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Racial Cues and Attitudes toward Redistribution: A Comparative Experimental Approach

Stuart Soroka, Allison Harell and Shanto Iyengar

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Abstract

Support for welfare in the US is heavily influenced by citizens' racial attitudes, especially citizens' attitudes toward Blacks. Indeed, the fact that many Americans think of welfare recipients as poor Blacks (and especially poor Black women) is a common explanation for Americans' comparatively low support for redistribution cross-nationally. In this study, we extend existing work on how racialized portrayals of recipients affect attitudes toward redistribution. The data for the analysis are drawn from a new and unique online survey experiment, implemented by YouGov with representative samples (n=1200) in each of the US, UK and Canada. Relying on a series of survey vignettes, we manipulate program type (welfare vs. unemployment insurance) as well as the ethno-racial background of recipients (through morphed photos and common ethnicized names). In doing so, we seek to make three specific contributions. First, we test whether support for a means-tested program like welfare is lower than support for contribution-based program like unemployment insurance. Second, we extend the American literature to explore whether there is an anti-Black bias in other countries. Third, we examine whether citizens respond to other minority groups (Asians and Southeast Asians) in a similar manner. Parallel survey designs allows for an unprecedented comparative analysis of the underlying political-psychological sources of support (or lack of support) for redistributive policies across Anglo-Saxon democracies. The paper concludes by considering the implications of this study in light of growing immigrant-driven diversity in North America and Europe.

Keywords

Immigration, public opinion, racial attitudes, redistributive policy.

With the development of the modern welfare state in the 20th century, the scope of what governments provide for citizens has grown exponentially to include a vast social safety net. The structure of specific programs varies from country to country, of course. But all industrialized nations are now actively involved in a wide range of social welfare programs, including employment insurance for the unemployed, social security and pensions for seniors, health care and childcare for some if not all citizens, and social assistance programs for the poor.

Understanding the sources of popular support for such provisions has been of interest to both political behavior researchers and comparative welfare state scholars. From the former perspective, while popular support clearly has a foundation in citizens' ideological orientations and their self-interest, it is becoming increasingly clear that public perceptions of a policy's beneficiaries may be equally, if not more, important to how average citizens judge public policies. From the latter perspective, as industrialized countries become increasingly diverse, public perceptions of who benefits (and who does not) have come to play an important role in the popular debates. In spite of this interest from multiple fields, however, there is little empirical work at the individual level exploring the implications of perceptions of policy recipients in a cross-national manner.

In this paper, we ask whether program type (means-tested vs. contribution-based) and racial cues influence support for transfers to individual welfare recipients in the US, Canada and the UK. Relying on experimental vignettes embedded in an online survey, we experimentally manipulate the ethno-racial background (through morphed photos and common ethnicized names) of welfare and unemployment insurance recipients. In doing so, we demonstrate that citizens in liberal welfare states do indeed make distinctions based on who benefits from specific redistributive policies, as well as whether programs are means-tested versus contribution-based.

Public Support for Social Welfare Programs: A Comparative Perspective

Support for the modern welfare state tends to be fairly wide-spread (Tang 1997), yet we know that this support is far from universal. In particular, the cost of supporting the welfare state led to growing backlash in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as renewed interest in the social and political bases of support for these institutions (Korpi 1983; Anderson 1990; Papadakis and Bean 1993).

One of the key contentions of this literature is that some welfare state regimes are more likely to garner public support than others. Esping-Anderson (1990) distinguishes between social-democratic, conservative and liberal welfare states. In universal programs, characterizing social democratic welfare states like those in Scandinavia, the “decommodification” of welfare benefits tends to generate broad support for such programs. Access to benefits in this context are based on citizenship, not market participation, and tend to be the most generous. Conservative states like Germany have more moderate redistributive policies, largely through programs that are primarily contribution-based. In contrast, liberal regimes rely more on the private provision of goods like health insurance and subsidies, and tax breaks to the private sector to promote market force participation.¹ In contrast to other regimes, benefits levels (and levels of public support) are lower, and those policies in place tend to be targeted and means-tested.

Empirical evidence supports these distinctions – not just in policies, but in public attitudes as well. Even after controlling for individual level variables, country-level differences in support for redistribution tend to remain (Papadakis and Bean 1993; Andres and Heien 2001; Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Larsen 2008). And while public support does not map perfectly onto Esping-Anderson's original country classification, liberal regimes – especially the United States – show lower levels of support for redistribution of wealth (Papadakis and Bean 1993: 234-235; Shapiro and Young

¹ For a discussion of the different principles at play in different types of programs, see Clasen and van Oorschot (2002).

1989; Larsen 2008). Furthermore, when we examine specific programs, it is clear that universal programs are more popular among the public than means-tested ones targeted at vulnerable subpopulations (van Oorschot 2000, Rothstein 1998).

Public support for redistribution is, in short, partly related to self-interest. One's access to (i.e., potential need for benefits) promotes support for redistribution (Rothstein 1998; Hasenfeld and Rafferty 1989; Bobo 1991; Feldman and Zaller 1992; Ove Moene and Wallerstein 2001; Johnston et al. 2010; Soroka and Wlezien 2008; Kam and Nam 2008; Wlezien and Soroka, N.d.). Universal programs that are accessible to everyone (for example, universal healthcare) or a group of people without distinction (i.e. education for children, old-age security for seniors) tend to be relatively popular. Similarly, contribution-based programs like employment insurance also tend to receive high levels of support, since those who benefit have contributed already. Means-tested programs, in contrast, benefit a smaller population, and are based on demonstrated need; they tend to result in a stigmatization around recipients receiving such benefits, and receive lower overall levels of support.²

The word "welfare" often captures these programs that provide cash benefits to the poor on a means-tested basis, even though welfare can be used to refer to a myriad of programs (Ellwood 1988; Cook and Barret 1992: Ch. 1). This association of welfare with cash benefits for the poor is important for understanding public support of such programs. Poverty, especially in the US, is often evaluated in terms of self-sufficiency and dependence (Heclo 1986; Iyengar 1990; Fraser and Gordon 1994; Misra et al. 2003; Somers and Brock 2005). There is a dominant, and according to Fraser and Gordon (1994: 325) even "pathological", view of welfare as creating a dependency on the state. Those who rely on welfare to support themselves are viewed as responsible for their situation, due to lack of a work ethic or moral character (Golding and Middleton 1982; Smith and Stone 1989; Henry et al 2004; Somers and Brock 2005). Furthermore, their use of social assistance programs is argued to breed such personal characteristics. By giving people something for nothing, so it goes, they have no motivation to work and become a drain on the whole system.³

This logic of dependency is intimately tied to the distinction between benefits and services. Whereas cash benefits for the poor are viewed as handouts, services are viewed as more legitimate because they encourage self-sufficiency: they provide people the tools to work. Not surprisingly, while the two series clearly move in parallel over time, public support for spending on welfare is consistently lower than support for spending on services for the poor (Smith 1987; Rasinski 1989; Cook and Barret 1992; Soroka and Wlezien 2010). In Canada, research has shown a parallel pattern when citizens are asked about welfare spending versus spending for services on the poor (Harell, Soroka and Mahon 2008). In other words, public support for programs aimed at the poor are somewhat dependent on the types of benefits received.

In sum, we know that support for redistribution is most likely when citizens feel like they will (or at least may) use the programs associated with the welfare state. When programs benefit everyone, or when citizens are viewed as "earning" those benefits through their contribution to the workforce, it is not surprising that support is more widespread. However, when benefits are targeted there is less support, not only because fewer people think they will ever benefit from such programs, but also because perceptions of those who benefit from such programs tends to be negative and imbued with concerns about deservingness and dependence.

² Interestingly, Sniderman and colleagues (1996) have shown that when targeted programs are framed in universal ways, they garner greater support.

³ It should be noted that little evidence of this culture of dependence is actual found among welfare recipients (Schneider and Jacoby 2005a).

Racial Attitudes and Support for Welfare

The comparative welfare state literature makes clear that levels of support for redistribution in general should be lower in liberal regimes like the US, and that individuals should be particularly hostile toward the types of programs associated with redistribution in these countries. Cash benefits targeted at a minority foster a stigmatization of these recipients as being undeserving of help. When the benefitting minority is viewed as not only poor, but an outgroup, this further exacerbates hostility toward such programs.

Social psychological research has consistently pointed to people's tendency to favour their own group members and to express hostility toward outgroup members (Allport, 1958, Blumer, 1958, Sherif et al., 1961, Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Within political science, these findings have formed the basis of large literature on racial attitudes that falls into two camps (for an overview, see Bobo and Fox, 2003, for a critique of both approaches, see Sniderman and Carmines, 1997). The first are social psychological theories focusing on prejudice expressed variously as modern racism, symbolic racism, subtle racism or racial resentment (Kinder and Sears, 1981, Pettigrew and Meertens, 1995, Meertens and Pettigrew, 1997). In essence, this approach views attitudes toward race-targeted policies as an outward expression of inwardly held beliefs about the negative moral and social characteristics of an outgroup. Social structural approaches, on the other hand, view hostile attitudes toward race-targeted policies as a reflection of real conflict between groups over social and economic resources (Key, 1949, Blumer, 1958, Quillian, 1995, Esses et al., 1998, Sears et al., 2000). The prejudicial attitudes, from this perspective, are used to justify discrimination to protect real interests, rather than the underlying cause.

Despite their different causal logic, both perspectives point to the potential importance of perceptions of policy recipients for understanding attitudes towards redistributive policy. When policies are racially (or gender) coded, we can expect intergroup dynamics to influence policy support. And indeed, this is what the literature tends to find. Substantial evidence indicates that perceptions of welfare and poverty are heavily racialized in the US.⁴ Americans tend to believe that more Blacks are on welfare than actually are, and this is reinforced by a media system that disproportionately portrays the poor as Black (Golding and Middleton, 1982, Gilens, 1996, 2000). Furthermore, problems of unemployment and poverty are viewed as less likely to be a national problem, or to require a more society-level solution, when news coverage of these issues portrayed black people compared to whites (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Iyengar 1991). Furthermore, the stereotype of the "black welfare queen" has played a powerful role in welfare discourses, highlighting not only the racialized but gendered dimensions of welfare attitudes in the US (Gilens, 2000, Hancock, 2004). Not surprisingly, substantial evidence shows a negative relationship between attitudes toward Black Americans and support for welfare (Gilens, 1996, 2000, Nelson, 1999, Mendelberg, 2001, Schram et al., 2003, Frederico, 2005, Winter, 2008, although see Peffley et al., 1997, Sniderman et al., 1996).

There is also an emerging body of aggregate-level research suggesting that high immigration levels have detrimental effects on support for redistribution. As countries have become more ethnically and racially diverse, there has been increasing concern over how to ensure continued support for a shared social safety net (Luttmer, 2001, Soroka et al., 2006, Banting and Kymlicka, 2006, Banting et al., 2007, Crepaz, 2008, Harell and Stolle, 2010). Some argue that increasing ethno-racial diversity is changing the terms of debate on social welfare issues. For example, Faist (1995), in a comparison

⁴ Of course, work on race, gender and policy attitudes is not restricted just to social assistance. There are related literatures focusing on affirmative action (e.g., Bobo and Kleugal, 1993, Krysan, 2000, Feldman and Huddy, 2005), on social security (e.g., Winter 2006, 2008), on crime (e.g., Peffley et al., 1997, Hurwitz and Peffley, 1997, Mendelberg, 2001, Peffley and Hurwitz, 2002, Gillaam et al., 2002, Frederico and Holmes, 2005), on speech restrictions (Harell, 2008, 2010a, 2010b), and on immigration (e.g., Pettigrew, 1998, Jackson et al., 2001, Green, 2007). As with welfare, for instance, media coverage of crime paints it as a disproportionately Black problem and consistent evidence suggests that when Blacks are portrayed as criminals, whites support harsher punishments.

between the US and Germany, has argued that while welfare state support has always been racialized in the US, rising levels of immigration in Germany has led to a shift from a class-based to an ethnic-class based cleavage around support for the welfare state. And some cross-national evidence shows a correlation between immigration levels and support for the welfare state (Bommes and Geddes, 2000, Bloch and Schuster, 2002, Soroka et al., 2006, Bay and Pedersen, 2006). This should, perhaps, not be surprising, as issues around immigration in other countries are often highly racialized (e.g. Silverstein, 2005, Bulbeck, 2004; although see Harell, Soroka, Iyengar and Valentino 2012). While the racial dynamics in the US are often considered a point of exceptionalism, then, increasingly the focus in the comparative welfare literature points to the importance of understanding how citizens across a wide range of countries perceive the ethno-racial background of the recipients of social welfare programs. This research suggests that new forms of ethnoracial diversity may influence welfare state support.

There has thus far been rather little synthesis between this aggregate-level research and the individual-level literature on race and welfare attitudes. In this study, we draw on both of these literatures to test whether the public supports lower levels of cash benefits to those in need when the recipients belong to a racial minority and when the benefits come from a means-tested program (welfare) versus a contribution-based program (unemployment insurance).

Data and Methods

The data used for this analysis are drawn from the Race, Gender and the Welfare State (RGWS) survey, which was collected in July 2012 using online panels in the US, Canada, and the UK (n=1200 per country). Each panel was fielded by YouGov-PMX, using a matching methodology for delivering online samples that mirror target populations on key demographics. For details on the sampling procedures, see Iyengar and Vavreck (2011).

These three countries were selected based on a “most similar” case design: all three are considered liberal welfare states; each has significant levels of internal racial and ethnic diversity; and each has experienced similar economic retrenchment (albeit to varying degrees) in recent years. As such, they provide a relatively clear test of whether the racialization of welfare is a uniquely American phenomenon, or if redistributive policy judgements tend to be racialized across contemporary, racially diverse welfare states (at least liberal ones). These countries also have the practical commonality of having large English-speaking populations, meaning that the survey instrument can be conducted in the same language in each country, minimizing some risk of inter-country differences resulting from survey instrument translation. (That said, in Canada the survey was conducted in both English and French to ensure national representativeness.)

To examine racial and gender cues on support for redistributive policy, we developed experimentally-manipulated policy vignettes, based on what is referred to in the literature as a factorial design (Rossi and Nock, 1982). Policy vignettes are in essence short stories about individual policy recipients, including a photo, and describing a fictional recipient’s situation along with the amount they are eligible for. The eligible amount is based on average support for a person in the individuals’ situation based on the current programs in place in each country.⁵ The respondent is then asked what level the recipient should receive on a scale from \$0 to twice the eligible amount.

The survey includes 7 vignettes that focus on welfare, unemployment insurance, disability benefits, benefits for low-income seniors and parental leave benefits. The vignettes are presented to respondents in a random order. The vignette approach provides a useful alternative way to establish attitudes compared to traditional survey items, despite its less common use in political science. Vignettes allow

⁵ Note that for parental leave in the US, no comparable public program exists. Here, we rephrase the vignette to say the recipient is eligible for a new parental leave benefits based on the approximate levels available under temporary disability benefits in the five states in the US that offer such programs.

people to make specific judgments that are often easier to report compared to feelings about abstract values (Alexander and Becker, 1978). They have the added benefit of being ideally suited to experimental manipulation because respondents can be randomly assigned different versions of the scenario (as well as randomly assigned the order of vignettes to minimize sequence effects). This is especially important when racial attitudes are considered. Overt racial animosity has decreased over time, yet studies suggest that people continue to express more subtle forms of racism (Kinder and Sears, 1981). Given increasing social pressure to refrain from overt forms of racism, asking directly about racial attitudes can induce social desirability bias in responses. The online vignette also has an additional advantage, in that it allows us to take advantage of visual cues not normally available in traditional survey methodology.

This paper is based on the results of a single vignette with two experimental treatments: (1) ethno-racial cue and (2) type of program. The full text of the vignette is available in Table 1. Note that the ethno-racial background of recipients is cued in two ways. First, using FaceGen, we start with a base photo and then apply ethnic morphs (White, Black, Asian, Southeast Asian). The morphed photos are then edited to add in shadows, age characteristics, and hair and clothing that are comparable across morphs. In addition to the photo manipulation, the vignettes vary the name of the recipient, using common ethnicized names associated with each ethno-racial group. We rely on morphed photos because it is important that we control for other characteristics of the visual cue (such as attractiveness and likability) which can clearly have an impact on social judgements (see, for example, Eberhardt et al., 2004; Eagly et al. 1991). By beginning with the same base face and using identical hair and clothing, we largely control for these confounding variables.

The level of comparability between the faces is further confirmed empirically by real-life evaluations. Relying on a sample of 50 respondents on Amazon's MTurk, we tested the levels of attractiveness and stereotypicality of the faces. Results for these ratings are available in the Appendix, and show no significant variance across photos on either dimension.





In addition to the experimental treatments, we include several control variables in the analyses. Two scales capture attitudes towards (a) government action, and (b) welfare recipients. The first is based on five questions which capture the general orientation of the respondent toward state intervention, scaled from 0 to 1 where higher scores indicate intervention.⁶ The second scale runs from 0 to 1 and is based on two questions about the personal responsibility of welfare recipients, with higher scores indicated responses that view poverty as a society problem (rather than a personal failure).⁷ Details on both are provided in the Appendix. We expect each to have a direct positive effect on benefits.⁸ We also control for the order in which respondents see this vignette, as our diagnostic analyses in both this and prior studies suggest that respondents' support drops as more vignettes are completed. In addition, we include a control for module order for whether the vignettes appeared near the beginning of the survey (0), before survey questions and an IAT were completed, or at the end of the survey (1).

⁶ The government action scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .72

⁷ The welfare recipient scale has a Cronbach's alpha of .56

⁸ These controls are also essential because a check of the experimental treatment's randomization showed that the government action scale (in Canada) and the view of recipients scale (in the US) are not randomly distributed across experiment treatments — an consequence of a design that divides just 1200 respondents across 6 different treatments.

Table 1: Welfare vs. Unemployment Vignette

	
Emily Johnson	Ebony Jackson
	
Jing Nyugen	Rita Singh

[X] is 37 years old and rents an apartment with her two children. She has worked in the food service industry since graduating high school in [BIGGEST CITY of PROVINCE/STATE/REGION]. Last year, she earned about \$1600 a month before taxes. This year, she has not found suitable employment. She has no savings and has about \$2500 in credit card debt.

would like to apply for [unemployment benefits/welfare benefits]. The average benefit in this situation is about \$[Z] a month.

How much, if any, do you think [X] should be entitled to receive per month in [unemployment benefits/welfare benefits]?

Slider scale: \$0 ---- 2X Benefit Amount

Note: The average benefit [Z] varied to an estimate of current levels in each country: Canada, \$1100; USA, \$600; UK, £1400.

Results

Table 2 presents the results of an OLS regression, where the dependent variable in column one is the cash benefit centered at the average benefit defined in each country's vignette. The first column shows results for all countries combined. In this case, all cash amounts have been rescaled to US dollars based on purchasing power parity, so that the coefficients can be interpreted as the effect, in US

dollars, of each variable on the average cash benefit given to the recipient by respondents. For the time being, we limit our analyses to only white, non-foreign born respondents.⁹

Table 2: Treatment Effects on Cash Transfer Levels

	Combined ^a	By Country ^b		
		CA	UK	US
<i>Ethno-racial cue</i>				
Black	-53.605*** (16.499)	-61.705* (31.461)	-74.303** (34.364)	-26.543 (22.174)
Asian	-52.252*** (19.677)	-74.578** (31.769)		-16.924 (22.017)
SE Asian	-75.759*** (25.386)		-107.884*** (34.744)	
<i>Program</i>				
Welfare	-25.947* (13.480)	-46.268* (25.632)	8.848 (28.204)	-32.150* (17.975)
Vignette order	-10.331*** (3.449)	-6.618 (6.502)	-4.092 (7.212)	-19.732*** (4.652)
Module order	51.474*** (13.497)	57.098** (25.724)	60.387** (28.059)	45.490** (18.138)
Support for Gov't Action	230.621*** (25.640)	292.516*** (52.413)	345.463*** (60.180)	169.420*** (32.163)
Views of Recipients	225.294*** (19.876)	192.468*** (38.864)	338.255*** (38.330)	213.988*** (29.138)
UK	-414.492*** (19.314)			
US	6.571 (17.750)			
Constant	-64.130** (25.292)	992.500*** (47.298)	647.229*** (51.797)	585.033*** (26.440)
N	2547	777	912	858
Rsqr	.335	.120	.178	.257

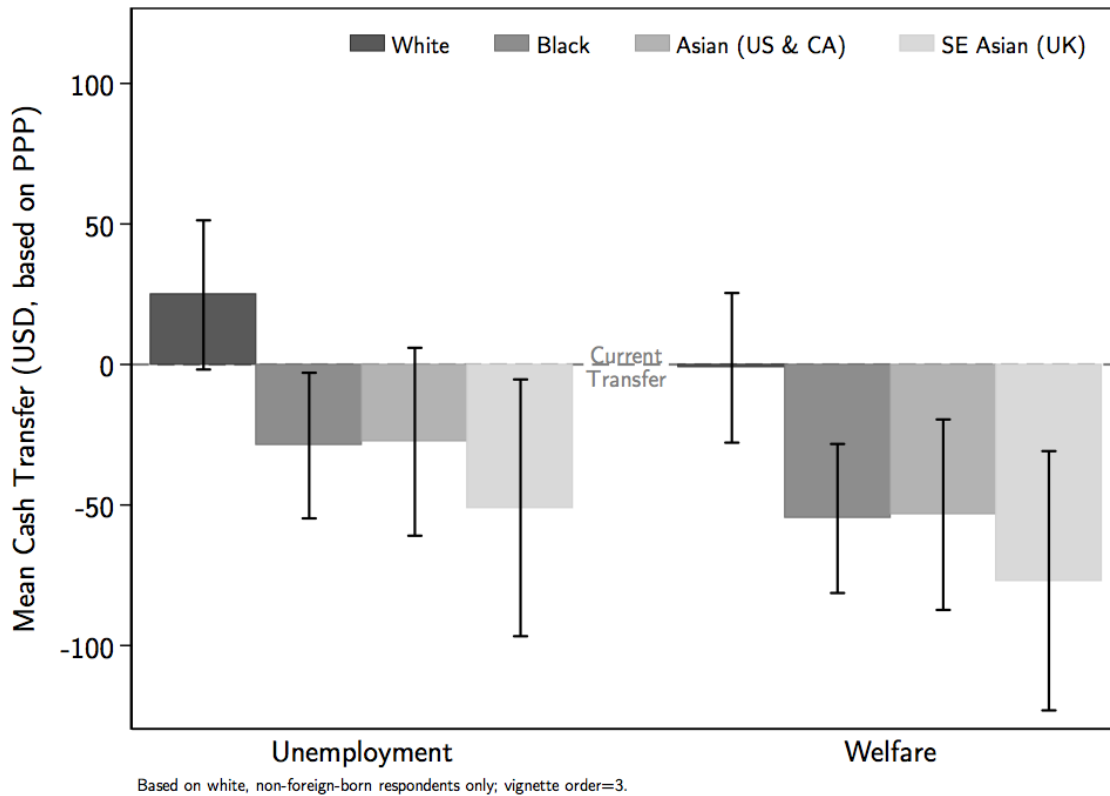
* p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01. Cells contain OLS regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Based on white, non-foreign born respondents only (unweighted).

^a Dependent variable is cash benefit centered at the average benefit (as defined in the vignette text) for each country, and rescaled to US dollars based on PPP.

^b Dependent variable is cash benefit in national currency units

⁹ Note that when the entire sample is used, the results do not vary substantially from those in Table 2, although the welfare treatment falls shy of statistical significance (p=.11).

Figure 1: Mean Cash Transfer based on Program Type and Ethno-Racial Cue



The ethnicity variables test whether there is a penalty associated with being non-white for welfare and EI recipients. In the case of all three non-white ethnic treatments, we find a negative and significant effect. In the case of the Black and Asian recipient, the average benefit is over \$50 less than for the white recipient. For the South East Asian recipient (only present in the UK vignette), the penalty is about \$75. In other words, controlling for the type of program, characteristics of the experimental design, and general attitudes toward redistribution and welfare recipients, we find an independent negative effect simply for portraying the recipient as non-white. These results are clear in Figure 1, which illustrates the main findings from the first model in Table 2.

Recall that the second experimental treatment involves the type of program that the fictional recipient in the vignette is eligible to apply for. Based on the comparative welfare state literature, we expect that citizens will be less supportive of a means-tested, targeted program like welfare. One of the reasons that support for welfare is argued to be so low at the aggregate level is because people see welfare as a hand-out given to people who could take care of themselves, rather than a societal or structural problem. Clearly, views about welfare recipients being able to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps”, so to speak, has a powerful effect on generosity. In the model, those who view recipients as lazy rather than in need (captured by our *Views of Recipients* variable) give on average about \$225 more in cash benefits.

Even controlling for these attitudes towards recipients, however, we find that program type has an effect on benefits. For a recipient that is described in *exactly* the same way, if we tell respondents that this recipient is eligible for welfare as opposed to unemployment benefits the generosity of benefits drops by an average of \$26. This difference in support across the two programs is evident in Figure 1 as well.

Note that when we tested for an interaction between the ethno-racial background of the recipient and the type of program, results were insignificant. In other words, we find no evidence that cuing welfare made respondents more sensitive to the ethno-racial treatments. Results here thus focus on the direct effects of the two treatments only.

The other control variables in the model behave as expected. Those who see a bigger role for the state tend to be substantially more generous toward welfare recipients, for instance. We also find that the experimental design matter to levels of support. People became less generous as they responded to more vignettes, and they tend to be more generous when they responded to the vignette battery at the end of the survey (having been exposed to series of questions cuing race and social welfare issues), rather than at the beginning.

This first combined model also lets us test whether we find differences in the generosity across countries. Who is most generous — Canadians, Americans or Brits? The country controls in the combined model suggest our UK sample gave over \$400 less in benefits than Canadians and Americans, *ceteris paribus*; there is no significant difference between the US and Canada. This effect may seem surprising given the fact that the US tends to be seen as exceptional when it comes to the welfare state. Indeed, both Canada and the UK, despite being less general liberal regimes, do have universal health care regimes and tend to spend more money on the types of redistributive programs associated with their social democratic and conservative counterparts in continental Europe.

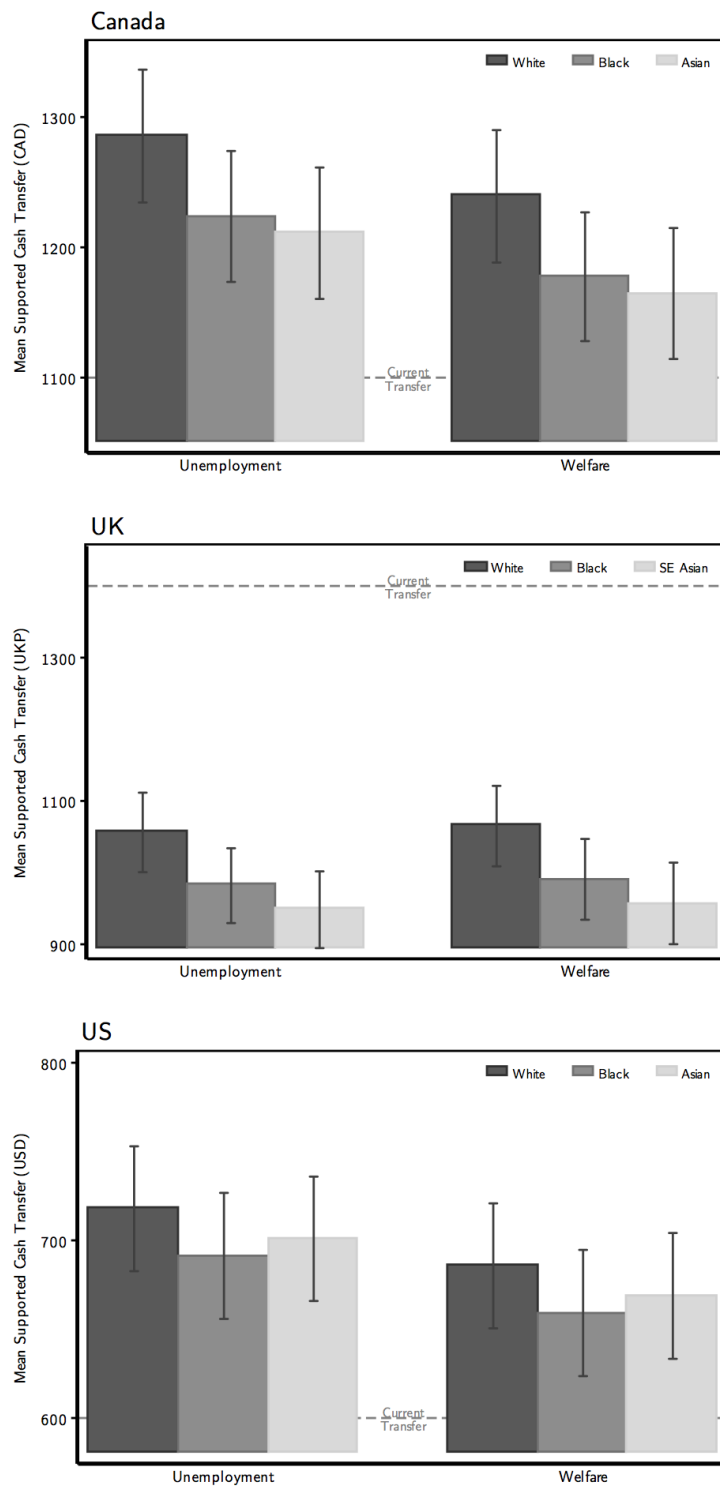
We nevertheless see these results as sensible given that the vignettes in each country were, while identical in all other ways, embedded within the current institutional context of each country. More specifically, the average benefits listed in vignettes were linked to the level of actual benefits that a person in the situation of the vignette recipient would receive in each country. The result is that the “average” benefit described in the US was substantially lower (\$600USD) than in Canada (\$1100CAD) and especially compared to the UK (£1400). In short, relatively high levels of support in the UK lead to less support for increased spending; in Canada, support hovers around existing levels of support in the Canadian case; and support in the US does as well, though the existing level of support there is much lower.

Columns 2 through 4 in Table 2 show the basic results separately for each country. In these models, the dependent variable is simply the cash benefit in national current units, which makes the constant interpretable as the estimated benefit in each country when all the variables in the model are set at 0. Here too, we can see the difference in support for existing levels of benefits across countries. A white respondent who reads the unemployment benefit vignette, wants a small government, and views poverty as a personal problem, supports benefit levels of roughly \$1000 in Canada, about £650 in the UK, and just under \$600 in the US. The drop in support for benefits is greatest in the UK, and much lower in the US and Canada. (Given the high level of benefits in the UK, we might see these cross-national differences as reflecting a thermostatic reaction of public opinion to policy; see Soroka and Wlezien 2010.)

The individual country models reveal some differences in the experimental treatment effects as well. For the ethno-racial cues, all the variables remain negative, as expected. However, in the US, the ethno-racial cues fail to reach statistical significance. This result requires further investigation, as the racialization of welfare literature is largely an American literature, and we would therefore expect to find clear evidence in the US sample. The fact that we do not here may be a product of a person-positivity bias; they may also be a product of the comparatively low level of spending in the US case. That is, low levels of benefits may be less affected by ethno-racial cues than high levels of benefits.¹⁰

¹⁰ We should note, however, that initial analyses of the two other welfare vignettes in this survey do point towards negative effects for black cues in the US.

Figure 2: Mean Cash Transfer by Country and Treatment



Based on white, non-foreign-born respondents only; vignette order=3.

In the case of the welfare treatment, we find significant effects in Canada and the US, whereas there is no evidence of an effect in the UK. Consistent with the literature, Americans and Canadians tend to be somewhat more generous when a recipient is portrayed as receiving contribution-based benefits compared to welfare benefits. In Canada, the difference is in the range of \$45 dollars, and over \$30 in the US. In the UK, however, there is no evidence of respondents differentiating between the two program types. This may be because the UK programs are harder to distinguish along this dimension. Indeed, welfare benefits for employable adults that are not working are almost non-existent in the UK unless there are children present in the home (as is the case in our vignette). We think that the null effect for treatment in the UK may well reflect the institutional context in which citizens are responding to our vignettes. If both welfare and unemployment benefits have a strong work component to them, then it is perhaps not surprising that the distinction between means-tested and contribution based benefits would be weaker in the minds of respondents.

Figure 2 illustrates the main treatment effects based on the separate country models presented in Table 2. The pattern of effects for the ethno-racial cues are similar in all three countries, with white recipients getting the highest level of support in every case (although as mentioned, this is not always a significantly higher level). The non-white respondents receive lower levels, and there are no clear distinctions made among the two non-white recipients in any of the three countries. The differences in program type are also clear in the US and Canada, whereas the estimated benefits in the UK look almost identical regardless of program type.

What is perhaps most evident in the figure, however, is the difference in the current level of benefits in contrast to the levels supported by survey respondents. In Canada and the US, the mean supported cash transfer is higher than the actual transfer level regardless of treatment group. This is to say that, despite evidence that people are affected by the ethno-racial background of recipients, they tend to nonetheless tend to increase benefit levels from that specified as “average” in the vignette. In contrast, respondents in the UK consistently suggested lower levels of cash transfers than the average benefit, regardless of treatment group. Again, this is clear evidence that citizens respond to the institutional environment in which they find themselves. Cross-national comparisons of whether citizens want more or less spent on various programs can not be understood without also understanding where current levels are at.

Conclusions

By focusing on the effects of ethno-racial cues and program type, this paper has investigated the individual-level implications of ethno-racial diversity for modern welfare states. Immigration has increasingly brought a more ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse population to Western democracies, just as welfare states have come under economic pressure to reign in spending. While the racialization and feminization of poverty is well-documented, the ways in, and extent to which, current changes may lead to the erosion of individuals’ support for some of the key institutions of the modern welfare state have thus far received relatively little attention. This kind of analysis is, we believe, of some importance for policy makers, and for researchers interested in understanding the nature and sources of public attitudes towards redistributive policy as well.

Our results suggest that the racialization of welfare is not a uniquely American phenomenon. Indeed, we find evidence that non-white recipients receive significantly lower levels of support for cash transfers in Canada and the UK. (The effect of race in the US, in contrast, appears to be rather muted.) We see these results as particularly convincing because the ethno-racial cue is experimentally administered to otherwise identical vignettes. We are thus able to directly measure the “penalty” for being non-white.

Our findings also suggest that welfare is not necessarily racialized in quite the same way as the literature suggests. Whereas the emphasis has been overwhelmingly on the association of Blacks and

welfare, our finds are significant when we target other non-white recipients as well. Our findings are also not contingent on assistance being linked to welfare – the effects of race are also evident when we ask about unemployment benefits. In other words, we find evidence that the majority in a society (defined here as white, non-foreign born recipients) tend to be less generous to the non-white minority, regardless of their ethno-racial background, and regardless of whether the support they receive is means-tested or contribution based. Put differently, while overall support is lower for welfare, we find no evidence that the “ethnic penalty” is limited to welfare. The white public in these three Anglo-Saxon democracies, it seems, tend to be less generous to those perceived to be from a different ethno-racial background.

Our study also points to the importance of institutional context in understanding support for redistribution. While all three of the countries examined here are liberal welfare states, they vary in terms of the structure and generosity of the programs they have in place to support those in need in their societies. Our individual vignettes provide context specific information, notably the average benefit in each country that our fictional recipients would receive. This allows us to speak not only about how citizens respond to specific types of recipients, but also to the relationship between public support and current levels of benefits in place in each country. Above, it is clear that the UK context matters in particular, because comparatively high current levels of spending push support for increases in benefits downwards.

In conclusion, then, this study has provided a preliminary test of the racialization of welfare hypothesis in a comparative context, and extended the argument to another policy domain that is contribution-based rather than means-tested. In doing so, the paper highlights the important role that intergroup attitudes play in support for redistribution. While it is true that citizens are not the ones approving specific recipients for benefits, we might expect that the sympathy that the average citizen has for various types of respondents translates into the way front-line workers respond to various types of beneficiaries. But even if institutional safe-guards are in place to prevent bias from entering into the distribution of benefits, our findings suggest that the portrayal of policy beneficiaries as being from non-white groups can have a serious impact on the ways in which the public thinks about, and in turn supports, various programs that are intended to help those in need.

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Appendix

Morphed Face Ratings

Attractiveness and stereotypicality are measured based on 7-point scales from not at all to very. Mean scores are presented in the columns, with standard deviations in parenthesis. N=50.

	Attractiveness	Stereotypicality
White Woman	4.12 (1.56)	5.24 (1.65)
Black Woman	3.86 (1.44)	4.84 (1.60)
Asian Woman	4.3 (1.43)	3.54 (1.58)
South Asian Woman	4.06 (1.60)	3.8 (1.82)

Support for Government Action

This scale is based on five questions capturing the general orientation of the respondent toward state intervention, scaled from 0 to 1 where higher scores indicate intervention. Questions are as follows:

Which statement comes closest to your own view [randomize order]: The free market can handle today's problems without government being involved OR We need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems.

Which statement comes closest to your own view [randomize order]: Less government is better OR There are more things that government should be doing.

Which statement comes closest to your own view [randomize order]: We should cut government spending OR We should expand government services

Which statement comes closest to your own view [randomize order]: The government should see to it that everyone has a decent standard of living OR The government should leave it to people to get ahead on their own.

Government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off? [Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree]

Views of Recipients

This scale runs from 0 to 1 and is based on two questions about the personal responsibility of welfare recipients, with higher scores indicated responses that view poverty as a societal problem rather than a personal failure. Questions are as follows:

Which statement comes closest to your own view [randomize order]: Most poor people are poor because they don't work hard enough OR Most poor people are poor because of circumstances beyond their control.

Which statement comes closest to your own view [randomize order]: Most people on welfare could find a job if they tried OR Most people on welfare have no other choice.

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