). Note that income – commonly regarded as an indicator of socio-economic status – is treated here as a measure of the experience of personal disadvantage.[2]

Contextual variables: To explore systematic differences between the citizens of Eastern and Western European countries we included an East–West dummy variable, with the East constituting the reference category.[3] To assess the effect of national economic performance, we use the percentage of GDP change calculated on the basis of national GDP per capita between the years 1994 and 1999 (current prices, US$) (source: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/dnllist.asp).

Since no existing typology of anti-poverty programmes would cover all countries under study, we operationalize *welfare tradition* as welfare effort, measured by (average) *total social spending* as a percentage of GDP (source: OECD Social Expenditure Database 2001 (Western Europe), GVG, 2002 (most of Eastern Europe) and IMF/Social Security Database: www.ilo.org (Russia)). Where possible, average values for a certain period were used: 1990–1999 in the case of OECD data and 1996 and 1998 in the case of GVG data. Data for Russia were available only for 1999. Direct measurements of national poverty levels for all 28 countries and relevant years were not readily found, and therefore we used the Human Development Index (HDI) as a proximal indicator. The HDI seeks to rank countries in terms of their level of development and combines normalized measures of life expectancy, educational attainment and GDP per capita for countries worldwide. There is evidence that the HDI is very strongly correlated to the more recently developed Human Poverty Index, and thus, to a large extent, measures the same construct (cf. Sahay et al., 2003: 90). Here, we use the average HDI score per country for the period 1994–1999. Data come from the World Bank's World Development Reports 1994–1999; see www.worldbank.org.

Cultural characteristics are measured by aggregated variables derived from our individual level data and include: *religious composition* (the percentage of Catholics), average national *adherence to work ethic* and average national support for *equality* as a justice principle. Note that controlling for the percentage of Catholics is considered important owing to the co-variation between welfare spending, level of wealth and the religious composition (Protestant/Catholic majority) that is evident in northern and southern European countries (cf. van Oorschot and Arts, 2005). Correlations between the contextual variables are reported in the Appendix. Table 1 reports descriptive statistics of all the independent variables that are included in the analysis.

Table 1 *Descriptive statistics of independent variables*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Individual variables				
Low income	0.306		0	1
Medium income	0.356		0	1
High income	0.339		0	1
Level of autonomy	6.820	2.108	1	10
Life satisfaction	6.936	2.268	1	10
Left–right self-placement	5.357	2.024	1	10
Work ethic	3.500	0.786	1	5
Endorsement of equality principle	3.790	1.173	1	5
Endorsement of need principle	4.593	0.745	1	5
Endorsement of merit principle	4.297	0.930	1	5
Not religious	0.293		0	1
Catholic	0.389		0	1
Protestant	0.169		0	1
Belongs to other religion	0.145		0	1
Church attendance	3.786	2.439	1	8
Post-materialism	2.296	1.003	1	4
Contextual characteristics				
Total social expenditure	21.631	6.174	8.200	33.100
Human Development Index	0.871	0.062	0.743	0.932
Proportion of Catholics	0.387	0.332	0.001	0.978
Average work ethic	3.485	0.289	3	4
Average egalitarianism	3.811	0.385	3	4
Change in GDP	25.742	11.913	4	64
Control variables				
Sex (ref. = men)	0.502		0	1
Age	44.337	15.381	16	75
Low level of education	0.306		0	1
Medium level of education	0.467		0	1
High level of education	0.227		0	1
Being employed	0.527		0	1
Being selfemployed	0.056		0	1
Being unemployed	0.070		0	1
Being otherwise active	0.348		0	1

Number of cases (listwise) = 24541.

Number of records (listwise) = 122705.

Note: In the case of dummy variables, the average can be interpreted as the proportion of individuals belonging to that particular category.

Method

The measurement of popular poverty explanations used in this study requires respondents to rank several potential reasons for living in need. Since people's sequential choices of alternatives are not independent of each other, such rank-ordered data cannot be adequately analysed with standard regression techniques. Hence, to analyse our data, we estimate the so-called rank-ordered logistic regression model (ROLM). The ROLM is applicable in our analysis because our dependent variable is operationally defined as a partial ranking task, where people rank the two most preferred alternatives from a larger set of poverty attributions but leave other alternatives unranked. One way of understanding the ROLM is to imagine the task

of ranking the alternatives as a sequence of choices: after the choice of the first preferred alternative, the probability of the second choice is conditional on the first choice, which leads to a dependency between choices. The estimates of the ROLM can be interpreted in terms of the exponentiated coefficients. This provides an odds ratio interpretation: exponentiated coefficients indicate the percentage change in the odds of ranking a particular alternative ahead of the base category for a unit change in an explanatory variable, holding other variables constant (Allison and Christakis, 1994; Long and Freese, 2006). We use Stata's cluster option to account for nesting of respondents within countries and for adjusting standard errors of estimated coefficients.

Concerning the analysis of individual variables, we note that because two key individual variables – income and left–right self-placement – included a large number of missing values, we applied univariate imputation of missing values for both variables. Specifically, missing categories were imputed using an ordinal logit model with country dummies, subjective disadvantage variables, values, social-demographic background variables and the ranking variable as predictors. The reported estimates of individual variables are based on 20 Multiple Imputation data sets.[4]

Findings

Descriptive analysis

Information regarding the distribution of causal poverty attributions within and across countries is contained in Table 2. The values in this table refer to the number of respondents within each country who chose a particular poverty attribution either as the first or second cause for living in destitution as a proportion of the total number of respondents in that country. This can be seen as an indication of the popularity of a particular poverty attribution within a country; it also permits comparisons of the relative popularity of various attributions across countries.

For most of the countries, the results indicate that living in need as a consequence of Injustice in Society is the most popular poverty attribution (with the exception of The Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Czech Republic, Greece, Russia, Malta and Luxembourg). The highest support for it is found in Croatia, where 87.9 per cent of respondents chose Injustice in Society as the first or second reason for living in need. The lowest adherence to it is found in Denmark, where only 32.2 per cent of the respondents chose this alternative; in this country, living in need is sooner attributed to being Part of Modern Progress. Furthermore, for most of the countries, we can see that Laziness and Part of Modern Progress are chosen more often than Unluckiness (except in The Netherlands and Luxembourg). The category None of These is least popular within all countries. All in all, there is relatively large variation in preferences for poverty attributions within each country.

A comparison of percentages across countries shows that Unluckiness is chosen relatively less frequently in Eastern European countries than in Western European countries. In contrast, Laziness is slightly more popular among the populations of Eastern European countries. Injustice in Society is – with the exception of Denmark and the Czech Republic – a relatively frequent first or second choice in all countries. In some countries this causal poverty attribution is strongly endorsed: the citizens of France, Spain, Sweden, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Croatia were especially likely to choose Injustice in Society as a reason for living in need. Moreover, in many countries, living in poverty is explained as simply being Part of Modern Progress: in Sweden, Finland, Greece and Russia, more than 60 per cent of respondents choose this particular attribution. Finally, citizens of most countries believe that living in poverty can indeed be ascribed to one of the three aforementioned causes: Injustice, Laziness, Unluckiness or Modern Progress; the option None of These is chosen far less frequently than the other ones.

Table 2 *Multiple response table of causal poverty attributions – differences within and between countries (per cent within country; number of responses in parentheses)*

	Unluckiness	Laziness or lack of willpower	Injustice in society	Part of modern progress	None of these	Total number of respondents
France	34.3 (512)	27.2 (406)	70.1 (1048)	58.1 (868)	6.1 (91)	1495
United Kingdom	34.4 (578)	43.2 (725)	55.6 (933)	48.9 (821)	9.3 (157)	1678
Germany	32.7 (595)	48.3 (878)	64.4 (1170)	42.3 (769)	8.8 (161)	1817
Italy	40.3 (762)	44.2 (835)	64.4 (1217)	36.4 (689)	10.2 (192)	1891
Spain	42.5 (451)	37.5 (398)	74.5 (791)	33.6 (357)	4.6 (49)	1062
Netherlands	62.1 (574)	32.0 (296)	50.7 (469)	37.2 (344)	14.6 (135)	925
Belgium	58.1 (1011)	37.3 (648)	59.2 (1030)	36.8 (641)	3.6 (62)	1739
Denmark	39.8 (357)	32.5 (292)	32.2 (289)	56.2 (505)	31.7 (285)	898
Sweden	29.0 (284)	18.5 (181)	72.6 (710)	63.7 (623)	12.0 (117)	978
Finland	35.8 (344)	41.8 (401)	47.0 (451)	61.2 (587)	8.0 (77)	959
Iceland	47.5 (426)	44.7 (401)	52.1 (467)	44.1 (396)	6.1 (55)	897
Ireland	46.0 (413)	39.2 (352)	54.7 (491)	47.5 (426)	7.6 (68)	898
Estonia	33.4 (320)	35.9 (344)	67.7 (648)	52.0 (498)	6.4 (62)	958
Latvia	29.6 (287)	51.4 (499)	56.0 (544)	48.1 (467)	9.4 (91)	971
Lithuania	33.7 (319)	22.1 (210)	74.2 (703)	59.1 (560)	2.9 (27)	948
Poland	25.3 (260)	42.7 (438)	74.0 (760)	50.4 (517)	3.5 (36)	1027
Czech Republic	42.1 (743)	68.1 (1201)	34.5 (609)	40.0 (705)	10.6 (188)	1765
Slovakia	28.1 (355)	54.0 (681)	61.5 (776)	26.7 (337)	21.9 (277)	1261
Hungary	35.7 (316)	46.6 (412)	64.4 (570)	40.5 (358)	5.0 (45)	885
Romania	27.6 (290)	56.0 (587)	71.3 (748)	31.9 (335)	7.3 (77)	1049
Bulgaria	29.5 (258)	35.3 (309)	68.4 (598)	44.3 (387)	12.3 (107)	875
Croatia	19.1 (189)	42.2 (417)	87.9 (869)	38.6 (382)	8.4 (83)	989
Greece	25.0 (272)	39.2 (427)	55.3 (603)	69.0 (752)	6.5 (71)	1090
Russia	27.6 (639)	47.9 (1109)	44.5 (1031)	70.1 (1624)	4.4 (101)	2318
Malta	28.8 (268)	72.2 (670)	55.6 (516)	35.7 (332)	4.6 (43)	928
Luxembourg	56.3 (637)	45.3 (513)	49.2 (557)	37.8 (428)	6.6 (75)	1132
Slovenia	22.9 (219)	55.6 (533)	62.4 (598)	44.1 (422)	10.0 (96)	958
Belarus	24.6 (232)	40.1 (378)	69.6 (656)	49.1 (463)	12.0 (113)	943

However, even here we can observe considerable differences between countries. While 31.7 per cent of the Danish respondents choose this option as the first or second reason for living in poverty, only 2.9 per cent of the Lithuanian respondents opt for it. In conclusion, the cross-tabulation indicates that there are clear differences in causal poverty attributions, both within and between countries.[5] In the next section we set out to explain these differences in the preference structure of respondents using the four groups of the independent variables that we identified in the theoretical discussion.

Explanatory analysis

In this section, we report the logit coefficients of the rank-ordered logit regression of causal poverty attributions on individual and contextual characteristics. We first describe the findings pertaining to bivariate contextual analyses (Table 3); then we report the findings of rank-ordered logit models in which the effects of contextual variables are estimated simultaneously, both with and without holding constant for individual characteristics (Table 4).

Inspection of the bivariate associations between contextual variables and the rankings of popular poverty attribution provides some evidence of the presumed associations between structural and cultural characteristics of countries on the one hand, and popular poverty attributions on the other. People who live in Eastern European countries are less likely to rank Unluckiness ahead of Modern progress, but this association is only significant at the 10 per cent significance level. Furthermore, we see that individuals who live in countries which have a high score on the HDI are more likely to rank Unluckiness ahead of Modern Progress as the cause for living in destitution (odds ratio of ranking Unluckiness ahead of Modern progress = exp (3.786) = 44.080; Model C). The results of Model D indicate that religious composition, measured as a share of Catholics, also shows a direct relationship to poverty attributions: For an increase of 1 per cent in the number of Catholics in a country, the odds of ranking Injustice in Society ahead of Modern Progress are expected to change by a factor of exp (0.885) = 2.423. The percentage of Catholics in a country is also positively related to a stronger preference for Unluckiness (odds ratio = exp (0.608) = 1.837) and Laziness rather than Modern Progress (odds ratio = exp (0.609) = 1.839). Individuals who live in countries in which the average work ethic

Table 3 *Rank-ordered logit (multinomial) regression of popular poverty attributions on contextual characteristics – bivariate models*

Model	Independent variable	Forms of popular poverty attributions (ref. = Modern progress)			
		Injustice in society	Unluckiness	Laziness or lack of willpower	None of these
A	Eastern Europe (ref.=Western Europe)	0.059	−0.382†	0.199	0.087
B	Total social expenditure	0.012	0.019	−0.019	0.016
C	Human Development Index	−0.215	3.786**	−0.418	0.907
D	Percentage Catholics	0.885**	0.608*	0.609*	0.353
E	Average work ethic	0.382	−0.397	0.746*	0.296
F	Average egalitarianism	0.505*	−0.129	0.136	−0.246
G	Percentage change in GDP	0.010	0.005	0.002	0.006

Number of countries = 28.
Number of respondents = 34,247.
†Significant at 10%; *significant at 5%; **significant at 1% (tests based on standard errors adjusted for nesting of individuals within countries).

is higher are more likely to rank Laziness ahead of Modern progress as a poverty attribution (odds ratio = exp (0.746) = 2.109; Model E). Finally, the results of Model F indicate that individuals who live in a country with a stronger egalitarian culture are more likely to attribute poverty sooner to Injustice in society rather than to Modern progress (odds ratio = exp (0.505) = 1.657). No relationships are found between social expenditure and change in wealth, on the one hand, and poverty attributions, on the other.

On the basis of the above bivariate contextual models, we selected the independent variables which were significantly related to popular poverty attributions – HDI, share of Catholics, average work ethic and egalitarianism – and estimated a rank-ordered logit model in which the effects of these contextual variables were estimated simultaneously (see Table 4, Model 1).[6]

The results of Model 1 indicate that as people live in more developed countries, they are more likely to rank Unluckiness ahead of Modern progress as an explanation for living in destitution.[7] Furthermore, as the share of Catholics in a country's population is higher, individuals are more likely to rank both Injustice and Unluckiness ahead of Modern Progress as an explanation for living in need, holding other variables constant. Also, as the average work ethic in a country is higher, individuals are more likely to rank Laziness ahead of Modern progress. Finally, all else being equal, living in a country which is characterized by an, on average, higher level of egalitarianism increases the odds of ranking Injustice ahead of Modern progress by 47 per cent.

In Model 2, we investigate whether the contextual effects that are found in Model 1 can be interpreted as contextual effects or rather that they must be attributed to compositional differences in the populations under study. The results suggest that the latter is partly true: Average work ethic and average egalitarianism are no longer directly related to popular poverty attributions once individual characteristics are held constant. However, as countries are more developed, individuals living in those countries are more likely to rank Unluckiness ahead of Modern progress, controlling for individual differences. In addition, a 1 per cent increase in the share of Catholics within a population increases the odds that individuals rank Injustice ahead of Modern progress by a factor 2.627, holding all other variables constant; it also increases the odds of ranking Unluckiness ahead of Modern progress by 48.1 per cent. These effects can be interpreted as positive evidence for the effects of structural and cultural characteristics of nations. Turning to individual level determinants, there is no evidence for the hypothesis that income differences – as an indicator of objective disadvantage – are directly related to causal poverty attributions. Evidence of the relationship between causal poverty explanations and subjective experience of disadvantage is considerably stronger: Individuals with a stronger sense of autonomy are less likely to rank Injustice and Unluckiness ahead of Modern Progress, and more likely to rank Laziness ahead of Modern Progress. In addition, the higher the life-satisfaction a person reports, the less inclined they are to rank Injustice ahead of Modern Progress, and the more disposed to rank Laziness ahead of Modern Progress.

Turning to the associations between personal values and causal poverty attributions, there is no evidence of direct relationships between religious background characteristics of individuals and their explanations for living in poverty. Stronger associations are found between having a strong work ethic and poverty attributions: all else being equal, the stronger the work ethic of an individual, the less likely he/she is to choose Injustice or Unluckiness ahead of Modern Progress (with decreases in the odds of 8.1 and 10.8 per cent), but the more likely to choose Laziness ahead of Modern Progress (an increase in the odds of 29 per cent). Individuals with a strong work ethic are also less likely to rank the category None of These ahead of Modern Progress.

As far as principles of distributive justice are concerned, we observe a positive relationship between adherence to either the norm of equality or the norm of need and the inclination to attribute poverty sooner to Injustice than Modern Progress. In addition, there is a negative

Table 4 *Rank-ordered logit (multinomial) regression of popular poverty attributions on individual and contextual characteristics*

| | Model 1 | | | | Model 2 | | | |
| | Forms of popular poverty attributions (ref. = Modern progress) | | | | Forms of popular poverty attributions (ref. = Modern progress) | | | |
	Injustice in society	Unluckiness	Laziness or lack of willpower	None of these	Injustice in society	Unluckiness	Laziness or lack of willpower	None of these
Human Development Index	−0.822	3.088†	1.836	2.507	−0.406	3.543*	1.026	2.454
Percentage Catholics	0.884**	0.562*	0.414	0.207	0.966**	0.393†	0.349	0.250
Average work ethic	−0.111	−0.043	0.984*	0.796	−0.131	−0.171	0.537	0.957
Average egalitarianism	0.385*	−0.087	−0.109	−0.367	0.175	−0.141	−0.011	−0.309
Objective disadvantage:								
Income (ref. = low income)								
Medium income					−0.025	−0.049	0.022	−0.003
High income					−0.091	−0.039	0.020	0.013
Subjective disadvantage:								
Sense of autonomy					−0.020*	−0.045**	0.038**	−0.012
Life satisfaction					−0.052**	−0.006	0.046**	−0.002
Values:								
Denomination (ref. = not affiliated)								
Catholic					−0.102	0.020	0.036	−0.141
Protestant					0.027	−0.241	−0.135	−0.093
Other religion					−0.049	−0.174	−0.044	−0.103
Church attendance					0.016	0.019	0.012	0.026
Work ethic					−0.084**	−0.114**	0.255**	−0.238**
Endorsement of equality principle					0.178**	0.043*	−0.076**	−0.062*
Endorsement of need principle					0.120**	−0.026	−0.114**	−0.027
Endorsement of merit principle					−0.009	0.007	0.068*	−0.029
Post-materialist value orientation					0.024	−0.119**	−0.141**	0.019
Left-right self-placement					−0.027*	0.018*	0.041**	0.004
Constant	−0.339	−2.767	−4.874	−5.659	−0.190	−1.759	−3.711	−5.444

Model 1: Number of countries = 28; Number of records = 171,235.
Model 2: Number of countries = 28; Number of records = 149,790. Estimates based on 20 Multiple Imputation data sets.
†Significant at 10%; *significant at 5%; **significant at 1% (tests based on standard errors adjusted for nesting of individuals within countries).
Effects in Model 2 are controlled for age, sex, educational attainment and employment status. Estimates for these variables are available from the authors upon request.

association between support for these two justice principles and a preference to choose Laziness as an explanation for living in poverty ahead of Modern Progress. We also see that as individuals more strongly endorse the equality principle, they tend to rank Unluckiness ahead of Modern progress, and are less likely to rank None of the alternatives mentioned ahead of Modern Progress. Finally, as people more strongly endorse the merit principle of justice, they are more likely to attribute poverty to Laziness sooner than to Modern progress.

With respect to post-materialist values, the results point to a negative relationship between post-materialism and the propensity to rank Unluckiness and Laziness ahead of Modern Progress for explaining living in destitution (decreases in odds of 11.2 and 13.2 per cent). With respect to the direct association between political orientation and causal poverty attributions, the findings indicate that the more right-wing in their political sympathies people are, the less likely they are to rank Injustice ahead of Modern Progress. On the other hand, the more right-wing oriented people are, the more likely they are to rank Unluckiness and Laziness as an explanation for living in poverty ahead of Modern Progress (increases in odds of 1.8 and 4.2 per cent).

Summary and discussion

In this contribution we have described and explained the differences in popular poverty attributions that exist within and between 28 European countries. On the basis of existing reviews of the correlates of causal poverty beliefs, we distinguished five types of predictor: awareness of the existence of poverty, personal experience of disadvantage, personal values, socio-demographic background and structural and cultural country-level characteristics. Using data from the EVS 1999/2000 we have been able to assess for most of these predictors whether, and to what extent, they are directly related to people's partial rankings of four different poverty attributions.

The results of our analysis can be summarized as follows. We started with an eye-ball inspection of a multiple response cross tabulation, which showed people's first or second pick from a list of five possible reasons for living in need, both within and across the 28 European countries included in the analysis. We observed that, within most of the countries under scrutiny, Injustice in Society is the most popular poverty attribution. Furthermore, we saw that for most of the countries Laziness and Modern Progress were ranked highly relatively more often than Unluckiness. The category None of These was found to be least popular within all the countries. The comparison of the popularity of various attributions also showed some interesting differences between countries. Still, systematic differences between groups of countries (e.g. East–West differences) could not readily be detected: some poverty attributions were popular among both Eastern and Western countries, or rather unpopular for that matter. We came to the conclusion that the relatively large variation in preferences for poverty attributions, both within and across countries, requires further investigation.

The explanation of the differences in poverty attributions was achieved by assessing the direct relationships between popular poverty attributions and the different types of predictors using rank-ordered logistic regression models. In particular, our data recorded how each person partially ranked alternative reasons for living in need. Obviously, this is much more information than simply knowing which alternative is most preferred, and the rank-ordered logistic regression model takes advantage of this added information (Long and Freese, 2006: 339). The results of this modelling approach showed, first, that differences in causal poverty attributions are not readily explained by cultural and structural characteristics of countries. Holding other variables constant, we found a direct association between living in a country with a strong Catholic tradition and the preference for poverty attributions. As expected, people living in countries with a strong Catholic tradition were more likely to attribute poverty to

reasons external to the poor – Social Injustice and Unluckiness. In addition, people who live in countries that have a higher level of development (and presumably a lower level of poverty) – measured by the HDI – are more likely to attribute living in poverty sooner to Unluckiness rather than to Modern Progress.

The explanation of differences in popular poverty attributions using individual-level predictors was more successful, even though differences in objective disadvantage – in terms of income differences – and religious values were not directly related to causal poverty attributions. Presumably, this is the result of controlling for socio-demographic differences, which makes a relationship between income differences or religious values and poverty attributions (partly) spurious. It may also be the result of including indicators of subjective disadvantage and other personal values, which may mediate a relationship between income differences or religious values and poverty attributions. In accordance with this, we found clear direct relationships between these types of predictor and causal poverty attributions. For example, those with a stronger sense of autonomy and those who reported a higher degree of life satisfaction were less likely to give Injustice priority to Modern Progress explanations of poverty, and – simultaneously – more likely to give priority to individualistic explanations of poverty (Laziness). The effects of variables measuring personal values were also, to a great extent, in accordance with our hypotheses (with the exception of religious variables). Those who more strongly endorse the work ethic were more likely to attribute poverty to individual disposition, but less likely to view destitution as caused by factors external to the poor. We also found positive evidence for the hypothesis that distributive justice beliefs matter for causal poverty attributions. In particular, those who more strongly adhere to egalitarianism or the principle of need are more likely to attribute poverty to the malfunctioning of the distributive system rather than Modern Progress, and less likely to view poverty as caused internally (Laziness). As expected, endorsement of the merit principle was directly related to the internal attribution of Laziness. We found positive evidence for the hypothesis that persons with post-materialist orientations were less prone to attribute poverty to individual blame and fatalistic explanations. Finally, those who place themselves more towards the (conservative) right on the political spectrum were, as expected, less likely to see lack of social justice in society as a reason for living in destitution, and more likely to blame the poor themselves for their predicament.

We have argued here that differences in the ways in which people explain poverty need to be understood, on the one hand, in terms of the cultural and structural characteristics of the country they live in, and, on the other, in terms of their personal attitudinal and social background characteristics. The fact that we were relatively unsuccessful in explaining poverty attributions by the former calls for future research seeking other explanations, such as national differences in awareness and visibility of poverty. Unfortunately, our data were limited in this respect. In addition, we believe that much could be gained by investigating in greater detail how the various individual-level determinants of poverty attributions are interrelated (e.g. by path modelling). In the current research, this was not feasible due to the nature of the dependent variable (ranking) and the modelling approach this requires. In this way, a more systematic theoretical framework for understanding the mechanisms that bring about differences in poverty attributions could be developed, which might also include moderating relationships, for example, between background characteristics and values. Finally, we note that the range of attributions for poverty included in this study, as well as their conceptual clarity, may have been limited. Thus, a further search for other valid and reliable indicators of popular poverty explanations is desirable (cf. Burgoyne et al., 1999: 88).

Notes

1. The EVS data do not allow an analysis of the popular understanding of what constitutes poverty or what it means to 'live in need'. It is therefore difficult to relate the popular poverty attributions as formulated in the EVS survey to the ongoing (academic) debates on the definitions of poverty. Some research suggests, however, that the general public tends to define poverty in terms of absolute shortage of basic necessities rather than relative deprivation (Soede and Vrooman, 2008).
2. Out of concern for the occurrence of multicollinearity in the models to be estimated, we inspected the correlations between the individual variables. The highest correlation was between autonomy and life satisfaction: $r = 0.459$.
3. The following countries were coded as 'Eastern European': Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Russia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Belarus.
4. Ideally, multiple variables should be imputed simultaneously, which would require a multivariate imputation method such as multivariate normal imputation. However, due to the sheer volume of the data in this study (rank-ordered logit models require data to be arranged with multiple records per cases; the total number of records for the full data set was 171,235), this approach proved not to be feasible. Univariate imputation assumes that income and left–right self-placement are independent and thus some bias may be introduced into the model by underestimating the correlation between income and left–right self-placement. Presumably, the approach taken outweighs the bias and loss of efficiency that would be introduced if cases were excluded based on listwise deletion of missing values. Of the originally 26,510 incomplete records for income, 21,400 were imputed, and of the originally 35,870 incomplete records for left–right self-placement 27,035 were imputed.
5. Note that we also estimated a rank-ordered logistic regression model in which we regressed the poverty attributions only on the East–West dummy variable (see Table 3). We found no significant differences between Eastern and Western countries at conventional levels of significance.
6. We note that excluding the East–West divide, social expenditure and the change in wealth as independent variable in models 1 and 2 of Table 4 has two advantages: First, because the excluded variables have no effect on the dependent variable, exclusion of these variables will not cause bias; second, inspection of the correlations between contextual variables showed that the HDI and average work ethic were relatively highly correlated to the variable indicating Eastern and Western countries and social expenditure. By excluding the latter irrelevant variables, estimates of the included variables will be more efficient because of collinearity considerations (see King et al., 1994).
7. The effect of the HDI on the logit of ranking Laziness ahead of Modern progress (b = 3.088) is nearly significant at the 5 per cent significance level with a *p*-value of 0.052.

References

Albrekt Larsen, C. (2005) *The Three Worlds of Deservingness: A Comparative Study of Welfare Regimes, Deservingness Criteria, and Public Support for Welfare Policy*. Aalborg: Centre for Comparative Welfare Studies, Aalborg University.

Alesina, A. and Glaeser, E. L. (2004) *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe. A World of Difference*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Allison, P. D. and Christakis, N. A. (1994) 'Logit Models for Sets of Ranked Items', *Sociological Methodology* 24: 199–228.

Andress, H.-J. and Heien, T. (2001) 'Four Worlds of Welfare State Attitudes? A Comparison of Germany, Norway, and the United States', *European Sociological Review* 17: 337–56.

Andress, H.-J. and Lohmann, H. (eds) (2008) *The Working Poor in Europe: Employment, Poverty and Globalization*. London: Edward Elgar.

Appelbaum, L. D. (2001) 'The Influence of Perceived Deservingness on Policy Decisions Regarding Aid to the Poor', *Political Psychology* 22: 419–42.

Brechon, P. (1999) 'Integration into Catholicism and Protestantism in Europe: The Impact on Moral and Political Values', in L. Halman and O. Riis (eds) *Religion in Secularizing Society. The European's Religion at the End of the 20th Century*, pp. 105–30. Tilburg: Tilburg University Press.

Bullock, H. E. (1999) 'Attributions for Poverty: A Comparison of Middle-Class and Welfare Recipient Attitudes', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 29: 2059–82.

Burgoyne, C. B., Routh, D. A. and Sidorenko-Stephenson, S. (1999) 'Perceptions, Attributions and Policy in the Economic Domain. A Theoretical and Comparative Analysis', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* XL: 79–93.

Eurostat (1989) Eurobarometer. The Perception of Poverty in Europe. Poverty 3. Brussels: Commission of the European Communities.

Feather, N. T. (1985) 'Attitudes, Values and Attributions: Explanations of Unemployment', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48: 876–89.

Feather, N. T. (1999) *Values, Achievement, and Justice. Studies in the Psychology of Deservingness*. New York and Boston: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

Furnham, A. (1982) 'Why are the Poor Always With Us? Explanations for Poverty in Britain', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 21: 311–22.

Furnham, A. (1985) 'The Determinants of Attitudes Towards Social Security Recipients', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 24: 19–27.

Furnham, A., Bond, M., Heaven, P., Hilton, D., Lober, T., Masters, J. et al. (1993) 'A Comparison of Protestant Work Ethic Beliefs in Thirteen Nations', *Journal of Social Psychology* 133: 185–97.

Gallie, D. and Paugam, S. (2002) 'Social Precarity and Social Integration.' Report based on Eurobarometer 56.1. Brussels: European Commission Directorate-General Employment.

Gijsberts, M. (1999) 'The Legitimation of Inequality in State-Socialist and Market Societies, 1987–1996'. Amsterdam: Thela Thesis.

GVG (2002) 'Study on the Social Protection Systems in the 13 Applicant Countries: Second Draft'. Koeln: Gesellschaft fuer Versicherungswissenschaft und -gestaltung GVG.

Hagenaars, J., Halman, L. and Moors, G. (2003) 'Exploring Europe's Basic Value Map', in W. Arts, J. Hagenaars and L. Halman (eds) *The Cultural Diversity of European Unity. Findings, Explanations and Reflections from European Value Study*, pp. 25–58. Leiden: Brill.

Handler, J. F. and Hasenfeld, Y. (1991) *The Moral Construction of Poverty. Welfare Reform in America*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Inglehart, R. (1997) *Modernization and Postmodernization. Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Countries*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Inglehart, R. and Abramson, P. (1999) 'Measuring Postmaterialism', *American Political Science Review* 93: 665–77.

Inglehart, R., Basáñez, M., Dierz-Medrana, J., Halman, L. and Luijkx, R. (eds) (2004) *Human Beliefs and Values. A Cross-Cultural Sourcebook Based on the 1999–2002 Value Surveys*. Mexico: Fundacion BBVA.

Kahl, S. (2005) 'The Religious Roots of Modern Poverty Policy: Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Protestant Traditions Compared', *European Journal of Sociology* 46: 91–126.

King, G., Keohane, R. O. and Verba, S. (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Kluegel, J. R. and Smith, E. R. (1986) *Beliefs about Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.

Kluegel, J. R., Csepeli, G., Kolosi, T., Orkeny, A. and Nemenyi, M. (1995) 'Accounting for the Rich and the Poor: Existential Justice in Comparative Perspective', in J. R. Kluegel, D. S. Mason and B. Wegener (eds) *Social Justice and Political Change: Public Opinions in Capitalist and Post-Communist States*, pp. 179–207. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Kreidl, M. (2000) 'Perceptions of Poverty and Wealth in Western and Post-Communist Countries', *Social Justice Research* 13: 151–76.

Lee, B. A., Lewis, D. W. and Jones, S. H. (1992) 'Are the Homeless to Blame? A Test of Two Theories', *Sociological Quarterly* 33: 535–52.

Lepianka, D. (2007) *Are the Poor to be Blamed or Pitied? A Comparative Study of Popular Poverty Attributions in Europe*. Tilburg: Tilburg University.

Lewin-Epstein, N., Kaplan, A. and Levanon, A. (2003) 'Distributive Justice and Attitudes Toward the Welfare State', *Social Justice Research* 16: 1–27.

Long, J. S. and Freese, J. (2006) *Regression Models for Categorical Dependent Variable using Stata*. College Station, TX: StataCorp LP.

Nilson, L. B. (1981) 'Reconsidering Ideological Lines: Beliefs About Poverty in America', *Sociological Quarterly* 22: 531–48.

Procter, M. and Hornsby-Smith, M. P. (1999) 'Individual Religiosity, Religious Context and Values in Europe and North America', in L. Halman and O. Riis (eds) *Religion in Secularizing Society. The European's Religion at the End of the 20th Century*. Tilburg, Tilburg University Press.

Riffault, H. and Rabier, J.-R. (1977) *The Perception of Poverty in Europe*. Brussels: Commission of the European Communities.

Sahay, R., Cashin, P., Mauro, P. and Pattillo, C. (2003) 'Macroeconomic Policies and Poverty Reduction: Stylized Facts and an Overview of Research', in C. M. Edmonds (ed.) *Reducing Poverty in Asia: Emerging Issues in Growth, Targeting, and Measurement*, pp. 79–106. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar publishing in cooperation with the Asian Development Bank.

Scheepers, P. and Te Grootenhuis, M. (2003) 'Who Cares for the Poor in Europe? Fighting Poverty in 15 European Counties', paper presented at the ESPAnet Thematic Seminar: Welfare and the Social Bond, Tilburg (March).

Schepelak, N. J. and Alwin, D. F. (1986) 'Beliefs About Inequality and Perceptions of Distributive Justice', *American Sociological Review* 51: 30–46.

Soede, A. and Vrooman, C. (2008) *Beyond the Breadline*. The Hague: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research.

van Oorschot, W. (2007) 'Culture and Social Policy: a Developing Field of Study', *Journal of International Social Welfare* 16: 129–39.

van Oorschot, W. and Arts, W. (2005) 'The Social Capital of European Welfare States: the Crowding Out Hypothesis Revisited', *Journal of European Social Policy* 15: 5–26.

van Oorschot, W. and Halman, L. (2000) 'Blame of Fate, Individual or Social? An International Comparison of Popular Explanations of Poverty', *European Societies* 2: 1–28.

Waxman, C. (1983) *The Stigma of Poverty: A Critique of Poverty Theories and Policies*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Biographical Note: Dorota Lepianka is a researcher at the Amsterdam Institute for Labor Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Her research interests embrace poverty and social exclusion as well as popular constructions of poverty and the poor. .

Address: Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS), University of Amsterdam, Plantage Muidergracht 12, 1018 TV Amsterdam, The Netherlands. [email: d.a.lepianka@uva.nl]

Biographical Note: John Gelissen is Assistant Professor at the Department of Methodology and Statistics at Tilburg University. His research interests are the methodology of (comparative) public opinion research and the substantive analysis of public opinions on welfare issues.

Address: Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Department of Methodology and Statistics, Tilburg University, P.O. Box 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands. [email: j.p.t.m.gelissen@uvt.nl]

Biographical Note: Wim van Oorschot is Professor of Sociology at Tilburg University, honorary president of the Network for European Social Policy Analysis (www.espanet.org) and coordinator of the European Data Center for Work and Welfare (www.edacwowe.eu). His research interests are in European Union comparative welfare opinions.

Address: Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Department of Social Cultural Studies, Tilburg University, P.O. Box 90153, 5000 LE Tilburg, The Netherlands. [email: w.v.oorschot@uvt.nl]

Appendix *Correlations between contextual characteristics*

	Eastern Europe (ref. = Western Europe)	Total social expenditure	Human Development Index	Percentage Catholics	Average work ethic	Average egalitarianism
Eastern Europe						
Total social expenditure	–0.596**					
Human Development Index	–0.897**	0.711***				
Percentage Catholics	–0.029	0.053	0.080			
Average work ethic	0.705**	–0.424*	–0.676**	0.231		
Average egalitarianism	0.351	–0.244	–0.293	0.165	0.381*	
Percentage change in GDP	0.049	0.068	0.006	0.463*	–0.094	0.190

N (listwise) = 28
*Significant at 5 per cent; **significant at 1 per cent.