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**The Welfare Agenda of the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe: Combining Welfare Chauvinism, Producerism and Populism**

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## *Abstracts*

*Recent scholarship on the populist radical right tends to imprecisely describe the welfare agenda of this party family with reference to its key ideological characteristics of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. We propose an alternative analytical framework that considers the multidimensionality of welfare state positions and the “deservingness criteria” that underlie ideas about welfare entitlement. Applying this framework to a sample of four European populist radical right parties, we conclude that three interrelated frames inform their welfare agenda. These parties, we argue, advocate social closure not only on the basis of the deservingness criterion of identity (welfare chauvinism), but also on criteria of control, attitude, and reciprocity (welfare producerism) and on an antagonism between the people and the establishment (welfare populism). Understanding the welfare agenda of the populist radical right requires us to move beyond welfare chauvinism and to reconsider the concept of welfare producerism and its interaction with welfare chauvinism.*

*Jüngste Forschungen über die populistische radikale Rechte neigen dazu, die Wohlfahrtsagenda dieser Parteifamilie in Bezug auf ihre Hauptmerkmale, Nativismus, Autoritarismus und Populismus, impräzise zu beschreiben. Wir schlagen einen alternativen analytischen Rahmen vor, der die Vielschichtigkeit wohlfahrtsstaatlicher Positionen und die "Verdienstkriterien" berücksichtigt, welche einem Anspruch auf Wohlfahrtsleistungen zugrunde liegen. Wir wenden diesen Rahmen auf vier populistische, rechtsradikale Parteien an und kommen zu dem Schluss, dass drei miteinander verbundene Kriterien ihre Wohlfahrtsagenda bestimmen. Wir argumentieren, dass diese Parteien soziale Ausgrenzung nicht nur auf der Grundlage von Identität (Wohlfahrtschauvinismus) befürworten, sondern auch auf der Grundlage von Kontrolle, Einstellung und Gegenseitigkeit (Produktivismus) und auf der Grundlage eines Antagonismus zwischen dem Volk und dem Establishment*

*(Wohlfahrtspopulismus). Um die Wohlfahrtsagenda der populistischen radikalen Rechten zu verstehen, sollten wir über bestehende Konzeptionen von Wohlfahrtschauvinismus hinausgehen und das Konzept des Wohlfahrtsproduktivismus und seine Wechselwirkung mit dem Wohlfahrtschauvinismus neu überdenken.*

*Les études contemporaines du programme en matière de politique sociale de la droite populiste radicale analysent ceci en s'appuyant, de manière imprécise, sur les piliers idéologiques de cette famille politique, c.a.d. le nativisme, l'autoritarisme, et le populisme. Dans cet article, nous proposons un nouveau cadre analytique qui considère la multi-dimensionnalité des positions sur l'État Providence et les « critères de mérite » qui sous-tendent les conceptions d'accès aux politiques sociales. En appliquant ce cadre d'analyse à quatre partis de droite populiste radicale européens, nous concluons que l'agenda de protection sociale de ces partis repose sur trois cadres interconnectés. Nous soutenons que ces partis promeuvent des restrictions sociales fondée sur le « critère de mérite » d'identité (chauvinisme social), mais aussi sur le critère de contrôle, d'attitude, et de réciprocité (producérisme social), et sur un antagonisme entre le peuple et l'élite (populisme social). Pour comprendre pleinement le programme social des partis de droite populiste radicale, il faut dépasser le cadre du chauvinisme social, et plutôt considérer son interaction avec le concept de producérisme.*

**Keywords:** welfare state, populist radical right, welfare chauvinism, welfare producerism, welfare populism.

## **Introduction**

The rise of populist radical right parties (PRRPs) has received extensive attention in recent years (Mudde 2007). While the xenophobic, authoritarian and populist profile of the populist

radical right (PRR) is well-documented, scholars have only recently analysed systematically the positions of PRRPs with regard to socio-economic issues. In the 1990s, electorally successful PRRPs were considered to follow a “winning formula” consisting of an authoritarian and nationalistic appeal coupled with a neoliberal pro-market position on socio-economic issues (Betz 1994, Kitschelt and McGann 1995). The winning formula thesis has, however, attracted considerable criticism, and has been largely revised (Kitschelt 2007; McGann and Kitschelt 2005). The precise position of the PRR on socio-economic issues still remains debated (e.g. Afonso 2015; De Lange 2007; Hainsworth 2000). Some scholars in fact argue that socio-economic issues are of secondary importance to PRRPs, or that these parties consciously aim to ‘blur’ their economic policy positions (Mudde 2007; Rovny 2013).

More recently, however, an increasing body of research shows that West European PRRPs place considerable emphasis on socio-economic issues, in particular in the domain of economic redistribution and the welfare state. PRRPs are observed to converge around a ‘welfare chauvinist’ position whereby non-natives are excluded from, or only have limited access to, welfare provisions (see e.g. Andersen and Bjørklund 1990; De Koster et al. 2013; Ivaldi 2015; Lefkofridi and Michel 2017). Yet, welfare chauvinism can still be conceptualised more accurately. For one, it remains unclear whether welfare chauvinism denotes complete or only partial exclusion of migrants (Careja et al. 2016).

In addition to welfare chauvinism, the concept of “producerism” has recently been proposed to describe the PRR’s socio-economic agenda. Producerism has been associated with a generic opposition between makers and takers (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2019; Rathgeb 2020) or, implicitly, with the PRR’s core ideological tenet of authoritarianism (Ennser-Jedenastik 2016; 2018). Both approaches have their shortcomings. The first interpretation does not allow for a

clear analytical distinction between producerism, on the one hand, and chauvinism and populism, on the other. The second approach overstretches the notion of authoritarianism, and is not suitable for capturing principles that inform welfare deservingness beyond identity.

Finally, PRRPs' positions on different dimensions of the welfare state remain unclear. Notwithstanding a few exceptions (Ennser-Jedenastik 2016), comparative studies on the radical right often fail to discriminate between various welfare policy areas (e.g. pension, healthcare and unemployment benefits) and to take into account the multi-dimensionality of conflicts over the welfare state. These conflicts relate to questions concerning three main dimensions: 1) its size, scope and goals; 2) its design and deservingness principles; 3) its implementation and outcomes. Above all, the main limitation of current studies on the PRR's welfare agenda is that they do not sufficiently integrate relevant insights from the abundant sociological literature on the welfare state and welfare deservingness.

In our contribution, we study the PRR welfare agenda in two innovative ways. First, building on welfare deservingness literature (notably Roosma et al. 2013; Van Oorschot 2006), we propose an analytical framework that considers the multidimensionality of welfare arrangements and bridges the gap between the political science literature on the PRR and sociological approaches to the welfare state. The framework is grounded in a wider empirical and theoretical body of scholarship on the legitimacy of welfare arrangements. Consequently, it is not only useful for our study on the PRR; scholars can apply it to analyse the welfare positions of any other political actors.

Second, we apply this framework to four PRRPs through a longitudinal and cross-country comparison that dissects the specific positions of these parties on different aspects and policy

areas of the welfare state. This empirical contribution focuses on the contents rather than on the determinants or consequences of PRRPs' welfare agendas: on *how* the PRR has formulated its stance on welfare, rather than *why*. The paper therefore provides a more precise understanding of PRRPs' positions regarding the welfare state and distributive deservingness, with a view to identifying the frames that inform the PRR's welfare agenda.

In the final part of the paper, we show how these welfare positions are ideologically connected to each other, and conceptualise the welfare agenda of the PRR through an interpretive framework that links the welfare positions of the parties analysed by means of the three ideological frames of welfare chauvinism, welfare producerism and welfare populism. We thus reinterpret the PRR's welfare agenda with reference to relevant literature on welfare deservingness and the multidimensionality of the welfare state. We redefine welfare producerism as an ideological frame advocating redistributive social closure on the basis of the deservingness criteria of control, attitude and reciprocity, rather than being based on authoritarianism or populist conceptions of the producing people. We also show how chauvinism and producerism are often combined through a "culturalisation of producerism" whereby non-natives are considered as "culturally" inclined to cheat the system and being unproductive.<sup>1</sup>

The remainder of this article is organised as follows. The following section reviews the existing literature on the socio-economic agenda of the PRR. We then discuss relevant sociological contributions on welfare deservingness and the multidimensionality of welfare. We also introduce our analytical and interpretive frameworks. The subsequent two sections outline our case selection and methodology and present the results of our analysis. We conclude by

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<sup>1</sup> For a similar approach see Abts and Kochuyt 2013: 242-245; Dalle Mulle 2018: 149.

discussing more in detail the three frames mentioned above.

### **Current Research on the Welfare State and PRRPs**

Studies of the PRR's economic agenda often conclude that these parties tend to have blurry (Rovny and Polk 2020) or inconsistent (Otjes et al. 2018) programmes on this matter. Yet in terms of welfare politics, most studies find that the PRR in Western Europe converges on a "welfare chauvinist" position (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990; Ennser-Jedenastik 2018). Accordingly, PRRPs argue for a particularistic form of redistribution by excluding non-natives from welfare provisions. In line with this, other studies argue that PRRPs have broadened their focus beyond cultural issues, placing more emphasis on welfare issues in an attempt to attract economically left-leaning voters (Bale et al. 2010; Lefkofridi and Michel 2017). In fact, the more PRRPs engage with policy positions on the welfare state, the more their preferences are found to be left-wing (Afonso and Rennwald 2018). This programmatic change of PRRPs is interpreted as a strategic adaptation to the preferences amongst their growing working-class constituency (Michel 2019; Mosimann et al. 2019; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018; Rathgeb 2020; Röth et al. 2018). Another strand of research on the PRR's welfare state agenda focuses on its political and policy consequences. PRRPs participating in governing coalitions, for instance, were found to favour the restructuring of the welfare state and welfare retrenchment (Afonso 2015; Keskinen et al. 2016) or to mitigate welfare retrenchment for the core workforce (Rathgeb 2020).

A number of studies have concentrated on the more specific contents of the PRR welfare agenda. On the basis of his "group-based" approach, Ennser-Jedenastik (2016; 2018) argues that the radical right's social policy positions stem from its core ideological traits of nativism, authoritarianism and populism (see also Otjes et al. 2018). Combined with the literature on

principles of social justice, this framework takes a first step towards linking the PRR and welfare state literature, and allows for predicting what kind of social policy instruments the PRR prioritises (see also Fenger 2018). Similarly, borrowing from studies of early 20<sup>th</sup> century American populism, other scholars emphasise the significance of producerist frames in economic populism. They refer to the idea of hardworking producers (the “makers”), who have contributed to the nation’s wealth, being threatened by undeserving parasites (the “takers”) both at the top and bottom of society (Abts and Kochuyt 2013; Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2019; Rathgeb 2020).

Although these studies have certainly contributed to a more precise appraisal of the PRR welfare agenda, three shortcomings still mark them. First, they fail to consider the multidimensionality of the welfare state, which is not limited to social justice principles and the analysis of different social policy areas, but also involves questions concerning responsibility for welfare, the range and scope of welfare arrangements, and the effectiveness, efficiency and (un)intended consequences of the redistribution process. Second, they fail to build on the extensive sociological literature on welfare deservingness, which is related to the normative question of “who should get what and why” (Van Oorschot 2006). This leaves room for a more accurate and comprehensive assessment of the PRR’s welfare agenda and its underlying redistributive principles. Third, none of the above accounts provides a satisfactory operationalisation of “producerism”. Ennser-Jedenastik refers to authoritarianism as a principle that allows the PRR to discriminate between the deserving and the undeserving poor beyond ethnic identity. Yet his analysis indirectly refers to deservingness criteria such as control and reciprocity without incorporating them explicitly in his own framework. In other words, the literature is dominated by the imprecise assumption that the PRR’s socio-economic agenda is exclusively informed (or best described) by the three core tenets of the party family’s ideology.



While nativism and populism clearly inform the PRR's welfare agenda, we argue that the concept of authoritarianism is less suitable for capturing the positions of its members in this domain (Enns-Jedenastik 2016: 414).

In addition to this, Ivaldi and Mazzoleni (2019) and Rathgreb (2020) tend to conflate producerism with chauvinism and populism. This lack of a clear distinction is evident in the assertion that the makers-takers cleavage juxtaposes the community of producers with the unproductive forces both in vertical and horizontal terms. More precisely, the authors argue that producers are pitted against non-productive elites (vertical dimension), and unproductive classes such as immigrants and underserving poor (horizontal dimension) (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2019: 7; for a similar point see Rathgreb 2020: 6–10). While chauvinism, producerism and populism certainly blend in practice in PRR discourses, however, they can and should be kept analytically distinct because they refer to different welfare principles and dimensions.

Based on specific deservingness criteria and theoretical considerations pertaining to the multi-dimensionality of welfare arrangements, we distinguish the three following ideological frames: (1) Welfare chauvinism refers to the appeal to redistributive social closure on the basis of the deservingness criterion of identity; (2) welfare producerism concerns the appeal to redistributive social closure based on the deservingness criteria of control, attitude and reciprocity; and (3) welfare populism pertains to the attribution of blame to elites for the sub-optimal implementation of welfare arrangements. In our final section, we use the findings from our empirical analysis to argue that the combination of these three frames provides an *interpretive* framework that allows for a more precise understanding of the socio-economic agenda of the PRR. In the next section we first develop the *analytical* framework that forms

the basis for our empirical analysis of PRR parties, but which can also be applied to study the welfare agenda of any other political actors.

### **The Multidimensionality of Welfare Positions: an Analytical Framework**

The welfare state is broadly defined as a set of institutions “predominantly preoccupied with the production and distribution of social well-being” (Esping-Andersen 1990: 1). More precisely, welfare states are social arrangements in which individuals accept a certain degree of redistribution in order to rebalance inequalities created by market dynamics (Mau 2003: 1-2). In this way, welfare states act as powerful institutional stabilisers of social relations and redistributors of life chances, enabling a more equal distribution of opportunities and a socialisation of risk (Ferrera 2005: 14). Created within the framework of nation-states (Bommes 2012: 38-39; Brubaker 1989: 155-156), welfare states have acted as powerful nation-building tools, providing the legitimate community of recipients with unprecedented levels of security while simultaneously strengthening the legitimacy of the state (Esping-Andersen 2004: 27). This process occurred through a mechanism of social closure whereby internal bonding and inclusion required external bounding and exclusion (Bommes 2012: 39; Ferrera 2005: 2-4; Freeman 1986: 52-53).

The institutionalised solidarity of West-European welfare states is founded on a double social contract: the idea of a cohesive community sharing special ties of reciprocity among its members, but also between these members and the state. From a sociological perspective, the stratification of social ties makes the welfare state a multi-dimensional reality. Elaborating upon the theoretical framework developed by Roosma et al. (2013), we distinguish between three major dimensions of the welfare state: agency and scope; redistribution design; and implementation and outcome.

First, *agency and scope* refer to the following three questions: which institutions should take care of redistribution (states, markets, families, or private institutions); which types of welfare state instruments should be privileged (social services, social benefits or active labour market policies); and how much the welfare state should redistribute (usually measured as the range and degree of welfare spending).

Second, *redistribution design* addresses the issues of who should get what, and who should pay for it. It thus captures the social contract of mutual support among citizens implicit in welfare arrangements. It is informed by ideas of solidarity, equality and justice, but also of trust and fairness. In this sense, redistribution, meant as a fair distribution of benefits and burdens, has become a well-entrenched norm (Mau 2003: 88-184). For our analysis, we rely on the literature on welfare deservingness, which identifies the criteria for legitimate public support of specific categories of welfare recipients (Coughlin 1980; De Swaan 1988; Will 1993). In particular, Van Oorschot (2000, 2006) distinguishes five criteria of deservingness (often referred to with the acronym CARIN): (1) Control – people who are personally responsible for their state of neediness are considered as less deserving; (2) Attitude – gratefulness and good morals increase the degree of deservingness; (3) Reciprocity – those who have contributed and who have done something in return for support are seen as more deserving; (4) Identity – people who belong to “our” socially defined in-group are more deserving; and (5) Need – people are more deserving if they are in greater need of help (see also Van Oorschot et al. 2017).

Third, the *implementation and outcome* dimension pertains to the efficiency and effectiveness of welfare arrangements. It relates to the second implicit social contract underlying welfare arrangements: the existence of a pact of loyalty and service provision between the citizens and

the state, where the legitimacy of the latter is conditional on the appropriate delivery of welfare services (Bommes 2012: 39). Implementation concerns the cost-effectiveness and quality of service delivery. It also pertains to the question of whether welfare ends up with those who genuinely need it, or whether there are situations of abuse/underuse. The “outcome” facet thus touches upon the attainment of the welfare state’s goals. Do existing arrangements provide more equality and security, or is the current functioning of the welfare state characterised by unintended and unwanted economic and moral consequences?

[Table 1 about here]

Based on this analytical framework, we investigate what kind of welfare state PRRPs prefer by investigating their positions on the multidimensional conflict about the welfare state. Three research questions guide our empirical investigation: (1) are PRRPs in favour of welfare state retrenchment, maintenance, or expansion?; (2) which deservingness criteria do they prioritise in their discourses about welfare?; and (3) who do PRRPs hold responsible for the current (suboptimal) functioning of the welfare state?

### **Case Selection and Methodology**

We analyse PRRPs’ welfare discourse in four West European countries. We exclude post-communist Central and East European countries from the analysis. The development of welfare state arrangements has clearly followed an idiosyncratic historical path in this part of Europe, and PRR parties in these countries have also been characterised by distinctive socio-economic agendas in comparison with their West European counterparts (Pirro 2015). We instead select four West European countries where the PRR has had a strong and uninterrupted presence in recent decades: Belgium, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. Our selected cases include the

Belgian *Vlaams Blok/Belang* (VB), the French *Front National* (FN), the Italian *Lega Nord* (LN), and the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV). This selection of PRR cases is not exhaustive, but it complements Ennser-Jedenastik's (2016; 2018) previous studies including PRRPs in Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, UK and the Netherlands.

These cases display notable and relevant variations on several relevant aspects. They encompass the different types of welfare regimes: two continental (Belgium and France), one Mediterranean (Italy) and one hybrid welfare system (the Netherlands).<sup>2</sup> This diversity allows to control for the potential impact of welfare regimes on PRRPs' agendas. In addition, we sought variation in terms of the parties' coalition potential and governing experience, since incumbency status and party strategy (in terms of seeking policy, office or votes) may influence PRRPs' policies. Among these cases, two PRRPs have been consistently in opposition (VB and FN), one has experience as support party for a minority coalition (PVV) and one has governing experience (LN). The selected PRRPs also vary in terms of age, electoral strength, and the type of democracy in which they operate, ranging from majoritarian (France) to consensual (Belgium). All in all, if we find a common welfare agenda between our PRRPs, we can be reasonably confident that this agenda stems from their core ideology, and not from contextual, institutional and strategic conditions.

We perform a qualitative content analysis of PRR party documents, dating from the parties' electoral breakthrough onwards. Election manifestos constitute our primary empirical material, as they are generally accepted as a suitable source to determine party positions and ideology (e.g. Laver and Garry 2000). However, in order to reveal the logic underlying party ideology

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<sup>2</sup> The Netherlands was initially placed by Esping-Andersen in the social-democratic group. Later authors have considered it as belonging to the continental category, but some have also labelled it as liberal. Esping-Andersen himself referred to it as the 'Dutch enigma' (see Arts and Gelissen 2002).

by means of a fine-grained analysis, we consider it necessary to select further sources. Parties do not only, or even primarily, express their precise positions by means of official documents – for instance, the PVV’s official 2017 election manifesto comprised of a single page only. Relying on case-specific knowledge, we extend the selection of sources to include the relevant material for each party.

We included electronic newsletters of the Dutch PVV, which consist of excerpts from parliamentary debates and newspaper interviews. For the LN, we used its party newspapers (*La Padania* and the monthly magazines published before its founding) as a key source. We selected all issues prior to national elections, and this source was used as an alternative for party manifestos in 2006 and 2008, as LN only published joint manifestos with its centre-right electoral coalition partners. Since the LN stopped publishing its newspaper at the end of 2014, we did not include it in the analysis of material concerning the 2018 election. For the FN, the sources include all party documents distributed during the presidential campaigns of 1988, 1995, 2002, 2007, and 2012. These documents include both the official campaign material distributed to all voters (standardised four-page manifestos), as well as the complementary electoral/programmatic leaflets produced by the FN (which are usually more extensive documents). The case study of the VB relies on a variety of primary sources: party manifestos for all federal elections (1985-2019), issues of the monthly party publications *Vlaams Blok/Belang Magazine* (1985-2015), and thematic brochures articulating explicitly its socio-economic programme like *Sociaal-Economisch Programma* (2012, 158 pages) and *Sociale Volkspartij* (2013, 144 pages). Additionally, the analysis of the VB includes references to a book by party president Tom Van Grieken that help further clarifying the VB’s main positions. We coded all references to welfare state positions in the above documents, and thus used the complete set of references for our analysis. The full list of sources and references are available

in the online appendix.

We structured the coding of these sources along the three welfare dimensions summarised in Table 1. Concerning the “Agency and Scope” dimension, we considered party positions with regard to the question of “which institutions should take care of welfare and how (much) should they redistribute?”. This data thus concerns parties’ stances on their preferred welfare mix, what type of arrangements should be prioritised, and how much should be spent (notably, whether the welfare state should be expanded, retrenched or recalibrated). Concerning the “Redistribution Design” dimension, we coded all references pertaining to the deservingness question of “who should get what, and who should pay for it?”. The answers were structured around the CARIN criteria: control, attitude, reciprocity, identity and need (Van Oorschot et. al 2017). We also noted how the parties sought to finance the proposed measures. The last dimension, “Implementation and Outcomes”, examines the parties’ statements about the efficiency and effectiveness of welfare arrangements and the unintended negative consequences of the welfare state. As the documents are listed chronologically, the coding results allow for both a cross-case as well as a longitudinal comparative evaluation of policy positions (see the supplementary material in the online appendix).

The qualitative content analysis thus aims at identifying the core arguments made by each party. It starts out from a clear corpus of sources and identifies welfare dimensions along which party arguments can be structured and analysed. Our qualitative methodology is geared at the identification of the “chains of concepts” composing the arguments made by the selected parties. A salience-based quantitative approach would be insufficient to this end: ideology is not defined by the proportion of particular references, but rather by how claims and positions are connected to each other. It is our goal to observe and understand the discourse through

which the parties constitute their welfare positions. In our final section, we present the interpretive framework that can be seen as the key outcome of our approach. Accordingly, we define the specific welfare ideology of the PRR as the configuration of three interconnected discursive frames: welfare chauvinism, welfare producerism and welfare populism.

## **Findings<sup>3</sup>**

### ***Agency and Scope***

We have previously described the alleged transition of West European PRRPs towards “welfare chauvinist” positions. Three out of our four cases (FN, LN, and PVV) confirm this trend very clearly, despite temporal and case variance. All parties initially adopted at least some neoliberal positions, but later advocated for the expansion of the welfare state’s scope. In the period since the “Great Recession” in the late 2000s, furthermore, these PRRPs seem to have placed renewed emphasis on the welfare state.

In the 1980s, the FN pledged to cut back the “overreaching and impotent” state, arguing that welfare schemes of socialist governments had instilled a “right to idleness” (FN 1988b). Yet the party gradually moved to more expansive welfare policies while insisting on the concept of “national preference” as the core of its welfare programme since the 1980s (FN 1988a). In 2012, Marine Le Pen went so far as proposing to create a new branch of social security focused on old-age and dependency (FN 2012b). Similarly, the *Lega* proposed liberal economic policies in the early 1990s, calling for the reduction of taxes and public spending, a more efficient and leaner public administration, and the privatisation of a wide range of services (LN 1992; 1994; 1996). Such arguments did not disappear (see for instance LN 2008a; 2018; Mariani 2013), yet the LN toned down its liberalism in the 2000s (see Cota 2008; Iezzi 2013a; Mariani 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> All primary sources cited in this section are to be found in the list of primary sources in the online appendix.



Notably, in the context of the economic crisis, the LN proposed the expansion of specific welfare programmes regarding housing, family policy, old-age pensions, and healthcare (Baiocchi 2013; Ballarin 2013; Iezzi 2013b; Leoni 2008). Geert Wilders' PVV followed a similar trajectory, albeit over a much shorter span of time. From the party's birth in 2005 onwards, the party has favoured free-market capitalism and minimal state involvement, whilst lamenting the fact that many citizens were dependent on government subsidies and benefits (Wilders 2005). Some years later, however, the party repeatedly spoke of the welfare state as a "source of pride", which had painstakingly been built up, and required protection (PVV 2010a: 21). Despite its continued demand for lower taxes and a leaner state, the PVV thus became evidently less hostile to state intervention in the area of social security.

In comparison with the three other cases, the VB has expressed a more ambiguous welfare agenda, with a less linear evolution. In the 1980s the party objected to state intervention in regulative economic policies, but considered social security to be the full responsibility of the state, and explicitly opposed privatisation (VB 1982). The party combined a neo-liberal rhetoric with protectionist nationalism and community-bounded solidarity, integrated in so-called "solidarism" (Smout 1989; VB 1981). However, in the early 1990s, VB supported neoliberal policies demanding less state intervention, a reduction of the welfare state and more individual responsibility (VB 1993a, 1993b). Afterwards, when it presented itself as a "social people's party" in the late 1990s and 2000s (VB 2013), VB's positions became more in line with other PRRPs, as it defined social security explicitly as a core task of the government (VB 2012: 15).

With regard to the range of social areas covered by welfare provisions, all parties – albeit to different degrees – have emphasised old age and retirement. They defended generous state

pensions for people who contributed all their life – which typically excluded immigrants. Health has been another key area for PRRPs, which generally defended a system of state-funded healthcare (except for the LN in the 1990s, when it advocated partial privatisation). All parties called for a reduction of user charges. The VB, FN and LN, in addition, put family issues at the core of their social policies, promoting active state support for families. VB and FN even proposed a “maternal salary” for native stay-at-home mothers (FN 2002b; 2012b; VB 1995; 2003; 2007; 2014). In contrast, the PVV never placed great emphasis on the family as a (deserving) core unit in society.

Unemployment benefits, on the other hand, were seen with much more scepticism. The FN and the LN placed little emphasis on active labour market policies in the first place. The FN (1995b) insisted on the need for better and more job training programmes only since 1995. The PVV shifted from a sceptical position in the mid-2000s, when it focused on the need to counter fraud and abuse by those unwilling to work (Wilders 2005: 3), to one marked by more generosity (PVV 2012a: 23). From the 1980s onwards, the VB has sternly stressed the duties of the unemployed and the need to control them (VB 2013: 83).

Overall, our analysis shows that the state has an important role in the welfare mix of the PRR. Whilst all parties have toned down neoliberal policies over time, the generally liberal policies of the 1990s have not given way to outright left-wing welfare policies. The parties have called for social justice and conditional welfare based on identity and reciprocity, not an egalitarian idea of universal equality of outcomes. PRRPs have supported a *recalibration* of the welfare state, rather than straightforward retrenchment or expansion.

### ***Redistribution Design***

In terms of redistribution design, our cases confirm that the welfare agenda of the PRR emphasises identity as a key criterion of deservingness, demanding to preserve and/or prioritize welfare for “our own kind of people”. Since “identity” pertains to the fundamental question of who belongs to the community of potential legitimate recipients, it logically precedes the application of the social justice principles of equality, equity, and need, that define the further conditionality of solidarity (see Deutsch 1975: 142; Opatow 1990: 1-4). Nevertheless, PRRP discourses focus also on reciprocity, control and attitude, arguing that only responsible and virtuous citizens who contribute are deserving welfare support.

The identity criterion can directly be related to the concept of welfare chauvinism, which lies at the heart of the PRR welfare ideology. Immigrants are typically perceived as a burden on the welfare state.<sup>4</sup> Referring to welfare magnetism and migrants’ disproportionate welfare (ab)use, the PVV and the VB even stressed the inherent incompatibility of immigration and welfare state preservation (PVV 2010a: 5; VB 2013: 21; VB 2019: 59-61). According to both parties, one key solution for the preservation of the welfare state would be to stop immigration (from Islamic countries), and both introduced the antagonistic choice between “*either* a welfare state *or* an immigration country” (PVV 2012a: 37; Van Grieken 2017).

The welfare chauvinism of all four parties has nevertheless ranged between full “welfare exclusion”, “welfare favouritism” and “welfare conditionality”. All four parties have more or less consistently proposed the total exclusion of migrants from social security for at least a certain period of time. In 1992, for instance, the LN suggested a separate social security system for immigrants, based on their own contributions (LN 1992). Likewise, in 2008, the LN

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<sup>4</sup> The LN and the VB are more complex cases because the identity criterion has not only referred to foreign migrants, but also to inhabitants of other regions of the parent state. However, the denial of solidarity with Southern Italy or Wallonia has rarely been based only on the criterion of identity, which has played a much more important role with regard to foreign, especially non-EU, migrants.

suggested that state pensions should be reserved for Italian citizens and not be extended to non-EU immigrants (Girardini 2008), while, in 2018, it proposed to reserve family allowances to Italian citizens with 20 years of residence in the country (LN 2018: 51-52). The VB has similarly proclaimed that social policies should always be “limited to our own people with a common cultural identity” (VB, 1999: 60; 2012: 16; 2013: 13). Similar to the LN, the VB has at some points in time proposed “ethnically-funded welfare systems”, resulting in the creation of a separate social security for immigrants, funded by their own contributions (VB 1991; 2019: 61). In France, the concept of “national preference” has been a hallmark of the FN since the late 1980s. In practice, this alluded to the full exclusion of immigrants from social security schemes, rather than a preference for national citizens (FN 1988a, 2002a, 2007b).

Precise positions have also shifted over time. The 2012 manifesto of the FN, for instance, marked a radical shift in welfare policies. Its exclusive concept of redistribution, “*préférence nationale*” was gradually replaced by “*priorité nationale*”. This shift was not systematic, yet it showed a marginal loosening of the FN’s welfare chauvinist conception from the eligibility criterion of “nativism” to “nationality”, and from preference, which entails exclusion, to priority. On certain occasions, the LN also steered clear of total exclusion of immigrants, asserting that immigrants’ access should be made proportional to the capacity of absorption of the Italian labour market (LN 1992; Cassani 2006; Manvuller 2013). More generally, the party argued that employment and social policy disbursements should be available to foreigners only after the needs of Italians were satisfied (Girardini 2008; Paragone 2006).

When PRRPs are willing to grant welfare entitlements to immigrants, it is typically conditional on period of residence, contributions and cultural assimilation. The VB, for instance, asserted to be a supporter of the “Danish model”, whereby rights were only granted to newcomers after

seven years of legal residence and at least three years of contribution (VB 2010: 24; 2013: 129; 2018). Similar provisions of exclusion were proposed in the realm of old-age pensions and healthcare (VB 2013: 130), as well as social housing and assistance (VB: 1999: 66; VB, 2013: 61; VB 2018). According to the PVV, immigrants should only be eligible for benefits if they had lived and worked in the Netherlands for at least ten years and mastered the Dutch language (PVV 2010a: 15). In 2012, furthermore, the party proposed to exclude Burqua-wearing women from welfare, presumably because of their lack of cultural integration (PVV 2012a: 37).

Some of the above examples indicate that the deservingness criterion of identity is often applied together with the principle of reciprocity: immigrants are deserving insofar as they have contributed. Usually, however, they are portrayed as “welfare scroungers”. In the Italian case, for instance, the defence of pensioners is often set against the pretended abuse of foreign migrants, who are therefore excluded on both principles: they do not belong to the community and have not contributed (Dussin 2008; Girardini 2008; LN 2001: 24). The VB, in a similar way, lamented the fact that needy pensioners fell through the social safety net, whilst newly arriving immigrants had easy access to social security and other social rights (VB 2013: 39; 2019: 59-61). Likewise, in a parliamentary debate, PVV leader Wilders proclaimed: “while elderly people do not get a cent of tax relief, illegal immigrants and asylum seekers are being pampered” (PVV 2015).

The examples above already suggest that the deservingness principle of reciprocity *per se* is pertinent in PRRPs’ defence of pensions. Native pensioners are typically described as citizens who ought to be rewarded for having worked hard all of their life. The PVV, for instance, justified its generous pension policy by characterising pensioners as people who built up the country (after the war) and who should therefore be treated with respect (PVV 2006c). Along

similar lines, in 2012 the FN proposed expanded coverage and a lower retirement age for pensioners, warranting such protection on the acknowledgment that they contributed most to the system (in addition to being genuinely in need) (FN 2012b). The LN took a similar position and proposed the reintroduction of an old-age pension for those with 40 years of contributions (LN 2018: 5).

The criteria of control and attitude also play a key role in the PRR's welfare agenda. These are expressed in the formulation of stricter rules for access to social benefits as well as a moralisation of undeserving welfare claimants. The LN, for instance, often accused both Southern Italians and migrants of being unwilling, rather than unable, to work. From the early 2000s onwards, claims about immigrants' supposed abuse of the system became more frequent (LN 2001: 24; 2008b). Similarly, the VB has accused both employable Walloons/francophone Belgians and immigrants of deliberately abusing Belgian social security. The party proposes a moralised conditional welfare system: only the 'worthy poor' falling victim to circumstances beyond their control, as well as those who conform to the social expectations in terms of merit and gratitude, should benefit from social support. In this regard, social security is a safety net for those in genuine need, not a social hammock for irresponsible free-riders (VB 2012: 76-78; 2013: 21-22 and 82; 2019: 59).

During its early years, the PVV also put great emphasis on the criteria of control and attitude. The party argued that citizens' dependence on the welfare state stimulated idleness and inactivity. Wilders proclaimed his willingness to stand up only for the "genuinely vulnerable": those who were ill or truly unable to work (Wilders, 2005: 5). This has changed more recently with the PVV leader proclaiming, in 2010, that "those who lose their jobs are entitled to welfare" (PVV 2012a: 23). The party's attitude towards the long-term unemployed has been

somewhat ambiguous, however. The PVV has continued to waver between presenting itself as a party for the underprivileged, on the one hand, and saviour of the hard-working middle-classes, on the other (see e.g. PVV 2012b).

The FN – for long – did not place great emphasis on the criteria of control and attitude: the party has generally defended welfare coverage for French nationals without additional individual conditions. However, in an extensive 2012 welfare programme, Marine Le Pen introduced strict measures to target “welfare scroungers”. For instance, the FN proposed to introduce a biometric social security pass in order to scrutinise and sanction beneficiaries more efficiently; and to exclude “cheaters” and usurpers from welfare rights (FN 2012b).

Finally, an important element of any redistributive design relates to the question of who bears the burden. PRR positions on taxation tend to follow a liberal approach of low business-friendly rates. The LN has consistently defended a reduction in both income and corporate tax, and recently demanded the introduction of a flat income rate at around 15% of yearly family income (LN 1996; 2008c; 2018: 3). Although the VB ultimately rejected the flat income tax already in 1996 after a heavy internal debate (Spruyt 2000: 166-171), it also consistently called for tax reduction (VB 2013: 79–81). The PVV has also consistently defended the lowering of taxation. While the FN has traditionally supported such policies, in its 2012 manifesto the party defended a higher income tax for the richest households, and a new rate of VAT for “luxury products”.

Given the support for, sometimes even generous, welfare policies recently shown by PRR parties, liberal supply-side measures might suggest a degree of inconsistency. To overcome this, all mentioned parties have often referred to the savings they would obtain from the exclusion of foreigners from social security, as well as more efficient governance. In the case

of the VB and LN, ending inter-territorial transfers to, respectively, Wallonia and Southern Italy has also been seen as a solution. The PVV, for its part, has proposed to stop spending money on expensive “left-wing hobbies” including the environment, development aid, and art subsidies (e.g. PVV 2012a; 2016). The party also – and to an increasing extent – portrayed the European Union as a wasteful and money-consuming project, and stressed the financial benefits of leaving the bloc. Along these lines, PRRPs can align their seemingly contradictory redistributive welfare agenda – entailing more welfare generosity for their own people – with their neoliberal regulatory economic policies focusing on lower taxation.

### ***Implementation Process and Outcomes***

Our analysis showed that PRRPs support welfare state recalibration instead of retrenchment. The parties nevertheless articulate a fundamental critique of the welfare state as an institution, and are very sceptical about the management of welfare arrangements by the state in terms of efficiency (i.e. cost-effectiveness) and effectiveness (i.e. legitimate redistribution). All PRRPs openly question the ability of the current welfare state to reduce poverty and to guarantee welfare for those in “real need”. Both the LN and the VB, for instance, have complained that immigrants often unjustifiably and disproportionally receive welfare benefits, that welfare system abuse is rife, and that service delivery is not cost-effective (LN 1992; 2001: 24; 2008b; VB 2013: 41, 62, 102). The PVV has identified multiple welfare state deficiencies as well, including fraud and welfare abuse, waiting lists for hospitals, and the disproportional amount of (Muslim) immigrants on benefits (PVV 2012a). From the 1980s, the FN has similarly denounced the “mismanagement” of the welfare state (FN 1988a).

One other recurring element of PRRPs’ welfare criticism is the claim that the welfare state has unintended economic and moral consequences. The VB, for instance, has consistently warned



against the increased burden of taxation. According to the party, high taxes weaken the competitiveness of firms and create a dependency culture generating an immoral “class of profiteers” (VB 2013: 12 and 71–84). The LN and the PVV similarly argued against overly extensive welfare arrangements in their more economically liberal periods. The PVV declared that “the extensive welfare state [led to] the destruction of our cultural and moral capital” (PVV 2006a). Welfare state regulations were alleged to hamper a healthy business climate (PVV 2006b), and the party blamed the government for the fact that “[m]illions of people sit at home on benefits” (PVV 2006c). Yet, as discussed previously, in later years the party described the welfare state in a more favourable light. The LN argued that extensive social support would naturally generate welfare-dependency (LN 1992; Stefani 1996). Since the late 1990s, however, the party has focused more on accusations of inefficiency and abuse by specific categories of recipients (mostly by Southerners and immigrants) rather than on the unintended consequences of welfare (Baiocchi 2008; LN 2001: 24; Neri 2013). In contrast, and perhaps due to intra-party disagreements, the FN did not engage directly with the unintended consequences of the welfare state in its official party documents, except for arguing that welfare benefits constituted a strong incentive for migrants to come to France (FN 2012b).

Who, according to the parties, is to blame for the shortcomings of the welfare state? The usual suspects are the undeserving welfare scroungers (not least immigrants) who abuse the system, and the political elites, who are accused of failing to act against abuse and overuse. The FN, for instance, considered immigration as the cause of high unemployment and financial burden for the welfare state (FN 1988a; 1995a; 2012b). While the LN similarly portrayed immigrants as undeserving, it sometimes portrayed them (and Southerners) as victims of the clientelistic strategies of “the Left”, which was accused of making them dependent on welfare for electoral purposes (LN 1994: 19-24; 2001: 3-4 and 24; LN 2013b). The party has also attacked

bureaucracy and the state for their hypertrophic, inefficient and unaccountable nature.

Criticism of political opponents and the state was also central to other PRRPs' blame attribution. The PVV repeatedly blamed the government of the day, and the Dutch political elites more generally, for making wrong choices or not having their priorities straight: money was spent on the EU (not least to prop up corrupt Greece), asylum seekers and other supposedly senseless causes, whilst deserving natives were left in the cold (e.g. PVV 2016). Similarly, the VB has criticised Wallonia and the francophone political class, notably the Socialist Party, which supposedly exploited the hard work of the Flemish people. In addition, trade unions were deemed responsible for "Belgian immobilism" and blind to the fact that workers and employers have more shared than conflicting interests (VB 2003: 34; 2013: 29–30; 2019: 62). In general, the hostility towards organised interests is rooted in a widespread populist critique of neo-corporatism. The FN has consistently blamed incumbent parties for inefficient management of welfare programmes. It placed responsibility on both the right and the left, whose policies were deemed indistinguishable (FN 1995c; 2012a). The FN's blame attribution to mainstream political parties of welfare state mismanagement has generally been framed in terms of a radical and urgent mission: irrespective of its (in)efficiency, the welfare state's actual survival is at stake (FN 2007a).

### **Discussion and Conclusion: Interpreting the PRR's Welfare Agenda**

Having analysed the positions and discourses of our four selected PRRPs, it became clear that these parties are not in favour of minimal social redistribution or the dismantling of the welfare state. They instead promoted a *recalibration* where the access to, and the design of, welfare benefits and services is not universal and egalitarian, but highly selective and conditional. This conditionality and selectivity is informed by the parties' positions concerning questions of

“redistribution design” and “implementation and outcome”. Moving away from both a universal leftist and neoliberal rightist framing of the welfare state, we argue that this welfare conditionality can be best understood as an articulation around three ideological frames: welfare chauvinism, welfare producerism and welfare populism.

First of all, PRRPs employ a “welfare chauvinist” frame advocating redistributive social closure on the basis of the deservingness criterion of identity. This observation is in line with the literature, but it becomes clear that PRRPs utilise different degrees of exclusions. Whilst welfare chauvinism sometimes implies an unconditional exclusion of immigrants, it more often assumes a temporal ban until some residence, contributory or cultural integration requirements are fulfilled. A related issue that it is often overlooked in the literature concerns the precise identity of the deserving community. As our cases demonstrated, it is sometimes unclear whether these parties refer to national citizenship, ethnicity, or residence as the identity criterion for accessing social benefits and services. Although it is rarely spelled out openly, PRRPs mostly seek to exclude non-EU immigrants – irrespective of occasional references to, for instance, “welfare tourism” within the EU. The VB and the LN are special cases in this respect: both share a regionalist agenda, and have also resorted to the criterion of identity to exclude fellow citizens speaking a different language or inhabiting specific regions.

Although identity is a crucial PRR criterion of deservingness, other criteria play an important role as well, notably: control, attitude and reciprocity. Building on Abts and Kochuyt (2013; 2014), we describe the articulation of these criteria by the PRR as “welfare producerism”. These criteria refer to moral principles of equity and fairness, and relate to a judgement about the behaviour of welfare recipients. On the one hand, they reflect a concern for equity, whereby people who contributed more to the system should be advantaged. This is clear when looking

at pensions. Our four PRRPs have all defended the rights of pensioners (who arguably contributed their entire life to the welfare system), pitting them against those categories of individuals who did not contribute enough. Hence, the exclusion of immigrants from welfare support is based not only on their identity, but also on their supposed lack of contributions to the system. From this perspective, giving immediate welfare access to immigrants would constitute an injustice to natives with long histories of contributions. Yet also natives are not automatically entitled to support: the criteria of control and attitude are also relevant in the PRR's conception of deservingness. All of our four cases have been unenthusiastic about unemployment benefits for most of their life cycle, and have tended to emphasise the potential for abuse and unintended consequences of social support schemes.

Welfare producerism entails a moralisation of social citizenship, since people should earn their share of welfare provisions by being “active, responsible, productive and grateful citizens” (Schinkel 2010; see also Bowles and Gintis 2000). Yet this does not necessarily justify defining producerism with reference to authoritarianism. In fact, many other party families in Europe also base their welfare positions on similar producerist principles (see Dingeldey 2007; Eichhorst et al. 2008). What distinguishes the PRR from other party families is the combination of producerism and chauvinism (as well as populism). While producerism and chauvinism are two analytically distinct frames, they are often combined in PRR discourses through a “culturalisation of producerism” (Abts and Kochuyt 2017; Kochuyt and Abts 2017). Following this logic, (ethnic) outsiders are portrayed as “naturally” inclined to cheat the system and to be less productive.

The two frames of welfare chauvinism and producerism concern the horizontal social contract between contributors and producers (as well as the issue of welfare deservingness). Conversely,

“welfare populism” relates to the vertical social contract between citizens and the state (as well as the agency and scope of the welfare state). Welfare populism is thus orthogonal and complementary to chauvinism and producerism. This third frame addresses the question of who is to blame for the sub-optimal functioning of welfare. The parties in our study clearly denounce the concrete malfunctioning of the welfare state, and they accuse elites of failing to use the community’s resources for the people. The welfare state-as-institution is not only criticised for being inefficient, but also for prioritising the wrong types of recipients (not least immigrants), sometimes for political elites’ own (electoral) gain. Elites are criticised for defending a welfare state that fails to serve the interest of the deserving common man. PRRPs thus construct a vertical antagonism between “the establishment” and “the people”, which is constitutive of their welfare-populist thinking.

Through the combination of chauvinism, producerism and populism, PRRPs formulate an apparently “egalitarian”, but in fact selective critique of the welfare state. They do this by blaming the establishment – including both parties and organised interests such as trade unions – for the alleged fact that welfare arrangements fail to adequately protect the real deserving poor, i.e. the (native) common people in genuine need. In this sense, PRRPs do not only propose to restrict or prioritise welfare access to “our own people”; they also criticise the arrangement of social redistribution and the management of the welfare state. Neither are deemed to serve the interests of the deserving “common man”. Furthermore, the combination of these three frames allows for defending welfare arrangements in principle, and even to argue in favour of their expansion in some areas like old age care and pensions. At the same time, it allows them to criticise the concrete functioning of the welfare state. PRRPs can therefore attract discontented voters from the socio-economic “left” and “right” alike, and move beyond the traditional class cleavage (Abts and Kochuyt 2013; Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Oesch

and Rennwald 2018).

Our paper shows that the PRR welfare agenda goes beyond welfare chauvinism and that “authoritarianism”, as one of the three core tenets of the PRR, is not the most appropriate concept to describe the party family’s social policies (cf. Ennser-Jedenastik 2016; 2018; Otjes et al. 2018). Although identity remains the cornerstone of PRRPs’ social policy proposals, it is fundamentally complemented by principles addressing welfare recipients’ behaviour, as well as by a populist criticism of the welfare state. Furthermore, we show that PRRPs have engaged with the welfare state as a multi-dimensional institution. We reflected on each of the three dimensions in which it can be analytically divided: agency and scope (by means of arguments in favour of recalibration); deservingness (through chauvinism and producerism); and implementation and outcome (via populism).

Whilst we expect that our interpretive framework holds for PRRPs across context, future studies should test its generalisability. At the same time, our analysis and conceptualisation also leave some questions unanswered. How do different welfare systems moderate the emphasis of specific parties on particular policy areas and deservingness criteria? Is the multi-dimensional approach also applicable to the realm of regulative economic policies? And, if so, what is the relationship between these policies and the PRR’s welfare agenda? Although, for reasons of scope, we have not addressed these questions in this paper, we strongly believe that our analytical framework and ensuing conceptualisation of the PRR’s welfare agenda can help contribute to answering these issues.

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### **Data Availability Statement**

The data that supports the findings of this study are available in the supplementary material of this article.

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*For all references to primary sources cited in the empirical part of the text, please refer to the list in the online appendix.*

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**Table 1: The Multi-Dimensionality of Welfare**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Sub-dimensions</b>
Agency and scope	Who should take care of welfare and how much should be redistributed?	Welfare mix Range Degree
Redistribution design	Who should get what? Who should pay for it?	Deservingness Burden
Implementation and outcomes	Are welfare arrangements delivered efficiently and effectively? Do they reach their goal?	Efficiency and effectiveness (Un)intended Outcomes