

Differentiated distributive justice preferences?

Equality, equity and need in the welfare domains of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits

Arno Van Hootegem, Koen Abts & Bart Meuleman

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Introduction

In the era of welfare state retrenchment, the social question “who should get what and why?” comes back to the fore (van Oorschot, 2000, p. 34). In this context, the notion of distributive justice, which pertains to how to appropriately distribute the burdens and benefits of our welfare state, structures many contemporary discussions (Mau & Veghte, 2007). Generally, research refers to three principles of distributive justice: equality, equity and need, with each principle implying different logics of allocating benefits, goods and services (Clasen & Van Oorschot, 2002; Deutsch, 1975). While equality extends justice to all citizens and disregards additional requirements for access to social welfare, equity conceives contributions as a prerequisite of distributions and need entails a selective concern to those highest in need of assistance. Apart from the existence of an extensive body of normative theories, public opinion studies focus increasingly on preferences for these principles (Liebig & Sauer, 2016). However, this empirical research fails to fully grasp what types of welfare distributions people consider just, as it suffers from two major interrelated shortcomings: it does not acknowledge that social justice preferences may be dependent of the particular distribution at stake and therefore it denies that people may simultaneously apply multiple justice principles in their distributive judgements.

Although Walzer (1983) and Miller (1999) have advocated for a context-dependent conceptualization of distributive justice, the presumption that people apply the same distributive justice principles universally across welfare domains remains widespread in public opinion research. This is questionable, as the principles seem to be supported to a differing extent depending on the welfare domain under consideration (Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2013). Yet, precise insight into how and to what extent preferences for the social justice principles are reliant on the social context remains scarce. Hence, we explore preferences for the principle of equality, equity and need in the three welfare domains of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits to understand exactly how different justice principles apply to distinct distributional contexts (cf. Walzer, 1983). This leads

to our first central research question: *How are preferences for the social justice principles dependent of the welfare domains?* Answering this question is not only crucial to understand distributive justice in and across concrete circumstances, but also to comprehend public preferences for different types of welfare distributions in times of the recalibration of the societal institutions in each of these traditional policy domains (Paz-fuchs, 2011).

Connected to this neglect of context-dependency, research generally supposes that everyone uses a single rule, criterion or principle in their justice-related assessments. This rather simplistic approach fails to recognize the variety and complexity of distributive justice preferences by making a conception of justice where individuals simultaneously call upon differential principles impossible. However, allowing for the simultaneous applicability of multiple distributive rules or standards is much more realistic (Leventhal, 1980). Consequently, we adopt a person-centered approach to investigate how exactly citizens apply multiple social justice principles across the domains of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits. This leads to the second research question: *How are preferences for the social justice principles combined across welfare domains?* Constructing this typology of unique subgroups of individuals with similar configurations of distributive justice preferences is particularly useful, as little is known about patterns of distributive justice preferences and their distribution across the population (cf. Collins & Lanza, 2010; Franke & Simonson, 2018; Meeusen, Meuleman, Abts, & Bergh, 2018). In addition, our study aims to offer insight into how these configurations of distributive justice preferences are related to social structure and ideology (Arts & Gelissen, 2001; D'Anjou, Steijn, & Van Aarsen, 1995; Ng & Allen, 2005).

To answer the research questions, a descriptive overview of the distribution of preferences in each welfare domain and a three-step Latent Class Analysis (LCA) are provided. Using the data of the Belgian National Elections Study 2014 (Abts et al., 2015), our analysis allows to explore the context-dependency of the social justice principles and configurations of distributive justice preferences in an conservative welfare regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Before elaborating on the data, measurements, methods and results, we present our theoretical framework.

1. The welfare domains of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits

As mentioned, research generally points to three principles of social justice (Deutsch, 1975). First, the principle of equality construes justice as equality of opportunities and rights, which posits that all citizens should be treated equally and receive the same access to social welfare, irrespective of additional requirements. Second, the principle of equity makes distributions dependent on

contributions. This implies that welfare benefits should be proportional to one's paid taxes, welfare contributions and labour market participation. Third, the principle of need entails a primarily and selective concern to citizens highest in need, such as the disabled or the poor, with the goal of providing sufficient resources to alleviate their basic needs. Although a growing body of research tries to uncover which of these three principles receives most support to form the basis of our welfare system, most studies assume that a single principle will be put forward that applies to all distributions uniformly.

In reaction to this flawed assumption, Michael Walzer (1983) argues in favor of a context-dependent account of distributive justice, which recognizes the applicability of differential criteria to the distribution of distinct social goods. Walzer (1983) speaks about '*spheres of justice*' and posits that social justice principles are domain-specific rather than universal. Nevertheless, context-dependency does not equate with context-specificity, which indicates that no general rules can be established. Instead it contains "the impact of context on the interpretation and application of general principles" (Konow, 2001, p. 139; Walzer, 1983). Equivalently, to investigate whether social justice preferences are context-dependent, we examine distributive justice preferences in the welfare domains of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits. These three domains are examined because they constitute the traditional social policy domains in post-war welfare states and are characterized by distinct modes of operation and conceptions of social justice (Bonoli, 2006; Mau, 2003). In addition, as these welfare programs are increasingly being reformed and redesigned (Paz-fuchs, 2011; ter Meulen & Maarse, 2008), an investigation of public support for different types of distributions in each of these domains is crucial.

However, these three domains also encompass distinct types of social risks, i.e. sickness, retirement and unemployment. Since the characteristics inherent to each of these risks may legitimize different types of distributions, we expect the support for the social justice principles to be different in each welfare domain. Particularly, three interrelated characteristics may be relevant in explaining differential preferences for the three social justice principles across social risks: predictability, locus of control and prevalence. First, the *extent of predictability* for each social risk is a decisive factor in determining which principle is preferred (Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2013). Making distributions conditional on past contributions, for instance, is more likely to be considered just for predictable risks compared to entirely unpredictable risks. Second, the *locus of control* may determine the appropriate principle. If the risk is inside one's own control, distinctions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' or between working and non-working recipients, as reflected in the principles of need and equity, may receive more support (Clasen & Van Oorschot, 2002). Third, *the prevalence* of each social risk is crucial. Risks that are more widespread facilitate the introduction of equal distributions of resources, as these

risks affect almost the entire population and equality-based systems are meant to promote the general well-being (Clasen & Van Oorschot, 2002).

To begin with, sickness is largely *unpredictable*, as it is labeled as an ‘external risk’ that befalls individuals unexpectedly (Giddens, 1999; Hinrichs, 1997). Nevertheless, with the development of genetic research and screening, most diseases have become increasingly predictable and preventable (Bernts, 1988). The impossibility of fully predicting sickness, however, makes high support for a system that grants rights on the basis of previous contributions, as in the principle of equity, rather implausible. Although internal control and individual responsibility have become more pronounced (Paz-fuchs, 2011; ter Meulen, 2015; ter Meulen & Maarse, 2008), the sick are generally not to be held accountable for their disadvantageous situation (Jensen & Bang Petersen, 2017; Mau, 2003). As mentioned, the *perception of limited internal control* decreases support for distributions that distinguish between types of recipients. Moreover, sickness, as a relatively unavoidable part of most people’s lifecycle, is considered to be a universal and *highly prevalent* risk (Green-pedersen & Jensen, 2019; Hinrichs, 1997; Jensen, 2012; Mau, 2003), which furthers the support for an equality-based distributional system. Since sickness is considered to be unpredictable, mostly uncontrollable and highly prevalent, the principle of equality is expected to be preferred in this domain.

Retirement, conversely, is almost *completely foreseeable*, as it is an unavoidable and institutionalized part of most people’s life (Mau, 2003, p. 147). This makes equity-based distributions based on previously built up rights, like pay-as-you-go systems, more feasible. Although highly predictable, retirement is *external to individuals’ control*. Nevertheless, it is considered to be within the control of individuals to participate in the labor market or to accumulate individual savings to prevent the loss of a reasonable life standard (Hinrichs, 1997; Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2013). The idea of ‘earned benefits’ coincides with an equity-based logic that makes the level of pension benefits dependent on previous contributions (Mau, 2003). Besides, retirement is an integral part of most individuals’ life course and is thus *highly prevalent* (Green-pedersen & Jensen, 2019), which implies that almost all segments of society benefit from public pension programs (Hinrichs, 1997). As retirement is almost fully predictable and individuals are seen as personally responsible for building up pension rights, the principle of equity is likely to be preferred most in this domain.

Last, the risk of unemployment is for most people in the labor market *unpredictable*, as the probability of a loss of income through unemployment is hard to calculate (Hinrichs, 1997; Mau, 2003). This complicates the introduction of benefits that depend entirely on past contributions. The level of internal control is thought of as being relatively high, as unemployment is often considered to be self-inflicted (Hinrichs, 1997; van Oorschot & Roosma, 2017). Furthermore, the unemployed are considered to be personally responsible for getting back to work and actively seeking a job (Dwyer,

2000). The perceived *high level of internal control* is expected to stimulate preferences for need- or equity-based distributions, as these entail a focus on individual responsibility through self-reliance and labour market participation respectively (Clasen & Van Oorschot, 2002). In addition, unemployment, as a labour market risk, is generally perceived to be an anomaly rather than a normal part of people's lifecycle (Green-pedersen & Jensen, 2019; Jensen, 2012). This indicates that unemployment is generally *not* considered to be *widespread*, which makes support for an extensive equality-based unemployment benefit system improbable (Hinrichs, 1997). As unemployment is largely considered to be within the control of individuals and as extensive government intervention is limitedly supported, preferences for the principles of need or equity are anticipated to be predominant.

2. Configurations of distributive justice preferences

Although investigating the context-dependency of the social justice principles is a crucial first step, it does not yet reveal the full variety and complexity of distributive justice preferences. While some individuals may apply the same justice principle universally across distributions, others balance different principles and call upon different criteria in their distributive judgements (Franke & Simonson, 2018; Miller, 1992; Scott, Matland, Michelbach, & Bornstein, 2001). Franke and Simonson (2018), for instance, show that people often combine different and sometimes even seemingly 'inconsistent' or contradictory beliefs (cf. Converse, 2006). Ignoring this diversity in opinions is to misrepresent the complexity of public support for different types of welfare distributions. Hence, to go a step further, we also aim to uncover configurations or patterns of distributive justice preferences. This enables to reveal unique subgroups of individuals who adopt similar distributive logics or combine distributive justice preferences in similar ways. Although it is only limitedly possible to predict exactly how citizens apply these justice principles across domains, some configurations of interconnected principles are probably more likely than others. We expect to find at least three types of configurations.

In line with a great share of research on welfare redistributions that tends to concentrate solely on general support for social redistribution and the role of government, we expect, to begin with, to find a subgroup of individuals who endorse equality across the welfare domains of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits. This is because surveys generally illustrate that a large share of the population justifies the promotion of equality and an extensive role of the government (Roosma, Gelissen, & van Oorschot, 2013; Roosma, van Oorschot, & Gelissen, 2014). Moreover, a majority endorses extensive government intervention across different welfare domains, including health care,

pensions and unemployment benefits (Jaeger, 2012). However, we expect to uncover different configurations of distributive justice preferences as well, which go beyond the uniform applicability of equality and show how people combine social justice principles.

As a result, we expect to find a second configuration, which combines a preference for equality in health care with preferences for equity in pensions and need or equity in unemployment benefits. This configuration takes the different levels of predictability, internal control and prevalence that are inherent to each of the social risks into consideration and prefers distinct principles accordingly. Individuals who employ this logic adopt more universal notions of solidarity towards the sick, while including a conditional or selective solidarity towards pensioners and the unemployed. This type of logic is also represented in the institutional designs of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits in Belgium, as health care is relatively universal, pensions are distributed in relation to working years and unemployment benefits are proportional to the last earned income (Gerkens & Merkur, 2010; Gieselink, Peeters, Van Gestel, Berghman, & Van Buggenhout, 2003; Van Lancker, Marchal, Schuerman, Van Mechelen, & Van Kerm, 2015). In addition, previous public opinion research has shown that there is indeed a subgroup of people who believe that the government should provide health care for the sick but who are less likely to believe that the government should provide a decent living standard for the elderly and who are the least likely to consider government support for the unemployed to be legitimate (Jaeger, 2012).

A third configuration is expected to combine preferences for equality in the domains of health care and pensions with support for equity or need in the distribution of unemployment benefits. The existence of this configuration is in line with deservingness literature, which illustrates that while a large proportion of people see the elderly and the sick as equally deserving and consider government responsibility in meeting their needs to be high, the unemployed are considered less deserving of welfare support (Green-pedersen & Jensen, 2019; Laenen & Meuleman, 2017; van Oorschot, 2000). This differentiation between sickness and retirement, on the one hand, and unemployment, on the other hand, coincides with the rationale behind *luck egalitarianism*, which only considers deviations from equality to be legitimate when the confrontation with the risk is within the control of individuals (Brouwer & Mulligan, 2018; Rippon, Theuns, de Maagt, Zala, & van den Brink, 2017). As the unemployed are especially considered to be personally responsible, this logic could only consider deviations from equality for the distribution of unemployment benefits to be justified.

3. An explanatory account of distributive justice preferences

After offering an tentative overview of plausible configurations, we also devote attention to potential explanatory determinants of membership of these subgroups. In particular, the impact of the social structure as well as ideology is investigated, as these frameworks have been mobilized previously to explain both welfare state attitudes and distributive justice preferences (D'Anjou et al., 1995; Ng & Allen, 2005; van Oorschot, 2010). However, as we adopt a more exploratory approach in uncovering which configurations of distributive justice preferences exist, it is difficult to link these predictors theoretically to precise configurations. Hence, the explanatory frameworks of the social structure and ideology will be related to more general orientations towards equality, equity and need instead of to specific configurations.

To begin with, distributive justice preferences are embedded in the social structure as preferences are socially stratified (Aalberg, 2003; D'Anjou et al., 1995; Ng & Allen, 2005). While those with a higher level of education and income, for instance, are more likely to be equity-oriented, deprived individuals are more inclined to prefer equality- or need-based distributions (Aalberg, 2003; Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2013). This kind of stratification in distributive justice orientations is related to self-interest as well as to exposure to particular social contexts and relationships. The higher support for equity-based distributions among well-off groups, for instance, is related to their higher personal interest in distributions proportional to past performances as well as to their higher exposure to competitive relationships (Arts & Gelissen, 2001; D'Anjou et al., 1995; Miller, 1992; Ng & Allen, 2005). Lower-status groups, on the other hand, benefit more from equality- or need-based distributions and generally experience more solidary relations (Arts & Gelissen, 2001; D'Anjou et al., 1995; Miller, 1992). Therefore, we expect higher status groups to be more likely to be equity-oriented in one or more domains, while lower status groups would be more likely to be directed at equality or need.

The second framework to explain patterns of distributive justice preferences refers to ideology (Arts & Gelissen, 2001; Ng & Allen, 2005). Ideology encompasses a broader system of coherent normative and political orientations on preferred and justified forms of social order that is internalized and converted to more specific attitudes towards the welfare state and distributive justice preferences (Jaeger, 2006; van Oorschot, 2006). To study how ideology affects patterns of distributive justice preferences, attention is devoted to the impact of left-right placement, authoritarianism, economic liberalism and utilitarian individualism. The inclusion of three additional dimensions of ideology, apart from the more traditional dimension of left-right placement, allows to study more precisely which ideas structure patterns of distributive justice preferences.

First, left-right placement is included. As right-wing individuals are less egalitarian and adopt more conditional notions of solidarity (van Oorschot, 2006), they are expected to be more equity- and need-oriented. Second, the effect of authoritarianism, which refers to an 'intolerance of deviance and a

submissiveness to authorities', is examined (Staerklé, Likki, & Scheidegger, 2012, p. 89). The commitment to the protection of the moral order coincides with support for distributions made conditional on conformity to prevailing norms (Staerklé et al., 2012). By defending reciprocal duties, authoritarianists are more likely to be equity-oriented and to support welfare support contingent on labor market participation and the fulfillment of obligations (Achterberg, van der Veen, & Raven, 2014). Third, economic liberalism, which includes a preference for limited government intervention and a regulation of welfare distributions by market mechanisms (Dwyer, 2000; Friedman, 1967; Nozick, 1974), may coincide with a preference for a restricted welfare state that only helps those who cannot obtain a reasonable living standard through participation in a market economy (cf. Friedman, 1967). As a result, it is more likely to be related to the principle of need. Last, the impact of utilitarian individualism is investigated. Since utilitarian individualists stress personal responsibility and the importance of rewarding hard work, accomplishments and merit (Halman, 1996; Mascini, Achterberg, & Houtman, 2013; Staerklé, 2009), they are more likely to be equity-oriented, as equity underlines the significance of achievements and performances.

4. Data and method

4.1. Data

We use data from the Belgian National Elections Study of 2014 (BNES), which was conducted among Belgians who were qualified to vote in the federal elections of 2014. Respondents were selected through two-stage random probability sampling and data were collected by means of computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). The National Register of Belgium served as the sampling frame. The data collection resulted in a total number of 1901 respondents and a response rate of 47.5 percent. Individuals with missing values on an independent or all dependent variables are excluded from the analysis, which results in a final sample size of 1823 respondents. Note that post-stratification weights for gender, age and education are applied.

4.2. Indicators

Dependent variables

Three items that assess which principle of justice should form the basis of the distribution of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits are used in the analyses. Originally each question also included an answer category for people who thought the government should not organize any distributions. However, due to a very low proportion of individuals opting for this category (approximately 1 percent for each welfare domain), this option is converted to a missing value. For each domain a preference for either an equality-, an equity- or a need-based distribution is maintained. The three questions were spread over the questionnaire to limit memory effects and the impact of the question order. The question for each domain was formulated as follows: *“The government can organize health care/pensions/unemployment benefits in different ways. According to you, what should the government do?”*. Answer categories started with *“The government should (only) provide”* and included the following options for each domain:

1) Q67- Health care

- “Minimal basic health care for people who are truly in need”
- “Better health care for people who have earned and contributed more”
- “Equal and reasonable health care for everyone”

2) Q93 - Pensions

- “A minimal pension for the poor elderly, which only covers their basic needs”
- “A higher pension for people who have earned and contributed more”
- “A reasonable pension for all, which is equal for everyone”

3) Q113 – Unemployment benefits

- “A minimal unemployment benefit for the unemployed who are in real need”
- “A higher unemployment benefit for people who have earned and contributed more”
- “A reasonable benefit for all the unemployed, which is equal for everyone”

Respondents could only mark one answer category for each of the three questions. Although it is possible for respondents to combine principles across the three questions, they cannot apply multiple principles within a welfare domain. This of course entails a more restrictive approach and ideally a differentiation within domains would have been enabled as well. For the purpose of this study, however, the operationalization suffices, as we want to comprehend which principles are dominant within domains and how people combine distributive criteria across domains.

Independent variables

First, socio-economic status is operationalized by occupation, education, income and welfare dependency. Occupation is divided into five classes based on the Erikson-Goldthrope-Portocarero class scheme, which distinguishes between: the service class, blue collar workers (reference category), white collar workers, the self-employed and the economically inactive (including students) (Ganzeboom & Treiman, 1996). Education is divided into three distinct categories: the lower (secondary) educated, the higher secondary educated (reference category) and those with a tertiary education. Income is measured as the net equalized household income and is divided into four quartiles and a dummy for missing values to limit the number of excluded respondents. Welfare dependency is measured by asking respondents whether they or a household member received a welfare benefit, such as income support, an unemployment benefit or a work disability allowance in the last two years. Gender, age and region (Flanders or Francophone Belgium) are included as control variables.

Left-right placement is measured by a single item on a 11-point scale with higher values pointing to a higher identification with a right-wing ideology. Authoritarianism is measured by three items on a 5-point scale that ask to what extent problems can be solved by getting rid of immoral people, obedience and respect for authority are important virtues and laws should become stricter. Economic liberalism is operationalized by two items (5-point scale), which determine whether individuals think that the government should intervene less in the market and that businesses should get more freedom. Utilitarian individualism is measured by three items (5-point scale) that ask respondents whether they believe that everyone has to defend their own interests, that personal success is more important than good relations and that everything resolves around one's own interest. A joint confirmatory factor analysis of the three latent concepts shows that the measurement model fits the data adequately ($\chi^2= 47.963$; $df=17$; $RMSEA=0.031$; $CFI=0.985$; $TLI=0.975$; $SRMR=0.022$) and that all factor loadings, which are displayed together with question wordings in table A1 (see appendix), are adequate. To include these latent concepts as predictors of class membership, the factor scores of this measurement model are saved and included in the regression analysis.

4.3. Statistical modelling

After the presentation of a descriptive overview, a three-step latent class analysis is conducted (Vermunt, 2010). As mentioned, this person-centered approach constructs a typology of distributive justice preferences and uncovers how people combine different principles across welfare domains. In this analysis strategy, a first step is to estimate latent class models and to determine how many latent

classes should be maintained. After the determination of the best latent class solution, a second step consists of saving the most likely class membership for all individuals. Third and last, class membership is predicted while considering the classification errors that are made when assigning respondents to classes. Specifically, a multinomial stepwise regression analysis is conducted to predict class membership. This stepwise approach allows to examine whether the effects of the social structure are attributable to differences in ideology between social groups or whether they remain substantial when introducing ideology into the model. All analyses were conducted in Mplus 8.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017).

5. Results

5.1. Descriptive overview

Figure 1 provides an overview of the distribution of distributive justice principles across the three welfare domains. Contrary to our expectations, results illustrate that most respondents prefer an equality-based distribution in health care, pensions and unemployment benefits. Nevertheless, the distributions of justice preferences are substantially different for each of the welfare domains. While about 82 percent of respondents prefer an equality-based distribution in health care, this is only just over half of the respondents in the domain of unemployment. The principle of equity, on the other hand, is represented – relatively speaking – most in regard to pensions. Besides, equity is also preferred by about a third of respondents to distribute unemployment benefits, illustrating that making unemployment benefits contingent on past contributions receives substantial support. While the need principle is preferred only marginally in case of health care and pensions, almost one fifth of the sample prefers to limit unemployment benefits to those who are in real need.

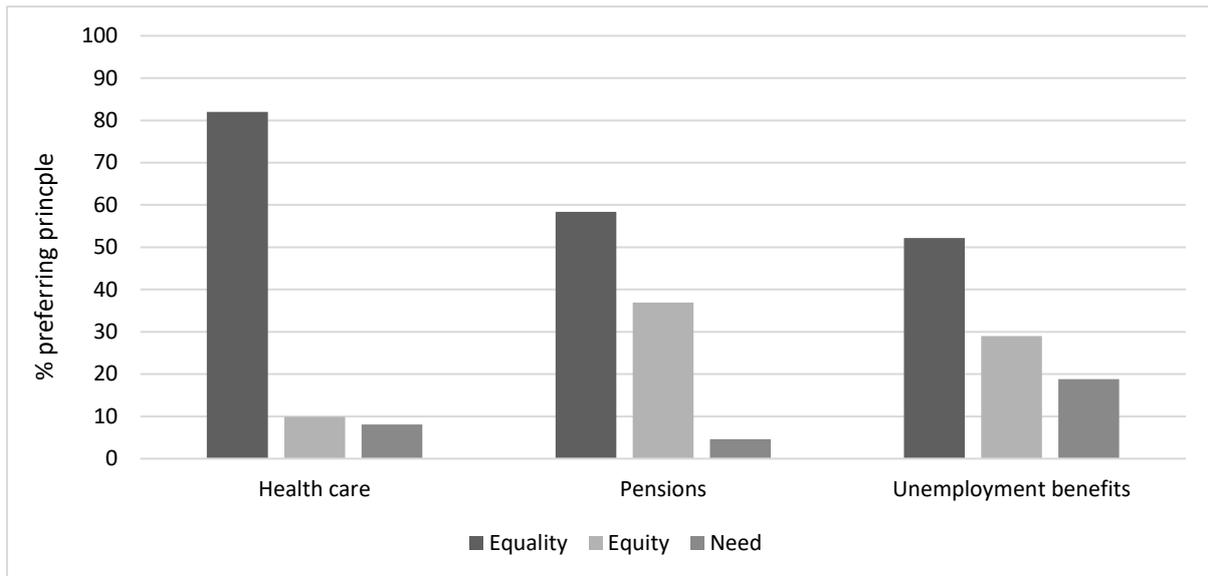


Figure 1. Preferences for equality, equity and need in the domains of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits (*weighted*)

Not only do these results show that distributive justice preferences are indeed context-dependent, it illustrates that various types of welfare redistributions are preferred to a different extent for particular types of social risks. While the low predictability and high prevalence of sickness convince almost all respondents to opt for the principle of equality in the domain of health care, the high predictability of retirement is probably responsible for a large proportion of people preferring a conditional distribution of pensions. Contrarily, the high level of internal control and individual responsibility associated with unemployment drives a substantial proportion to prefer the principles of need or equity. Apart from being related to these diverging characteristics, the different distributions of preferences might be related to the differential organization of each of the welfare domains in the Belgian social security system, as public preferences seem to partly mirror the institutional designs of the three welfare domains. While the high support for the principle of equality in the distribution of health care might be due to the large universality in the organization of the Belgian health care system, the relatively large proportion of preferences for equity in the distribution of pensions might be connected to the strong contributory logic inherent to the organization of the pension system.

5.2. Latent class analysis

To decide on the best class solution, several fit indices of models with differing number of classes are compared (Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007). We examine the Akaike information criterion (AIC), the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) and the sample size-adjusted BIC (aBIC), which should all be

as low as possible. In addition, the entropy, which should be as high as possible, and the Lo–Mendell–Rubin likelihood ratio test (LMR LRT), which compares the fit of a given class model relative to a model with one class less, are studied. The fit indices of the different class models are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Fit statistics for different latent class solutions

	AIC	BIC	aBIC	Entropy	LMR LRT
2 Classes	8726.344	8798.475	8757.174	0.576	0.000
3 Classes	8650.136	8761.107	8697.567	0.672	0.000
4 Classes	8656.676	8806.487	8720.708	0.730	0.249
5 Classes	8669.990	8858.641	8750.623	0.715	1.000

Chosen class-solution in bold

The three-class solution has the lowest AIC, BIC and aBIC, and performs significantly better than a two-class solution (p -value LMR LRT < 0.05). While the four-class solution is characterised by the highest entropy, it does not perform significantly better than the three-class solution and it is characterised by higher values for the three information criteria. Although there is a class that constitutes only 4.4 percent of the sample in the three-class solution, this small subgroup is still theoretically interesting and the other fit indices assure that this solution is the most appropriate. Hence, the three-class solution is chosen as the final model. Table 2 displays the conditional probabilities and class sizes for each of the three classes.

Table 2. Class sizes and conditional probabilities of the three-class solution

	Egalitarians	Meritocrats	Residualists
Class size	0.666	0.290	0.044
Health care			
Equality	0.926	0.648	0.559
Equity	0.030	0.247	0.119
Need	0.044	0.106	0.322
Pensions			
Equality	0.788	0.157	0.441
Equity	0.196	0.843	0.038
Need	0.016	0.000	0.521
Unemployment			
Equality	0.753	0.085	0.195
Equity	0.129	0.689	0.139
Need	0.118	0.226	0.666

The *egalitarians*, as a first subgroup, make up approximately 67 percent of the sample and are very likely to prefer the principle of equality in all three domains. This configuration encompasses an outspoken egalitarianism, which does not differentiate between target groups (cf. Nielsen, 1979). Respondents who adopt this configuration are unlikely to prefer equity or need in either one of the three domains, which shows that this group is not likely to prefer a conditional or residual type of distribution in health care, pensions or unemployment benefits. The finding that these egalitarians comprise more than half of the sample, is in line with the high prevalence of the principle of equality in each of the three welfare domains and with the existence of a substantial group of individuals that encourage extensive government intervention across domains (Jaeger, 2012).

The second group (29%) are the *meritocrats*, as they have a high probability of preferring the principle of equity in the domains of pensions and unemployment benefits. This configuration does, however, include a differentiation between social risks, as the principle of equality instead of equity is supported most in the domain of health care. While respondents who adhere to this logic consider the individual responsibility of preserving a reasonable living standard to be low for sickness, they support a meritocratic system that depends on personal contributions for the distribution of pensions and unemployment benefits. As such, they recognize the differential characteristics of the social risks. It should be noted that although the principle of equality is most likely to be chosen in health care, the probability of opting for equity in this domain is higher than in the other two classes. For this reason, this configuration is described as being meritocratic.

The last subgroup, *the residualists*, includes only about 4 percent of the respondents. While, as for the other two configurations, individuals who adopt this residual logic are most likely to choose the principle of equality in health care, they have the highest probability to prefer residual distributions of pensions and unemployment benefits that are targeted at those in the highest need of assistance. In addition, similarly to the previous class, they recognize the differing characteristics related to each social risk. Nonetheless, even for health care the likelihood of preferring need is higher than in the other two configurations, which supports the thesis that this configuration encompasses a preference for a more residual welfare state. It should be noted, however, that the probability of favoring equality in the domain of pensions is relatively high for this group.

The existence of these three subgroups is not fully conform to the profiles set out in the theoretical section. While we do find a subgroup of individuals who consistently applies equality across welfare domains and a group which prefers equity in pensions and unemployment benefits, the existence of the residualist class was not anticipated. Nevertheless, these results do illustrate that there is indeed an important proportion of respondents that systematically prefers equality as well as a substantial group of individuals that combines principles across the welfare domains.

5.3. Predicting class membership

Table 3 displays the results of the stepwise multinomial regression on class membership. The effects are displayed as logit parameters and as odds ratios, with the egalitarian class serving as the reference category. In the first model, only the social structure is included and in the second step the effect of ideology is added to the model. Note that the standard errors of the effects for the residualist configuration are relatively large, which might be due to a small number of respondents belonging to this subgroup.

Table 3. Multinomial logistic regression of social structure and ideology on latent classes (N=1823)

	Meritocrats						Residualists					
	Model 1			Model 2			Model 1			Model 2		
	Logit	SE	OR	Logit	SE	OR	Logit	SE	OR	Logit	SE	OR
<i>Social structure</i>												
Gender												
Woman (ref.)												
Man	0.174	0.159	1.190	0.218	0.168	1.243	0.760*	0.351	2.139	0.802*	0.354	2.230
Age	-0.005	0.005	0.995	-0.009	0.005	0.991	0.000	0.011	1.000	-0.006	0.011	0.994
Education												
Lower (secondary)	-0.023	0.205	0.978	-0.059	0.222	0.943	-0.595	0.523	0.552	-0.472	0.563	0.624
Higher secondary (ref.)												
Tertiary	0.026	0.199	1.027	0.287	0.215	1.333	-0.169	0.357	0.844	0.096	0.372	1.101
Income												
Quartile 1 (ref.)												
Quartile 2	0.625**	0.243	1.868	0.518*	0.250	1.679	-0.545	0.696	0.580	-0.520	0.637	0.595
Quartile 3	0.822***	0.247	2.275	0.700**	0.259	2.014	0.178	0.571	1.194	0.069	0.542	1.072
Quartile 4	0.956***	0.268	2.601	0.929***	0.280	2.531	0.806	0.480	2.239	0.879	0.506	2.409
Missing	0.969***	0.297	2.636	0.884**	0.319	2.421	1.213*	0.501	3.364	1.326*	0.562	3.765
Occupation												
Blue collar (ref.)												
Service class	0.099	0.238	1.104	0.157	0.259	1.170	0.657	0.561	1.928	0.510	0.567	1.665
White collar	0.257	0.231	1.293	0.354	0.241	1.425	1.010	0.639	2.745	0.890	0.706	2.435
Self-employed	0.399	0.286	1.491	0.220	0.308	1.246	1.271	0.697	3.567	0.831	0.669	2.296
Inactive	0.260	0.281	1.297	0.193	0.313	1.213	0.947	0.547	2.578	0.740	0.570	2.096
Welfare dependency												
No benefit (ref.)												
Benefit	-0.146	0.189	0.864	-0.068	0.200	0.934	0.174	0.380	1.191	0.369	0.382	1.446
Region												
French region (ref.)												

Flanders	-0.995***	0.157	0.370	-1.111***	0.169	0.329	-1.173***	0.356	0.309	-1.189***	0.347	0.305
<i>Ideology</i>												
Left-right placement				0.087*	0.037	1.091				0.196*	0.099	1.217
Authoritarianism				0.314	0.298	1.369				1.384*	0.558	3.991
Economic liberalism				0.101	0.216	1.106				1.132**	0.423	3.101
Utilitarian individualism				0.364*	0.164	1.438				-0.706*	0.351	0.493

SE= standard error; OR= odds ratio; * p≤0.05; ** p≤0.01; *** p≤0.001;

The first model illustrates that most effects of the social structure are insignificant. Nevertheless, some variables do have a significant impact, which shows that instead of judging from behind a 'veil of ignorance' (Rawls, 1972), the social position of individuals partly clouds their distributive judgments. Individuals in higher income quartiles, for instance, are more likely to adhere to the meritocratic configuration than to the egalitarian one. This is because high-income groups benefit more from equity-based distributions and because they generally experience more competitive relationships, which inclines them to adopt more conditional notions of solidarity (Arts & Gelissen, 2001; D'Anjou et al., 1995; Miller, 1992; Ng & Allen, 2005). Results also illustrate that men are more likely than women to apply a residualist logic, which is attributable to the higher support of women for an extensive instead of a selective government through their higher benefit from state-provided services (Sainsbury, 1996). In addition, Francophone Belgians tend to belong to either one of the differentiating classes rather than to the egalitarian subgroup. This may be due to the higher share of people who are on benefit in Francophone Belgium, which instigates differentiation between target groups and concerns about the effects of extensive benefit providence. This in turn leads to preferences for more conditional or residual redistributions (Billiet, Abts, & Swyngedouw, 2015). The second model illustrates that the effects of these structural characteristics remain significant after introducing the effects of ideology, which indicates that the social stratification of justice preferences is not attributable to ideological differences between groups.

The second model also shows that ideology is crucial in predicting class membership. First, right-wing individuals tend to be meritocrats or residualists instead of egalitarians. This is in line with previous research that suggests that a right-wing ideology includes more conditional or residual forms of solidarity and a stronger reluctance towards egalitarianism and government redistribution (Jaeger, 2008; van Oorschot, 2006). Second, instead of influencing the probability of being in the meritocratic subgroup, authoritarianism affects the likelihood of being in the residualist class. This is because authoritarianism encourages a selective distribution to deserving individuals that comply with dominant norms (Staerklé et al., 2012). The neediest in society might exactly be those who are seen as deserving and compliant, as most people do not believe that their poverty is attributable to deviant behavior (Lepianka, Gelissen, & van Oorschot, 2010). Third, by supporting limited government intervention and distribution through the free market, economic liberalism heightens the probability of being residualist. Individuals who underscore economic liberalism prefer a more selective distribution targeted at those who cannot gain a reasonable living standard through participation in the market economy (Friedman, 1967). Fourth and last, individuals identifying with utilitarian individualism tend to be part of the meritocratic instead of the egalitarian configuration. This may be attributable to their focus on individual responsibility and the rewarding of hard work (Mascini et al.,

2013; Staerklé, 2009). Contrarily and rather surprisingly, utilitarian individualism decreases the likelihood of adhering to the residualist configuration. We would expect utilitarian individualism, through its emphasis on individual responsibility, to heighten instead of lower support for moderate government intervention. However, this counter-intuitively negative relationship might be related to the importance of rewarding hard work and personal success in utilitarian individualism, as this is realized to a larger extent when everyone receives equal benefits than if only the neediest or poor receive benefits.

As membership of both selective classes relative to the egalitarian class has so far been predicted, it is useful to also compare the meritocrats to the residualists. These logit parameters, standard errors and odds ratios are displayed in table A2 in appendix. When comparing these configurations, the social structure does not have any significant influence. This illustrates that members of both classes do not differ significantly in their social positions. Ideology does, nonetheless, have a significant effect, as economic liberalism stimulates and utilitarianism decreases the likelihood of adhering to the residualist instead of the meritocratic configuration. This is in line with the emphasis in economic liberalism on a selective targeting at those who cannot acquire a reasonable living standard through participation in a market economy and the focus of utilitarian individualism on hard work and individual responsibility rather than on relieving the needs of the poorest groups.

Conclusion

The objectives of this study were twofold. First, we aimed to offer a context-dependent approach to distributive justice by recognizing that preferences for the social justice principle are dependent of the type of distributions at stake (cf. Walzer, 1983). Empirically, this paper investigated whether preferences for equality, equity and need diverge across the welfare domains of health care, pensions and unemployment benefits. Second, this paper sought to reveal to variety of distributive justice preferences by determining how people combine multiple criteria when making justice-related judgements. This was examined by uncovering subgroups of individuals with different configurations of distributive justice preferences. In addition, we tried to explain adherence to these differing configurations by focusing on two explanatory frameworks: the social structure and ideology.

Results illustrated, to begin with, that preferences for equality, equity and need are indeed context-dependent. Although equality was preferred most in each of the welfare domains, the proportions of people opting for each principle varied substantially. The criteria of equity was, for instance, preferred more for pensions and the principle of need received substantial support for the distribution of

unemployment benefits. Next, we found three types of configurations of distributive justice preferences: an egalitarian, a meritocratic and a residualist one. While two thirds of the sample adhered to the egalitarian subgroup, about a third of respondents belonged to the meritocratic profile and about 5 percent resided in the residualist subgroup. By uncovering the existence of multiple patterns of distributive justice preferences, our study demonstrates that the implicit assumption that all individuals apply one abstract social justice principle to all types of distributions is inherently flawed. Rather, it illustrates that a substantial proportion of individuals cares about which target groups or social risks are the subject of their distributive judgements and adapts their preferences accordingly (Mau & Veghte, 2007). To provide insight into which types of welfare distributions people prefer, it is crucial that this context-dependency as well as these patterns of distributive justice preferences are considered. Last, it became apparent that especially ideology, in terms of a right-wing ideology, authoritarianism, economic liberalism and utilitarian individualism, rather than the social structure drives these configurations of distributive justice preferences.

However, it should be noted that the conclusions of this study should not be generalized too broadly. Although the Belgian case offers an interesting starting point to investigate distributive justice preferences in advanced welfare states, it also has a particular institutional context. To begin with, as mentioned, the Belgian social security system is organized in such a way that while equality is represented quite strongly in the provision of health care, equity is relatively important in the distributions of pensions and unemployment benefits (Gerken & Merkur, 2010; Gieselink et al., 2003; Van Lancker et al., 2015). As distributive justice preferences are adaptive to the institutional context and individuals can internalize the norms inherent to important welfare institutions (Arts & Gelissen, 2001; Koster & Kaminska, 2012; Taylor-Gooby et al., 2018), the particular context of our study may explain why there was for instance a relative large subgroup that preferred equality in health care and equity in the domains of pensions and unemployment benefits. In addition, Belgium is generally categorized as a conservative welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990), which indicates that many of its institutions operate in a way closely related to the justice principle of equity (Clasen & Van Oorschot, 2002). Together with its high equality of benefits and a high social expenditure rate (Esping-Andersen, 1990; OECD, 2019), this might explain why most respondents preferred either equality or equity in the three welfare domains.

This study also sheds light on possible directions for future research. First, it would be useful to explore how preferences for the three social justice principles or configurations of distributive justice preferences vary cross-nationally. This would also allow to further explore how the institutional context affects distributive justice preferences (cf. Arts & Gelissen, 2001). Second, future research would benefit from an analysis on how people combine principles not only across but also within

domains (cf. Franke & Simonson, 2018). Although our study provided insight into how the social justice principles are combined across welfare domains, we did not allow respondents to opt for multiple principles within welfare domains. Last, a further exploration of the determinants as well as the consequences of distributive justice preferences would be fruitful. Of the explanatory factors put forward in this paper, only few proved to have a substantial impact and, as a result, deeper insight into the basis of distributive preferences is crucial. In turn, as distributive justice is central to so many contemporary welfare discussions (Mau & Veghte, 2007), these preferences and configurations are likely to shape more specific welfare attitudes or policy preferences.

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Appendix

Table A1. Standardized factor loadings for utilitarian individualism, authoritarianism and economic liberalism (N=1899)

	UI	AU	EL
Q64_1 - ‘Humanity’, ‘brotherhood’ and ‘solidarity’ are all nonsense. Everybody has to take care of themselves first and defend their own interests.	0.748		
Q64_2 - Striving for personal success is more important than ensuring good relations with your fellow man.	0.657		
Q64_3 - In our society everything revolves around one’s own interest, power and material success. That is why it is better to take care first and foremost of oneself.	0.717		
Q64_4 - Most of our social problems would be solved if we could somehow get rid of the immoral, crooked people.		0.480	
Q64_5 - Obedience and respect for authority are the two most important virtues children have to learn.		0.699	
Q64_6 - Laws should become stricter because too much freedom is not good for people.		0.634	
Q88_1 - Society would be better off if the government intervenes less in the market.			0.650
Q88_4 - Businesses should get more freedom. Therefore, regulations for businesses should be reduced.			0.599
Correlation authoritarianism	0.503	1	

Correlation economic liberalism

0.397 0.284 1

$X^2= 47.963$; $df=17$; $RMSEA=0.031$; $CFI=0.985$; $TLI=0.975$; $SRMR=0.022$; $UI=$ Utilitarian individualism; $AU=$ Authoritarianism; $EL=$ Economic liberalism

Table A2. Multinomial logistic regression of social structure and ideology on the residualist class relative to the meritocratic class (N=1823)

	Residualists					
	Model 1			Model 2		
	Logit	SE	OR	Logit	SE	OR
<i>Social structure</i>						
Gender						
Woman (ref.)						
Man	0.587	0.351	1.798	0.584	0.351	1.794
Age	0.005	0.011	1.005	0.004	0.011	1.004
Education						
Lower (secondary)	-0.572	0.521	0.564	-0.413	0.561	0.662
Higher secondary (ref.)						
Tertiary	-0.195	0.354	0.822	-0.191	0.370	0.826
Income						
Quartile 1 (ref.)						
Quartile 2	-1.170	0.699	0.310	-1.038	0.643	0.354
Quartile 3	-0.645	0.582	0.525	-0.631	0.558	0.532
Quartile 4	-0.150	0.486	0.861	-0.049	0.503	0.952
Missing	0.244	0.514	1.276	0.442	0.566	1.555
Occupation						
Blue collar (ref.)						
Service class	0.557	0.563	1.746	0.353	0.576	1.424
White collar	0.753	0.633	2.122	0.536	0.691	1.709
Self-employed	0.872	0.700	2.393	0.611	0.678	1.842
Inactive	0.687	0.550	1.987	0.547	0.574	1.728
Welfare dependency						
No benefit (ref.)						
Benefit	0.321	0.380	1.378	0.437	0.383	1.549
Region						
French region (ref.)						
Flanders	-0.178	0.347	0.837	-0.078	0.342	0.925
<i>Ideology</i>						
Left-right placement				0.110	0.098	1.116
Authoritarianism				1.070	0.562	2.916
Economic liberalism				1.030*	0.443	2.802
Utilitarian individualism				-1.070**	0.358	0.343

SE= standard error; OR= odds ratio; * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$;