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Welfare state reform acceptance in the face of reform pressures: how citizens make a distinction between norms and necessity

Bakgrund/Frågeställning

In most Western democracies, welfare states are pressured, overburdened, and changing in multidimensional ways. Previous studies have highlighted that while normative support for various forms of social policies remains high, people tend to be more critical about the actual performance of welfare states. Hence, policy-makers and citizens alike are increasingly worried about the quality and sustainability of their welfare systems (Roosma et al., 2013). In this paper, we examine a more radical implication of this emerging literature on citizens' social policy preferences and welfare state sustainability. We posit that citizens are not just worried, but have two distinct sets of policy preferences in pressured welfare states. On the one hand, citizens may express normative support for various types of social policies, and social policy reforms. On the other hand, citizens may also accept that specific reforms are necessary—even when they themselves do not like or would normatively prefer such policies. The level of citizens' reform acceptance is crucial to explain the extent to which social policy reforms (including budget cuts) may be perceived as legitimate by the electorate, yet we know little about its causes, and the extent to which it is related to normative support. We hypothesise that reform acceptance is less strongly linked to citizens' values and interests, and is therefore less conflictual. We suggest that it is more dependent on what reform trajectories are currently debated in one's society, and the salience of such proposals. This study relies on three-wave Norwegian panel data to test whether normative preferences and actual acceptance of welfare reforms are indeed distinct concepts.

Metod och Resultat

Konklusion