

# Exploring Leave Policy Preferences: A Comparison of Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States

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This study analyses preferences regarding leave length, gender division of leave, and leave financing in four countries with different welfare-state and leave regimes. Embedded in a gender perspective, institutional, self-interest, and ideational theoretical approaches are used to explore the factors shaping individuals' preferences (ISSP 2012 data). Findings show dramatic cross-country differences, suggesting the institutional dimension is most strongly related to leave policy preferences. Self-interest and values concerning gender relations and state responsibility are also important correlates. The study identifies mismatches between leave preferences, entitlements, and uptake, with implications for policy reform and the gendered division of parenting.

## Introduction

Leave policies such as maternity, parental, and paternity leaves are key family policy measures in most industrialized countries. They enable employed parents to care for their newborn children during their first months or years of life. They provide job protection during this time and often some financial support. Yet, substantial differences exist between countries regarding leave length and payment, whether both women and men can take leave, and whether benefits are collectively financed or employer-financed (Koslowski, Blum, and Moss 2016; O'Brien 2013). With increasing female labor force participation, the greater quest for gender equality in work and care, growing economic pressures on welfare states, and persistently low

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fertility in many postindustrial countries, questions regarding the length of leaves, their gendered impact, as well as their financing have become more important in public and political discourses in Western welfare states (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015; Kremer 2007; Thévenon 2011).

This article is the first to explore individuals' preferences regarding these three aspects of leave policies—length, gender division, and financing source—and to analyze the factors related to leave policy preferences. It thus addresses three central questions: What leave length do individuals consider to be legitimate? How should parents divide this leave entitlement between them? And who should pay for the leave; is it the state's responsibility or should employers contribute? The study explores leave policy preferences in Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States, four countries with contrasting leave schemes. In Sweden and Austria employed parents are entitled to 1–2 years of job-protected paid leave while in Switzerland mothers (and not fathers) are granted 3.5 months of leave. In the United States, there is no national statutory paid leave. The present article provides an in-depth analysis of these case study countries. It draws on data from the International Social Survey Programme 2012, the first survey to address leave length, gender division, and financing source preferences from an employment-care nexus, gender, and welfare-state perspective.

This study is rooted in the field of comparative welfare attitudinal research, which aims to understand how “institutional and cultural factors impinge on the formation of attitudes toward the welfare state in different contexts” (Svallfors 2012, 4). Scholars have pointed to the complex associations that exist between the institutional and policy context in which people live, their self-interest and ideational positions, and the attitudes they hold toward welfare policies (e.g., Mischke 2014; Svallfors 2012). We test these associations for leave policy preferences. We also adopt a gender perspective since leave policies, depending on their set-up, can either crystallize or challenge gender inequalities (Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Kremer 2007; Leitner 2003).

Welfare attitudinal scholarship has mainly focused on people's attitudes toward traditional social insurances such as health or old age insurances and the welfare state in general (e.g., Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Svallfors 2012). Studies on attitudes toward family policies are still somewhat rare (Chung and Meuleman 2017; Dobrotić and Vučković Juroš 2016; Lewin-Epstein et al. 2000; Miettinen, Esveldt, and Fokkema 2008; Mischke 2014). These studies generally find cross-country attitudinal differences that reflect the institutions and existing policies in each national context, even if some mismatches are identified (see Miettinen et al. 2008; Mischke 2014). However, the majority of studies focuses on attitudes toward childcare services while leave policy preferences have seldom been analyzed in a comparative perspective. The only study we found dealt with whether people in ten European countries considered the current parental leave in their country to be sufficiently long or to be too short, and whether they would prefer full-time, part-

time, or flexible leave (Stropnik, Sambt, and Kocourková 2008). Aspects such as which specific length of leave people would prefer, how leave should be divided between parents, and how leave should be financed have not been investigated so far in comparative perspective. We therefore lack a more comprehensive understanding of leave preferences. Investigating these dimensions provides us with the unique opportunity to gain some insight into people's preferences for how new social risks (see Bonoli 2005) should be handled in current welfare states, in our case, the social risk of becoming a parent and having to interrupt employment due to care obligations.

The study reveals that leave policy preferences differ dramatically across the four selected countries. It shows that the institutional and leave policy context significantly shapes individuals' preferences regarding length of leave, preferred gender division, and leave financing source. Furthermore, results show an interplay between the institutional context and individuals' attitudes and self-interest, giving a nuanced picture of leave policy preferences. The study also has important policy implications. Since public attitudes may also influence policy making (e.g., Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015), it is important to understand what might influence individuals' advocacy for change. Our results show, for instance, that whatever the national context in which individuals live, their life course circumstances and values still shape their support for a long paid leave. Furthermore, more knowledge about what people consider as appropriate leave policies is useful for policymakers, as attitudes are also likely to be linked to individuals' leave uptake. For instance, we find that Sweden has a majority of respondents who favor a gender-equal division of leave between parents and it is also among the countries with the highest leave uptake rates by fathers (Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Koslowski, Blum, and Moss 2016).

The article is structured as follows. We start by presenting our theoretical framework as well as results from studies on family and leave policy preferences. Then, we provide background information on welfare state and leave policies in each case-study country before moving on to the research hypotheses and research design. Results are divided into a descriptive part and a section where multinomial logistic regression results are reported. Finally, we discuss the results and conclude by pointing out implications of the study.

## Theoretical Approach and Literature Review

To analyse leave preferences, we draw upon theories used in comparative welfare attitudinal research where the influence of three dimensions are typically considered: institutional, self-interest, and ideational dimensions (e.g., Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Mischke 2014; Svallfors 2012; Van Oorschot 2010). We also take a gender approach since leave policies touch upon individual representations of ideals of care (Kremer 2006, 2007), and since they

influence the gender division of paid and unpaid work in the family (e.g., Haas and Hwang 2008; O'Brien 2013).

According to institutional theory, the macro-level (national) context in which individuals are embedded shapes their support or opposition to the welfare state and toward specific welfare programs (Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Mischke 2014; Svallfors 2012). From a sociological perspective, the term “institutions” refers not only to *public policies* (e.g., social security schemes), but also includes the *contextual norms* that ground them (e.g., values and justice beliefs), which together act as a frame of reference that influences individuals’ actions and expectations (Mischke 2014). Welfare states and welfare regimes—as institutions that represent specific combinations of policies and that are rooted in distinct ideologies such as social democratic, conservative, and liberal—would therefore create systematic variation in public support for welfare state policies (Esping-Andersen 1990). In addition, the gender perspective recommends taking into account how care arrangements and the division of paid and unpaid work between men and women are institutionalized across welfare states, in order to understand leave policy preferences in each context (Boje and Ejrnæs 2012; Kremer 2006; Leitner 2003). We therefore expect the national context to be associated with what people believe is good parenting, who they think should provide social care, and whether the state, the employer, or the family should bear the costs.

The few studies that have analyzed attitudes toward family policies in a comparative setting indicate that the institutional context indeed acts as a frame of reference and orients individuals’ expectations (Chung and Meuleman 2017; Dobrotić and Vučković Juroš 2016; Lewin-Epstein et al. 2000; Lewis and Smithson 2001; Miettinen, Esveldt, and Fokkema 2008; Mischke 2014). For instance, Lewis and Smithson (2001) found that individuals living in a social-democratic welfare state with an egalitarian gender contract and a long history of gender equality-oriented family policies—typically the Nordic countries—have higher expectations of state support for work and family reconciliation. However, the expected welfare regime effect is not always confirmed. For instance, in her analysis of public opinion toward childcare services, Mischke (2014) found higher support for childcare services in southern Europe (where state support for such services is low) than in the Nordic countries (where state support for childcare services is high), followed by conservative countries, and finally, unsurprisingly, by liberal ones.

Mismatches between policies and preferences in different national contexts might indicate a discrepancy between existing public policies and norms at the institutional level. Studies, such as Kremer’s (2006, 2007) analysis of the development of childcare policies in Europe, have shown that these two institutional dimensions do not necessarily evolve at the same pace and that collective actors advocating distinct ideals of care confront each other. It is therefore likely that there is a mutual influence between policies and public

opinion (Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Brooks and Manza 2006; Svallfors 2012).

The majority of studies focuses on attitudes toward childcare services while leave policy preferences have seldom been analyzed in a comparative perspective. Stropnik et al.'s (2008) study of ten European countries regarding individuals' evaluation of the length of parental leave in their country revealed a weak correlation between existing leave policies and attitudes. Authors concluded that fairly uniform leave length preferences existed across countries, yet admitted that further research was needed for a more comprehensive understanding of individuals' expectations.

*Self-interest theory* posits that there is a direct relationship between individuals' position in the social structure and their welfare attitudes. From this rational choice perspective, those who benefit from or are at risk of becoming recipients of social protection are expected to be more supportive of the welfare state. In the case of leave policies we would expect parents as well as adults of childbearing age to have more positive attitudes toward the provision of leave policies than others. We would also expect gender differences since women's employment is more affected by children than men's (Craig and Mullan 2010) and since they are the main users of parental leave (Koslowski, Blum, and Moss 2016).

Several studies confirm such a mechanism (Bonoli and Häusermann 2009; Grover 1991; Hyde, Essex, and Horton 1993; Lewin-Epstein et al. 2000; Staerklé et al. 2003; Warren, Fox, and Pascall 2009). For instance, younger cohorts have comparatively more positive attitudes than older cohorts toward maternity insurance implementation in Switzerland (Bonoli and Häusermann 2009; Staerklé et al. 2003), and toward childcare services in a comparative study of twenty-two European countries (Chung and Meuleman 2017). Women were significantly more supportive than men of parental leave in the United States (Grover 1991), of father-friendly leaves in the United Kingdom and the United States (Hyde, Essex, and Horton 1993; Warren, Fox, and Pascall 2009), and of childcare services and child allowances in Norway (Pettersen 2001). In regard to the influence of parenthood, research shows that it is not systematically a significant predictor of support for family policies (e.g., Knijn and Smit 2009; Lewin-Epstein et al. 2000). This suggests that parents who have managed without state support may not necessarily favor welfare state extension in this field. However, other studies do find an effect of parenthood, especially when children are young (Chung and Meuleman 2017; Grover 1991; Mischke 2014; Pettersen 2001).

*Ideational theory* suggests that subjective characteristics, such as individuals' normative orientations, ideology, and political stance, also influence attitudes toward the welfare state (Svallfors 2012). For instance, adhering to social equality and solidarity principles, or to economic individualism (according to which individuals should be responsible for their own welfare), provides ideological justification for either supporting or opposing the welfare

state and welfare programs. The gender perspective suggests that in addition to attitudes toward redistribution, individuals' views about family life and about how women and men should divide paid and unpaid work are of prime importance when it comes to support for certain leave policies. Individuals holding more or less traditional gender attitudes may favor state support for mothers' continued participation in the labor market and fathers' involvement in childcare to different degrees.

There is also empirical support for including ideational factors in the study of leave preferences (Chung and Meuleman 2017; Knijn and van Oorschot 2008; Lewin-Epstein et al. 2000; Mischke 2014; Staerklé et al. 2003). For instance, individuals' beliefs about welfare state responsibility and their recognition of gender inequalities in society were found to significantly influence their support for statutory paid maternity insurance in Switzerland (Staerklé et al. 2003). In the Netherlands, individuals' ideas about the importance of children to society and personal life were the most important predictors of support for new childcare and parental leave arrangements (Knijn and van Oorschot 2008).

This literature review suggests that a gender perspective should be adopted and that institutional, self-interest, and ideational factors should be combined to fully analyze and explain leave policy preferences. This combination will give a nuanced and deeper understanding of the attitudes we investigate. Before presenting our research hypotheses, we provide information on the four case study countries.

## Case Study Countries

Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States were selected because they represent very different, and in many ways typical cases of welfare state and family-policy regimes. Limiting the analysis to a small number of representative countries allows us to consider the policy context of each of them in more depth. Table 1 presents the leave schemes of these countries as well as some elements of their family and childcare policies. We mainly concentrate on the policy context in 2012, the year the ISSP survey was conducted.

### Austria

Austria is regarded as a conservative welfare state. The familistic orientation of its public policies is particularly noticeable in the leave scheme, which has long supported a gendered division of work and care (Leitner 2003; Neyer 2010). In addition to four months of paid maternity leave for employed mothers, previously employed or unemployed parents can take a job-protected parental leave up to the child's second birthday. Independently of any previous employment, parents are entitled to a universal childrearing benefit up to the child's third birthday. These benefits are paid from the Family

Table 1. Key institutional and family policy characteristics of the four case study countries in 2012

	Sweden	Austria	United States	Switzerland
Welfare regime	Social-democratic	Conservative	Liberal	Hybrid
Total public expenditure on families as a percent of GDP	3.6 percent	2.6 percent	1.2 percent	2.1 percent
Statutory leave scheme	<i>Parental leave:</i> 390 days paid at 80 percent and 90 days paid flat rate <i>Paternity leave:</i> 10 days paid at 80 percent	<i>Maternity leave:</i> 16 weeks paid at 100 percent <i>Parental leave:</i> 2-year job protection 5 options of <i>care leave benefits</i> (12–36 months)	<i>Family leave:</i> 12 weeks unpaid for workers in companies with 50+ employees	<i>Maternity leave:</i> 98 days paid at 80 percent
Total length of job protected and statutory paid leave	16 months	24 months	0	3.5 months
Gender equality incentives	✓ (2 months of parental leave reserved for fathers)	✓ (2–6 months of care leave benefits reserved for fathers)	–	–
Financing system of leave scheme	Government (+ complements from some employers)	Government	None	Government (+ complements from some employers)
Statutory entitlement to ECEC services (age of child)	✓ (12 months)	✓ (5 years)	–	–
Proportion of children enrolled in ECEC services (i. 0–2 years; ii. 3–5 years)	i. 48.2 percent ii. 94.2 percent <sup>(2)</sup>	i. 18.8 percent ii: 83.3 percent <sup>(2)</sup>	i. 28 percent <sup>(1)</sup> ii. 66 percent <sup>(2)</sup>	i. 39.1 percent ii. 46.7 percent <sup>(2)</sup>

Sources: Haas, Duvander, and Chronholm (2012), Kamerman and Waldfogel (2012), Moss (2012), OECD (2017), Rille-Pfeiffer (2012), and Valarino (2012).

Notes: (1) Data available for 2011 (concerns children living with their mother only).

(2) Data available for 2013.

Relief Fund (Familienlastenausgleichsfond) to which employers contribute a certain percentage of the total wages of their employees.

In 2012, parents could choose between five care leave benefit variants; four were flat rate and one was income dependent. The longest flat-rate variant (the “30 + 6” variant) was paid at 436 euros per month. It was the most widely used, by two-thirds of families (Leibetseder 2013). It could be drawn during the child’s first 3 years, provided that 6 of the 36 months were taken by the other parent; i.e., the father. Because job-protection only lasts 2 years, use of this variant often resulted in mothers dropping out of the labor market (Riesenfelder et al. 2007). Parents could also opt for 20 + 4, 15 + 3, or 12 + 2 months variants, paid, respectively, at 624 euros, 800 euros, or 1,000 euros per month. Considering that the average net monthly wage in 2012 was about 1,716 euros (2,039 euros for men and 1,357 euros for women) (Statistics Austria 2016), the benefits for long leaves are complements to household income while the factual replacement rate for the shorter flat-rate benefits may vary by gender and previous employment characteristics (e.g., full-time/part-time, occupation). The income-dependent variant can be drawn for 12 + 2 months, paid at 80 percent of previous income, up to a ceiling of 2,000 euros per month. The latter variant is increasingly chosen by previously employed mothers and fathers (Riesenfelder and Danzer 2015). Despite this, in 2012, the vast majority of leavetakers (95 percent) were women.

In addition to leave policies, childcare services have been extended since the beginning of the 2000s. Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions is compulsory for children aged 5 (on a 20 hour basis, free of charge) (Rille-Pfeiffer 2012). The level of attendance at formal childcare services for children aged 0–2 years was about 19 percent in 2012, but there were great regional differences. This contrasts strongly with that of children aged 3–5 (83 percent, see table 1).

## Sweden

As a prototype of a social-democratic welfare state, Sweden has implemented policies that support the dual earner-carer family model, in which both parents are employed and share unpaid work (Ferrarini and Duvander 2010). It was the first country to introduce a gender-neutral and income-related parental leave scheme in 1974 (Lundqvist 2011). Paid parental leave lasts 16 months (or 480 days), 13 of which are compensated at 80 percent of a parent’s previous gross earnings, up to a certain income ceiling (Haas, Duvander, and Chronholm 2012). Three months (or 90 days) are paid at a low flat rate. Parental leave benefits are paid by the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and financed through employers’ contributions based on employees’ wages. Collective agreements often entitle parents to additional payments from their employers. Leave uptake is very flexible; it can be taken full time or



part-time and continuously or in segments. In 2012, it could be used until the child's eighth birthday.

The leave scheme aims to support gender equality and men's use of leave entitlements. In 2012, 2 months of the parental leave were reserved for each parent. In 2012, almost nine out of ten fathers took some parental leave during the child's preschool years; however, 75 percent of all available paid leave days were still used by mothers (Haas, Duvander, and Chronholm 2012). Fathers are also entitled to 10 days of paid paternity leave to be taken during the first 3 months of the child's life.

Leave entitlements are complemented by quality and subsidized ECEC services. Every child is entitled to a place from the age of 1 and such services are highly subsidized, means-tested, and widely used (see table 1). Sweden has among the highest attendance rates of all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, both for infants (0–2 years) and preschool children (3–5 years) (OECD 2017).

## Switzerland

Switzerland has a conservative regime with liberal traits (Armingeon 2001). It has relatively comprehensive social insurances, but its family policies are closer to those of liberal countries (Thévenon 2011). The Swiss leave scheme is particularly limited and gendered. Federal maternity insurance was implemented in 2005 after 60 years of political struggle (FCWI 2001, 2011). In 2012, mothers were entitled to 98 days (3.5 months) of allowances paid at 80 percent of salary, up to a ceiling. Benefits are financed by equal contributions from employees and employers. Job protection continues for 2 additional weeks (4 months in total) without pay, although one canton and some employers offer more generous paid entitlements, up to 5 months (Valarino 2012).

Switzerland is the only country in Europe that does not grant fathers statutory paid or unpaid leave. A minority of men have access to leave through employers or collective labor agreements. These voluntary or negotiated leaves are financed directly by employers. About half of employees are covered by collective labor agreements, but in 2009 only 27 percent had access to paternity and/or parental leave (FSIO 2013). In the last decade, the lack of statutory parental and paternity leave was increasingly problematized, and a number of policy proposals were submitted in Parliament (Lanfranconi and Valarino 2014; Valarino 2016).

After the end of short paid maternity leave, families tend to organize child-care solutions privately—with the help of grandparents and/or by reducing maternal work hours—or by combining private solutions with ECEC services (Le Goff, Barbeiro, and Gossweiler 2011). Childcare services in Switzerland are expensive and the supply does not meet the demand, which is reflected in low attendance rates among both infants and preschool-aged children (see table 1).

## United States

The United States is a liberal welfare state based on a strong belief in individualism (Williamson and Carnes 2013). Its “market-centered family policy model” (Korpi 2000) implies low levels of public support for parental employment. It is the only industrialized nation lacking national statutory paid leave (Klerman, Daley, and Pozniak 2014). The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) enacted in 1993 offers unpaid leave to those who work for larger employers (50+ employees). In 2012, only 59 percent of employees were eligible to use the FMLA, which provides 12 weeks of unpaid leave for a variety of reasons, including childbirth or care of a child up to one year (Klerman, Daley, and Pozniak 2014). However, the FMLA has limited impact, since only 16 percent of eligible employees use it, and only one in five of those who use it do so in order to care for a newborn (Klerman, Daley, and Pozniak 2014).

About 28 percent of workers have access to paid leave, either because they work for progressive employers or because they live in one of five states with paid leave legislation (Council of Economic Advisors 2014; US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014). Research shows that state legislated leaves are most likely to be used by mothers, in particular disadvantaged ones, but that fathers’ leavetaking has also increased by small amounts (Baum and Ruhm 2014; Lerner and Applebaum 2014). Recent events indicate increased interest in paid leave, with several states proposing paid leave programs.

In regard to ECEC services, there is no entitlement in the United States (see table 1). The system is fragmented; most services are private although some state and local governments have developed policies for some low-income families (Kamerman and Gatenio-Gabel 2007). This results in a wide range in the quality of services and unequal access, depending notably on families’ income and structure, mothers’ education, and ethnicity.

## Research Hypotheses

Considering these contextual differences, as well as the theoretical framework outlined for our study, we present the following hypotheses (see table 2 for a summary). In regard to leave length preferences, in support of institutional theory, respondents in Austria and Sweden are expected to favor a long leave, while respondents in the United States and Switzerland are more likely to favor a short leave (H1a). In support of self-interest theory, women are expected to be more likely than men to favor a long leave (H1b). The same should apply to parents (H1c) and to respondents in their childbearing years (H1d). In accordance with ideational theory, individuals with strong state responsibility attitudes will be more supportive of a long leave (H1e).

For the gender division of leave preferences, institutional theory leads us to expect that in Sweden a strong gender equality norm of leave division will exist, while in the other countries a preference for a gendered use of the leave

**Table 2.** Summary of hypotheses and results

Theory	Leave length preferences	Gender division preferences	Leave financing source preferences
Institutional dimension	<b>H1a:</b> Austria and Sweden favor long leave; Switzerland and the United States favor short leave → <i>partly confirmed</i>	<b>H2a:</b> Sweden favors a gender-equal division of leave → <i>confirmed</i>	<b>H3a:</b> Sweden and Austria favor government financing; Switzerland and the United States favor employer or mixed financing → <i>confirmed</i>
Self-interest dimension	<b>H1b:</b> women favor long leave → <i>confirmed</i>  <b>H1c:</b> Parents favor long leave → <i>confirmed</i>  <b>H1d:</b> young cohort favor long leave → <i>confirmed</i>	<b>H2b:</b> younger cohort favors a gender-equal division and older cohort favors a fully gendered division of leave → <i>partly confirmed</i>	<b>H3b:</b> women favor government financing → <i>rejected</i>
Ideational dimension	<b>H1e:</b> strong state responsibility attitudes favor long leave → <i>confirmed</i>	<b>H2c:</b> Gender traditionals favor a fully gendered division of leave → <i>confirmed</i>	<b>H3c:</b> strong state responsibility attitudes favor government financing → <i>confirmed</i>

may dominate (H2a). According to self-interest theory, we expect younger cohorts to be more likely to favor a gender-equal division of leave than older cohorts who will tend to prefer a fully gendered division of leave (H2b). Following ideational theory, we expect that individuals with a traditional

gender ideology will favor a fully gendered division of leave and will reject a gender-equal division (H2c).

Finally, regarding the preferred financing source for leave, in agreement with institutional theory, we hypothesize that Swedish and Austrian respondents will favor government payment, while this will not be the case for Swiss and American residents, who are more likely to favor employer or mixed financing solutions (H3a). In accordance with self-interest theory, women are expected to be more supportive than men of government financing of leave (H3b), since they are overall more likely to rely upon social benefits than men and therefore are generally more supportive of the welfare state. In line with ideational theory, individuals who support state intervention will prefer government financing over employer financing (H3c).

## Research Design

### Data Presentation

We use data from the 2012 International Social Survey Programme module *Family and changing gender roles IV* (ISSP Research Group 2014). For the first time, respondents were asked questions on their preferences for leave length, the leave gender division, and financing source. This represents a unique opportunity to compare three different aspects of leave policy preferences across nationally representative samples beyond EU countries.

The sample used in this study was 4,108 men and women aged 18 and over for whom complete data were available (682 respondents with missing data were excluded). Descriptive statistics for the sample are presented in [table 3](#).<sup>1</sup> Country sample sizes were 1,029 in Austria, 882 in Sweden, 1,134 in Switzerland, and 1,063 in the United States. Response rates in each country were, respectively, 65.3, 54.2, 52.2, and 71.4 percent. When weights were provided (for Austria and the United States), they were used in the analyses.

*Dependent variables* The first dependent variable is **individuals' preferred length of paid leave**. The question asked was: "Consider a couple who both work full-time and now have a newborn child. One of them stops working for some time to care for their child. Do you think there should be a paid leave available and, if so, for how long?" Answers were given in number of months (from 0 to 95). Since answers were non-normally distributed, they were recoded into the following categorical variable: *short leave* (0–4 months), *moderate leave* (5–12 months), and *long leave* (>12 months). Cut-off points were chosen for theoretical reasons: the minimal length set by the International Labor Organization for maternity protection is about 4 months (i.e., 14 weeks) and the median length of paid statutory leave in thirty-three industrialized countries in 2012 was 12 months (Moss 2012, 31). Sensitivity tests conducted with slightly different categories showed similar results.<sup>2</sup> We also

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of the sample

	N	Percent
<b>Country</b>		
Sweden	882	21.5
Austria	1,029	25
United States	1,063	25.9
Switzerland	1,134	27.6
Total	4,108	100
<b>Sex</b>		
Man	1,956	47.6
Woman	2,152	52.4
Total	4,108	100
<b>Parenthood</b>		
Childless	1,344	32.7
Parent (one child or more)	2,764	67.3
Total	4,108	100
<b>Age</b>		
18–44 years	1,831	44.6
45–65 years	1,485	36.1
>65 years	792	19.3
Total	4,108	100
<b>Education</b>		
Primary and secondary degree	2,990	72.8
Tertiary degree	1,118	27.2
Total	4,108	100
<b>Employment</b>		
In paid work	2,557	62.2
Not in paid work	1,551	37.8
Total	4,108	100
<b>Gender ideology mean score (0–4)</b>		1.61
<b>State responsibility mean score (0–1)</b>		0.41
<b>Leave length preferences</b>		
Short (0–4 months)	1,298	31.6
Medium (5–12 months)	1,391	33.9
Long (>12 months)	1,419	34.5
Total	4,108	100
<b>Gender division preferences</b>		
Fully gendered	839	24.2
Partly gendered	1,229	35.4
Gender equal	1,402	40.4
Total	3,470	100

*Continued*

Table 3. *Continued*

	N	Percent
<b>Leave payment preferences</b>		
Government	1,519	43.8
Both government and employers	1,495	43.1
Employers	458	13.2
Total	3,473	100

*Note.* See also endnote 1 for details on the sample distribution.

tested whether accounting for the policy context in which respondents were living would influence results. However, logistic regressions performed on a *relative leave length variable* revealed similar relationships.<sup>3</sup> All robustness check analyses are available from the first author on request.

The second dependent variable captures **gender division of leave preferences** (only for those who answered  $\geq 1$  month to the previous question): “Still thinking about the same couple, if both are in a similar work situation and are eligible for paid leave, how should this paid leave period be divided between the mother and the father?” Answers are coded into three categories: *fully gendered* (“mother entire period, father none”), *partly gendered* (“mother most, father some of it”), and *gender equal* (“half each”).<sup>4</sup>

The third dependent variable captures the **preferred financing source of the leave**: “And who should pay for this leave?” Possible answers are *the government*, *the employer*, and *both the government and the employer*.<sup>5</sup> This variable taps into individuals’ attitudes toward the role of the state and collective responsibility, and whether they consider families should receive government support or whether the labor market and the private economy should be (partly) held responsible through employer liability.

*Independent variables* The independent variables reflect the various influential dimensions suggested by our theoretical framework. The institutional dimension is accounted for by the **country** variable. Sweden is set as the reference country in the analyses, since it is a forerunner in gender-equal leave policies. Self-interest factors and the reference categories were chosen in order to test our hypothesis, i.e., that parents, women and adults in their childbearing years would be more in favor of leave policies than others. A **parenthood** dummy variable captures whether respondents have one child or more (being childless is the reference category). **Sex** is a dummy variable, where men are the reference category. We distinguish three **age** categories: younger cohorts (adults in their childbearing and childrearing years, 18–44 years), middle cohorts (respondents in the 45–65 year age group, the reference category), and older cohorts (>65 years).

Two variables assess the influence of *ideational factors*.<sup>6</sup> In order to create a reliable indicator of **gender ideology**, we conducted principal component analysis on seven survey items that tap into attitudes toward family and gender roles. Five items formed a single scale with good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.80). These included "A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works"; "All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job"; "A working mother can establish just as warm and secure relationship with her children as a mother who does not work"; "A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children"; "A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family". A mean gender ideology score was computed for each individual. It ranges from 0 (denoting an egalitarian gender ideology) to 4 (denoting a traditional gender ideology). In order to minimize missing data, we allowed one missing value in the computation of the mean.

**State responsibility** captures individuals' attitudes toward the role of the state with regard to the provision and payment of care services to dependent individuals. The four following survey items formed a reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.76): "People have different views on childcare for children under school age. Who do you think should primarily provide childcare?"; "Who do you think should primarily cover the costs of childcare for children under school age?"; "Thinking about elderly people who need some help in their everyday lives, such as help with grocery shopping, cleaning the house, doing the laundry, etc. Who do you think should primarily provide the help?"; "And who do you think should primarily cover the costs of this help to these elderly people?" Answers were recoded into dummy variables; 1 was attributed to responses in favour of state responsibility and 0 when any other actor (e.g., family members, employers, nonprofit organizations, or private providers) was considered responsible. Scores were averaged for each individual (one missing value allowed). They range from 0 (the state is not seen at all as the responsible actor) to 1 (the state is seen as the primary responsible actor).

Finally, we also control for socioeconomic characteristics such as **educational degree**, a dummy variable distinguishing tertiary degree-holders from others (reference category). An **employment status** variable distinguishes between respondents in paid work (reference category) and those not (e.g., retired, unemployed, homemakers, students, education, recipients of disability benefits).

### Analytical Techniques

We start by describing leave policy preferences at the aggregate level in the four countries separately. Then, in order to understand the relationship between the selected variables and leave policy preferences, we apply multinomial logistic regressions. Such analysis allows predicting membership

of a dependent variable with more than two categories; in our case each dependent variable has three possible outcomes. This implies that a reference (or baseline) category is chosen for each dependent variable, and that analyses compare one outcome category with the baseline. For instance, in the case of leave length preferences, we choose the moderate leave length as the reference category. We thereby assess predictors' influence firstly on wanting a long leave compared with a moderate one, and secondly of wanting a short leave compared with a moderate one. Similarly, for the two other dependent variables, we choose reference categories that express a middle or intermediate position among possible answers. The categorization of the outcome in three groups allows us to examine relationships between characteristics of individuals and more clear-cut preferences. For gender division of leave preferences, wanting a fully gendered leave and wanting a gender-equal leave are compared with wanting a partly gendered leave (reference category). For financing source preferences, wanting state financing and wanting employers' financing are compared with wanting mixed financing (both state and employers as reference category). We then report the odds ratios for each independent variable. The odds ratio is an indicator of the change in odds of an outcome occurring (e.g., preferring a long leave rather than a moderate leave) resulting from a unit change in the predictor (e.g., being a woman rather than a man). We refrain from investigating preferences of individuals with specific profiles, and stay on the level of relating the independent variables with our outcomes, with the aim to better test our hypotheses and to not conclude about profiles in a way that the data do not allow for. This also applies to any causal interpretation, since our data are only cross-sectional and thus not suited for causal path analysis.

We adopted a stepwise analytical approach in order to assess the relevance of our theoretical dimensions for understanding leave policy preferences. This means we ran four models for each dependent variable where we progressively entered variables connected to each theory, starting with entering the country effect only (Model 1), then integrating self-interest variables (Model 2), ideational variables (Model 3), and finally adding control variables (Model 4). On the basis of pseudo *R*-square measures (Cox and Snell and Nagelkerke values), we concluded Model 4 had the best predictive power. [Table 4](#) presents results of multinomial logistics regressions for Model 4. Stepwise results for Models 1–4 are available as [supplemental material \(tables S1–S3\)](#).

Further robustness checks were conducted. We ran Model 4 on separate samples for men and women, as well as separately by country. We concluded that results were consistent and that only a few minor deviations occurred. We found that separate country analyses lacked stability because of the small number of cases for some categories of the dependent variables in some country samples. For this reason, we rely and present results from pooled samples. The few cases when country results significantly deviate from pooled samples results are highlighted in the results section. Finally, we also ran our models



specifying that standard errors allowed for intragroup correlation, in order to account for the nested structure of our data (individuals within countries). Clustered standard errors were similar, which confirmed the robustness of results.

## Results

### Contrasted National Trends

The descriptive statistics presented in [figure 1](#) show striking differences in policy preferences across the four countries. Regarding leave length, preferences in Sweden—and even more clearly in Austria—are for a long leave of over 1 year. In the United States, a majority favors a short leave, while in Switzerland respondents are divided between a short and a moderate leave. The distribution of leave length indicates that responses cluster on specific lengths. In Sweden, the most cited lengths are 12, 18, and 24 months (mean is 17 months). In Austria, one-fourth of the sample favors 24 months and one-third opts for 36 months (mean is 29 months). In the United States and Switzerland, responses are more varied, but in both countries, 6 and 3 months are the two most cited leave lengths (respective means are 5 and 6 months). A minority of respondents in Sweden (4 percent) and Austria (7 percent) consider there should be no paid leave at all, but somewhat more do so in the United States (17 percent) and in Switzerland (11 percent).

Regarding the preferred gender division of leave, there is a dominant pattern only in Sweden, where 70 percent favor a gender-equal division between parents. Preferences are more mixed in the other countries, especially in the United States, where all three options are equally represented (e.g., fully gendered, partly gendered, and gender equal). In Austria, respondents are mainly divided between the fully and the partly gendered sharing of leave, and in Switzerland preferences are mainly for a partly gendered or a gender-equal division of leave.

Regarding preferences concerning the financing source, country differences are also clear-cut and reveal different conceptions of the role of the welfare state at the aggregate level. Government financing is preferred in Sweden and Austria. In Switzerland and the United States, the preferred financing option is a mix between the government and the employer. However, in the United States, 40 percent of the sample answered that employers should finance paid leave. This option was very rarely considered in other countries and reflects the limited role of government typical in liberal welfare states.

### Factors Related to Leave Policy Preferences

*Leave length preferences.* [Table 4](#) presents odds ratios from multinomial logistic regression models involving the three dependent variables. Results indicate that our theoretical approaches are all useful for understanding leave

Table 4. Multinomial logistic regressions on leave policy preferences (odds ratios)

Institutional dimension	Leave length preferences (Ref.: moderate leave)			Gender division preferences (Ref.: partly gendered)		Financing source preferences (Ref.: both)	
	Short leave	Long leave	Gender fully gendered	Gender equal	Government	Employers	
Country (Sweden ref.)							
Austria	3.28***	9.15***	26.91***	0.29***	0.99	0.86	
United States	6.49***	0.09***	45.83***	0.79	0.09***	7.47***	
Switzerland	3.59***	0.11***	18.27***	0.63***	0.19***	1.55	
Sex (Man ref.)	0.88	1.36**	0.75**	0.96	1.03	1.42**	
Parenthood (Childless ref.)	1.01	1.67***	1.21	0.71***	1.26*	1.24	
Age (45–65 ref.)							
18–44 years	0.96	1.39**	0.96	0.96	0.96	0.98	
>65 years	1.38*	0.71*	2.34***	1.30	0.87	0.99	
Gender ideology	1.14*	1.16*	1.45***	0.67***	1.15**	1.02	
State responsibility	0.23***	2.89***	2.02***	1.73***	1.86***	0.26***	
Education (non-tertiary ref.)	0.71***	1.05	0.46***	0.83	0.90	0.95	
Tertiary degree							
Employment (work ref.)	0.87	0.84	0.98	1.29*	1.04	1.46**	
Not in paid work							
N	4108		3470		3473		
Likelihood ratio test	$\chi^2(22) = 3038.69***$		$\chi^2(22) = 1067.55***$		$\chi^2(22) = 1509.77***$		
Pseudo R-square							
Cox and Snell	0.523		0.265		0.353		
Nagelkerke	0.588		0.300		0.409		

Significance levels: \* $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$ .

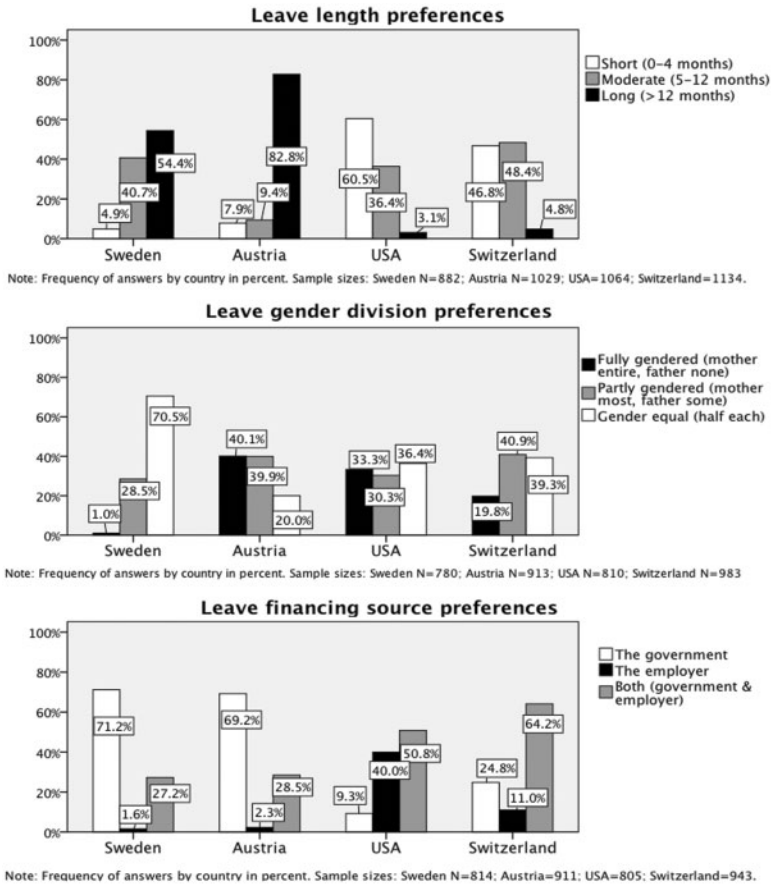


Figure 1. Descriptive statistics of leave policy preferences by country.

policy preferences. The country variable is very important for understanding leave length preferences, as already suggested in the previous section and shown by the large odds ratios. As expected, Americans and Swiss respondents are considerably less likely than Swedes to want a long leave rather than a moderate one. They are also over six times (relative risk of 6.49) and about four times (relative risk of 3.59) more likely to want a short leave rather than a moderate one. However, we expected both Austrians and Swedes to want a long leave but we found that Austrians are in fact both more likely to want short leaves as well as to want long leaves (H1a partly confirmed, see table 2 for a summary).

The self-interest hypotheses (H1b, c, and d) were all confirmed. Women are more likely than men to favor long leaves rather than moderate ones.

Being a parent further increases the odds of wanting a long leave. Age also plays a role: respondents of childbearing age are more likely than the middle-aged (45–65) to want a long leave, while those in their pension years are more likely to prefer short leaves.

The ideational hypothesis H1e is also confirmed. As expected, the more individuals believe in state responsibility, the more likely they are to prefer a long leave and to reject a short one. The impact of gender ideology on leave length preferences proved to be varied. The more traditional individuals are, the more likely they are to favor a short leave as well as a long one.

In terms of control variables, holding a tertiary degree noticeably decreases the odds of wanting a short leave versus a moderate one. Employment status seems not to be influential as a determinant of preferred leave length.

*Gender division preferences* Regression results for the gender division of leave preferences generally support our hypotheses. In line with institutional theory, controlling for all other correlates, Swiss residents are markedly more likely (18.27 times) than Swedes to prefer a fully gendered leave over a partly gendered one. The odds for a fully gendered leave are even greater for Austrians and especially for Americans (confirming H2a).<sup>7</sup> Austrians and Swiss residents are also significantly less likely than Swedes to favor a gender-equal division of leave.

In accordance with ideational theory, as the gender ideology score increases, the odds of preferring a fully gendered leave use over a partly gendered one also increases, while preferences for a gender-equal leave decrease (confirming H2c). Regarding the influence of age, our hypothesis (H2b) is only partly confirmed. Individuals in their pension years are about twice as likely as the middle aged to prefer a gender-traditional leave use. However, there seems to be no distinct pattern of preference for the respondents of childbearing age compared to the middle aged.

Additional variables shape gender division preferences. Women are less likely than men to want a fully gendered division of leave. Parents are less likely than childless individuals to favor a gender-equal leave. We also find a relationship between advocating state responsibility and favoring a fully gendered division of leave as well as a gender-equal division. Finally, highly educated individuals have lower odds of favoring a fully gendered division of leave, and those outside the labor market have higher odds of wanting a gender-equal division.

*Financing source preferences* Turning to financing source preferences, we find that institutional theory is supported. As expected Americans and Swiss respondents are clearly less likely to want government financing rather than joint financing between the state and employers (confirming H3a). More precisely, they are, respectively, eleven times (1/0.09) and five times (1/0.19) less likely than Swedes to do so. Americans are seven times more likely than

Swedes to prefer employers financing rather than mixed financing. In line with ideational theory, the more individuals believe in state responsibility, the more likely they are to want government financing and to reject employers' financing (confirming H3c). Hypothesis H3b based on self-interest theory received no support. We had expected that women would be more likely than men to prefer government financing, but instead they have higher odds of wanting employer financing. Regressions by country show in fact that this result is driven mainly by the American sub-sample, where women are more likely than men to prefer employers' financing.

In addition, results indicate that being a parent as opposed to being childless significantly increases the odds of wanting government financing, which can be interpreted as a self-interest mechanism. Separate country analyses show that the United States differs in this regard; parents are less likely than childless respondents to prefer government financing. This different picture can be understood in light of current reliance on employer-based leave policies. Finally, results show that individuals with traditional gender attitudes are more likely to want government financing rather than joint financing.

## Discussion

### Matches and Mismatches between Policies and Preferences

Our descriptive results show distinct patterns of leave policy preferences across the four countries, which reflect roughly the respective leave schemes, family policies, and welfare state ideologies in each context. In Sweden, preferences for moderate to long government-financed leaves that are shared equally by parents reflect the normative influence of social redistribution, and the prevalence of the dual earner-carer family model. In Austria, conservative ideology and the male breadwinner family model most likely influence respondents' preferences for a state-financed long leave used mainly or exclusively by mothers. In the United States and Switzerland, liberal ideology is evident in preferences for short (to medium) leaves financed jointly by the government and employers. No clear norms regarding the gender division of leave are identified, which can be interpreted as the outcome of their minimal family policies and therefore less normative regulation of gender and parental roles.

Our results suggest that the generosity of childcare policies might also be related to parents' preferences for leave length (especially their affordability, quality, availability as well as children's starting age). While in Sweden the end of well-paid parental leave (16 months) and the start of statutory access to ECEC services (12 months) overlap, this is not the case in Austria. Statutory entitlement to childcare starts when the child reaches the age of 5, while job-protected paid leave stops at age 2. This large gap could also explain preferences for long leaves in Austria. In Switzerland and the United States, the

combination of limited leaves with the absence of access to statutory ECEC services and the subsequent variety of individualized solutions adopted by families during preschool years may explain more heterogeneity in respondents' preferences. Leave policies are part of a broader family policy context, which undoubtedly shapes individuals' policy preferences.

The study also shows that there are several mismatches between current leave policies and their use in each country on the one hand, and respondents' policy preferences on the other. This is most evident in the United States, where eight out of ten respondents prefer at least one month of paid leave for parents when no paid leave is now available. In Switzerland, about half of the respondents state that paid leave should last longer than what is available, and about 80 percent think the father should take at least some leave, when such entitlements for fathers are currently nonexistent. In Austria, the preferred leave lengths are 2 and 3 years, which corresponds to the most frequently used childrearing benefit options (the 20 + 4 and 30 + 6 variants). However, there is a clear mismatch between the latter variant of benefit and the 2-year job protection period. Finally, in Sweden, the mismatch is between policy preferences and actual policy use. Most respondents preferred a gender-equal division of leave, but three-fourths of leave days are still taken by mothers.

Our results have important policy and research implications. In the case of Sweden, findings suggest that there is a divide between gender-equal social norms regarding leave uptake and families' concrete situations where structural, organizational, and economic factors may hinder men's actual leave uptake (e.g., [Duvander and Johansson 2012](#)). In Austria, the gap between leave length preferences and the job protection period calls for a harmonization of measures in order to prevent women's exit from the labor market ([Riesenfelder et al. 2007](#)). In the United States and Switzerland, individuals' preferences regarding statutory paid leave are modest but nonetheless exceed the current legal frame. This means political actors and interest groups would likely find some support within civil society to implement more extended paid leaves. In the case of the United States, attention should be paid to the potential negative consequences of implementing a leave scheme with employer liability. While employer financing was markedly favored by respondents, such a financing system is vulnerable to economic downturns.

These results also contribute to the comparative welfare state research literature. They show mismatches between family policies and public attitudes not only in Southern or Eastern European countries (as found by [Mischke 2014](#); [Stropnik, Sambt, and Kocourková 2008](#)), but also in liberal ones. Overall, mismatches suggest that contextual norms and collective preferences may evolve more quickly than formal public policies (see [Kremer 2006, 2007](#); [Pfau-Effinger 2005](#)). Consequently, citizens' policy preferences may become drivers of family policy extension, as suggested by [Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser \(2015\)](#).

## Leave Policy Preferences as a Complex Phenomenon

Multinomial logistic regression results show that the institutional context is the factor most strongly related to leave policy preferences, as indicated by the support of our hypotheses and the large odds ratios of the country variable (see tables 2 and 4). Preferences differ dramatically across the four countries, which suggest that the social context in which individuals live is strongly related with what they consider to be legitimate state responsibility and good parenting for early childcare. Yet, this result should be interpreted with caution. First, the case study countries were selected precisely for their distinct welfare regimes and leave schemes, which likely results in overestimating the influence of institutional context. A study involving more countries, with more similar institutional settings, would enable an exploration of this issue.

Secondly, as pointed out in other welfare attitudinal studies, it is possible that while the institutional context influences attitudes, public opinion also shapes to a certain extent the policies that are implemented (see Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Chung and Meuleman 2017; Svallfors 2012). Other studies have indeed shown that citizens' public policy preferences influence policymakers' responsiveness (Brooks and Manza 2006; Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015). The cross-sectional nature of our data prevents us from determining with certainty the direction of the mechanism at play.

Results show that the self-interest dimension is also relevant. As expected, individuals who have a personal interest in or a close relation to childbearing and parenting are more likely to be supportive of leave policies. This is particularly the case for leave length preferences: women, parents, and young adults are more likely to want a long leave. Also revealing a self-interest mechanism, parents are more likely than the childless to want government financing of leave. Interestingly, parents are less likely to want a gender-equal division of leave. This result might be interpreted in light of the traditionalizing effect parenthood has on couples (e.g., Craig and Mullan 2010).

These results point to the importance of adopting a gender perspective in analyzing attitudes toward leave policies, and of looking into the different meaning policies may have for men and women. Women are more likely than men to prefer a long leave, which can be understood by the fact that they are the main caregivers and main leavetakers (Bruning and Plantenga 1999). They also have higher odds than men of rejecting a fully gendered division of leave. This suggests that they are inclined to involve men in childcare. This may be interpreted from either a self-interest perspective (women expect help from men for childcare) or an ideational perspective (women generally hold more gender-equal attitudes than men, Davis and Greenstein 2009). The result is consistent with previous studies showing women's more positive attitudes toward father-friendly parental leaves (Grover 1991; Hyde, Essex, and Horton 1993; Warren, Fox, and Pascall 2009).

We find ideational aspects also shape leave policy preferences, with all hypotheses supported. As expected, the more individuals believe in state responsibility, the more likely they are to want a long leave and to prefer government financing. Individuals with traditional gender beliefs are more likely to favor a fully gendered division of leave. In addition, we found some unexpected relationships; for instance, gender-traditional individuals have higher odds of favoring a short as well as a long leave. It is likely that there are two groups among them; some may believe the state should facilitate stay-at-home mothering and others probably think that families should solve this privately. These findings suggest that it is important to further explore the complex relationship between welfare state representations, gender ideology, and leave policy preferences.

In future research, education and employment status should receive more attention, as they turned out to be influential predictors for some aspects of leave policy preferences. It is, for instance, striking that highly educated respondents voiced a preference for moderate leave rather than a short leave. This suggests that reconciliation of career and childrearing may be particularly important for this group.

## Conclusion

This research makes two significant contributions to the literature. First, it adds to the comparative welfare attitudinal literature, which has mainly analyzed general attitudes toward the welfare state or toward traditional social insurance programs. The present study therefore fills a gap by uncovering attitudes toward policies addressing new social risks (Bonoli 2005), in particular leave policies. Facilitating combining work and childcare and reducing gender gaps in employment and care have become increasingly important concerns for parents and policymakers worldwide. The same applies to issues of financing welfare-state policies, in our case, leave policies. This paper provides a detailed view of attitudes toward leave policy preferences in four countries, exploring three aspects that complement each other: leave length, gender division of leave, and leave financing source. Although the 2012 ISSP survey data entails limitations, it nonetheless provides rich and original insights into this underresearched topic. The study complements previous comparative research on attitudes toward leave policy which found a weak correlation between policies and individuals' evaluation of the leave in their country as too short or sufficiently long (Stropnik et al. 2008). Our study allows us to capture more precisely leave length preferences and reveals a strong association between policies and preferences in the four selected countries.

Second, this study confirms that welfare attitudinal theories should be combined with a gender perspective to understand determinants of leave policy preferences. It suggests that leave preferences in Austria, Sweden,



Switzerland, and the United States are mostly shaped by the institutional context in which individuals are embedded. This is visible both in the descriptive findings regarding cross-national differences and in multivariate results. There are strong attitudinal differences by country for individuals with the same socioeconomic characteristics and ideological views. This suggests that more research should focus on the institutional level of social life when understanding individuals' preferences for social policy.

Future research analyzing a larger number of institutional contexts and including changes over time in policy settings will improve our understanding of the relationship between leave policy preferences, policy set-ups, and individuals' personal circumstances.

## Notes

Isabel Valarino holds a PhD in social sciences from the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. Her research interests include welfare state and gender equality, family and leave policies, and parenthood and the gender division of work. Her current research project addresses attitudes toward care policies.

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Gerda Neyer, PhD in political science from the University of Vienna, Austria, is associate professor at Stockholm University, Department of Sociology, Demography Unit, and a senior researcher at the Stockholm University Linnaeus Center on Social Policy and Family Dynamics in Europe. Her research deals with institutional and policy aspects of fertility and family development.

1. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for respondents answering the main survey item on leave length preferences. Sample distribution differs slightly for analyses on preferences for the gender division of leave and leave financing, since items were asked only of respondents preferring some paid leave. Sensitivity test results showed that these differences do not affect results: similar factors are related to leave length preferences, whether including or excluding those who want no paid leave.
2. Instead of 0–4 months for the short leave category, 0–3, 0–5, and 0–6 months, as well as 1–4 months were tested. Instead of 5–12 months for

the moderate leave length category, a wider range of 5–18 months was also tested.

3. The *relative length variable* is a dichotomous variable distinguishing between respondents who *want more*; i.e., those with a preferred leave length exceeding the legal paid leave length in their country (in Austria >24 months, in Sweden >16 months, in Switzerland >4 months, and in the United States >0 month) from those who *want less or the same length* as the existing one (used as reference category in logistic regression).
4. Two additional answers, “father most, mother some” and “father entire, mother none,” were recoded as *gender equal* (0.6 percent of answers).
5. A fourth option “other sources” was excluded from the analysis (3.4 percent of the sample).
6. Due to missing data on party affiliation, we were unable to include individuals’ political orientation, likely to be an important influence on leave policy preferences.
7. The confidence interval for estimates of the country variable is wide, and robust standard errors are large, indicating this estimate may lack reliability. This is probably due to the fact that in Sweden, the reference category, very few respondents wanted a fully gendered leave.

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## Supplementary Data

Supplementary data are available at *SOCPOL* online.

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