

Preferences, vote choice, and the politics of social investment: Addressing the puzzle of unequal benefits of childcare provision

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Excerpt from Abstract

Research on the politics of social investment finds public opinion to be highly supportive of expansive reforms and expects this support to matter for the politics of expanding social investment. Expanding social investment, it is argued, should be particularly attractive to left-wing voters and parties because of the egalitarian potential of such policies. However, few studies have examined to what extent individual preferences concerning social investment really matter politically. In this paper, I address this research gap for the crucial policy field of childcare by examining how individual-level preferences for expanding childcare provision translate into voting behavior. Based on original survey data from eight European countries, I find that preferences to expand public childcare spending indeed translate into electoral support for the left. However, this link from preferences to votes turns out to be socially biased. Childcare preferences are much more decisive for voting the further up individuals are in the income distribution. This imperfect transmission from preferences to voting behavior implies that political parties could have incentives to target the benefits of childcare reforms to their more affluent voters. My findings help to explain why governments frequently fail to reduce social inequality of access to seemingly egalitarian childcare provision.

Region: Europe [4]

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