

Reconsidering Material Self-Interest in Welfare State Preferences: The Psychology of Everyday Economic Context

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Reconsidering Material Self-Interest in
Welfare State Preferences:
The Psychology of Everyday Economic Context

PhD Dissertation

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next adventure(s), and I promise you that the next journey won't involve anything as stressful and mentally draining as this one.

Preface

This report summarizes my Ph.D. dissertation, "Reconsidering Material Self-Interest in Welfare State Preferences: The Psychology of Everyday Economic Context". The dissertation was written as the conclusion of my Ph.D. project at the Department of Political Science, Aarhus University. The dissertation consists of this summary report and the four research papers that are listed below. The report presents the core contributions of the articles and discusses the broader implications for the welfare state literature as well as policymakers.

- **Paper A:** Mitigating Tough Times? How Material Self-Interest Shapes Citizens' Welfare State Interests (Under Review)
- **Paper B:** Unequal and Unsupportive: Exposure to Poor People Weakens Support for Redistribution among the Rich. Co-authored with Peter T. Dinesen and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov (Revised and resubmitted at British Journal of Political Science)
- **Paper C:** It's the (relative local) economy, stupid: Local income position is robustly linked to subjective well-being. Co-authored with Peter T. Dinesen and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov (working paper)
- **Paper D:** Downward Competition: How Voters' Perceptions of their Economic Distance to the Poor Shape Attitudes toward Redistribution (Under Review)

Chapter 1

Introduction

The foundation of the welfare state is one of the biggest achievements of modern societies. While no country had a nationally compulsory social policy program by 1880, most present-day rich democracies had implemented a wide range of programs only a few decades later, covering almost all major labor market risks: sickness, unemployment, and disability. Over the years and decades that followed, these programs underwent significant expansion as increasing resources were allocated to cover more people and a broader range of risks. The expansion has been crucial in protecting individuals from the harmful effects of labor market risks. Without them, citizens face significant welfare losses and drops in consumption when they are unable to work, which could result in a range of detrimental economic effects, such as higher levels of household debt (Wiedemann 2021b, 2021a) or, quite simply, poverty, which in turn would result in lower political engagement (Margalit 2019; Schafer et al. 2022) or higher mortality rates (Browning and Heinesen 2012; Martikainen, Mäki, and Jäntti 2007). However, modern welfare states do not only serve as a buffer against citizens' risk of losing income during an adverse life event; another central element is to distribute resources across individuals, typically from the wealthy to the poor, through poverty relief and redistributive policies to lower income inequality. In addition to reducing poverty and economic inequality, these policies are important in supporting people during their life course through social investment in education, childcare, or paid parental leave (Barr 2001; Baldwin 1992; Rehm 2016).

In democracies, the extent, resources, and range of the welfare state and its policies hinge on the preferences of the public. As Brooks and Manza (2007, p. 694) write in their seminal book on the link between mass opinion and the welfare state: "Analysts within multiple theoretical traditions have anticipated the possibility that mass opinion is a factor relevant to shaping social policymaking, and perhaps in accounting for differences between countries." While the welfare state literature points

to a wide range of predictors of welfare state policy preferences, the most central explanation is material self-interest, which suggests that individuals weigh costs versus benefits to calculate their preferred policies. Income and its variability (the risk of losing income) are the key variables in this approach (see, e.g., Cusack, Iversen, and Rehm 2006; Finseraas 2009; Franko, Tolbert, and Witko 2013; Iversen and Soskice 2001; Kenworthy and Pontusson 2005; Meltzer and Richard 1981; Rehm 2009; Rehm, Hacker, and Schlesinger 2012). From this perspective, we should expect, for example, that high levels of economic inequality are met with a demand for more redistribution, especially among those with a below-mean income (Meltzer and Richard 1981). Yet, this has not been the reality in many countries. Instead, public resentment of economic inequality is often underwhelming, if not completely absent. Empirically, studies show that the public in more economically unequal countries does not necessarily care more about economic inequality than the public in more equal countries (Brezna and Hommerich 2019; Kelly and Enns 2010; Kenworthy and McCall 2008; McCall 2013, though see Finseraas 2009). The role of material self-interest has also been questioned by research examining citizens' preference for social insurance. These studies argue and show empirically that the link between material circumstances and the welfare state is confounded by long-term values and deservingness concerns rooted in socialization (see e.g. Newcomb 1967; O'Grady 2019; Wehl 2019). In sum, the literature presents numerous empirical examples and theoretical arguments that question whether citizens' welfare state preferences and behavior are motivated by material self-interest.¹

My central claim in this dissertation is that dismissing material self-interest as explaining citizens' welfare state preferences and behavior is premature. I contend that citizens' views and actions towards the welfare state under certain conditions may reflect material conditions rooted in self-interested concerns. More explicitly, I argue that psychological and contextual conditions can moderate the influence of material self-interest, e.g., economic vulnerability or status, on how individuals make up their minds about the welfare state. My argument takes its starting point in studies showing that citizens with the same underlying material conditions, whether it be their position in the economic distribution (Cruces, Perez-Truglia, and Tetaz 2013; Fernández-Albertos and Kuo 2018) or views of their job insecurity (Marx and Picot 2020; Sverke, Hell-

1. Throughout the dissertation, I use the terms *preferences* and *behavior*. While preferences indicate citizens' opinions about or support for welfare state policies, behavior refers to their use of welfare state policies, e.g. the choice to take up a publicly facilitated supplementary social insurance.

gren, and Näswall 2002), *perceive* the economic distribution and their risks differently. Related, a recent strand in the literature suggests that perceptions of the economic distribution and welfare state preferences are partly rooted in everyday experiences (Franko and Livingston 2020; Newman 2020; Newman, Shah, and Lauterbach 2018; Sands 2017; Sands and Kadt 2020). Although the national economy can seem abstract and intangible to many citizens, people experience the economy as a “by-product” of their everyday lives. They may, for example, see neighbors buying fancy cars or struggling to repair older ones, or they may witness esteemed colleagues losing their jobs. These experiences can shape citizens’ perceptions of the economic distribution and their place in it, which then potentially activates material self-interested welfare state preferences and behavior. Yet, it is equally likely that instead of activating material self-interested concerns, perceptions of the economic distribution - in particular one’s own economic resources vis-à-vis resources of other economic groups in society - may trigger group-based competitive status and economic thinking, which potentially suppresses material self-interested motives from materializing. All in all, these factors can help us understand under what conditions material self-interest influences citizens’ welfare state attitudes and behavior. Hence, to evaluate the central claim in this dissertation, I shed light on the following guiding research question:

To what extent can contextual and psychological conditions moderate the influence of material self-interested concerns in shaping citizens’ welfare state preferences and behavior?

In order to scrutinize this question, I study citizens’ attitudes and behavior toward the risk-reducing as well as the distributive aspect of the welfare state. First, I examine the risk-reducing aspect of the welfare state by studying citizens’ choice to take up government-sponsored supplementary social insurance under economic uncertainty arising from workplace experiences, which represents a case where material self-interest is clearly at stake. Studying workplaces as a source of information about economic conditions is important because economically active people spend at least 1/3 of their day at the workplace, which makes it an essential locus of preference formation (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014). For example, when assessing labor market risks, individuals should be likely to consider signals from their workplace, such as layoffs of co-workers, and infer from them whether they personally face a risk of future unemployment. These risk perceptions may, in turn, influence the decision to take up supplementary unemployment insurance coverage because mem-

bership protects against future financial hardship, ensuring a decent standard of living in case of unemployment. This, in sum, provides a strong case to test whether psychological and contextual conditions in conjuncture can moderate the influence of material self-interested concerns in citizens' social insurance behavior.

In addition to providing social insurance, the welfare state plays a pivotal role in the distribution of economic resources. However, in recent years, many developed societies have experienced an increasing concentration of wealth and income in the hands of the very rich (Piketty and Saez 2013; OECD 2015). This trend has sparked concern among scholars and the public due to the many adverse outcomes of economic inequality, including reduced generalized trust (Rothstein and Uslaner 2005; Steijn and Lancee 2011), lower political participation (Solt 2008; Uslaner and Brown 2005), and increased violent crime (Kawachi et al. 1997). Given that citizens - via their preferences for redistribution - contribute to either the amelioration or aggravation of economic inequality, studying these preferences has become increasingly important. Consequently, the dissertation focuses on how contextual and psychological conditions moderate the influence of material self-interested consideration in shaping attitudes toward redistribution.

Motivated by research within political behavior that supports the notion that opinions are formed by casually observing others in the local context (Bisgaard, Dinesen, and Sønderskov 2016; Enos 2017; Dinesen and Sønderskov 2015; Sands and Kadt 2020), I focus on citizens' neighbors in the immediate residential surroundings and the local distribution of economic resources as contextual conditions that can moderate economic self-interest in redistribution preferences. Moreover, because citizens engage with their nearest surroundings on an everyday basis (Baybeck and McClurg 2005), neighborhoods are an ideal environment to study how contextual conditions shape economic and status perceptions as well as attitudes toward redistribution.

This leads to the final central concept in the dissertation: psychological conditions. Here, I focus explicitly on economic and status perceptions and whether they moderate the effect of material self-interested concerns. While economic perceptions are a very wide-ranging concept, potentially containing everything from perceptions of the national economy (Bisgaard, Dinesen, and Sønderskov 2016), unemployment rates (Books and Prysby 1999), economic inequality (Newman, Shah, and Lauterbach 2018; Xu and Garand 2010), I focus on perceptions of personal economic well-being, economic distance from other income groups, and risk perceptions. The reason for focusing narrowly on these concepts

is that they relate to the distributive as well as the risk-reducing aspect of the welfare state. Finally, status perceptions refer to an individual's belief about where they stand relative to others in society (Gidron and Hall 2017, 2020).

Outline of the Dissertation

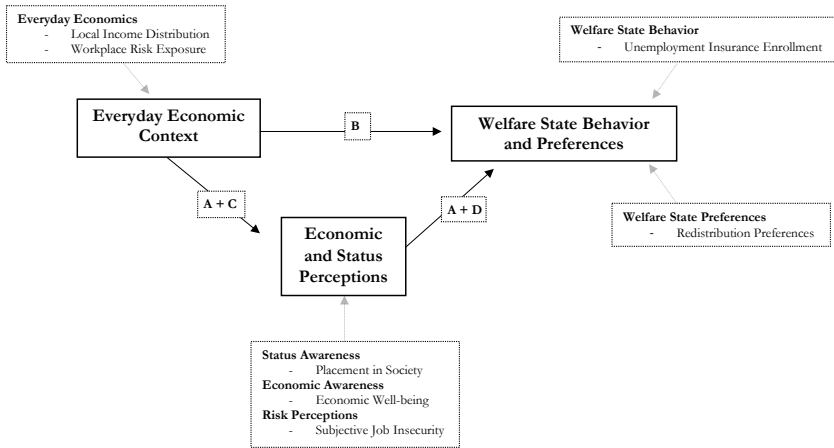
The dissertation consists of the present summary as well as four articles, two single-authored and two co-authored. The papers and their names are presented in Table 1.1. Figure 1.1 illustrates the overall project and how the four articles relate to each other.

Table 1.1: The Four Articles of the Dissertation

Paper	Author	Title	Status
A	Matias E. Christensen	Mitigating Tough Times? How Material Self-Interest Shapes Citizens' Welfare State Interests	Under Review
B	Matias E. Christensen, Peter T. Dinesen, and Kim M. Sønderskov	Unequal and Unsupportive: Exposure to Poor People Weakens Support for Redistribution among the Rich	R&R at BJPS
C	Matias E. Christensen, Peter T. Dinesen, and Kim M. Sønderskov	It's the (relative local) economy, stupid: Local Income Position is robustly linked to subjective well-being	Working Paper
D	Matias E. Christensen	Downward Competition: How Voters' Perception of their Economic Distance to the Poor Shape Attitudes toward Redistribution	Under Review

In Paper A, I examine the link between risk exposure and perceptions of risks and their effect on citizens' choice to take up government-sponsored supplementary social insurance. In doing so, I evaluate to what extent contextual and psychological conditions in conjuncture moderate the influence of material self-interests in shaping citizens' welfare state behavior. My central argument is that exposure to increased unemployment signals at the workplace makes individuals worried about their future job situation, which - through future material self-interested concerns - positively affects the choice to join a supplementary unemployment insurance scheme. Additionally, drawing on the recent theoretical development in the policy feedback literature (Busemeyer, Abrassart, and Nezi 2021), I examine whether enrollment subsequently shapes preferences for the expansion of other welfare state policies.

Figure 1.1: Project Overview



In Paper B, C, and D, I turn toward citizens' welfare state preferences and to what extent psychological and contextual conditions moderate economic self-interest in attitudes toward redistribution.

First, in Paper B, my coauthors and I explore whether the well-off's attitudes toward redistribution are shaped by exposure to poor people in their everyday surroundings. This serves as a first step in exploring whether contextual conditions moderate material self-interested concerns in welfare state attitudes. If the well-off react to local exposure to poor individuals by lowering their support for redistribution, this suggests that the local income composition can activate material self-interested attitudes among the rich because redistribution, *ceteris paribus*, would reduce their economic resources. On the other hand, provided that exposure to poorer individuals is associated with more support for redistribution among the well-off, it indicates that everyday economic experiences can suppress material self-interested attitudes.

Second, I explore whether economic experiences from one's local surroundings shape perceptions of economic well-being and place in the social hierarchy (Paper C) and whether these perceptions influence attitudes toward redistribution (Paper D). In Paper C, my co-authors and I examine the link between local income position and the perception of economic well-being and social status. We utilize unique data that are constructed by merging survey data of a large sample of people in Denmark with detailed administrative data on their true position in the local income distribution. The precise and highly local measures of income

position are a major strength of the design because it credibly allows us to assess whether citizens use their position among their neighbors to inform them about their own economic well-being and social status.

Finally, in Paper D, I test whether economic perceptions shape attitudes toward redistribution. I propose a novel psychological condition that moderates the influence of material self-interested considerations on citizens' attitudes toward the welfare state. I argue that perceiving a small economic distance from people triggers a perception of competition in terms of status and economic resources that negatively affects attitudes toward redistributive policies benefiting the poor. To test my theoretical argument, I conduct two pre-registered nationally representative survey experiments in the United Kingdom ($n = 3,470$) and use observational data from 18 democracies. This combination enables me to evaluate attitudes towards redistribution from over 8,000 respondents covering 18 democracies as well as identify the causal effect of individual-level perceptions of downward inequality. Additional tests allow me to examine whether perceptions of economic and status competition with poor people are a likely mechanism linking perceived economic distance with redistribution attitudes.

Overall, based on the summary and the four self-contained papers, I am able to advance the understanding of the extent to which contextual and psychological conditions moderate the influence of material self-interests in shaping citizens' welfare state attitudes and behavior.

Roadmap

In Chapter 2, I outline the theoretical arguments of the dissertation. I combine theories of context effects, consumption, and social comparison with the political economy literature on redistribution and social insurance to argue why we should expect material self-interest in citizens' welfare state attitudes and behavior to be moderated by contextual and psychological conditions.

In Chapter 3, I lay out the empirical foundation of the four papers. I discuss the methodological challenges - in particular the issue of selection bias - that are inherent in research that addresses how citizens make up their minds about the welfare state. I also consider how the research designs and data sources used in the project handle these challenges in different ways and complement each other.

In Chapter 4, I summarize the core findings of the dissertation. First, I present the findings on the moderating effect of contextual and psychological conditions on the influence of material self-interests in shaping

citizens' choice to take up additional social insurance. Second, I address citizens' welfare state attitudes and whether psychological and contextual conditions activate or suppress material self-interested redistribution preferences.

In Chapter 5, I summarize the empirical findings across the four papers and reflect on their contributions to the welfare state literature. In light of the dissertation's findings - and its limitations - I point to potential research avenues, including considering differences between the moderating effect of contemporary and adolescent economic experiences. Finally, I discuss the dissertation's implications for policy-makers in designing new welfare state policies that address economic challenges in the future.

Chapter 2

Literature Overview and Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework of the dissertation. First, in Section 2, I provide a synthesized overview of the existing literature on the influence of material self-interested considerations in shaping citizens' behavior and attitudes toward the welfare state. Based on this literature review, I present my argument of the extent to which contextual and psychological conditions can moderate material self-interested concerns. In Section 2, I put forward Paper A and Paper C's theoretical argument about how everyday economic experiences shape economic and status perceptions. Next, drawing on Paper B, I outline the link between local exposure to poor individuals and attitudes toward redistribution among the rich. In Section 2, I present the theoretical reasoning linking economic and status perceptions to citizens' preferences for and behavior in the welfare state. Here, I present the relationship between subjective job insecurity and the choice to take up supplementary social insurance. Finally, I propose a novel theory of a psychological condition that affects voters' attitudes toward redistribution.

Literature Overview: Material Self-Interest and Citizens' Welfare State Attitudes

A prominent line of research suggests that material self-interest - defined as behavioral choices or attitudinal positions that improve the present and future material well-being of an individual's personal life (Chong, Citrin, and Conley 2001; Sears and Funk 1991)² - is the primary predictor of welfare state attitudes (Iversen and Soskice 2001; Owens and Pedulla 2014; Margalit 2013; Moene and Wallerstein 2001; Piketty 1995; Rehm

2. While present-oriented material self-interest prioritizes maximizing disposable income in the present (1981), future-oriented self-interest focuses on protecting against potential financial hardship in the future (Alt and Iversen 2017; Iversen and Soskice 2001; Rehm 2009).

2016, 2009). This approach highlights income and its uncertainty (e.g., the risk of losing income) as the focal points when individuals make up their mind about social insurance and redistribution. Income is expected to shape redistribution attitudes because those with an income below the mean are net beneficiaries of redistribution, while those with an income above the mean stand to lose income from more redistribution (see e.g. Meltzer and Richard 1981; Finseraas 2009; Franko, Tolbert, and Witko 2013). When circumstances change, e.g. following a job loss, and new interests emerge, individuals are expected to adapt their preferences and behavior accordingly (Owens and Pedulla 2014; Margalit 2019). Studies drawing on material self-interest, thus, posit that individuals weigh economic costs versus benefits to calculate their preferred welfare state policies. Moreover, drawing on material self-interested motives, scholars argue that prospects of upward and downward mobility influence welfare state attitudes (Alesina and Ferrara 2005; Benabou and Ok 2001; Piketty 1995). Here, the line of reasoning is that anticipation of upward mobility entails a declining utility of redistribution in the future. Turning to social insurance, the risk of downward mobility is strongly associated with insurance-based models, which stress the significance of economic self-interest. According to these models, exposure to labor market risks is an important predictor of support for social insurance because an individual's risk exposure shapes expected net benefits from a social insurance program (Cusack, Iversen, and Rehm 2006; Iversen and Soskice 2001; Rehm 2009, 2016). Specifically, if an individual risks losing her job, a generous social safety net ensures that the job loss does not result in (large) downward mobility.

However, the empirical performance of the material self-interested perspective is - at best - mixed. According to it, the rising economic inequality we have seen in many democracies should be followed by increased support for redistribution. Yet, the empirical reality in many countries is that public resentment of economic inequality is often underwhelming, if not completely absent. In fact, the argument that material self-interest shapes political behavior and attitudes is rejected by a series of contributions (see, e.g., Coughlin 1990; Sears et al. 1980; Schlozman and Verba 1981). Moreover, a sizable body of work questions whether changes in economic standing lead to a shift in political views, instead contending that ideological dispositions and views adopted early in life tend to endure (Newcomb 1967; Krosnick and Alwin 1989). Empirically, newer studies have also shown that the link between material circumstances and welfare state attitudes is likely confounded by norma-

tive predispositions rooted in socialization (see e.g. Wehl 2019; O’Grady 2019).

Recent studies have identified contextual and psychological conditions that can explain why the empirical predictions of the material self-interest perspective do not always match reality. A growing strand in the literature points to contextual factors that may moderate the influence of material self-interested considerations on citizens’ attitudes and behavior toward the welfare state (see, e.g. Franko 2016; Newman 2020; Newman, Johnston, and Lown 2015; Sands and Kadt 2020). The argument from this line of work is that economic cues from voters’ everyday lives shape their perceptions of the economic distribution and their place in it, which then influence their welfare state attitudes. These cues may, for instance, cause citizens to develop more accurate perceptions of their placement in the economic distribution, thereby activating self-interested considerations.³ Consistent with this reasoning, a prominent field experiment by Sands and de Kadt (2020) shows that short-termed exposure to a luxury car in a poor neighborhood (which serves as a reminder of inequality) increases support for redistribution among people with low wealth. This research is particularly important, as it demonstrates 1) that the local context matters for redistribution attitudes, and 2) that voters are aware of economic differences even when exposure is brief. Turning to psychological conditions, the role of economic perceptions becomes particularly prominent. Here, the mixed empirical evidence on the link between material self-interested considerations and welfare state attitudes is explained by the fact that the public is simply not aware of their layoff risks or position in the economic distribution. Several studies have questioned the central assumption that the electorate knows their ranking in the national income distribution by showing that most voters are quite ignorant of their own position (Cruces, Perez-Truglia, and Tetaz 2013; Karadja, Mollerstrom, and Seim 2017; Fernández-Albertos and Kuo 2018). Moreover, scholars have begun to stress the subjectivity of labor market vulnerability (for a review, see Marx and Picot 2020). The subjective approach facilitates a more nuanced conceptualization of risk, e.g., distinguishing between cognitive and affective insecurity (Anderson and Pontusson 2007) and between worries about job loss and worries about re-employment (Marx 2014).

3. In this dissertation, I use the term *activate* to refer to instances where citizens respond in accordance with their material self-interest. For instance, well-off individuals exhibiting reduced support for redistribution - compared to demanding more redistribution - would be an example of activated self-interested considerations. Conversely, I use the term *suppress* to indicate situations where self-interested attitudes and behavior do not manifest.

However, several shortcomings in the existing studies impede us from drawing firm conclusions on the role of contextual and psychological conditions in shaping material self-interested welfare state attitudes. First, while a significant body of work examines the link between the local income distribution - in particular exposure to poor individuals among the rich - and welfare state attitudes, there is substantial disagreement over the nature of this link. On the one hand, a large bulk of cross-sectional studies show that exposure to poor people among the well-off is positively linked to redistribution attitudes, suggesting that the local context can suppress material self-interested attitudes among the rich. On the other hand, one prominent field experiment finds that the rich become less supportive of redistribution when they are exposed to poor people in their local surroundings (Sands 2017), which indicates that the local income composition can activate material self-interested attitudes. Second, while knowing whether material self-interest shapes citizens' social insurance interests is critical to our understanding of how welfare states can best protect citizens against risks, evidence from the social insurance literature has been unable, as Rehm and colleagues note (2013), to distinguish material (future-oriented) self-interest from empathy and deservingness concerns. However, by studying citizens' welfare state *behavior* under economic uncertainty - e.g. the choice to take up supplementary social insurance - we can distinguish more clearly between material self-interest and normative predispositions. Third, a central notion in the literature is that economic experiences observed in one's local surroundings shape economic and status self-perceptions, which, in turn, influence welfare state attitudes. Yet, empirical analyses of the first part of the link are often neglected, and studies that attempt to examine it (see, e.g., Condon and Wichowsky 2020) use highly aggregated measures of exposure that may be imprecise reflections of people's everyday economic experiences (Bisgaard, Dinesen, and Sønderskov 2016; Dinesen and Sønderskov 2015). In sum, these points show that the extent to which contextual and psychological conditions can moderate economic self-interest in citizens' welfare state preferences and behavior remains a contested question.

Contextual Conditions: Everyday Economic Experiences

In this section, I outline whether contextual conditions can moderate the influence of self-interested concerns on citizens' welfare state preferences and behavior. Motivated by research within political behavior that supports the notion that individuals form opinions by casually observing oth-

ers in the local context (Bisgaard, Dinesen, and Sønderskov 2016; Enos 2017; Sands and Kadt 2020), I focus, first of all, on the immediate residential surroundings and how local economic exposure shapes economic perceptions and attitudes. While individuals who reside in homogeneous income areas may have limited opportunities for cross-class exposure, those who live in income-diverse neighborhoods are exposed to a range of economic groups in their daily lives (Minkoff and Lyons 2019). In such contexts, citizens might see some neighbors purchasing expensive cars, going on exciting vacations, and putting their kids through the best schools while others struggle to keep up a decent standard of living.

Still, economic signals received from the neighborhood are only a subset of the signals citizens receive in everyday life. The workplace is another essential locus of preference formation (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014). Economically active people spend at least 1/3 of their time at work, making it an important source of information about labor market conditions. For example, when assessing their labor market risk, people may consider their colleagues' experiences and infer from them whether they personally risk future unemployment.

As I theorize in the following section, these signals can directly or indirectly moderate the influence of material self-interest on citizens' welfare state preferences and behavior. First, I put forward the theoretical argument in Paper A and Paper C that everyday experiences are related to economic and status perceptions, which later will be linked to welfare state preferences and behavior. Second, drawing on Paper B, I outline whether everyday experiences - more specifically local exposure to poor individuals among the rich - suppress or activate material self-interested redistribution attitudes.

Everyday Economic Experiences and Perceptions of Risks and Status

Research on social influence (see, e.g., Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987; Alt et al. 2021) suggests that citizens obtain relevant economic information as a by-product of everyday life, making such experiences highly accessible and easily obtainable. Drawing on these insights, I propose in Paper A that citizens use signals from the labor market to assess the likelihood of a future job loss, which then influences enrollment in a supplementary social insurance scheme. More specifically, cognitive job insecurity, an individual's estimate of the likelihood of being laid off in the near future, is linked to signals from the labor market, which can be used to assess how secure the current employment is (Anderson and Pontusson 2007). For example, layoffs of colleagues or others in the same indus-

try may signal that the labor market is loose and increase the feeling that one's job is insecure. In Paper A, I propose that in addition to occupational or industrial risk exposure, often used in prior studies (see, e.g., Rehm 2009, 2011; Iversen and Soskice 2001), citizens consider signals of unemployment risks from their workplace. While occupational unemployment rates provide an overall indication of labor market risk, individuals should pay close attention to signals of risk from their own workplace. This is because the likelihood of knowing someone who has been affected by such risks, such as job loss, is higher and, therefore, more relevant to their personal situation. In other words, when assessing unemployment risks, individuals may consider signals from their workplace, such as layoffs of colleagues, and based on them infer their own risk of future unemployment.

Turning to signals from the local context, my coauthors and I hypothesize in Paper C that the local income distribution and one's position in it shape perceptions of economic well-being and status. Because humans are social animals who are attuned to social status, people have a tendency to make social comparisons in which "other people who are similar to an individual are especially useful to that individual in generating accurate evaluations of his or her abilities and opinion" (Suls, Martin, and Wheeler 2002, p. 694). By implication, people partly use others as benchmarks when evaluating their own performance in life, which then shapes self-evaluation. The worse you do relative to other people - i.e., the higher the relative deprivation experienced - the more you see yourself as economically and socially deprived.

Using economic signals from neighbors in the immediate residential surroundings may be one means to assess one's financial circumstances and place in a social hierarchy. Individuals' approximate position in the local income distribution is likely discernable even without intimate contact with neighbors, e.g., from visual cues like clothes, cars, etc. (Kraus, Park, and Tan 2017). Therefore, if people are sensitive to their relative position in their social context, we should expect them to pay attention to their own position in the local income distribution, which would influence perceptions of their own economic well-being and social status.

Everyday Economic Experiences and Attitudes toward Redistribution

Related to the link between everyday economic experiences and economic perceptions, a growing literature examines the link between the local context and welfare state attitudes. Given its attention to the dis-

tribution of economic resources, this literature focuses on the economic differences observed in one's local surroundings and their influence on attitudes toward redistribution (Sands 2017; Sands and Kadt 2020; Condon and Wichowsky 2020; Newman 2020). Yet, the empirical evidence reaches different conclusions about the nature of the link between exposure to economic inequality, especially rich individuals' exposure to poorer individuals, and support for redistribution. The dominant finding in the literature is that rich people being exposed to poorer individuals is associated with positive attitudes toward redistribution (Bailey et al. 2013; Kearns et al. 2014; Minkoff and Lyons 2019; Franko and Livingston 2020). These findings are seen as supporting (an extended version of) intergroup contact theory, which predicts that contact with out-group members induces more positive attitudes towards them. This applies most straightforwardly to richer individuals for whom the effect of such contact may extend beyond sympathy for poorer individuals to greater support for redistribution benefiting this group. This, in turn, suggests that everyday economic experiences - due to cross-income group contact with poor people - can suppress material self-interested attitudes among the well-off.

Another finding supports the notion that the local income composition can activate economically self-interested attitudes among the rich. In a prominent field experiment, Sands (2017) found that the presence of a noticeable poor-appearing person in affluent neighborhoods in Boston, United States reduced redistribution support. This finding is consistent with theories of intergroup conflict, which predict that exposure to economic out-groups prompts material conflict or evokes negative out-group stereotypes that reduce support for redistribution among the better-off.

In Paper B, we propose two explanations for these divergent findings. The *self-selection* explanation attributes the diverging results to different abilities to eliminate bias from selection of individuals into neighborhoods in the two lines of work. The contact-supporting studies, in contrast to Sands' experiment, rely on cross-sectional designs that are confounded by self-selection. Our argument is that wealthy individuals may choose their neighborhoods and neighbors based on their attitudes towards the less well-off, which are likely to correlate with their redistribution preferences. Therefore, the contact-supporting evidence may reflect a choice to live in certain areas that are associated with redistribution attitudes.

On the other hand, our *single episode vs. repeated exposure* explanation attributes the divergent findings to differences in the duration of the out-group exposure that was studied. Existing contact-supporting stud-

ies, which link traditional omnibus surveys to administrative data, typically measure more prolonged or repeated exposure to poor neighbors than the transient single-episode exposure that Sands' study examined. Prolonged exposure may come to resemble "meaningful personal interactions" (Allport 1954), which could explain why cross-sectional studies find evidence supporting (an extended version of) intergroup contact theory.

Psychological Conditions: Economic and Status Perceptions

In the following sections, I propose how economic and status perceptions can moderate material self-interested behavior and attitudes. Here, economic perceptions refer narrowly to perceptions of economic distance from other income groups and risk perceptions. Moreover, status perceptions refer to an individual's belief about where they stand relative to others in society (Gidron and Hall 2017, 2020).

Risk Perceptions and Citizens' Welfare State Behavior

While I argued in Section 2 that exposure to labor market risks shapes risk perceptions, I now develop the argument of how this psychological condition can activate material self-interested considerations in citizens' welfare state behavior. Centrally, subjective job insecurity suggests that those who may be institutionally well protected may nevertheless perceive their situation as insecure because insecurity can stem from e.g. firm-specific circumstances (Marx and Picot 2020), such as lay-offs of colleagues. These signals reduce informational uncertainty about the probability of future unemployment, suggesting that the firm is struggling and that one's job is at risk. In Paper D, I propose that increased job insecurity positively affects enrollment in a government-sponsored unemployment insurance scheme due to future-oriented self-interest. This expectation draws on the permanent income hypothesis (Friedman 1957), which suggests that individuals prefer a stable to a fluctuating consumption flow. To maintain a consistent standard of living, people may need to set aside resources to prevent a transitory job loss from leading to a decline in living standards. From a material self-interest perspective, we should, therefore, expect that those who are worried about their job situation are more likely to be a member of an unemployment insurance scheme because it ensures that they can maintain a decent standard of living if unemployment materializes. Likewise, social insurance literature (e.g.,

Moene and Wallerstein 2001; Rehm, Hacker, and Schlesinger 2012) contends that future income uncertainty raises the motivation for insurance because social insurance protects against downward mobility caused by unemployment. For these reasons, worries about the future job situation should activate future-oriented material self-interested concerns, making workers more likely to be enrolled in a government-sponsored unemployment insurance scheme, as it provides protection against losses of income in the future.

Additionally, I expect that exposure to unemployment risks - and the subsequent increase in job insecurity - is better at mobilizing people to join a supplementary social insurance scheme than keeping existing members from dropping out. This occurs because prior members, those who are members of a supplementary unemployment insurance scheme before being exposed to signals of unemployment risks, and nonmembers, those without membership before being exposed to risks, differ in their level of risk aversion. The reason is that risk-averse individuals prefer to pay moderate amounts of money rather than losing a large sum with a minimal probability. Accompanied by the preference for a stable consumption flow, this suggests that those who are risk-averse are members of an unemployment insurance fund *even* when their job is secure. Conversely, risk-neutral (and -loving) individuals are much more likely to change their insurance status due to job worries. This is because risk-neutral individuals require an added incentive, such as increased job insecurity, to choose the less risky option of joining an unemployment insurance scheme. In sum, this suggests that the group of prior nonmembers is more likely to consist of risk-neutral (or risk-loving) individuals who are expected to join a supplementary social insurance scheme when unemployment signals increase.

Lastly, drawing on the recent theoretical development in the policy feedback literature (Busemeyer, Abrassart, and Nezi 2021), I derive in Paper A two opposing observable implications of how the choice to take up supplementary social insurance may shape welfare state attitudes. On the one side, the accelerating positive feedback mechanism suggests that enrollment in a government-sponsored unemployment insurance scheme creates support for expanding other welfare state policies, such as redistribution. This might materialize - through resource effects (Pierson 1993) - because those who take up supplementary unemployment insurance may expect it to shape their future material resources. This, in turn, makes them increasingly attentive to the protecting role of the welfare state, which feeds into their attitudes toward other related welfare state policies. On the other side, the self-reinforcing feedback effects imply

that a policy induces support for its persistence but not for similar policies or expansion of it. The empirical prediction is, thus, that being a member of an unemployment insurance scheme does not affect redistributive attitudes.

Economic and Status Perceptions and Attitudes toward Redistribution

Finally, in Paper D, I argue that economic perceptions moderate the influence of material self-interested concerns on attitudes toward redistribution. Here, I propose a novel theory of a psychological mechanism that forms citizens' attitudes toward redistribution. In the paper, I argue that perceiving a small economic distance downward triggers a perception of status and economic competition with poor individuals, which negatively affects attitudes toward redistributive policies that benefit the poor.

I draw on the concept of perceived economic distance, which argues that individuals categorize themselves and others into income groups (Shayo 2009; Lupu and Pontusson 2011; Cansunar 2020). This categorization process involves benchmarking one's economic situation in relation to other economic groups in society. Yet, because engaging in comparisons with the poor is much less uncomfortable than comparing with the rich (Leigh, Jencks, and Smeeding 2012; Wheeler and Miyake 1992) and has a status-boosting potential (Fiske 2011), we should expect citizens to be especially concerned about the gap between their income and that of the poorest in society. This is further supported by the *social rivalry theory*, which suggests that citizens derive utility from living a life that they perceive as different from and better than those at the bottom (Corneo and Gruner 2000).

One way to determine whether one is doing better than those at the bottom is by comparing one's own standard of living with theirs. This entails that those who think that the economic distance to the poor is small (but otherwise do not regard themselves as being poor) are likely to have the conviction that the poor are living a life that is not that different from their own. This may, in turn, contribute to a perception that one's status is under pressure because their lifestyle and status position are threatened and imitated by poor individuals. These perceptions of status competition cause more negative attitudes towards redistribution to the poor because insecurity about social status conflicts with solidarity and care for other people (Schwartz 1992, 2010). Moreover, individuals who perceive a small economic distance from poor individuals may think that they are in direct competition with the poor for scarce

economic resources or low-paying jobs. This zero-sum game mentality creates an environment of perceived rivalry with the poor, where people believe that their own economic success requires that rival groups are cut off from success and payoffs (Brown, Jacoby-Senghor, and Raymundo 2022; Boyer and Petersen 2018). In contrast, if the perceived economic distance from poor people is large, there is less competition in terms of status or economic resources with the poor, which implies that people can let other things, such as compassion concerns, influence their redistributive preferences.

Summarizing these claims, I argue that perceiving a small economic distance to the poor negatively affects attitudes toward redistribution that targets this group because it induces competitive thinking in terms of status and economic resources. These perceptions may, consequently, activate present-oriented material self-interested attitudes for the economically non-poor because they would not stand to gain from more redistribution to the poor. On the other hand, although it is, objectively speaking, in their own material interest to demand more redistribution, the economically poor may counter-intuitively refrain from doing so due to their perception of bottom-end inequality.

Summarizing the Chapter

In this chapter, I have outlined the dissertation’s theoretical framework. Here, I have argued to what extent psychological and contextual conditions can moderate the role of material self-interested concerns in shaping citizens’ behavior and attitudes toward the welfare state. The empirical predictions are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Empirical Predictions in Papers

	Material Self-Interests are	
	Activated	Suppressed
Contextual and Psychological Conditions Jointly	Paper A: Increased Job Insecurity resulting from Risk Exposure Increases Supplementary Social Insurance Enrollment	
Contextual Conditions	Paper B: Local Exposure to Poor People Decreases Support for Redistribution among the Rich	Paper B: Local Exposure to Poor People Increases Support for Redistribution among the Rich
Psychological Conditions	Paper D: Perceived Distance to the Poor Decreases Redistribution Support among the Economically non-Poor	Paper D: Perceived Distance to the Poor Decreases Redistribution Support among the Economically Poor

As shown in the top-left corner of the table, I expect, based on the theoretical argument put forward in Paper A, that exposure to increased signals of unemployment risks increases enrollment in a supplementary unemployment insurance scheme because these signals make individuals worried about their future job situation. This suggests that psychologi-

cal and contextual conditions in conjuncture can activate the influence of material self-interested concerns. Moreover, Paper B proposes that the local surroundings - through exposure to poor people - can either suppress or activate material self-interested attitudes among the rich. The direction of this moderation depends on whether repeated out-group exposure prompts material conflict or generates positive attitudes toward the out-group. Finally, Paper D suggests a psychological condition that moderates the influence of material self-interested considerations on citizens' attitudes toward the welfare state. Here, I put forward the argument that perceiving a small economic distance downward triggers a perception of status and economic competition with poor individuals, which negatively affects attitudes toward redistribution to the poor.

Chapter 3

Research Designs and Data

After having outlined the theoretical framework for understanding to what extent contextual and psychological conditions can moderate the influence of material conditions on citizens' behavior and attitudes toward the welfare state, I will now outline my empirical approach. As with any attempt to address how citizens make up their minds about the welfare state, the dissertation faces several methodological challenges. In this chapter of the dissertation, I outline the research designs and data sources used in the project and discuss their advantages and limitations in the face of these challenges.

I begin with a discussion of the observational and experimental approaches that have been used and the implications of these designs. Lastly, I provide an overview of the various data sources in the different papers.

Research Designs

In the dissertation, I use a range of supplementary research designs to examine to what extent contextual and psychological conditions moderate the influence of material self-interested concerns. In Papers A, B, and C, I use observational data to examine citizens' welfare state preferences and behavior. In Paper D, I combine observational data with two pre-registered survey experiments to empirically test whether the perception of economic distance to poor people shapes redistribution attitudes. As I outline in the following section, the combination of observational and experimental approaches increases the internal as well as the external validity of my dissertation.

Observational Strategies

A central aspect of any empirical research is the question of its external validity. External validity refers to a study's generalizability or "inferences about the extent to which a causal relationship holds over variations in

persons, settings, treatments, and outcomes” (Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2001, 20; see also Druckman 2022). In Papers A-C, the combination of cross-sectional observational survey data and individual-level registry data from Statistics Denmark, containing individual-level characteristics of the participants (e.g. income) and social-demographic characteristics of their local and work context, is a significant advantage in terms of the dissertation’s external validity.

In Paper A, using the administrative data enables me to link everyone working in Denmark with their workplace and colleagues. Coupled with data on weekly unemployment status, I can measure workplace risk exposure by computing the exact share of colleagues who shift from being employed to unemployed. Additionally, as the registries contain information on supplementary unemployment insurance status, I am able to examine whether citizens’ real-world behavior changes in response to labor market risks. This increases the confidence that the studied contexts and measures reflect the respondents’ real-world experiences.

Moreover, in Paper B and Paper C, the linkage allows my co-authors and I to flexibly construct measures of the income composition of individualized local contexts with any given radius. The precise and flexible measures of our independent and related variables (including potentially confounding factors) provide for a strong test of the effect of local economic conditions compared to studies measuring exposure in more aggregate contexts (e.g., US counties), which may be imprecise reflections of people’s everyday economic experiences (Dinesen and Sønderskov 2015). Further, in Paper C, we avoid the often-used strategy of relying on self-reported income placement (Tan et al. 2020), which may be a product rather than a cause of economic and social status.

In Paper D, I draw on cross-sectional observational data from 18 democracies, which enables me to examine whether the association between perceived distance from poor people and redistribution attitudes holds across a wide range of countries.

In addition to generalization, a central aspect of any research that aims to identify a (causal) effect is the question of selection bias, that is, systematic differences between those who received treatment and those who did not. For instance, in Paper A, the quantity of interest for the risk-exposed group is the average difference between their unemployment insurance status in the year they were exposed to signals of unemployment risks compared to a counterfactual situation - in the same year - where they were not exposed to risks. Yet, because we cannot observe the same individual’s unemployment insurance status in either situation,

we can only hope to glimpse the causal relationship through comparisons of *different* units, which open the door to selection bias.

In all four papers, I use a “between-individuals” design to reduce selection bias concerns. The identification strategy in these analyses is selection-on-observables, which handles selection bias by controlling for observable differences between respondents. In Papers A-C, I add a large set of registry-based individual- and contextual-level control variables in my models to minimize concerns about self-selection and confounding, while in Paper D, I introduce individual-level survey-based control variables. For example, in Paper C, the identifying assumption is that after adjusting for imbalance on observable characteristics, local income position is independent of other unobserved factors that also predict perceptions of social status. Although we have introduced a rich set of register-based individual- and contextual-level characteristics, including household income, population density, median income, and years of education, there might still be unobserved differences, e.g. personality traits, that potentially confound the relationship between local income position and status perceptions.

To address selection bias concerns further, I use panel data in Papers A-C that observes the same units over time. More specifically, I analyze the relationship between the independent and dependent variables using panel data (i.e., longitudinally within individuals) by means of two-way—individual and time—fixed effects models. While this design does not allow for causal identification, strictly speaking, it does remove important sources of confounding of the relationships; specifically, the within-individual analysis eliminates confounding from any time-invariant features (e.g., personality traits) and simultaneously takes out time trends.

The identifying assumption using two-way fixed effects is the parallel trend assumption, which implies that in absence of treatment, e.g. exposure to poor individuals in Paper B, the development in the outcome variable between units would have followed parallel trends (Angrist and Pischke 2009). While this assumption cannot be tested directly, I pursue several strategies in the papers to validate the parallel trends assumption. First, I include a set of time-varying register-based individual- and contextual-level control variables to address time-variant confounding. Second, in Paper A and Paper B, I add leads of the independent variables to see if I find evidence of pretrending. Such evidence would suggest that citizens who experienced an increase in, e.g., workplace risks were already more likely to join an unemployment insurance scheme. Third, in Paper A, I exploit that I have repeated observations on the out-

come variable prior to the treatment period. This implies that I can use exact matching on pretreatment outcomes to further accommodate the presence of time-varying, unobserved factors (see, e.g., Hall and Yoder 2022). Here, I match workers on their unemployment insurance status three years before treatment to create control units that offer a more accurate counterfactual trend. Because my outcome variable is binary, I can do better than a synthetic match and, thus, find exact matches on pretrends for every worker.

Additionally, to increase the confidence that the estimated relationships can be interpreted causally in Paper A, I use an extended version of a mass layoff event design. An increase in unemployment signals caused by a mass layoff may be regarded as exogenous to the development of unemployment insurance membership, which allows for a more causal interpretation of the results. In this setup, treated workers are those who work in an industry within which a workplace in the same industry and municipality dismisses more than 70 percent of its employees.⁴ For instance, employees in a firm in the automobile industry are likely to infer from a mass layoff in another automobile firm that the industry is struggling, and that they also risk losing their job. Moreover, focusing on workplaces in the same municipality raises the likelihood that workers receive the layoff cue. In the paper, I show that treated and nontreated followed similar pretreatment outcome trends and report a balance table suggesting that treated and nontreated workers are quite alike.

Still, recent methodological research on the traditional TWFE design, which pools the individual difference-in-differences, demonstrates that this approach provides a weighted average of treatment effects in which some weights may be negative (see, e.g., Chaisemartin and D’Haultfœuille 2022). These negative weights could potentially bias the average-treatment-effect-on-the-treated (ATT) by yielding estimates that are too small or even wrong-signed (Goodman-Bacon 2021). To accommodate these issues, I restrict the sample to prior nontreated workers in Paper A, thereby ensuring that treated workers are compared to nontreated workers with almost the same treatment history. Second, in addition to the pooled TWFE estimates, I estimated the effect in each period separately, reporting the single-period estimates and the average of these individual difference-in-differences estimates. Similarly, in Paper B, we estimated the effect for each period to accommodate potential negative weighting bias that may affect the ATT-estimate in panel models with more than one time-period (Chaisemartin and D’Haultfœuille 2022) and applied a matching TWFE-estimator, where individuals experiencing pos-

4. Those who work in the affected firms are excluded.

itive and negative changes, respectively, are matched on pretreatment characteristics to allow changes in redistribution attitudes to vary with these characteristics (see e.g., Sant’Anna and Zhao 2020).

Together, these strategies increase the confidence that the estimated relationships can be interpreted causally. Still, there might be reasons to suspect that there are unobserved differences that might confound the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. To further accommodate these issues, I randomized experiments in Paper D.

Randomization

Although we can come a long way in estimating a causal relationship using observational data, randomization is often seen as the gold standard for identifying causal effects. Randomizing treatment assignment is a powerful method to address selection bias because randomly assigning participants to treatment groups ensures that the potential outcome of the respondents is independent of treatment assignment. As a result, we can have confidence that any observed differences in outcomes are truly attributable to the treatment rather than to confounding variables (Angrist and Pischke 2009).

Drawing on these insights, I conducted two nationally representative survey experiments in the United Kingdom (Paper D), where I manipulated the perception of economic distances by randomly assigning respondents to one of two conditions (see Figure 3.1 for treatment conditions). Given that treatment is randomly assigned, the identifying assumption is that perceived distance to poor people is independent of other observed as well as unobserved factors that also predict redistribution attitudes.

Figure 3.1: Paper D's Treatments in UK Study 1 and UK Study 2

Table 1: Stimulus Material from UK Study

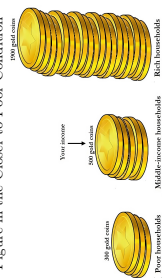
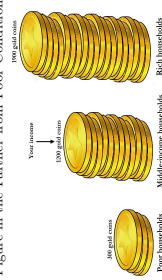
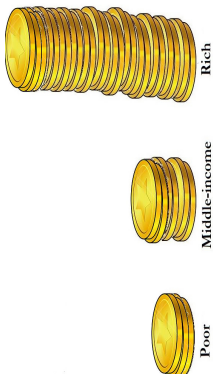
Treatment 1: Closer-to-Poor	Treatment 2: Farther-from-Poor
<p>Please imagine that you live in a country in which you and your family are a middle-income household. As in other societies, economic resources in your country are unequally divided between low- (labelled poor), middle- (labelled middle-income) and high- (labelled rich) earning households.</p> <p>A recent economic report from the country shows that the relative economic distance between middle-income households like yours and poor households is smaller than the economic distance between middle-income households and rich households. In the figure, these relative economic distances are represented by coins: A higher stack of coins symbolizes more economic resources.</p> <p>The figure displays that the income of a middle-income household, such as yours, is only about 1.5 times larger than the income of a poor household. In contrast, the income of a rich household is about 4 times larger than the income of a middle-income household.</p> <p>Figure in the Closer-to-Poor Condition</p>	<p>Please imagine that you live in a country in which you and your family are a middle-income household. As in other societies, economic resources in your country are unequally divided between low- (labelled poor), middle- (labelled middle-income) and high- (labelled rich) earning households.</p> <p>A recent economic report from the country shows that the relative economic distance between middle-income households like yours and poor households is larger than the economic distance between middle-income households and rich households. In the figure, these relative economic distances are represented by coins: A higher stack of coins symbolizes more economic resources.</p> <p>The figure displays that the income of a middle-income household, such as yours, is about 4 times larger than the income of a poor household. In contrast, the income of a rich household is only about 1.5 times larger than the income of a middle-income household.</p> <p>Figure in the Farther-from-Poor Condition</p>
	

Table 2: Stimulus Material from UK Study 2. Control group is not exposed to any material.

Closer-to-Poor
<p>How unequal is Britain?</p> <p>In a recent report from the Office for National Statistics, the picture of inequality across modern Britain shows the financial health of the nation is divided along lines of economic resources.</p> <p>As depicted in the figure, data from the Office for National Statistics displays that the economic distance between a middle-income household and a rich household is larger than the economic distance between a middle-income household and a poor household. In the figure, the economic distances are represented by coins: <i>A higher stack of coins symbolizes more economic resources</i>.</p> <p>Specifically, economists pinpoint that the annual income of a rich household is on average 5 times larger than the annual income of a middle-income household. In contrast, the annual income of a poor household is on average only 1.5 times smaller than the annual income of a middle-income household.</p> <p>The data was collected before the impact of the COVID pandemic and Brexit.</p> 

Source: ONS wealth and assets survey, July 2014 to June 2016.

Despite the advantages of random assignment of treatment, using survey experiments also comes at a cost. With the attempt to create a controlled setting, respondents often find themselves in a situation that is very remote from the world of politics. This implies that we - after having identified a causal effect using survey experiments - need to ask ourselves whether the effect travels to the real world. In an attempt to make the vignettes as realistic as possible, I randomly exposed respondents to real-world economic distances in Paper D's Study 3. Using data on real-world economic distances ensures that the treatment resembles situations encountered outside an experimental setting, thereby increasing mundane realism. In addition, by using different treatment conditions as well as various measures of the dependent variable in Paper D, I further strengthen the external validity of the findings (Druckman 2022).

Overview of Data Sources

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the data sources used in the four papers. In Paper A, I use extensive comprehensive individual-level administrative data from Denmark, which contains population-wide information on attachment to the job market for all individuals and a wide range of socio-economic characteristics. This information enables me to 1) link every individual living and working in Denmark with their workplace and colleagues, 2) measure unemployment status weekly, and 3) explore whether people enter or leave an unemployment insurance fund. Moreover, the administrative data is linked to (panel) survey data, which enables me to test whether subjective job insecurity is a likely link between exposure to unemployment risks and citizens' insurance choices and examine whether enrollment in an unemployment insurance scheme has consequences for attitudes toward redistribution.

In Paper B, we use panel data from the Social and Political Panel Study, which is a three-wave panel collected in 2008/9 (wave 1, collected as part of the European Social Survey (ESS)), 2011/12 (wave 2), and 2017 (wave 3). The panel data (as well as seven rounds of the Danish version of the European Social Survey) are coupled with individual-level registry data from Statistics Denmark, which contain longitudinal data on the exact geographical location of the place of residence for all individuals with permanent residence in Denmark.

Paper C also uses panel data from the Social and Political Panel Study, but because the third wave does not contain information about economic well-being, it is only a two-wave panel. Additionally, our measure of status perception consists of data from the sixth round of the European

Social Survey, five rounds of the International Social Survey Project, the third wave of the Danish Social and Political Panel Study, and a mapping survey. These survey data are linked to individual-level registry data from Statistics Denmark.

Lastly, Paper D consists of two nationally representative survey experiments in the United Kingdom and observational data from 18 democracies based on the International Social Survey Project - Social Inequality IV.

Table 3.1: Overview of Data and Research Designs

Paper	Data Sources	Research Design
A	Detailed individual-level administrative data from Denmark, containing population-wide information on attachment to the job market and unemployment insurance membership	Generalized difference-in-differences models
	Linking the administrative data with four rounds of the Danish part of the European Social Survey, three parts of the Danish Election Study, and the Danish Social and Political Panel Study.	Extended version of a mass-layoff event design
		Cross-sectional survey data on job insecurity
B		Panel survey models with adjustment for observables
	A three-wave panel based on Danish Social and Political Panel Study (Individuals = 818, Observations 1,813)	Panel survey data with adjustment for selection on (time-varying) observables
	Seven rounds of the Danish part of the European Social Survey (N = 8,268) The survey data is combined with (anonymized) governmental administrative data about the respondents and the people who live in their immediate vicinity (100-2,500 meters)	through (fixed effects) regression
C	A two-wave panel based on Danish Social and Political Panel Study (Individuals = 1,310, Observations 2,620)	Panel survey data and adjustment for selection on (time-varying) observables through (fixed effects) regression
	One round of the European Social Survey, five rounds of the International Social Survey Project, the third wave of the Danish Social and Political Panel Study, and Mapping Survey (N = 9,930).	Cross-sectional design with adjustment for selection on observables
	The survey data is combined with (anonymized) governmental administrative data about the respondents and the people who live in their immediate vicinity (100-2,500 meters)	
D	Two nationally representative survey experiments in the United Kingdom (N=1,781 and N=1,689, respectively)	Random assignment of (imaginary and real-world) economic distances from poor people.
	Survey data from 18 democracies based on the International Social Survey Project - Social Inequality IV (N = 8,653)	Cross-sectional design with adjustment for selection on observables

Summarizing the Chapter

In this chapter, I have outlined the research design as well as the data sources used in the dissertation and the four articles of which it consists. I use a range of supplementary research designs that enable me to examine to what extent psychological and contextual conditions moderate the influence of material self-interest in shaping citizens' behavior and attitudes toward the welfare state. Throughout the papers, I rely on observational data, which increases external validity but is prone to selection bias. To reduce selection bias concerns, I employ panel data, which handles time-invariant confounding, and control for a wide range of individual-level register-based covariates to address time-variant confounding. In Paper D, I sidestep the issue of selection bias by randomly assigning respondents to treatment and control groups.

Furthermore, a central advantage of observational data, which is based on administrative data, is its external validity. For example, the precise and highly local measure of local income position is a major strength of our design because it credibly captures people's palpable everyday experiences (Enos 2017; Dinesen and Sønderskov 2015; Bisgaard, Dinesen, and Sønderskov 2016). Related, because I can track citizens' unemployment insurance status over time, I am able to examine whether real-world behavior changes in response to labor market risks. In the next chapter, I present the core findings of my dissertation using these research designs.

Chapter 4

Core Findings of the Dissertation

In this chapter, I present the core findings of the dissertation. First, I present the findings on whether contextual and psychological conditions in conjunction moderate the influence of material self-interests in shaping citizens' enrollment in a government-sponsored supplementary social insurance scheme. Afterward, I turn toward citizens' welfare state preferences and whether psychological and contextual conditions can activate or suppress economic self-interest in attitudes toward redistribution. Here, I begin with the direct link between everyday economic experiences and attitudes toward redistribution. This is followed by the findings on the relationship between economic experiences from one's local surroundings and perceptions of economic status and place in the social hierarchy and whether economic perceptions influence attitudes toward redistribution.

Supplementary Social Insurance Enrollment: Causes and Consequences

In this section, I present the findings on the link between risk exposure and the choice to take up additional social insurance. These findings appear in Paper A. First, I assess whether signals of unemployment from the workplace - measured as the share of colleagues at one's workplace who become unemployed from one year to the next - are correlated with supplementary unemployment insurance enrollment. Second, I present the results when using an extended version of a mass layoff event design, which provides more subtle but as-if random variation in signals of unemployment risk (see Section 3). I then go on to examine the link between workplace risk exposure and perceived job insecurity cross-sectionally, thereby giving suggestive evidence of whether perceptions of job insecurity are a likely mechanism linking risk exposure and social insurance enrollment. Finally, because I have repeated observations on support for redistribution, I can explore the possible feedback mecha-

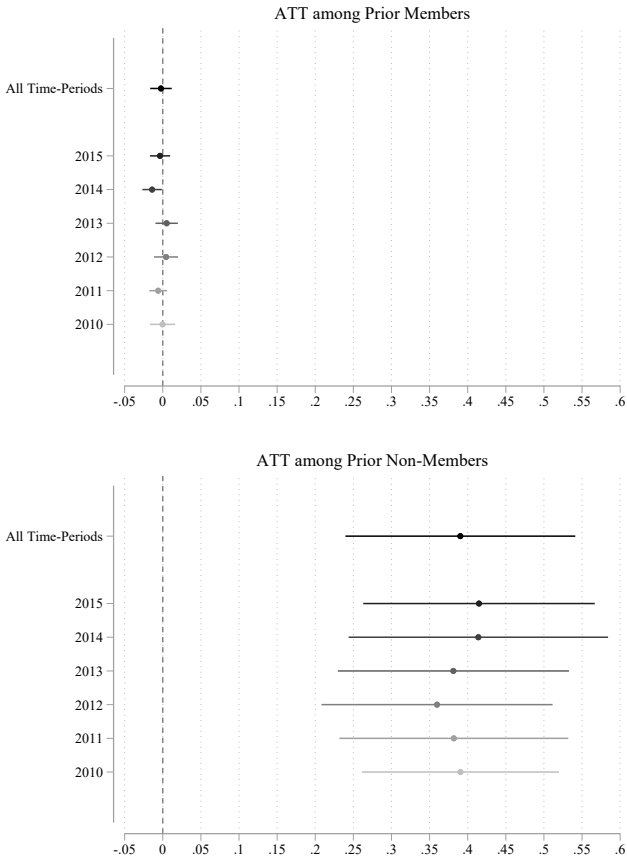
nisms between taking up a government-facilitated supplementary social insurance scheme and welfare state support.

In Figure 4.1, I report the effects of workplace risk exposure on social insurance enrollment. Here, I present the results among those with supplementary unemployment insurance membership in the last pretreatment year (prior members) and those without membership in the last pretreatment year (prior nonmembers) to examine if risk exposure is better at mobilizing workers to join a supplementary social insurance scheme than keeping existing members from dropping out. In the upper panel, which estimates the effect among prior unemployment insurance members, we see a substantially small and insignificant effect of workplace risk exposure. In contrast, it is evident from the lower panel that workplace risk exposure has a positive and significant effect among prior nonmembers. In substantive terms, 10 colleagues being laid off at a workplace with 100 employees leads to an approx. 4 percentage point intake of new members. While substantially small, the results provide initial evidence that workplace risk exposure is better at mobilizing new members to take up supplementary social insurance than keeping existing members from dropping out of an unemployment insurance scheme.

This analysis, in sum, shows that strong cues about the risk of future unemployment are positively associated with the decision to join a government-sponsored unemployment insurance scheme. However, a disadvantage of this analysis is that we cannot tell whether workplace risk exposure affects the choice to take up additional unemployment insurance due to *signals* of unemployment risks or because of actual, *experienced* unemployment. To sidestep this issue, I supplement the first analysis using an extended version of a mass layoff event design. Besides providing more subtle unemployment signals, using signals from a mass layoff allows for a more causal interpretation of the results.

In Figure 4.2, I illustrate the differences in supplementary social insurance enrollment for prior and prior non-members, respectively. Turning to the upper panel, which shows the effect among pretreatment members, we see a small but significant effect of unemployment signals from a mass layoff event. However, after a couple of years, the effect wears off and becomes statistically as well as substantially insignificant. In comparison, the effect among the prior non-members is significant and quite substantial. Here, I find an almost 8 percentage point difference in unemployment insurance membership between treated and non-treated in the first year. Additionally, as seen in Figure 4.2, the effect is quite stable as the difference is consistently between 8 and 10 percentage points.

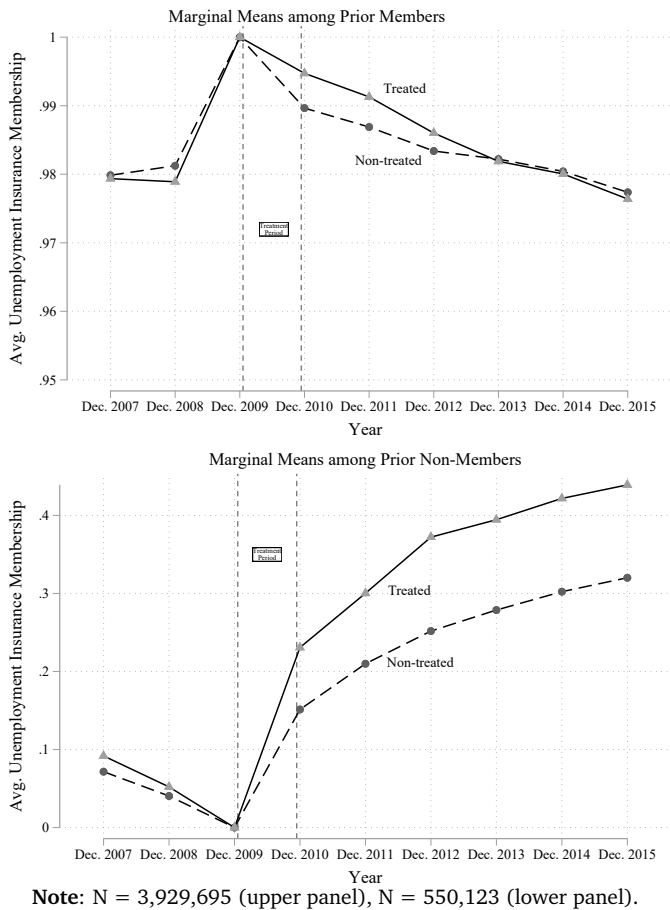
Figure 4.1: Average Treatment Effect on the Treated across Time Periods



Note: N = 1,574,111 (upper panel), N = 267,596 (lower panel). The Figure is from Paper A. Beta-coefficients on the x-axis. Prior members are those who were a member of a UI scheme in the last pretreatment year.

Moreover, when increasing the number of treated groups, a similar pattern appears. While the effect of a mass layoff is minuscule among prior members, there is, as reported in Paper A, a mobilizing effect of signals of unemployment risks. More specifically, prior non-members are almost 6 percentage points more likely to join an unemployment insurance fund than the comparison group, an effect that is quite consistent across time.

Figure 4.2: Average Treatment Effect on the Treated among Prior and Non-Prior Members



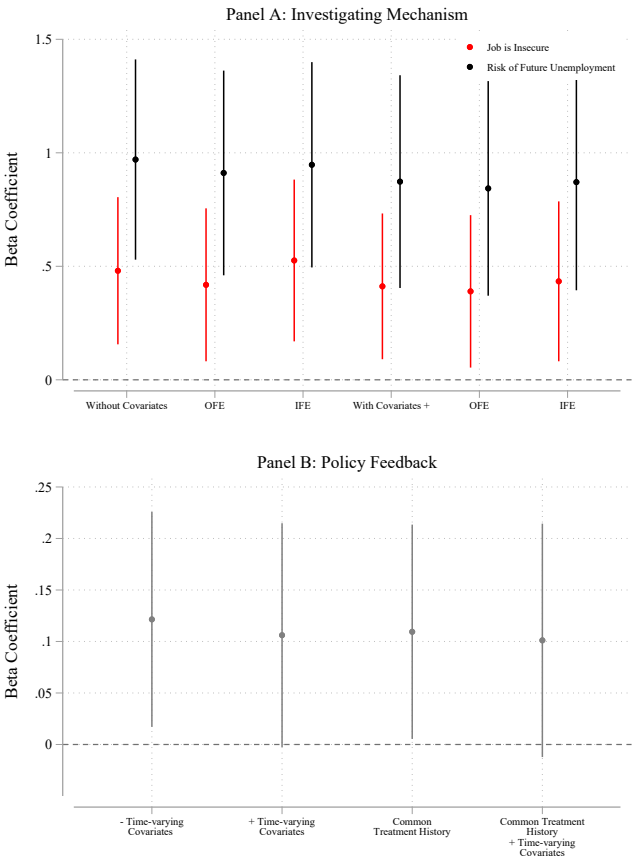
While these findings show that contextual conditions - specifically exposure to signals of labor market risks - can activate material self-interest in citizens' welfare state behavior, they cannot tell us whether the effect is caused by perceived job insecurity. Moreover, the results presented so far do not show whether these social insurance choices subsequently shape welfare state attitudes. To shed light on these aspects, I exploit the fact that the administrative data is linked to cross-sectional data on perceived job insecurity as well as panel data on attitudes toward redistribution. Perceived job insecurity is measured using reactions

to the following items: a) "My job is secure", and b) "How likely is it that during the next 12 months you will be unemployed and looking for work for at least four consecutive weeks?" Both questions are coded as a dummy, with 1 being "perceived job insecurity" and 0 being "perceived job security". Moreover, attitude toward redistribution is gauged by the widely used question included in the European Social Survey: "Government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels" (e.g. Dimick, Rueda, and Stegmueller 2018; Rehm 2009)—assessed on a five-point Likert-scale from "Agree strongly" (1) to "Disagree strongly (5)" (reversed in the analysis).

Panel A in Figure 4.3 shows the association between workplace risks and the two measures of perceived job insecurity, while Panel B reports the effect of unemployment membership on attitudes towards redistribution. Across all models, I find a positive and significant association between workplace risk exposure and job insecurity. When introducing covariates, an increase in exposure to unemployment signals by 2 standard deviations is correlated with almost a 9 percentage point positive increase in perceived risks of future unemployment. While I cannot empirically assess whether these feelings of job insecurity are linked to selection into a supplementary social insurance scheme, this analysis does provide initial evidence that a psychological condition - specifically perceptions of job insecurity - serves as a channel through which exposure to unemployment cues shapes citizens' welfare state behavior.

Finally, Panel B illustrates that the effect of unemployment insurance membership on attitudes toward redistribution is statistically significantly positive ($p < 0.1$ - $p < 0.05$), and the estimated 12 percentage-point increase in support for redistribution is quite substantial. This, in turn, provides evidence of an accelerating, positive policy feedback mechanism and indicates that welfare state policies may influence the public's views on the welfare state not only through the *immediate* material improvements but also because they have the potential to shape future material resources.

Figure 4.3: Estimated Association between Workplace Risk Exposure and Subjective Job Insecurity as well as Policy Feedback Mechanism



Note: OFE = occupation-by-year FE, IFE = industry-by-year FE. The upper panel (N=2006 and N=939, respectively) reports the association between workplace risks and perceived job insecurity, while the lower panel (N=856) reports the effect of unemployment membership on attitudes towards redistribution. Please see Paper A for covariates.

Attitudes toward Redistribution: Contextual and Psychological Conditions?

While the previous section showed that those without unemployment membership react to exposure to increased signals of unemployment risks by deciding to take up supplementary social insurance, thereby suggesting that contextual and psychological conditions can activate self-interested behavior for a large group of workers, the following sections turn to attitudes toward redistribution. First, I present the findings on the relationship between exposure to poor people and the wealthy's redistribution preferences. Second, I outline to what extent everyday economic experiences influence perceptions of economic well-being and status and whether these perceptions moderate the influence of material self-interest concerns in shaping redistribution attitudes.

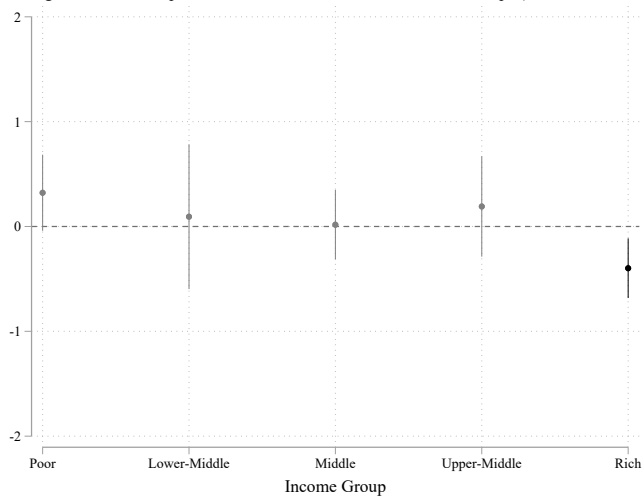
Local Exposure to Poor People among the Rich

Now, I present the results based on Paper B, in which coauthors and I examine whether the rich become more or less supportive of redistribution when they are exposed to poor people in their local surroundings. Inspired by previous studies (Condon and Wichowsky 2020; Franko and Livingston 2020), exposure to poor individuals is measured as the share of individuals in a local context (of a given size) with an income below the 20th percentile in the national income distribution. We employ the same measure of attitudes toward redistribution as Paper A. To analyze the relationship separately for income groups, we interact exposure to the poor with respondents' income quintile in the first survey wave in which they participated.

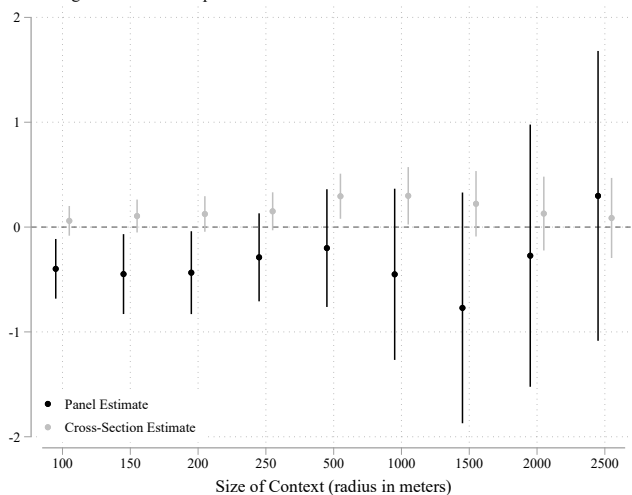
The upper panel in Figure 4.4 reports the marginal effect of local exposure to poor people across five income quintiles.

Figure 4.4: Marginal Effects of Exposure to Poor Individuals Across Income Groups and Context Sizes

Marginal Effect of Exposure to Poor Individuals across Income Groups (100 meters radius)



Marginal Effects of Exposure to Poor Individuals for the Rich across Context Sizes



Note: The panel (upper and lower) estimates in the lower panel are based on 818 individuals. The cross-sectional estimates are based on 8268 individuals. The figure is from Paper B.

Important for our purpose is the marginal effect among the rich. Here, we find a statistically significant negative ($-.40$, $p < .01$) effect of the share of poor in the local context. A one-standard-deviation increase in exposure to poor people over time decreases support for redistribution by 5.1 percentage points, which is a quite substantial effect. Furthermore, looking at the dark lines in the lower panel, which estimates the exposure effect across different context sizes, we observe that the estimate is most consistently significantly negative in smaller contexts. This tentatively suggests a local nature of the effect of exposure to the poor on the well-off's redistribution attitudes (Sands and Kadt 2020).

In the paper, we also assess our *self-selection explanation* for the diverging results. More specifically, we compare the estimates between the share of poor individuals and the wealthy's redistribution support in cross-sectional and in panel models, respectively. Comparing the light-grey (*between*-individual models) and dark (*within*-individual models) lines in the lower panel, we find a consistently *positive* (and sometimes statistically significant) relationship using a cross-sectional design and a *negative* association using panel data. This suggests that the selection plausibly accounting for the divergence between the existing conflict- and contact-supporting studies is rooted in time-invariant characteristics that are held constant in the panel models but not in the cross-sectional models.

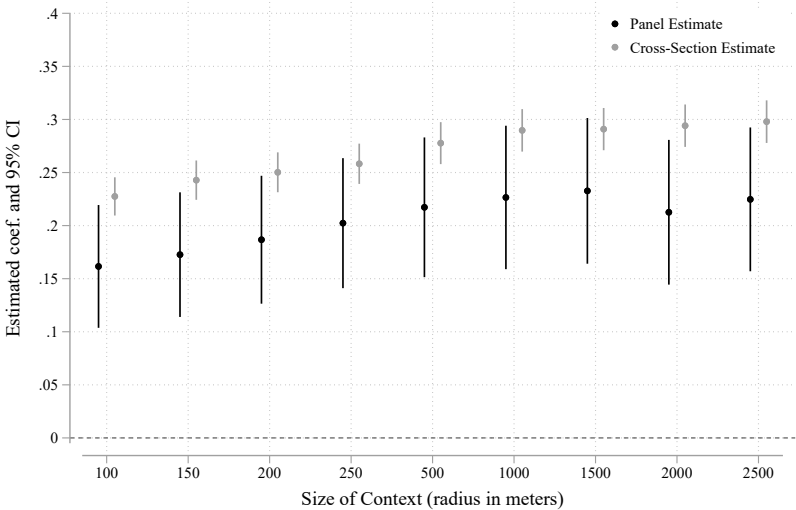
All in all, these results support the negative effect of exposure to poor individuals on support for redistribution among the well-off observed in Sands' foundational study. This negative effect suggests that the local income composition - through the share of poor people - activates material self-interested attitudes among the rich, as more redistribution, *ceteris paribus*, reduces this group's economic resources.

The Local Roots of Economic and Status Perceptions

In this section, I present the results from Paper C on the relationship between local income position - measured as the decile rank (1–10 with higher values representing higher rank) of a respondent’s disposable income - and economic as well as status perceptions. While coauthors and I use several measures of economic satisfaction in the paper, I focus primarily on the panel data item, which asks respondents to evaluate their household income on a 4-point scale from “living comfortably on present income” to “finding it hard to get by with the current income” (reversed and rescaled between 0 and 1 in the analyses).

Moreover, we measure status perception with the question: “In our society, some groups can be said to belong to the top, and other groups are at the bottom. Below is a scale going from ‘top’ (10) to ‘bottom’ (0). Where would you place yourself on this scale”? A commonly used measure of evaluation of social status (see, e.g., Gidron and Hall 2017; Evans and Kelley 2004).

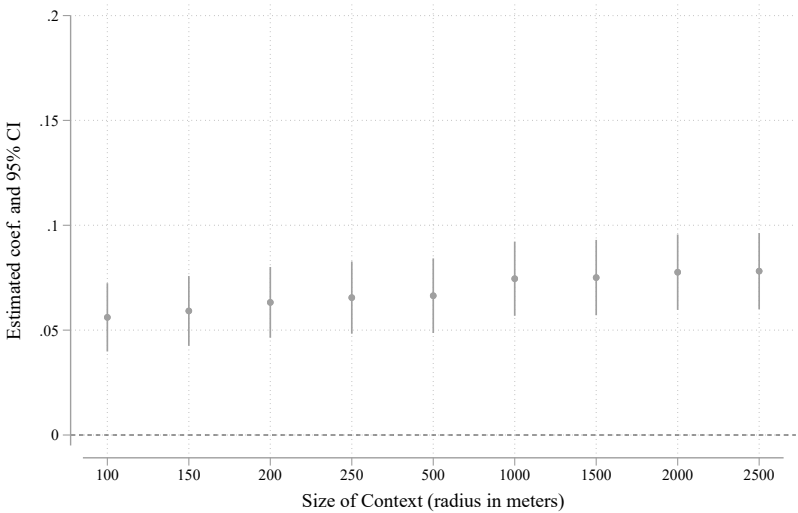
Figure 4.5: Relationship between Local Income Position and Satisfaction with Household Income (panel and cross-sectional data)



Note: Note: Coefficients and 95% confidence intervals from regressing satisfaction with household income on local income position as well as control variables across local contexts of different size. Black lines report the results of longitudinal (within-individual) analyses ($n = 1310/2620$ individuals/observations). Grey lines report the results of cross-sectional (between-individual) analyses ($n = 8, 697$). The figure is from Paper C.

Figure 4.5 illustrates the relationship between local income position and satisfaction with household income controlling for a wide range of individual-level register-based covariates, including household equivalent income. Here, we find a statistically significant positive relationship between local income position and satisfaction with household income across context size, thus corroborating the finding in related studies (e.g., Clark, Westergård-Nielsen, and Kristensen 2009). Focusing on the panel estimates, a 1-standard deviation increase in the local income position is related to a 4.53 percentage point change in satisfaction with household income. This indicates the central role of social comparison as citizens' financial well-being is higher when they are surrounded by people who are below them in the local income distribution.

Figure 4.6: Relationship between Local Income Position and Self-Placement (Bottom/Top) in Society (Cross-Sectional Data)



Note: N=8,653. The figure reports results from regressing self-placement in society on local income position across contexts of different sizes. The figure is from Paper C.

Figure 4.6 presents the results from models regressing respondents' evaluations of where they see themselves on the social ladder in society on relative local placement as well as time-invariant and time-variant covariates. Across all context sizes, we find a statistically significant positive relationship, indicating that people of higher local income rank see themselves as being ranked higher in society. Substantially, a one stan-

dard deviation increase in local income rank amounts to a 1.57 percentage point change when self-placing on the social scale. This corroborates the idea that people use the income of other people in their social surroundings to evaluate their own social status (Condon and Wichowsky 2020).

In sum, these findings support the notion that economic experiences observed in one's local surroundings shape economic and status self-perceptions. In the final section, I show that these perceptions, in turn, influence welfare state attitudes.

Do Economic Perceptions Shape Attitudes toward Redistribution?

In the final section of this chapter, I present Paper D's findings on the link between economic perceptions - specifically perceptions of the economic distance to the poor - and attitudes toward redistribution that gives to the poor. First, I present the results based on the cross-sectional data from 18 democracies. In this analysis, I follow Cansunar (2020) and operationalize the perceived economic distance to poor people as the distance between the respondents' own income and the perceived earnings of an unskilled factory worker.⁵ The dependent variable is measured using the following statement: "The government should spend less on benefits for the poor." Answers were recorded on a scale from 1-5, 1 being "strongly agree," 5 being "strongly disagree." To facilitate ease of interpretation, responses are rescaled to range from 0-1, where 1 indicates support for *giving to the poor*.

Second, I report the findings from Study 2 and Study 3, which address issues of confounding by randomly assigning respondents to conditions that manipulate perceptions of the economic distance to poor people (see Section 3 for treatments). In these studies, I use a range of different items that measure attitudes toward redistribution that gives to the poor. In Study 2 of Paper D, I combine reactions to the following statements into an additive index: a) "The country should give more money to poor households to reduce inequality," b) "The country should spend money on social assistance to poor households," and c) "The country should accept demands for more benefits from those with the fewest resources." All questions were obtained on a scale from 1-7, 1 being "strongly disagree," 7 being "strongly agree."⁶ The index is then re-scaled to vary from 0 (low support) to 1 (high support). Finally, in Study 3 of Paper D,

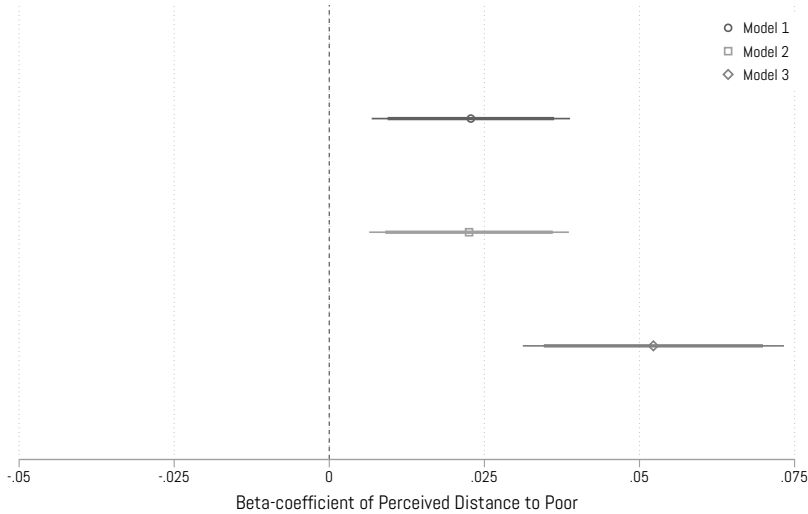
5. Income distance from poor people = $\ln\left(\frac{\text{Respondents' HHIncome}}{\text{Estimated workers pay}}\right)$.

6. Reliability: 0.88; Factor loadings: 2.42. The mean and standard deviation of the index are 0.65 and 0.21, respectively.

attitudes toward redistribution that gives to the poor were captured using the statements a) "Poor people should get higher welfare benefits" (1 being "strongly disagree," 7 being "strongly agree"), and b) "The government should tax the rich more than they currently do in order to support the poor" (1 being "strongly agree," 10 being "strongly disagree").

Figure 4.7 presents the results based on the cross-sectional data. Here, we observe that the perceived distance from the poor is positively and significantly related to support for benefits to the poor across all models. Thus, on average, voters tend to be more supportive of policies aimed at the poor when they believe that a typical unskilled worker earns less than they do. In the full model, a 2 standard deviation change in perceived distance to the poor is associated with increased support for redistribution of 6.7 percentage points. This is comparable to 2/3 of the difference between self-identified left-wing and right-wing voters.

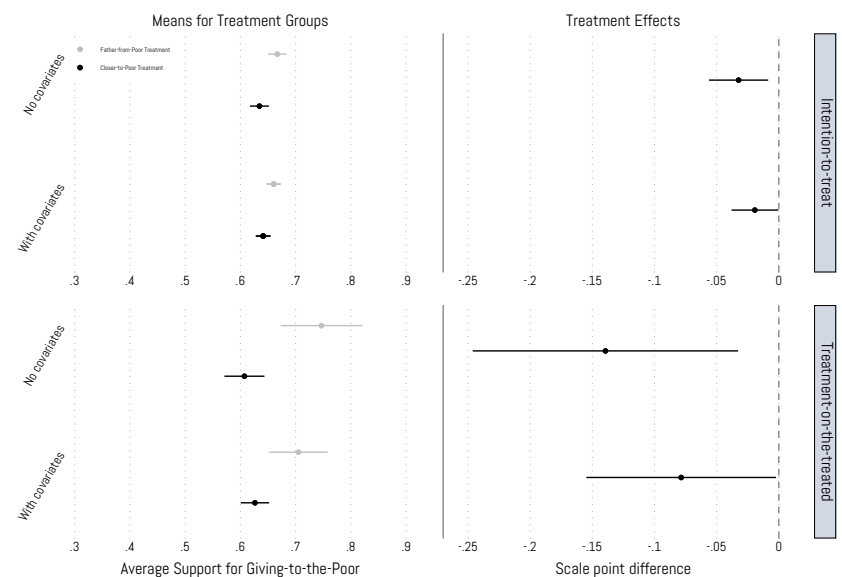
Figure 4.7: Perception of Distance to the Poor and Support for Redistribution



Note: N=8,653. Estimated effect of perception of distance to the poor on support for giving to the poor. Horizontal lines are 95% (thin) and 90% (thick) confidence intervals. Co-variates: income, (Models 1-3), + unemployment status, gender, education, union membership, age, part-time employment, social class, church attendance (Models 2-3), + left-wing affiliation, and preferred distance (Model 3).

While these findings provide initial support for an effect of perceived distance downward on attitudes toward benefits to the poor, they might be confounded by unobserved characteristics, such as psychological predisposition. To accommodate possible confounding, I now turn to the experimental results. Figure 4.8 and Figure 4.9 report the results based on the two nationally representative survey experiments in the United Kingdom. In Figure 4.8, I report the estimates of the intention-to-treat (ITT) using linear regression with an OLS estimator as well as the treatment-on-the-treated (TOT) employing a 2SLS estimator. The latter is added because of non-compliance, especially in the farther-from-poor condition.

Figure 4.8: Economic Distances from Imaginary Countries

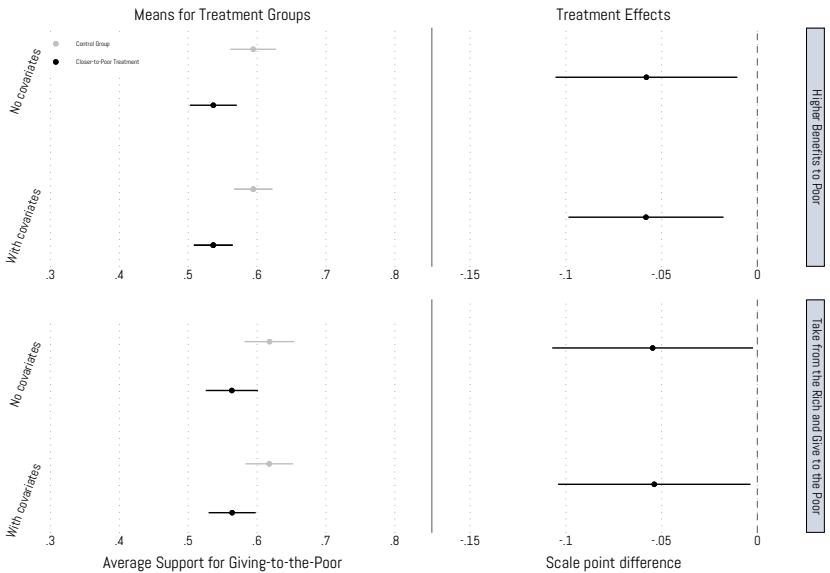


Note: N=1,200 respondents. Estimates are based on either an OLS-estimator (ITT) or a 2SLS-estimator (TOT). The left panel shows predicted values, and the right panel reports unstandardized regression coefficients. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. Co-variables are Compassion Sentiments, Political Ideology, Economic Self-Placement, Status-Seeking index, Feeling of Poor and Rich, Education, Age, Income, Gender and Social Grade. The figure is from Paper D.

While the ITT effect shows a statistically significant difference of 2 to 3.2 percentage points (depending on the model specifications) between the two treatment conditions, the effect among compliers is quite substantial. Those who receive the closer-to-poor condition are, on average, between 8 and 14 percentage points ($p < 0.05$ - $p < 0.01$) less supportive of redistribution than those who receive the farther-from-poor condition. Turning to Figure 4.9, which reports the effect when randomly exposing

respondents to real-world economic distances, we again observe a significantly negative effect. When covariates are added, perceiving a small economic distance to poor individuals produces a six percentage point decrease in support for higher welfare to the poor ($p < 0.01$). Further, compared to the control group, respondents in the closer-to-poor condition are, on average, five percentage points ($p < 0.05$) less supportive of redistribution, which is directly intended to give to poor people by taking from the rich.

Figure 4.9: Real-World Economic Distances



Note: N=512 respondents. Estimates are based on OLS regressions. The left panel shows predicted values, and the right panel reports unstandardized regression coefficients. Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals. Co-variables are compassion and envy sentiments, political ideology, education, age, income, location of residence, gender, and social grade. The figure is from Paper D.

Finally, I probe the mechanism linking economic distances with redistribution attitudes. As reported in the paper, we observe that participants who receive the closer-to-poor condition are more likely to agree that there is economic and status competition between poor and middle-income households than those who receive the farther-from-poor condition. Depending on the model specifications, the average difference between the two groups varies between 2 and 14 percentage points ($p < 0.05$ - $p < 0.01$). These results thus indicate that perceiving a smaller economic distance to poor individuals triggers perceptions of increased

competition with poor people, negatively affecting attitudes towards redistribution that gives to the poor.

These findings, in sum, show evidence of a psychological condition that moderates the influence of material self-interest on citizens' attitudes toward the welfare state. Material self-interested attitudes of the economically poor can be suppressed because their perception of bottom-end inequality makes them reluctant to support more redistribution to the poor, while material self-interested attitudes are triggered among those who are not economically poor but *perceive* that the economic distance to poor people is small.

Summarizing the Chapter

This chapter has presented a comprehensive summary of the main findings derived from the four papers that constitute this dissertation. Combined, the papers provide unique empirical evidence of the extent to which contextual and psychological conditions can moderate the influence of material conditions on citizens' welfare state behavior and attitudes. In the next chapter, I summarize and conclude the dissertation's overall research question and discuss the implications of the findings.

Chapter 5

Concluding Discussion

Summarising Main Findings

While growing empirical evidence questions the influence of material self-interest in shaping citizens' welfare state preferences and behavior, the central claim in this dissertation is that under certain circumstances, citizens' welfare state views and actions reflect self-interested considerations that are rooted in their material conditions. To assess this claim, my dissertation has examined the role of contextual and psychological factors in moderating citizens' material self-interest in relation to the risk-reducing and distributive aspects of the welfare state. In four studies, I have provided evidence that contextual conditions shape psychological thinking, which then either activates or suppresses the influence of material self-interest. In particular, Paper A and Paper B provide novel evidence of material self-interested behavior and attitudes in citizens' decision to take up supplementary social insurance as well as in their attitudes toward redistribution. Moreover, Paper C showed that economic experiences from one's local surroundings shape perceptions of economic well-being and place in the social hierarchy, which, in Paper D, was shown to moderate self-interested redistribution attitudes.

First, Paper A examined citizens' enrollment in a government-provided supplementary social insurance scheme under economic uncertainty, which represents a case where citizens' material self-interest is clearly at stake. Here, I argued that exposure to increased signals of unemployment risks - through feelings of job insecurity - positively affects the decision to take up supplementary social insurance. To evaluate this argument, I utilized the unique feature of the unemployment insurance system in Denmark, where workers can combine basic unemployment insurance with the possibility of buying publicly facilitated supplementary unemployment insurance coverage. I demonstrated, using various empirical strategies, that exposure to signals of the risk of becoming unemployed substantially increases the probability of joining an unemployment insurance fund. Moreover, I showed that workplace risk exposure

is associated with increased subjective job insecurity, thereby providing suggestive evidence that perceptions of job insecurity serve as a channel through which exposure to unemployment cues shapes citizens' welfare state behavior. Finally, using panel survey models, I provided evidence that members of an unemployment insurance fund are more supportive of increased redistribution. All in all, these findings suggest that contextual and psychological conditions can activate the influence of material self-interest on the decision to protect against potential financial hardship in the future.

Second, in Paper B, my co-authors and I take up the central question of whether the welfare attitudes of the rich are shaped by exposure to poor people in their everyday life. Using a design resembling existing cross-sectional studies but with more causal leverage, we find that local exposure to poor people is associated with lower support for redistribution among rich individuals. Moreover, our findings indicate that self-selection based on stable individual characteristics is a likely explanation for why previous cross-sectional studies find a positive relationship. This shows that the local income composition - through the share of poor people - can activate material self-interested attitudes among the rich.

Third, in Paper C and Paper D, I addressed the proposition that economic experiences from one's local surroundings shape perceptions of economic status and place in the social hierarchy, which then are reflected in redistribution attitudes. By asking to what extent one's position in the local income distribution shapes self-evaluation, Paper C examined the first part of the link, revealing two interesting findings. First, those who are placed higher on the local income ladder are, on average, more satisfied with their own income than those who are placed lower, underscoring the importance of social comparison in determining perceptions of financial well-being. Second, individuals with higher local income ranks tend to perceive themselves as ranking higher in society. This supports the notion that people assess their social status by comparing their income to that of their peers in the local community.

Finally, in Paper D, I examined to what extent economic perceptions - specifically perceived distance to poor people - influence support for redistributive policies that benefit the poor. Using a combination of experimental and observational data, I provided robust empirical evidence that perceiving a small economic distance from the poor reduces support for redistribution. Additionally, my evidence indicated that perceptions of economic and status competition are a likely mechanism linking perceived economic distance with redistribution attitudes. These findings suggest, on the one hand, that perceiving a small economic distance to

poor people can activate present-oriented material self-interested attitudes among the economically non-poor as they would not stand to gain from more redistribution to the poor. On the other hand, the findings also show that the economically poor may counter-intuitively refrain from making such demands because their perception of bottom-end inequality makes them reluctant to support more redistribution to the poor.

All in all, the findings in the dissertation demonstrate that contextual and psychological conditions moderate the influence of material self-interested considerations in shaping citizens' attitudes and behavior toward the welfare state. Exposure to increased signals of unemployment risks, for instance, activates material self-interested behavior because these signals make individuals worried about their future job situation, which makes them opt to buy supplementary unemployment insurance coverage. However, in other instances, material conditions rooted in self-interested concerns are suppressed by psychological conditions. More specifically, the dissertation indicates that citizens' perception of the economic distance to poor people functions as a moderator that may prevent material conditions from being reflected in the redistributive attitudes of the economically poor.

Contributions, Future Research, and Policy Implications

In this section, I consider the contributions of the dissertation. First, I discuss its contribution to the welfare state literature and address avenues for future research. Finally, I reflect on the dissertation's implications for policy-makers.

Contributions to the Welfare State Literature

A prominent line of research in the welfare state literature, often drawing on economic models, assumes that individuals weigh costs versus benefits to calculate their preferred policies. Despite its central position within the literature, the material self-interested explanation has been questioned in a series of significant contributions. In this dissertation, I argue and show empirically that citizens' welfare state behavior and preferences under certain conditions reflect material self-interested concerns. This implies several important contributions to the welfare state literature.

First, based on the findings of the dissertation, we now know that contextual conditions - specifically the local income composition and unemployment signals from the labor market - can moderate the influence

of self-interested economic attitudes. Examining local conditions, the dissertation finds that the composition of residential surroundings can reduce support for redistribution among the rich, who possess a disproportionate share of the economic and political power and are more likely to turn out at elections (Bartels 2017; Solt 2008). Compared to earlier cross-sectional studies (Bailey et al. 2013; Kearns et al. 2014; Minkoff and Lyons 2019; Franko and Livingston 2020), the dissertation reveals that repeated out-group exposure consolidates the negative effect of exposure to poor people and, thus, extends beyond a temporary effect after a singular event found in Sands' (2017) foundational study. As the rich would stand to lose economic resources from increased redistribution, this suggests that being exposed to poor people in residential surroundings can activate economic self-interested redistribution preferences among the rich. The dissertation provides, additionally, an important corrective to existing cross-sectional work on the consequences of local exposure to poor people among the rich. Employing a design closer to earlier studies but with more causal leverage, I substantiate that previous cross-sectional studies are likely confounded by self-selection into neighborhoods based on stable individual characteristics. Because the wealthy may choose neighborhoods and neighbors partly based on stable predispositions towards the less well-off, which likely correlate with redistribution preferences, self-selection might explain why most previous studies find a positive relationship between exposure to poor individuals and redistribution support among the well-off.

Second, I argue and show empirically that psychological and contextual conditions in conjuncture can activate the influence of material self-interested concerns in citizens' social insurance behavior. By examining citizens' choice to take up government-sponsored supplementary social insurance under economic uncertainty, I study a case in which citizens' (future-oriented) material self-interest is undoubtedly at stake. As the individual member bears the heaviest costs - and reaps the potential benefits - of being enrolled in a publicly facilitated supplementary scheme, I can, in contrast to earlier studies of social insurance attitudes (Iversen and Soskice 2001; Moene and Wallerstein 2001; Rehm 2009; Rehm, Hacker, and Schlesinger 2012), clearly distinguish material self-interest from empathy and deservingness concerns. My findings show that a significant group of workers react to unemployment risks by opting to buy supplementary unemployment insurance coverage to reduce the severe economic consequences of job loss. The effect of unemployment risk signals on citizens' decision to take up supplementary social insurance is likely mediated by subjective risk perceptions. This makes this argu-

ment more plausible and aligns with the conclusion of a recent review of the broader literature on labor market vulnerability and political preferences (Marx and Picot 2020) that subjective insecurity should be studied as an intermediate outcome. These findings show that contextual and psychological conditions in conjunction can activate the influence of an instrumental calculation based on future-oriented self-interest in shaping citizens' welfare state behavior. Empirically, compared to earlier studies that employ cross-sectional designs to examine how individuals make up their minds about social insurance (see, e.g., Alt et al. 2021; Landais et al. 2021; Rehm, Hacker, and Schlesinger 2012), I use individual-level panel data and quasi-experimental variation in risk exposure, which increases the confidence that the estimated relationships can be interpreted causally. Using unemployment signals from an extended version of a mass layoff design is a novel empirical contribution because it draws on quasi-random variation in risk exposure. Moreover, by measuring exposure to unemployment cues from the workplace, I employ some of the most fine-grained variations in labor market risk exposure to date (though see also Alt et al. 2021). This ensures that I do not have to rely on pre-defined aggregated data on e.g. occupational risks (see e.g., Rehm 2009), which might poorly reflect how individuals learn about their labor market risks.

Third, my dissertation addresses research on feedback effects by showing that taking up a government-facilitated supplementary social insurance scheme shapes welfare state preferences. Being a member of publicly facilitated unemployment insurance scheme is positively related to support for redistribution, indicating that social policy recipients may develop preferences for the expansion of welfare state programs. In addition to showing empirical evidence of accelerating positive feedback effects (Busemeyer, Abrassart, and Nezi 2021), these results suggest that the link between existing social policies and public opinion about the welfare state is shaped by *future-oriented* material self-interest. This demonstrates that social policies may influence the public's views on the welfare state not only through the *immediate* material improvements but also because they have the potential to shape future material resources.

Finally, I identify a psychological condition that moderates the influence of material self-interested redistribution attitudes. Using experimental and observational evidence, I find rigorous empirical support for the link between individual-level perceptions of the economic distance to poor people and support for redistribution that aims to improve the living standards of the poor. These findings suggest an explanation for the missing link between high levels of inequality and increased demand

for redistribution. In many advanced democracies, economic inequality is driven by the concentration of wealth and income in the hands of the very rich (Piketty and Saez 2013; OECD 2015). In addition to its impact on economic outcomes, economic inequality has been associated with higher levels of status insecurity (Layte and Whelan 2014; Gidron and Hall 2017; Engler and Weisstanner 2021), which can lead to uncomfortable and stressful comparisons with the very rich in everyday life (Leigh, Jencks, and Smeeding 2012; Wheeler and Miyake 1992). As a result, people may over time have become more likely to think about and compare themselves with the poor rather than with the rich. The rising income of the wealthiest may, additionally, induce the feeling that the economic distance to the poor is decreasing, at least in relative terms. These two conditions, combined with the findings of my dissertation, may partly explain the missing link between rising economic inequality and redistribution demands: Voters may counter-intuitively refrain from making such demands because their frequent downward comparisons trigger perceptions of status and economic competition with poor individuals, which make them reluctant to contribute to their material well-being.

Avenues for Future Research

In light of the dissertation's findings - and its limitations - I address in this section areas for future research. While the dissertation has shed light on important questions about how voters make up their minds about the welfare state, several questions remain unanswered.

First, Paper B revealed a moderating effect of contextual conditions on self-interested redistribution attitudes among the wealthy, demonstrating that local exposure to poor people can activate such attitudes. However, the dissertation does not examine whether the immediate residential surroundings shape redistributive preferences for other economic groups that also wield significant influence on political decision-making. Given the pivotal role of the median voter in elections, a limitation of this dissertation and an important avenue for future research is whether contextual conditions - such as exposure to poor *or* wealthy people - affect the median voter's support for redistribution. The growing economic inequality in many countries has led to increasing spatial isolation of the wealthy (Reardon and Bischoff 2011), which may imply that median voters are more exposed to poor than to rich people. If such local exposure also decreases their willingness to redistribute, this could partly explain why the increasing economic inequality has not been met with a demand

for more redistribution. Another aspect worth diving into is whether exposure to the rich elicits self-interested attitudes of the poor. Studying this using a combination of observational data and a field experiment in South Africa, Sands and De Kadt (2020) show that local exposure to wealth increases support among the poor for taxing the wealthy, which suggests that contextual conditions - at least in residential surroundings - also hold the potential to activate self-interested attitudes among the poor.

Second, and related, it is important to acknowledge that voters are situated in a multitude of social contexts beyond those studied in this dissertation. To advance our understanding of the moderating effect of contextual conditions, future research should dedicate time to think theoretically about whether the types of interaction in different social contexts have an impact on the aforementioned effect. Specifically, as Nathan and Sands (2023) point out, the duration and depth of interactions may vary from brief, one-off encounters to more sustained and cooperative relationships, and such variations can produce moderating effects that are distinct from those uncovered in this dissertation. For example, recent evidence suggests that in schools, which foster more cooperative interactions than residential surroundings, students from wealthy homes become more prosocial, generous, and egalitarian when they have poor classmates (Rao 2019). Another limitation of this dissertation is its sole focus on the moderating effect of contemporary economic experiences. Yet, research drawing on political socialization indicates that adolescent experiences are also especially influential (see e.g., Goldman and Hopkins 2020). Future research could make a considerable contribution by theoretically and empirically examining whether adolescent experiences, either from residential surroundings or seeing friends and classmates struggling to find a job, moderate the influence of self-interested concerns in adulthood.⁷

Finally, although much of the social insurance literature has focused on labor market risks, given the crucial role of the labor market in capitalist societies, future research should investigate material self-interested behavior in other domains, such as health. For example, while people's preferences regarding health risks may differ from their preferences regarding layoff risks (Jensen 2019), it is possible that workers may be influenced by observing colleagues who become physically or mentally ill

7. In a series of empirical contributions, Chetty and Hendren (2018; 2018) have shown that children who grow up in better neighborhoods have significantly higher earnings as adults, which suggests that early-life experiences significantly shape material conditions in adulthood.

due to workplace stress. Similar to layoff cues, such cues may heighten concerns about one's future health, which may increase the likelihood of joining a health insurance scheme. Thus, investigating the impact of workplace stress on health insurance participation can provide valuable insights into material self-interest and behavior beyond labor market risks.

Policy Implications

As I embarked on my dissertation journey, I was intrigued by a remark made by Kaare Dybvad, the former Danish Minister of Housing. He articulated a vision of creating affordable housing in affluent neighborhoods and upscale condos in economically disadvantaged areas to foster mixed communities. His vision is based on the widespread belief that interactions between different socioeconomic groups are fundamental to social integration and, hence, needed in order to improve social affinity between (economic) groups. At the time, there was mixed empirical evidence on whether such policies could successfully achieve these aims. Now, based on the findings of my dissertation, we may have to question some of the positive implications of diminishing economic segregation. My findings show that local exposure to poor people reduces the willingness among the rich to redistribute, which indicates that social affinity might be hampered by establishing mixed neighborhoods. Additionally, because people feel more economically and socially deprived when living in an area where they are economically inferior, mixing economic groups might reduce the well-being of the poor while having positive effects on the self-evaluation of the wealthy. Moreover, the dissertation highlights a significant obstacle to reducing high levels of economic inequality. Instead of prompting a self-correcting demand for greater equality, experiences with and exposure to poor people may actually perpetuate inequality by lowering the desire for redistribution among those who have the means to redistribute.

The dissertation shows that in addition to contextual factors that may sustain inequality, there are psychological factors that can hinder efforts to reduce economic inequality. If the increasing economic resources of the wealthiest facilitate a general feeling that the economic distance to the poor is becoming smaller, this could explain why public pressure to implement policies to address economic inequality has been limited. Additionally, it may be counterproductive for policymakers' efforts to address economic inequality if they give the impression that redistributing wealth from the rich primarily benefits the poor. It may be more effec-

tive to highlight how redistributing resources can enhance social welfare institutions to the benefit of all.

Finally, the dissertation sheds light on social insurance and what motivates individuals to take up a government-sponsored social insurance scheme. Because the welfare state has a significant role in mitigating income losses and drops in consumption when people lose their job, knowledge of citizens' social insurance motivation is essential for policymakers in order to design social insurance policies that protect citizens against economic risks. My dissertation shows that a significant group of workers' decision to take up supplementary social insurance is based on future-oriented material self-interest. This suggests severe adverse selection into social insurance, which could undermine the benefits of combining basic unemployment insurance with the option to buy publicly facilitated supplementary social insurance. While this indicates that mandating supplemental coverage to all workers would be a more optimal solution, Landais and colleagues (2021) show that this, due to moral hazard, is not the best policy response. Still, policymakers have to be careful when choosing to combine a basic mandate with the possibility of buying supplementary social insurance. Due to the influence of material self-interest in citizens' social insurance choices, such a combination could lead to increased inequality between rich and poor risk-exposed workers if the social insurance premiums become too costly. It is, consequently, crucial for policymakers to ensure that social insurance programs are designed in a way that does not restrict access to individuals with adequate resources.

Overall, this dissertation provides an important stepping-stone for evidence-based policy-making in the welfare state. The findings presented in this summary and the four self-contained papers show, using a range of causally rigorous methods, that citizens are - at least under certain conditions - driven by material self-interested concerns in their attitudes and behavior towards the welfare state. Policymakers can use these findings, for example, to design more effective policies that address the growing concentration of wealth and income in the hands of the very rich. Here, policymakers should highlight the general welfare benefits of increasing redistribution, for example, through social investments that benefit everyone. However, policymakers should be careful not to create the impression that redistribution from the rich primarily benefits the poorest in society, as this may activate the psychological condition identified in this dissertation and make it difficult to generate wide support for redistributive measures. Moreover, establishing economically mixed neighborhoods may not necessarily be effective in enhancing social affin-

ity between economic groups, at least if the desire is to redress existing inequality. In sum, this dissertation offers valuable insights for policy-makers in designing new welfare state policies that intend to address economic challenges in the future.

Summary

The welfare state is a fundamental institution in modern societies, not only distributing income and wealth but also providing insurance against labor market risks, such as unemployment and sickness. Because the extent, resources, and range of the welfare state depend on the preferences of the public, a substantial body of work has examined the micro-foundations of welfare state preferences, often arguing that preferences are rooted in material self-interested concerns. Yet, recent studies question whether citizens' welfare state preferences are motivated by such concerns, instead claiming that the link between material circumstances and the welfare state is confounded by long-term values and deservingness concerns rooted in socialization. However, I argue in this dissertation that it is premature to dismiss material self-interest as explaining citizens' welfare state attitudes and behavior. I propose that views and actions towards the welfare state under certain conditions reflect self-interested considerations that are rooted in their material conditions. To evaluate this, I ask the following question in the dissertation: to what extent do contextual and psychological conditions moderate the influence of material self-interested concerns in shaping citizens' welfare state preferences and behavior?

Combining theories of context effects, consumption, and social comparison with the political economy literature on redistribution and social insurance, the dissertation develops expectations about how material self-interest in citizens' welfare state attitudes and behavior is moderated by contextual and psychological conditions. Regarding the risk-reducing aspect of the welfare state, I expect that exposure to increased unemployment signals makes individuals worried about their future job situation, which positively affects enrollment in a supplementary unemployment insurance scheme. Turning to the distributing aspect, I expect that economic experiences from one's local surroundings shape perceptions of economic well-being and place in the social hierarchy, which then shape self-interested redistribution attitudes.

These expectations are tested in four studies. Utilizing the unique feature of the Danish unemployment insurance system, where workers can

combine basic unemployment insurance with the possibility of buying publicly facilitated supplementary unemployment insurance coverage, I demonstrate in Paper A, using various empirical strategies, that exposure to signals of the risk of becoming unemployed substantially increases the probability of joining an unemployment insurance fund. Moreover, I provide evidence that workplace risk exposure is correlated with increased feelings of job insecurity, thereby providing suggestive evidence that perceptions of job insecurity serve as a channel through which exposure to unemployment cues shapes citizens' welfare state behavior.

Second, in Paper B, my coauthors and I take up the central question of whether the rich become more or less supportive of redistribution when they are exposed to poor people in their everyday life. Using a design resembling earlier studies but with more causal leverage, we find that local exposure to poor people is associated with lower support for redistribution among rich individuals. This suggests that the local income composition can activate material self-interested attitudes among the rich.

Third, I test whether economic experiences from one's local surroundings shape perceptions of economic status and place in the social hierarchy (Paper C), which then shapes redistribution attitudes (Paper D). In Paper C, my coauthors and I show that those who are placed higher on the local income ladder are, on average, more satisfied with their own income than those who are placed lower. Moreover, we find that individuals with higher local income ranks tend to perceive themselves as ranking higher in society. These findings underscore the importance of social comparison in determining perceptions of economic well-being and social status.

Finally, in Paper D, I go on to show that economic perceptions - specifically perceived distance to poor people - influence support for redistributive policies that benefit the poor. Using a combination of experimental and observational data, I provide empirical evidence that perceiving a small economic distance from the poor reduces support for redistribution. This finding suggests, on the one hand, that perceiving a small economic distance to poor people can activate material self-interested attitudes among the economically non-poor as they would not stand to gain from more redistribution to the poor. On the other hand, the finding also shows that material self-interested attitudes of the economically poor can be suppressed because their perception of bottom-end inequality makes them reluctant to support redistributive measures.

Overall, the dissertation demonstrates, using various causally rigorous methods, that citizens are - under certain conditions - driven by ma-

terial self-interested concerns in their welfare state attitudes and behavior. This provides valuable insights for policymakers in designing new welfare state policies that intend to address economic challenges in the future. It suggests, for example, that establishing economically mixed neighborhoods may not necessarily be effective in enhancing social affinity between economic groups, at least if the desire is to redress existing inequality.

Dansk Resumé

Velfærdsstaten er én af de vigtigste ”opfindelser” i moderne tid og er en fundamental institution i dagens samfund. Foruden at omfordele indkomst og velstand mellem rige og fattige, sikrer velfærdsstaten, at borgerne kan opretholde en anstændig levestandard i forbindelse med arbejdsløshed eller sygdom. I demokratiske lande er indretningen af velfærdsstaten i vid udstrækning bestemt af borgernes præferencer for velfærdsstatspolitikker, der f.eks. øger eller reducerer niveauet af omfordeling. Viden om, hvad der driver borgernes holdning til velfærdsstaten er derfor afgørende for politikere, der ønsker at designe velfærdsstatspolitikker, der adresserer fremtidens økonomiske udfordringer.

Tidlige studier fra velfærdsstatlitteraturen argumenterer, at borgernes primært drevet af materiel egennytteinteresse. Dette indebærer således, at borgernes holdning til velfærdsstaten afgøres af, hvorvidt de selv får økonomisk gavn af dets politikker. Nyere studier har imidlertid sat spørgsmålstejn ved dette perspektiv og i stedet påpeget, at borgernes holdninger til velfærdsstaten har rod i ideologiske prædispositioner samt andre dybereliggende politiske prædispositioner.

I denne afhandling argumenterer jeg imidlertid for, at det er for tidligt at afskrive materiel egennytteinteresse som forklaring for borgernes velfærdsstatsholdninger. I stedet hævder jeg, at borgernes synspunkter og handlinger i velfærdsstaten under visse betingelser afspejler egennytteinteresser, der er rodfastet i deres materielle forhold. For at belyse dette har jeg i denne afhandling derfor undersøgt følgende spørgsmål: i hvilket omfang betinger kontekstuelle og psykologiske forhold indflydelsen af materielle egeninteresser i formningen af borgernes holdninger til og adfærd i velfærdsstaten?

Ved at kombinere teorier om konteksteffekter og sociale sammenligninger med den politisk-økonomiske litteratur udleder jeg i afhandlingen forventninger til, hvordan materielle egeninteresser i borgernes velfærdsstatsinteresser betinges af kontekstuelle og psykologiske forhold. Med afsæt i det risiko-reducerende aspekt af velfærdsstaten forventer jeg, at borgerne forsikrer sig mod øget jobusikkerhed som følge af

dagligdagserfaringer fra arbejdspladsen ved at tilmelde sig en a-kasse. Jeg forventer desuden, at økonomiske erfaringer fra nabolaget former opfattelsen af økonomisk tilfredshed og placering i det sociale hierarki med en afsmittende effekt på egennytteinteresserede omfordelingsholdninger.

Disse forventninger testes i fire studier. Med afsæt i det danske arbejdsløshedsforsikringssystem og detaljeret data fra Danmarks Statistisk, viser jeg i Studie A, at andelen af ens kollegaer, der har mistet deres job i det seneste år, øger folks tilbøjelighed til at tilmelde sig en a-kasse. Desuden finder jeg, at arbejdsløshedssignaler er korreleret med en øget frygt for arbejdsløshed, hvilket indikerer, at jobusikkerhedsopfattelser forbinder dagligdagserfaringer fra arbejdspladsen med borgernes adfærd i velfærdsstaten.

Dernæst undersøger mine medforfattere og jeg i Studie B, om de riges holdning til omfordeling er formet af eksponering for fattige i hverdagen. Her finder vi, at andelen af fattige i nabolaget (indenfor en radius af 100 meter) er forbundet med lavere støtte til omfordeling blandt rige personer. Dette tyder på, at nabolagserfaringer kan aktivere materielle egennytteinteresserede holdninger blandt de rige.

For det tredje undersøger jeg, om økonomiske erfaringer fra ens nabolag former opfattelser af økonomisk status og placering i det sociale hierarki (Studie C), og hvorvidt disse opfattelser former omfordelingsholdninger (Studie D). I Studie C viser mine medforfattere og jeg, at tilfredshed med ens økonomisk situation stiger, når man er relativt rigere end sine naboer. Desuden finder vi, at de lokal rigeste opfatter sig selv som værende højere placeret i samfundet selv efter kontrol for absolut indkomst. Samlet set understreger disse resultater betydningen af sociale sammenligninger for opfattelsen af økonomisk tilfredshed og social status.

Endelig viser jeg i Studie D, at økonomiske opfattelser – mere præcis den opfattede indkomstafstand til fattige - påvirker støtten til omfordelingspolitikker, der gavner de fattigste. Ved en kombination af eksperimentelle og observationelle data finder jeg, at borgeres opfattede indkomstafstand til de fattige reducerer deres støtte til omfordeling. Dette resultat antyder på den ene side, at den opfattede afstand til de fattigste kan aktivere materielle egennytteinteresser blandt personer, der ikke er fattige, da deres økonomiske situation ikke forbedres som følge af større omfordeling til de fattige. På den anden side viser resultatet, at materielle egennytteinteresserede holdninger hos de fattigste kan undertrykkes, fordi deres opfattelse af indkomstafstand til bunden mindsker deres omfordelingsstøtte.

Samlet set viser jeg i afhandlingen ved hjælp af en række kausalt robuste metoder, at borgerne - under visse betingelser - er drevet af materielle egennytteligheder i deres holdninger til og adfærd i velfærdsstaten. Dette giver værdifuld indsigt for politikere, der ønsker at designe velfærdsstatspolitikker, der har til hensigt at adressere økonomiske udfordringer i fremtiden. Afhandlingens resultater tyder eksempelvis på, at det ikke nødvendigvis er effektivt at etablere økonomisk blandede nabolag, hvis politikerne ønsker at øge det sociale sammenhold mellem økonomiske grupper.

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