

INTERNATIONAL  
JOURNAL OF  
SOCIAL WELFARE

**Welfarism and the multidimensionality of welfare state legitimacy. Evidence from The Netherlands, 2006**

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Social Welfare</i>
Manuscript ID:	Draft
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	welfare state, legitimacy, public opinion, attitudes, The Netherlands, welfarism

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Review

# WELFARISM AND THE MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF WELFARE STATE LEGITIMACY

Evidence from The Netherlands, 2006

## 1. Introduction

Is it possible that individual citizens, each of whom fully endorse a substantial role of government in the provision of welfare, nevertheless negatively evaluate specific aspects of such provisions? For instance, being critical about what it costs in taxes, being disappointed by the social outcomes or perceiving negative economic consequences? Likewise, can citizens who reject state intervention in social affairs generally, at the same time be positive about specific social policies and their outcomes? In other words, can welfare support be multi-dimensional, in the sense that people have different positive and negative evaluations of diverse aspects of the welfare state in which they are living?

On the face of it, these seem rhetorical questions, with ‘yes’ as the obvious answer. If the answer were affirmative, it would indeed imply that people’s support for the welfare state, and therefore its overall societal legitimacy, could not be narrowed down to one underlying attitude. Notwithstanding this, most empirical analyses in the field tend to reduce welfare state legitimacy to a single dimension, indicating people’s preference for government taking responsibility for the provision of benefits and services.<sup>i</sup> The most popular indicators of such preferences concern what Roller has called the ‘range’ or ‘extensiveness’ of the role of government (what tasks concerning what policy areas government should take responsibility for) and the ‘degree’ or ‘intensity’ of this role (how much government should spend on certain social policies).

This dominant research practice may be understandable, given the general lack of detailed data regarding welfare attitudes<sup>ii</sup>, but it is highly problematic. Obviously, if welfare legitimacy is multi-dimensional, single dimension studies can give only partial, or even false, information. In particular, the strong focus on ‘role-of-government’ indicators may paint too rosy a picture of welfare legitimacy, if it is true (as it is regularly claimed in literature) that the general public readily tends to say ‘yes’ when asked whether or not government should take responsibility for benefits and services (see e.g. Jacoby, 2000; Pettersen, 2001). Furthermore, failing to distinguish between various dimensions might lead to a biased view of the

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3 determinants of welfare attitudes. Various studies, for example, depart from the idea that ‘net-  
4 receivers’ of welfare are pro-welfare in general, while other groups, who are considered to be  
5 ‘net-payers’ of welfare and much less in need of social benefits and services, are anti-welfare.  
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7 However, if welfare state legitimacy is truly multi-dimensional, various aspects are expected  
8 to have different causes. In that case, the idea of a single welfarism attitude dimension runs  
9 the risk of giving too simple a picture of welfare attitude formation.  
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16 For the abovementioned reasons, we believe that the question of the dimensionality of welfare  
17 attitudes is a pressing one. Some few studies address this issue explicitly; e.g. Svallfors  
18 (1991), Sihvo & Uusitalo (1995), Sabbagh & Vanhuysse (2006), Svallfors (1995) and  
19 Gelissen (2000). But, as we will explain in the following section, there still is an apparent lack  
20 of knowledge regarding the possible dimensions and their interrelations, which restricts our  
21 understanding of welfare state legitimacy and the factors influencing it. In this paper, using  
22 data from a 2006 Dutch national welfare survey, we aim to contribute to the literature by  
23 analysing the following questions regarding the multi-dimensionality of welfare support.  
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- 31 1) What dimensions of the welfare state attitudes can be distinguished by means of  
32 confirmatory factor analysis?
- 33 2) Is there evidence for a single welfarism factor underlying people’s evaluations of the  
34 various dimensions?
- 35 3) What factors can explain people’s evaluations of the various dimensions of the welfare  
36 state, and if applicable, what factors explain their position on a possible single welfarism  
37 dimension?
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46 In the remainder of the paper, firstly we will discuss previous multi-dimensional legitimacy  
47 studies. We will then proceed with an explanation of our data and methods, and continue with  
48 a discussion of our empirical findings. We will finish with conclusions and some points for  
49 discussion.  
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## 56 **2. Multiple dimensions of welfare legitimacy: A literature review**

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60 Although the multi-dimensionality of welfare state support is at times readily acknowledged  
(Roller, 1995; Andress & Heien, 2001), nevertheless the lion’s share of empirical welfare

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3 studies exclusively focus on opinions regarding the welfare role of government. Among the  
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5 studies that do go beyond this focus, several approaches can be distinguished. A first group of  
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7 studies discusses opinions concerning various welfare state issues (such as spending levels,  
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9 benefit levels, images of target groups, abuse perceptions, bureaucracy, etc.), but these do not  
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11 attempt to relate the various aspects to each other and thus essentially neglect the question of  
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13 multidimensionality (see e.g. Ploug, 1996; Van Oorschot, 1998; Hills, 2002). A second group  
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15 consists of studies that combine a number of opinions on various welfare related issues into a  
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17 single, additive scale, without any analysis of whether this is justified, going beyond a  
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19 Cronbach's alpha reliability test. Yet, as Cronbach's alpha can hardly be seen as a stringent  
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21 test for the dimensionality of a scale (Sijtsma, 2009), these studies are not able to provide a  
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23 satisfactory answer to the present research question. Examples of this approach can be found  
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25 in Gidengil et al. (2003) and Bryson (1997).

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27 Far fewer studies explicitly address the dimensionality of welfare attitudes. A few studies  
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29 apply exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to test whether sets of items cluster in different  
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31 factors. If so, scales are constructed from items that load on one and the same factor. Yet  
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33 these exploratory factor analyses are often carried out in a manner that results in them failing  
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35 to provide a stringent test of the multi-dimensionality of welfare attitudes. For example, Sihvo  
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37 and Uusitalo (1995) depart from the idea that welfare attitudes separate into at least five  
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39 different dimensions: responsibility for welfare (public, private, civic), financing (public  
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41 spending), use of the welfare state (overuse, underuse), outputs (sufficiency of incomes, and  
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43 of services), and effects of the welfare state (inequality reduction, making people passive).  
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45 Based on the finding that EFA reproduces all hypothesized dimensions, the authors conclude  
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47 that people may indeed have different opinions on various issues, while relatively low inter-  
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49 correlations between the dimensions suggest that the retrieved dimensions are not reducible to  
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51 a single, underlying welfarism dimension. As an additional argument for multi-  
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53 dimensionality, the authors put forward that they find substantial differences in the  
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55 determinant structures of the various scales.

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57 Yet the analysis of Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995) is limited, because instead of formulating one  
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59 factor model that includes all dimensions and items, a factor analysis is performed separately  
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for each of the five dimensions. This makes it impossible to discover whether the proposed  
dimensions are reducible to a more limited number of factors. Neither can they reveal whether  
some of the items load on multiple factors at a time. Thus, rather than performing a truly

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3 critical test of the multi-dimensionality of welfare attitudes, Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995) have  
4 shown that their items tap into a number of predefined factors.  
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9 A second example is a study by Svallfors (1991) concerning welfare attitudes in Sweden. It  
10 pre-defines four dimensions of welfare policy, and measures each of them with a set of  
11 indicators. These dimensions are: (1) the distributional dimension, measuring attitudes to  
12 social spending in various areas (health care, support for the elderly, support for families,  
13 social assistance, education, etc); (2) the administrative, or implementation dimension,  
14 measuring attitudes to welfare institutions and procedures, (3) the cost dimension, focusing on  
15 issues of welfare financing, and; (4) the abuse dimension, measuring attitudes to claimants'  
16 groups and their alleged misuse of entitlements. Unlike Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995), Svallfors  
17 (1991) provides a test of multi-dimensionality by taking all items for the four dimensions into  
18 account in a single EFA. A series of six separate factors are found, from which it is concluded  
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28 *“....welfare policy can and should be treated as a multi-dimensional and highly*  
29 *complex phenomenon. Instead of basing analyses of public support for welfare*  
30 *policies on a single ‘for or against welfare state’, it should be recognized that*  
31 *attitudes to welfare policy can be fragmented or even contradictory”* (Svallfors, 1991,  
32 p. 617).  
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37 Like Sihvo and Uusitalo, Svallfors finds that the effects of a series of determinants differ for  
38 each single dimension.  
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42 However, the problem here is that Svallfors (1991) chooses to rotate the factor structure  
43 orthogonally (the so-called VARIMAX rotation), which implies that the dimensional structure  
44 is pre-constructed in such a way that the factors do not inter-correlate. In other words, instead  
45 of testing relations between various dimensions, Svallfors (1991) a priori assumes that they  
46 are unrelated, and imposes zero-correlations in the model. If Svallfors had not rotated the  
47 factors orthogonally, he might well have found, as Sihvo and Uusitalo did, that there are inter-  
48 correlations between (several of) the dimensions. If these had been substantial, there might  
49 have been reason to further analyse the question of whether, and to what degree, they would  
50 reflect one single underlying welfarism dimension. A very similar approach is found in  
51 Svallfors (1995).  
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3 Finally, we know of only two studies that address the dimensionality of welfare attitudes by  
4 means of a more adequate analysis strategy. Based on Eurobarometer data, Gelissen (2000)  
5 uses Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to investigate support for welfare provisions and its  
6 antecedents in 11 European countries. In his study, Gelissen (2000) focuses on the two well-  
7 known welfare attitude dimensions proposed by Roller (1995); namely the preferred range of  
8 domains in which government should intervene (the extensiveness of welfare interventions)  
9 and the preferred degree to which government should be active in these domains (the  
10 intensiveness of welfare interventions). Gelissen's (2000) CFA shows that extensiveness and  
11 intensiveness form two distinct, but correlated, factors. The finding that the two dimensions  
12 have different antecedents — class indicators, for example, seem to influence the  
13 intensiveness, rather than the extensiveness dimension — strengthens the case for a multi-  
14 dimensional treatment of welfare attitudes. A crucial limitation of the study by Gelissen  
15 (2000), however, is that only two possible dimensions of welfare attitudes are taken into  
16 account, both referring to goals of the welfare state rather than to means or outputs..  
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30 Sabbagh and Vanhuyse (2006) similarly address the question of multi-dimensionality by  
31 means of CFA. Analyzing student samples from eight different countries, they argue for the  
32 existence of two ideological meta-frames (i.e. market-based vs. welfare-statist) underlying a  
33 range of welfare attitudes, each consisting of three dimensions. Sabbagh and Vanhuyse  
34 (2006) conclude that support for egalitarian distribution, the preferred scope of the welfare  
35 state and external attribution of social inequality are each distinct dimensions that are  
36 constitutive of a welfare-statist position. However, a drawback of this study is that it is based  
37 on university student samples. As the authors acknowledge, the generalizability of findings  
38 from among this very specific and highly educated faction is not guaranteed.  
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48 This literature review makes clear that stringent tests of the multi-dimensionality of welfare  
49 attitudes are still lacking. Several studies claim to present evidence for welfare attitude multi-  
50 dimensionality, but to date they take only an overly-limited number of possible dimensions  
51 into account, they apply inadequate methodological tools or they are not based on general  
52 population data.  
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58 Despite these shortcomings, existing research is a useful starting point, in the sense that it  
59 suggests a number of potential dimensions of welfare legitimacy. We interpret the single  
60 items measured by Bryson (1997) and Gidengil et al. (2003) as reflecting various dimensions

of the welfare state, such as the principles on which welfare is based, the role of government in the provision of welfare, implementation practices, and unintended outcomes of the welfare state. There is quite a strong overlap with the dimensions distinguished by Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995), regarding responsibility for welfare and the role of government, use and abuse of the welfare state, and effects and consequences of the welfare state. In addition, Sihvo and Uusitalo distinguish the aspects of financing and outputs (in terms of sufficiency of incomes and of services). Svallfors' (1991) dimensions overlap with these regarding the administration/implementation of welfare, the costs/financing of welfare, and the use/abuse dimension. Svallfors' distributional dimension seems to be particular, but is actually operationalised in terms of people's opinions regarding the degree to which government should spend in various areas of social policy. This is similar to what Roller (1995) refers to as the 'degree' or 'intensity' aspect of the 'role of government' dimension. The picture of the various dimensions that come to mind on the basis of this brief review corresponds with a view of the welfare state as being an institution which, on the basis of certain principles, compels government to take responsibility for the provision of social welfare. In this course it implements certain policies, which in turn have certain intended outcomes, and which may have certain intended or unintended consequences at a larger societal level. Thus, we hypothesize welfare attitudes structures to separate into the following six dimensions:

1. *Support for the principles of the welfare state*
2. *Preferred range of the role of government ('extensiveness')*
3. *Preferred degree of government spending ('intensiveness')*
4. *Evaluation of the implementation of welfare policies*
5. *Evaluation of the outcomes of the welfare state*
6. *Perceived consequences of the welfare state*

### **3. Data and methods**

#### *3.1 Data*

Our data are from a national representative welfare opinions survey held in October-November 2006 from the Dutch population aged 16 years or above. This dataset is uniquely detailed, in that it contains over 50 attitude questions referring to various aspects and dimensions of the welfare state. The total questionnaire was divided into three parts, which



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3 were put successively to all respondents in three waves over a six-week period. The sample  
4 was taken from a large, national representative panel (run by the Center for Data of Tilburg  
5 University, The Netherlands) and respondents filled out computer-based questionnaires on-  
6 line. Of the 2682 selected respondents, 1972 filled in the sub-questionnaires of all three  
7 waves, and thus completed the total questionnaire, giving a response rate of 73%. In this  
8 response group there is very slight under-representation of younger people, people of a lower  
9 educational level and people on lower incomes. The Dutch *Stichting Instituut Gak* financed  
10 the survey.  
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### 21 3.2 Indicators

#### 22 3.2.1 Dependent variables: welfare dimensions

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24 The questionnaire contains several indicators for each of the six potential dimensions that  
25 were previously determined. Here, these items are discussed briefly; exact question wordings  
26 can be found in the Appendix.  
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33 In respect of welfare principles, our data set has two items that indicate the principle of  
34 equality, which traditionally guides the actions of welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990).  
35 Specifically, these items refer to a moral evaluation of income inequalities, and to the  
36 desirability of reducing these inequalities. But we also have items that allow us to include the  
37 more recent principle of activation. This has been implemented by many developed welfare  
38 states, to the effect that they increasingly focus on employment policies and the re-integration  
39 of unemployed people at the cost of reductions in income benefit schemes (Hvinden, 2008).  
40 Six items refer to conditions that need to be fulfilled in order for an unemployed person to  
41 keep his or her benefit.  
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51 Roller's 'range' aspect of the responsibility-of-government dimension (Roller, 1995) is  
52 measured using two different sets of items. One set concerns whether or not government  
53 should take measures to protect weaker groups in society generally, the other, whether or not  
54 government should take responsibilities for protecting people from certain social risks, such  
55 as unemployment or becoming incapacitated for work. Yet, apart from old risks, some items  
56 also refer to so-called new social risks, such as divorcing or becoming a single parent (For  
57 these types of risk see e.g. Taylor-Gooby, 2004).  
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5 Support for government spending — i.e. the ‘degree’ aspect of role-of-government (Roller  
6 1995) — is operationalized by means of questions on preferred spending levels for several  
7 social benefits. The items refer to work-related (e.g. unemployment, sickness, disability), as  
8 well as other benefits (e.g. social assistance, pensions).  
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14 The aspect of the implementation of welfare policies refers here to people’s perceptions of the  
15 abuse of a number of benefits. In addition, the questionnaire contains a single item concerning  
16 people’s perceptions of under-use, or non take-up.  
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21 Popular evaluations of welfare outcomes are indicated by people’s perceptions of the  
22 adequacy of benefits, that is, their thoughts concerning the ease, or difficulty, with which  
23 claimants of a number of benefits can make ends meet.  
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28 Finally, this study includes several measurements of perceived consequences of welfare  
29 policies. Specifically, respondents are asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of  
30 statements regarding the possible consequences of the social benefits system. The  
31 consequences mentioned separate into three categories, i.e. economic, moral and social  
32 consequences.  
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### 40 3.2.2 Independent variables

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44 Besides investigating the dimensionality of welfare attitudes, this paper also explores possible  
45 determinants of the several dimensions that are retrieved. In the explanation models, the  
46 following independent variables are included: gender; age (in years); income (net monthly  
47 income of household, subdivided into quintiles); educational level (primary school, lower  
48 vocational, middle vocational, secondary school, higher vocational, university); work status  
49 (employed private sector, employed public sector or semi-public sector, self-employed,  
50 unemployed, other, e.g. student, homemaker, pensioner); use of benefits (a dummy indicating  
51 whether the respondent currently receives an unemployment benefit, a disability benefit, sick  
52 pay or social assistance); political stance (self-assessment on a left-right scale ranging from 1  
53 to 10).  
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### 3.3 Methodology

The above-mentioned studies illustrate that in order to readdress the dimensionality of welfare attitudes, it is indispensable to make a careful selection from the available statistical tools. We are of the opinion that confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), more than EFA for example, is the appropriate statistical tool for this dimensionality study (Thompson, 2004). Similarly to EFA, CFA assumes that one or more underlying, latent factors are responsible for the covariances between observed items. Although CFA and EFA thus have a lot in common, each technique is based on a very different logic. EFA is a data-driven technique that explores the underlying factor structure without imposing a preconceived model on the data. It is therefore to be preferred when the researcher has no theoretical expectations at all regarding the factor structure. On the other hand, CFA is used to assess the discrepancy between the data and some *a priori* theoretical expectations on the factor structure. If one can fall back on existing theory (and we argue that this is indeed the case here: the above-cited studies offer more or less clear expectations of possible dimensional structures) then CFA is a far more powerful and versatile statistical tool. CFA renders it possible to evaluate the model fit by means of various indices and, even more importantly, provides deeper insight in the sources of misfit. Other major advantages of CFA include detailed control over the model (e.g. by constraining or relaxing some parameters), statistical tests to compare competing theoretical models and the possibilities to specify more complex factor structures, such as second-order factors. As we will show in the remainder of this paper, these are crucial components with which adequately to address the question of the multi-dimensionality of welfare attitudes.<sup>iii</sup>

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis: The dimensionality of welfare attitudes

A first step in this empirical analysis consists of testing whether or not welfare legitimacy is a multi-dimensional concept and, if it is, then what different dimensions can be distinguished. In order to answer this research question, we test several, increasingly complex factor models that imply the different dimensionality of welfare attitudes. Because the models are nested (i.e. the parameters of the least complex model are a subset of the parameters of the other

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3 models), model fits can be compared to determine what model offers the best description of  
4 the observed data. The results are presented in Table 1.  
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9 We start by estimating a single factor model, in which all 43 welfare items load on one latent  
10 variable. Judging by the variety of fit indices (Hu & Bentler, 1991; Byrne, 1998), there is an  
11 unacceptable discrepancy between model and data. The Root Mean Square Error of  
12 Approximation (RMSEA) equals 0.0924, which is substantially greater than the commonly  
13 accepted cut-off point of 0.05. Furthermore, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI; 0.785) is not  
14 sufficiently close to 1. Obviously, welfare attitudes are a phenomenon too complex to capture  
15 by means of a single dimension.  
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23 **...TABLE 1 about here....**  
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27 Second, a model was estimated containing the six dimensions derived from the literature  
28 review (cfr. supra). Specifying six different latent variables instead of one, results in a clear  
29 improvement of model fit. The chi-square value impressively decreases by almost 4500 units,  
30 while only 15 degrees of freedom are lost. However, the RMSEA (0.0776) and CFI (0.851)  
31 indicate that the six-factor model still does not give a satisfactory description of the data  
32 structure.  
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39 Therefore, we continued by inspecting modification indices in order to detect the sources of  
40 this misfit. Patterns of modification indices suggest that a still greater number of dimensions  
41 are needed to give an accurate account of the structure of welfare legitimacy. First, the  
42 principle-dimension turns out to consist of two distinct principles underlying contemporary  
43 welfare states, namely the principle of equality and the principle of activation. Second, the  
44 preferred range of the role of government separates into two factors as well. One factor refers  
45 to the responsibility of government to protect weaker social groups in general, whereas the  
46 other regards the responsibility of government to offer protection against a series of specific  
47 social risks. In the third place, respondents make an attitudinal distinction between different  
48 types of consequences of the welfare state. On the one hand, we find a factor measuring the  
49 perceived social consequences of the welfare state. The items loading on this factor deal with  
50 the possible positive consequences of social benefits for social life, such as the reduction of  
51 income inequalities and the reduction of poverty. On the other hand, perceptions of negative  
52 moral and economic consequences cluster together on one scale. Individuals that perceive the  
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welfare state as having negative moral consequences are generally also of the opinion that the welfare state has adverse effects on the performance of the economy. This specific attitude structure (i.e. one factor with social consequences, and one with combined economic and moral consequences) mirrors the Dutch public debate, in which negative economic and moral consequences often appear in conjunction, while positive social consequences are only mentioned rarely. These model modifications result in 10 latent factors:

- 1 - PRINEQUAL Principle of equality;
- 2 - PRINACTIV Principle of activation;
- 3 - ROGWEAK Role of government – protection of the weak;
- 4 - ROGRISK Role of government – protection from social risks;
- 5 - SPENDING Support for government spending;
- 6 - OVERUSE Perceived overuse of social benefits;
- 7 - UNDERUSE Perceived underuse of social benefits;
- 8 - OUTCOME Evaluation of the outcomes of the welfare state;
- 9 - CONSSOCIAL Perceived social consequences;
- 10 – CONSECOMOR Perceived economic and moral consequences.

A model containing these ten, instead of the original six, factors gives a substantially better account of the data. The drop in chi-square is notably significant, and both the RMSEA (0.0469) and CFI (0.947) indicate that the overall model fit is acceptable.

In this final model, all standardized factor loadings are quite high (mostly over .70, see Table 2) and decidedly significant. Together with the absence of cross-loadings, this indicates that the items are reliable indicators of the intended concepts. Additional tests (which we do not report here) show that all attempts to reduce the number of factors to less than 10 result in significantly worse models. The finding that ten clearly distinct factors can be measured adequately, and are necessary to describe the data, supports the claim that welfare attitudes should be treated as a truly multi-dimensional concept.

**...TABLE 2 about here....**

#### *4.2 A general welfarism dimension?*

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3 Although the ten latent variables clearly represent distinct dimensions, they are not  
4 independent from each other. Significant correlations exist between the latent factors,  
5 meaning that attitudes toward one aspect of the welfare state therefore contain information on  
6 opinions regarding the other aspects. This raises the question as to whether, and to what  
7 extent, it is possible to speak of a single, general pro vs. contra welfare dimension that causes  
8 the observed pattern of correlations. To answer this question, we formulate yet another model  
9 in which a second order factor — i.e. a factor that is not measured directly by the items, but  
10 on which all first order latent variables load — replaces the correlations between the latent  
11 variables. This second-order factor captures what the ten latent variables have in common,  
12 and can thus be seen as an indicator of support for welfare state policies in general. Therefore,  
13 we refer to this second-order factor as WELFARISM.  
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24 The original second-order factor model had to be adjusted in one respect; a correlation  
25 between PRINEQUAL and ROGWEAK had to be tolerated. This correlation means that these  
26 two dimensions share some content beyond WELFARISM. Both factors seem to refer to a  
27 more ideological position; that government should intervene to reduce inequality and to  
28 protect the weak. After this modification, the second-order factor model has an acceptable fit.  
29 For 848 degrees of freedom, the chi-square value equals 5100.99, leading to an RMSEA of  
30 0.0503 and a CFI of 0.937. In fact, the second-order factor model has a slightly worse fit than  
31 the previous model using first-order factors only. This expresses that WELFARISM is not  
32 able fully to explain the correlation structure between the latent variables. Apparently, there  
33 exist elements besides welfarism that cause specific dimensions to correlate more strongly.  
34 This is not very surprising, as some dimensions refer to general welfare principles, while  
35 others deal with the more concrete implementations or consequences of policies. However, as  
36 the overall fit of the model is acceptable, we can conclude that the relations between the ten  
37 dimensions are, for a relatively large part, accounted for by the common element of  
38 WELFARISM.  
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53 The standardized second-order factor loadings, expressing the strength of the relation between  
54 the ten dimensions and the general factor of WELFARISM, are given in Table 3. The second  
55 column of this table contains the shared variances, i.e. the proportion of variance that the  
56 separate dimensions have in common with the second-order factor. Judging by the strength of  
57 the factor loadings, three dimensions — ROGWEAK, SPENDING and CONSECOMOR —  
58 are the key constituents of a pro-welfare attitude. Each of these three dimensions shares over  
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3 two thirds of its variance with the second-order factor. A general disposition to support  
4 welfare systems thus consists in the first place, of the view that government should take action  
5 to reduce inequality, should spend adequate amounts on social protection and that such  
6 interventions should not have unfavourable repercussions in the economic or moral spheres  
7 (after all, the loading for CONSECOMOR is negative). The finding that attitudes toward the  
8 role of government belong to the core of welfarism is an important one. To a certain extent, it  
9 legitimizes the dominant practice of focusing on role-of-government indicators, as this  
10 appears to be the dimension most close to overall welfarism.  
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26 The dimensions least connected to WELFARISM are people's ideas on the role of  
27 government in the protection from traditional social risks (ROGRISK), their perceptions of  
28 non-take-up of benefits (UNDERUSE), and especially, their attitudes towards the principle of  
29 activation (PRINACTIV). These dimensions share roughly between 5 and 25 per cent of their  
30 variance with the general pro or contra welfare dimension, meaning that they are for the  
31 largest part determined by considerations apart from welfarism. With correlations ranging in  
32 absolute value of between 0.60 and 0.80, the remaining four dimensions (PRINEQUAL,  
33 OUTCOMES, CONSSOCIAL and OVERUSE) are situated in between. This means that these  
34 dimensions have about half of their variance in common with the second-order factor, while  
35 the other half is dimension-specific.  
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45 This analysis indicates that it is indeed possible to speak of a general welfarism dimension,  
46 and has provided a view on what this dimension essentially represents. Nevertheless, it should  
47 be clear that welfare attitudes cannot entirely be reduced to this overarching disposition to  
48 support the welfare state in general. Besides the meaning they share, the separate dimensions  
49 also have, to a certain extent, content that is dimension-specific and which merits the attention  
50 of welfare attitude researchers. Researchers that solely focus on welfarism gloss-over a part of  
51 the story that might deepen our insight into the formation of welfare attitudes.  
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#### 4.3 Differential antecedents of the welfare attitude dimensions

A study into the dimensionality of welfare attitudes cannot bypass the question of whether or not attitudes toward various aspects of the welfare state have similar antecedents. Previous research has repeatedly shown that popular evaluations of the welfare state depend on an individual's structural position in society, reflecting interests in social protection, and ideological variables, such as political stance (see e.g. Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Van Oorschot, 2002). In this section, we investigate whether these classical variables in welfare research have a differential impact on the welfare attitude dimensions.

Table 4 presents the results of multiple regression analyses that were performed for this purpose. The dependent variables in these analyses are the ten dimensions of welfare attitudes that were discovered earlier.<sup>iv</sup> To facilitate comparison between the models, all dependent variables were standardized prior to analysis. Furthermore, the scores of the dimensions that load negatively on WELFARISM (i.e. PRINACTIV, OUTCOMES, CONSECOMOR and OVERUSE) were reversed, so that higher scores express more positive attitudes toward the welfare state for all dependent variables.

We start by presenting the explanation model for the overarching WELFARISM-factor. Such a model can give us more insight into the common roots of the different dimensions of welfare attitudes. Welfarism turns out to be influenced in the first place by an individual's ideological orientation, as indicated by political stance on a left vs. right scale. As expected, respondents tending toward the political left are far more supportive of the welfare state.<sup>v</sup> The ideology effect is substantial; political stance alone explains almost a quarter of the variance in pro or contra welfare attitudes. The strong impact of ideological position confirms the earlier finding that second-order factor welfarism contains an important ideological component, referring to the goals pursued by welfare policy.

Besides ideology, socio-demographic and interest indicators also have an impact on welfarist dispositions. Males, as well as those in the 45 to 65 year age range, are found to be more supportive of the welfare state in general. Regarding the income of the respondents, those in the highest quintile hold significantly more critical attitudes toward the welfare state, although this income-effect is quite small. We find that education has no significant direct effect on welfarism. Some evidence is found that education has an indirect, rather than direct, impact



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3 on welfarism, via political ideology; on average, the higher educated have a more leftist  
4 orientation (the results are not given here), which brings with it higher levels of support for  
5 the welfare state. Contrary to the factor of education, work status is perceivably related to  
6 welfarism. Those employed in the (semi-) public sector, the unemployed and those not in the  
7 labour market, hold more positive attitudes toward the welfare state in general. Finally, the  
8 current use of welfare benefits (the most direct indicator of personal interest in welfare  
9 policies) is also a significant predictor of support for the welfare state. So, we see that in  
10 agreement with rational choice arguments and common findings in welfare attitude studies,  
11 people are more welfare-minded if they are in positions that imply greater (or greater chances  
12 of) welfare state dependency (lower income, employment in the public sector, unemployment,  
13 use of benefits). With all variables taken together, the model explains roughly one third of the  
14 total variance in welfarism.  
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26 For each of the ten dimensions of welfare attitudes that were detected in a previous section, a  
27 similar model was estimated. These analyses yield quite different patterns from the ones  
28 found for WELFARISM, suggesting that the antecedents of welfare attitudes are indeed  
29 dimension-specific. Significant gender differences, for example, are present for only three  
30 dimensions. Females are more critical of government intervention in order to protect weak  
31 groups in society (ROGWEAK), opine less often that welfare policies have positive social  
32 consequences (CONSSOCIAL) and perceive lower levels of benefit underuse (UNDERUSE).  
33 Regarding the other dimensions, attitude differences between males and females are  
34 negligible.  
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44 While age has no impact on some of the dimensions, strong age-effects are present for others.  
45 Very similar curve-linear patterns are found for people's ideas regarding the role of  
46 government with regard to provision for social risks (ROGRISK), their perceptions of the  
47 adequacy of benefits (OUTCOMES), their perception of the degree of non-take-up  
48 (UNDERUSE), and also, to a lesser extent, for their perceptions of the economic and moral  
49 consequences of welfare (CONSECOMOR). Each time, people between the ages of 45 and  
50 64, are found to be least critical of these aspects, while the most critical views are found  
51 among the youngest cohort (15 to 24 years of age). The model for people's ideas on the  
52 principle of activation (PRINACTIV), however, reveals very different age-effects. Here, the  
53 strongest opposition against the principle is found among the youngest group. It is very likely  
54 that this finding is due to the specific wording of the items measuring support for activation;  
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3 three out of six items specifically refer to young unemployed persons. Furthermore, the group  
4 between 25 and 44 years of age is the most critical of government spending (SPENDING) and  
5 perceives most benefit overuse (OVERUSE). Not surprisingly, it is precisely this age group  
6 (which will contribute significantly to the welfare budget in their future lives and which has  
7 no immediate perspective on enjoying retirement benefits) that has negative attitudes toward  
8 the financial aspects of the welfare state.  
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16 The income that individuals dispose of turns out to be especially relevant for more ideological  
17 attitude dimensions, which refer to the general principles of the welfare state. People in the  
18 two highest income quintiles less frequently endorse the principles of equality (PRINEQUAL)  
19 and governmental intervention to protect weaker social groups (ROGWEAK). The lowest  
20 support for activation policies (PRINACTIV) is found among people in the lowest income  
21 category.  
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28 While education was not found to have any direct impact on WELFARISM, the educational  
29 level does matter for some specific aspects of attitudes toward the welfare state. What is more,  
30 the sign of the education-effect is different according to the specific content of the dimension  
31 concerned. The higher-educated score lower on dimensions that refer to the general principles  
32 of the welfare state, such as PRINEQUAL and ROGWEAK. At the same time, those with a  
33 higher educational level are less concerned with the unintended negative effects of the welfare  
34 state, such as possible moral and economic consequences (CONSECOMOR) and benefit  
35 overuse (OVERUSE).  
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44 The effects of work status are considerably more similar across the welfare attitude  
45 dimension, although the significance of the effects differs. For almost every dimension, the  
46 unemployed hold more favourable views on the welfare state, a pattern that was also found in  
47 the explanation model for WELFARISM. Besides that, employees in the public, or semi-  
48 public, sector are more supportive of the principles of equality (PRINEQUAL) and  
49 government intervention (ROGWEAK). The self-employed, on the other hand, are rather ill-  
50 disposed toward the equality principle. Another interesting finding is that those not in the  
51 labour market more frequently think of the welfare state as having positive social  
52 consequences (CONSSOCIAL).  
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3 Current use of welfare benefits leads to more supportive attitudes for about half of the  
4 dimensions, covering a wide variety of aspects of the welfare state (PRINEQUAL,  
5 ROGWEAK, SPENDING, CONSECOMOR, OVERUSE), while significant effects are  
6 absent for the other dimensions. The dimensions on which benefit use has an impact are  
7 precisely those with the strongest loadings on second-order factor WELFARISM.  
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14 Finally, ideological position has a significant effect on all dimensions of welfare attitudes; a  
15 more leftist orientation leads to more positive attitudes toward every surveyed aspect of the  
16 welfare state. For dimensions referring to the key principles of the welfare state  
17 (PRINEQUAL and ROGWEAK), or to negative moral and economic consequences  
18 (CONSECOMOR), ideology is a far better predictor than interest related characteristics.<sup>vi</sup>  
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20 Dimensions regarding the practical organization of the welfare state, such as the level of  
21 spending (SPENDING), the range of risks the government should offer protection against  
22 (ROGRISK), satisfaction with benefit levels (OUTCOMES), perception of social  
23 consequences (CONSSOCIAL) or over- and under-use of benefits (OVERUSE,  
24 UNDERUSE), depend to a lesser extent on political stance, although ideology effects are still  
25 notably significant.  
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35 The presented explanation models make clear that, although some common patterns were  
36 detected, the various dimensions can have quite different antecedents. It is not the case that  
37 socio-economic status uniformly leads to more positive or negative evaluations of all aspects  
38 of the welfare state. Instead, the strength and sometimes even the sign of the effects, depend  
39 on the specific content of the dimensions concerned. This re-confirms that welfare attitudes  
40 are multi-dimensional, and that it is necessary to disentangle these various dimensions in  
41 order fully to grasp the genesis of welfare legitimacy.  
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## 51 **5. Conclusion and discussion**

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55 We set out this paper with the question of whether it is possible that individual citizens, who  
56 emphatically endorse a substantial role for government in the provision of welfare, are at the  
57 same time critical about specific aspects of such provision? In other words, is the social  
58 legitimacy of the welfare state multi-dimensional, or not? By means of confirmatory factor  
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3 analysis, we provide a stringent dimensionality test, thereby using a unique diversity of  
4 attitude indicators.  
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9 Our analysis clearly shows that welfare legitimacy is indeed multi-dimensional, a finding in  
10 line with suggestions from previous research. Ten different latent factors are needed to reflect  
11 the structure of welfare attitudes in its full complexity. These dimensions refer to various  
12 aspects of the welfare state, such as underlying principles, the role of government, the degree  
13 of social spending, implementation practice, social outcomes and unintended effects.  
14 However, these dimensions correlate to a degree, which raised the question whether, and to  
15 what extent, they are concrete expressions of a more general underlying welfarism dimension.  
16 Second-order factor analysis showed that it is possible to construct an overarching pro- vs.  
17 contra welfare dimension. This welfarism dimension consists basically of views that the  
18 government should intervene to reduce equality in society, and should spend adequate  
19 amounts for this purpose, as well as of the idea that these government provisions do not have  
20 unfavourable repercussions in the economic or moral spheres. However, the separate  
21 dimensions cannot be reduced entirely to this general welfarism dimension. Besides the  
22 meaning they share, the separate dimensions also have content that is dimension-specific.  
23 Finally, we have shown that the ten separate attitude dimensions are differently affected by  
24 socio-structural position and ideological dispositions. Notwithstanding this, people's political  
25 stance on a left-right scale consistently affects their scores on all dimensions in the expected  
26 direction; leftist people are more positive towards, or less critical of, all aspects of the welfare  
27 state, compared to rightist people.  
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44 More generally, our findings suggest that where we generally criticized the dominant practice  
45 of exclusively focusing on role-of-government indicators for the measurement of welfare  
46 legitimacy, this practice is to a degree justified, in the sense that it uses the dimensions that  
47 appear to be closest to overall welfarism. In our view, this means that if one wants, or needs,  
48 to measure welfare legitimacy using a limited set of survey questions, one would do best to  
49 focus on people's opinions on the range and degree of the welfare responsibilities of the state.  
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<sup>i</sup> Examples of such single-indicator studies are: Andress & Heien (2003), Blekesaune & Quadagno (2003), Bowles & Gintis (2000), Brooks & Manza (2006), Feldman & Steenbergen (2001), Kluegel & Miyano (1995), Linos & West (2003), Papadakis & Bean (1993), Paugam (2003), Roller (1995), Svallfors (1999), Gelissen (2000), Meier Jaeger (2005), Edlund (2006), Edlund (2007), Feldman & Steenbergen (2001), Forma (1997), Hasenfeld & Rafferty (1989), Papadakis & Bean (1993), Pettersen (1995).

<sup>ii</sup> This is especially the case with cross-national data sets. The ISSP survey, with its modules on Role of Government, is exceptional in that they pay most attention to welfare attitudes compared to e.g. the World Values Survey, and the European Social Survey. It is therefore the most used data set for cross-national studies of welfare legitimacy. However, the ISSP questions relevant for analysing welfare legitimacy are still limited to one asking about the role of government in taking responsibilities in a series of policy fields (Roller's 'degree' concept), and one asking about preferred government spending levels in these fields (Roller's 'range' concept). Note that in 2009 the European Social Survey will release the data of its 2008 wave which contain a detailed module on welfare attitudes.

<sup>iii</sup> All CFA models presented below are estimated with LISREL 8.7 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993; Byrne, 1998). Because all items are measured on 3 or 5-point scales, and some of the items show a high degree of skewness, the assumption of multivariate normality is violated. To deal with these violations, we apply a weighted 'least squares estimation procedure', in which polychoric correlations and asymptotic covariance matrices are used as input, rather than regular covariance matrices (Jöreskog, 1990). Missing values on the welfare attitude items were imputed by means of the expectation-maximization algorithm implied in LISREL 8.7. This procedure replaces missing values by random draws from the distribution, conditional on the known information.

<sup>iv</sup> The factor scores on the dimensions were calculated by summing the items weighted by the factor regression scores that were obtained as output from the LISREL CFA analysis. More weight is thus given to items with higher factor loadings

<sup>v</sup> Some would say that left-right ideology is a fundamental ideological aspect of welfarism and not a possible determinant. However, we agree with Edlund's arguments (Edlund 2006: 80) that left-right self-identification is conceptually different from state-intervention orientations. The relation between the two is an empirical matter, not a conceptual one.

<sup>vi</sup> This can be deduced from the standardized regression coefficients which are, due to lack of space, not given here.

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**Table 1. Fit indices for various CFA models**

Model		Model description				Model comparison		
		$\chi^2$	Df	RMSEA	CFI	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta Df$	p-value
1	One factor	15325.11	860	0.0924	0.785	--	--	--
2	6 factors	10877.10	845	0.0776	0.851	4448.01	15	0.0000
3	10 factors	4361.76	817	0.0469	0.947	6515.34	28	0.0000

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**Table 3. Second-order factor loadings on WELFARISM and shared variances**

	WELFARISM	Proportion of shared variance
PRINACTIV	-0.22	0.05
PRINEQUAL	0.71	0.50
ROGWEAK	0.83	0.68
ROGRISK	0.51	0.26
SPENDING	0.82	0.67
OVERUSE	-0.66	0.44
UNDERUSE	0.38	0.14
OUTCOMES	-0.63	0.40
CONSECOMOR	-0.85	0.73
CONSSOCIAL	0.74	0.55

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**Table 4. Multivariate regression models for various welfare attitude dimensions – parameter estimates**

	WELFARISM		PRINEQUAL		PRINACTIV (reversed)		ROGWEAK		ROGRISK		SPENDING		OVERUSE (reversed)		UNDERUSE		OUTCOMES (reversed)		CONSECO- MOR (reversed)		CONSSOCIAL	
Intercept	0.97	***	1.38	***	0.98	***	1.41	***	-0.42	**	0.71	***	0.58	***	0.10		0.21		0.50	***	0.37	*
Gender																						
<i>Male</i> (ref.cat. : <i>female</i> )	0.09	*	-0.06		0.06		0.08	*	0.06		0.01		0.01		0.14	**	0.03		0.07		0.13	**
Age																						
25-44	0.00		-0.18		-0.34	**	-0.11		0.30	**	-0.26	*	-0.30	**	0.38	***	0.48	***	0.10		-0.11	
45-65	0.24	**	-0.06		-0.33	**	-0.04		0.60	***	0.02		0.00		0.47	***	0.60	***	0.24	*	-0.05	
65+	0.17		0.11		-0.52	***	-0.04		0.50	***	-0.01		-0.06		0.33	**	0.45	***	0.13		-0.03	
(ref.cat. : 15-24)																						
Income																						
<i>Quintile 2</i>	0.06		0.07		-0.26	***	0.04		0.20	**	0.07		0.03		-0.10		0.04		0.01		0.03	
<i>Quintile 3</i>	0.05		-0.02		-0.19	**	-0.05		-0.03		0.05		0.03		-0.01		0.06		0.04		0.16	*
<i>Quintile 4</i>	0.00		-0.19	**	-0.24	***	-0.16	**	0.15	*	-0.04		0.12		-0.15	*	-0.02		0.06		0.13	
<i>Quintile 5</i> (ref.cat.: <i>Quintile 1</i> )	-0.14	*	-0.36	***	-0.27	***	-0.25	***	-0.06		-0.07		-0.03		-0.15	*	-0.02		-0.08		0.12	
Education																						
<i>Lower vocational</i>	0.02		-0.13		-0.16		-0.11		0.03		-0.01		0.05		0.10		-0.03		0.13		-0.01	
<i>Middle vocational</i>	0.06		-0.35	***	-0.17		-0.20	*	0.32	**	-0.16		0.27	*	0.03		-0.21		0.31	**	0.02	
<i>Secondary school</i>	0.01		-0.19		-0.13		-0.16		0.11		-0.15		0.08		0.03		-0.12		0.19		0.05	
<i>Higher vocational</i>	0.07		-0.43	***	-0.21	*	-0.24	**	0.20		-0.15		0.29	**	-0.16		-0.20		0.35	***	0.17	
<i>Universitary</i> (ref.cat.: <i>primary school</i> )	0.01		-0.63	***	-0.16		-0.39	***	0.12		-0.26	*	0.38	***	-0.22		-0.29	*	0.42	***	0.22	
Work status																						
<i>(Semi-)public</i>	0.13	*	0.17	**	-0.01		0.15	*	-0.03		0.09		0.03		-0.05		0.07		0.08		0.09	
<i>Self-employed</i>	-0.14		-0.30	**	-0.13		-0.06		-0.11		-0.08		-0.05		-0.15		0.05		-0.18		0.10	
<i>Unemployed</i>	0.46	***	0.21	*	0.27	*	0.43	***	0.03		0.30	**	0.32	**	0.15		0.27	*	0.36	***	0.20	
<i>Other</i> (ref.cat.: <i>private</i> )	0.15	**	0.09		-0.01		0.11		0.09		0.10		0.08		0.08		0.13		0.04		0.19	**
Use of benefits	0.26	***	0.18	*	0.03		0.23	***	-0.02		0.29	***	0.15	*	-0.01		0.10		0.25	***	0.01	
Political stance	-0.23	***	-0.18	***	-0.06	***	-0.22	***	-0.05	***	-0.11	***	-0.13	***	-0.09	***	-0.12	***	-0.18	***	-0.11	***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.300		0.234		0.041		0.263		0.051		0.106		0.127		0.060		0.094		0.192		0.077	

\* p&lt;.05 \*\* p&lt;.01 \*\*\* p&lt;.001

## APPENDIX

Table App1: Dimensions of welfare legitimacy: Items and scales of measurement

Dimension	Item	Freq.	N
		% (strongly) agree	
Principle of equality PRINEQUAL	Eq1: "Large income inequalities are unjust"	42.5	1906
	Eq2: "Government needs to take substantial measures to reduce income inequalities"	51.4	1907
	<i>Disagree-Agree (5-point scale)</i>		
Principle of activation PRINACTIV	"What should a <i>long-term</i> unemployed do in order to keep his or her benefit?"		
	Act1. Search for a job	94.7	1930
	Act2. Participate in reintegration activities	92.2	1919
	Act3. Get schooling or re-training	91.1	1931
	"What should a <i>young</i> unemployed person do in order to keep his or her benefit?"		
	Act4. Search for a job	97.6	1943
	Act5. Participate in reintegration activities	95.4	1934
	Act6. Take schooling or re-training	95.6	1856
	<i>Disagree-Agree (5-point scale)</i>		
<b>Role of government</b>		% (strongly) agree / government	
Protection of the weak ROGWEAK	"Government should...."		
	Rog1. reduce income inequalities	50.6	1886
	Rog2. offer more chances for children of poor families to go to university	68.6	1911
	Rog3. spend less on benefits for the poor	7.6	1901
	Rog4. guarantee a reasonable standard of living to unemployed people	47.0	1908
	Rog5. offer a basic minimum income to everybody	52.5	1889
	<i>Disagree-Agree (5-point scale)</i>		
Protection against 'old' social risks ROGRISK	"Should government organise statutory social benefits to provide for the financial needs that arise for people when being...or should it be left to people themselves?"		
	Risk1. unemployed	74.8	1858
	Risk2. incapacitated for work	69.3	1894
	Risk3. widow(er)	53.0	1844
	Risk4. ill	71.5	1866
	<i>People-Government (5-point scale)</i>		

	RisKn3. single after co-habitation	7.4	1833
	<i>People-Government (5-point scale)</i>		
<b>Spending</b>		% (strongly) increase	
Benefit spending work-related benefits SPENDING	“Should government increase or decrease the level of the benefit...? Increase would result in higher contributions, decrease in lower contributions.”		
	Spew1. unemployment benefit	13.6	1860
	Spew2. disability benefit	39.0	1863
	Spew3. sick pay	17.1	1866
	<i>Decrease-Stay the same-Increase (5-point scale)</i>		
<b>Implementation</b>		% often	
Overuse OVERUSE	“How often is benefit... being misused”		
	Over1. disability benefit	32.6	1846
	Over2. unemployment benefit	42.3	1859
	Over3. social assistance	42.1	1855
	Over4. sick pay	32.5	1780
	<i>Hardly ever – Sometimes – Often (3-point scale)</i>		
Underuse UNDERUSE	Under1. “How often do you think does it occur that people do not claim or receive a benefit to which they are entitled?”	37.7	1825
	<i>Seldom-Often (5-point scale)</i>		
<b>Outcomes</b>		% (very) difficult	
Making ends meet OUTCOMES	“How difficult or easy is it for people with benefit...to make ends meet?”		
	Out1. unemployment benefit	25.4	1728
	Out2. disability benefit	30.7	1719
	Out3. sick pay	50.8	1785
	Out4. old age pension	34.4	1824
	Out5. minimum benefit	49.4	1790
	<i>Easy - Difficult (5-point scale)</i>		
<b>Consequences</b>		% (strongly) agree	
Economic and moral CONSECOMOR	“Because of the system of social benefits and services...”		
	Eco1. the international competitiveness of the Dutch economy decreases	26.8	1741
	Eco2. labor costs increase too much	35.1	1825
	Eco3. the economy deteriorates	9.3	1815
	Eco4. unemployment increases	18.6	1835
	<i>Disagree – Agree (5-point scale)</i>		
	“Because of the system of social benefits and services...”		
	Mor1. people get lazy	39.4	1921
	Mor2. people lose their sense of self-responsibility for their subsistence	39.2	1910
	Mor3. people become egoistic and calculative	33.6	1878
	Mor4. people do not want to care for each other anymore	37.4	1861
	<i>Disagree – Agree (5-point scale)</i>		



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Social CONSSOC	“Because of the system of social benefits and services...”		
	Soc1. societal unrest is prevented	57.8	1864
	Soc2. people divorce too easily	71.6	1893
	Soc3. the Dutch population is happier	50.8	1845
	Soc4. wealth is distributed more fairly	55.7	1897
	Soc5. everybody gets a chance to make something of life	59.9	1914
	<i>Disagree – Agree (5-point scale)</i>		

For Peer Review