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Political Leanings and Redistribution Preferences: Analyzing Social Protection Programs in Poland Using Conjoint Survey Experiment

Poglądy polityczne a preferencje redystrybucyjne: Analiza preferencji programów ochrony społecznej w Polsce za pomocą eksperymentu conjoint

Abstract

The nexus between social program preferences and political ideologies has emerged as a pivotal area in contemporary welfare reform and social policy discourse. This study uses a conjoint survey experiment on Poland's most extensive children's allowance social protection program in order to examine the extent to which political leaning affects spending adequacy, spending efficiency, and fiscal sustainability preferences. It shows that in Poland conservative voters favor higher social spending adequacy, while progressive voters prefer more efficient and fiscally sustainable social spending, and that progressive voters are against national discrimination in social benefits, while conservative voters are indifferent to it. This paper provides valuable insights into Polish preferences for social protection programs and illustrates how political ideologies are associated with public support for welfare policies.

Keywords: Social Protection, Policy Preferences, Redistribution, Conjoint Experiment.

JEL: C92, H23, H55, I38

Streszczenie

Związek między preferencjami dot. programów społecznych a ideologiami politycznymi stał się kluczowym obszarem we współczesnej debacie na temat reformy opieki społecznej i polityki społecznej. Przy użyciu eksperymentu conjoint dotyczącego najszerzego w Polsce programu ochrony socjalnej w zakresie zasiłków na dzieci, badamy, w jakim stopniu preferencje dotyczące adekwatności i efektywności programy i stabilności fiskalnej różnią się w zależności od poglądów politycznych. Na podstawie wyników stwierdzamy, że w Polsce konserwatywni wyborcy opowiadają się za wyższą adekwatnością wydatków socjalnych, podczas gdy postępowi wyborcy wolą bardziej wydajne i zrównoważone fiskalnie wydatki socjalne. Postępowi wyborcy sprzeciwiają się krajowej dyskryminacji w zakresie świadczeń socjalnych, podczas gdy konserwatywni wyborcy są obojętni na krajową dyskryminację. Artykuł dostarcza cennych spostrzeżeń na temat polskich preferencji dotyczących programów ochrony socjalnej i ilustruje, w jaki sposób ideologie polityczne są powiązane z poparciem społecznym dla polityki socjalnej.

Słowa kluczowe: ochrona społeczna, preferencje polityczne, redystrybucja, eksperyment conjoint.

JEL: C92, H23, H55, I38



“No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable”.

— Adam Smith (1827), *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*

1. Introduction

Social spending is vital to a country’s overall economic performance and stability. Adequate social spending on education and healthcare enhances human capital by improving the work- force’s skills and health, which in turn increases productivity and promotes sustainable economic growth. Well-designed social spending can improve labor market outcomes by encouraging workforce participation and reducing structural unemployment. Conversely, inefficient spending can create labor market distortions. Social spending helps reduce poverty and income inequality by providing social safety nets and welfare programs. Lower poverty and income inequality promote social cohesion and reduce the risk of social unrest, which can destabilize the economy. Social spending programs like unemployment benefits act as automatic stabilizers during economic downturns. They help maintain consumer demand by supporting incomes, thereby mitigating the depth of recessions. Efficient and sustainable social spending ensures that government resources are used effectively without incurring excessive debt. Unsustainable social spending can result in large fiscal deficits and debt accumulation, thereby undermining economic stability. Because social spending impacts key macroeconomic variables, such as growth, employment, inflation, and fiscal balance, it is paramount for policymakers to manage it effectively.

The nexus between social program preferences and political ideologies has emerged as a pivotal area in contemporary welfare reform and social policy discourse, not least in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). As nations grapple with economic inequality, demographic shifts, and fiscal constraints, the political feasibility of various social protection mechanisms, including universal basic income (UBI), labor market policies, and comprehensive welfare reforms, has become a subject of intense debate.

In his seminal work, van Oorschot (2000) introduces a theoretical framework to explain public perceptions of deservingness in social welfare support by identifying five key criteria, forming the basis of the CARIN model¹. The model elucidates variations in public support for different welfare target groups and aids policymak-

¹ CARIN is an acronym for Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity, and Need. ‘Control’ assesses whether individuals are responsible for their neediness, with those facing circumstances beyond their control deemed more deserving. ‘Attitude’ examines the demeanor of those in need, where positive attitudes like gratitude and a willingness to improve one’s situation enhance perceived deservingness. ‘Reciprocity’ considers past or potential future contributions to society, favoring individuals who have previously participated positively in the community. ‘Identity’ evaluates the social and cultural proximity between people in need and the broader society, with those perceived as part of the in-group being viewed as more deserving. Lastly, ‘Need’ measures the hardship experienced, assigning greater deservingness to those with more urgent and severe needs.

ers and social researchers in designing welfare policies that are both effective and publicly endorsed. Further, van Oorschot (2006) examines cross-national differences in perceptions of welfare deservingness across Europe and van Oorschot and Roosma (2017) analyze how different targeting mechanisms affect the perceived legitimacy of welfare benefits.

Recent empirical studies have employed conjoint experiments to unravel the complexities of public support for social policies. They shed light on the multifaceted nature of policy preferences and the intricate interplay between self-interest, ideological leanings, and perceptions of fairness and deservingness. Rincon (2023) delves into the politics of universal basic income (UBI), revealing that while its universality tends to generate opposition, its unconditionality is not as controversial. The study highlights the potential for increased support through progressive funding and citizenship-based eligibility criteria, underscoring the nuanced considerations that shape public attitudes towards UBI. Gallego and Marx (2017) extend the analysis to examine labor policies, and find that public support is not monolithic but varies significantly across different policy dimensions, with generosity and financing mechanisms particularly influential. They also illustrate the role of ideology in prioritizing policy attributes, challenging the assumption of a direct link between economic self-interest and policy preferences.

Hausermann, Kurer, and Traber (2019) address the trade-offs of welfare state reform in austerity contexts, emphasizing the importance of compensatory measures in mitigating opposition to benefit cutbacks. This research provides empirical evidence on how carefully crafted trade-offs can facilitate the acceptance of restrictive welfare reforms. It highlights the agency of policymakers in navigating the political landscape of social policy reform.

Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont (2020) examine public approval of basic income schemes in Finland and Switzerland and find variations in support levels for scheme design between the two countries. This study points to the significance of contextual factors and the specifics of policy design in shaping public support for radical welfare state reforms.

Lastly, Attewell (2022) explores the impact of the educational divide on redistributive politics, and presents a nuanced analysis that contrasts traditional political economy models that view education as a marker of social status. The findings suggest that education influences attitudes toward welfare state expansion and perceptions of beneficiary deservingness, thereby contributing to the educational divide in electoral politics and shaping support for different political parties.

These studies offer valuable insights into the public preferences for social programs and their political implications. They highlight the complexity of public attitudes towards social protection mechanisms, suggesting that policy design, funding mechanisms, ideological orientations, and perceived fairness play critical roles in shaping support for welfare policies. Whereas the studies cited above focus on whether welfare benefits are perceived as socially appropriate and fair, the present study examines preferences for welfare benefits from a macro-critical perspective.

Institutional Context in Poland

Poland is a bicameral parliamentary democracy. Parliamentary elections for both houses (with all seats contested) are held every four years or when the government is dissolved. Since 2005, political power in the legislative and executive branches has been alternating between conservative coalitions led by Law & Justice (PiS) and center-progressive coalitions led by the Civic Platform (PO): PiS ruled from 2005 to 2007 and from mid-2015 to end-2023; PO has ruled from 2007 to mid-2015 and from end-2023 until today. The “500 Plus” program is the most extensive cash transfer allowance in Poland. It was introduced by PiS in 2015 and pays PLN 500 (approx. USD 125 or EUR 115) per month per child under the age of 18. Firstborn children were excluded until November 2019. Previous studies have established that the 500 Plus program has increased electoral support for the PiS party (Gromadzki, Sałach, and Brzeziński 2024). Significantly, the program also reduced poverty among children and has the potential to mitigate general poverty in the long run (Brzeziński and Najsztub 2017). As for its primary stated objective—increasing the birth rate—the program could have been more successful (Bartnicki and Alimowski 2022). Lastly, the program was shown to have a negative medium-term impact on household labor supply, especially among households of low socioeconomic status (Gromadzki 2024).

Based on direct surveys, CBOS (2021) finds that the 500 Plus program has improved the financial stability of families, especially those on lower incomes, had a significant positive impact on the lives of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, enjoys widespread support, primarily among conservative demographics, and is viewed as a likely enduring component of Polish family support policy. The survey approach allowed CBOS to gather insights on the public’s *backward-looking* perception of the program’s impact on family welfare, as well as its social and economic effects across diverse demographics, but it did not elicit any desired *forward-looking* social program attributes. Nor did it examine whether, and if so how and to what extent, these attributes vary with political leaning.

The present paper adds to previous studies on the 500 Plus program in two ways. First, it utilizes a conjoint survey experiment to elicit those attributes of the 500 Plus program deemed most favorable by the public in terms of their macro-critical dimensions. Second, it shows the heterogeneity of the results when broken down by political partisanship, i.e., by support for the then-incumbent conservative (Law and Justice, PiS) presidential candidate versus support for the center-progressive (Civic Platform, PO) candidate. In broad terms, Poland’s political landscape resembles that of other large Western countries (e.g., France, Italy, Netherlands, and Denmark), and other CEE countries (e.g., Czechia and Slovakia) in that it is dominated by a conservative populist coalition and a progressive pro-European coalition. The results obtained therefore have implications beyond Poland.

2. Methodology

There is an evident but elusive interplay between ideology—understood as a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy— and redistribution preferences. On the one hand, ideology affects perceptions and works as a filter lens that narrows the set of attributes used to rank these preferences. On the other hand, redistribution preferences may augment and reinforce ideology if they induce people to vote for political parties whose platforms are most closely aligned to those preferences. While the prevailing causal directionality remains difficult to model and quantify, the present paper sheds some light on the association between political leaning and redistribution preferences through a novel conjoint experiment.

Conjoint experiments have become a standard method for capturing stated preferences in multidimensional choice situations. They are applied across various topics, from climate change policies and immigration to democratic institutions. For instance, when purchasing products like a washing machine, individuals typically evaluate their options based on multiple factors—such as price, appearance, reliability, noise level, and warranty. They assign varying levels of importance to these attributes and are willing to compromise on certain features in favor of others.

Multidimensional choices extend beyond consumer behavior to include politics and public policy. Consider the voting process, where individuals decide between Party X and Party Y or Candidate A and Candidate B. Similar to how consumers evaluate goods and services, political and policy decisions are influenced by multiple factors. Voters form their preferences not only based on rational socio-economic attributes but also on personal tastes and behavioral biases. Recently, conjoint experiments have become a prominent analytical tool for capturing these complex, multidimensional public policy preferences.

In the social sciences, conjoint experiments became prominent in the mid-2010s, following the establishment of their methodological foundations and estimation procedures by Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto (2014). Figure 1 illustrates the increasing trend in scholarly articles utilizing conjoint experiments over time. Before their rise in popularity, factorial vignette experiments were the preferred method for assessing the causal impact of various attributes on stated preferences concerning political candidates, parties, and public policies, among others. Due to their specific design features, conjoint experiments offer several advantages over traditional factorial vignette experiments².

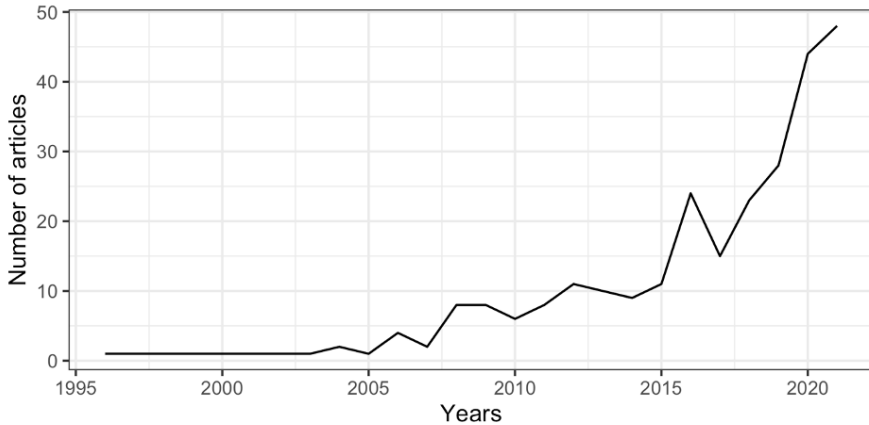
First, conjoint experiments can potentially reduce social desirability bias and “satisficing”. This enhances their external validity (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015 and Horiuchi, Markovich, and Yamamoto 2022). Second, when presented in their traditional tabular format, these experiments more effectively manage ordering effects. Third, they enable the collection of substantially more data from respondents. Given these advantages and the increasing popularity of survey methodologies, conjoint experiments have found wide applications in social

² For a practical implementation of the conjoint experiment methodology, see Kantorowicz (2022).

sciences to measure multidimensional preferences towards political candidates (e.g., Franchino and Zucchini 2015 and Graham and Svulik 2020), immigrants (e.g., Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015), social policies (e.g., Gallego and Marx 2017), climate policies (e.g., Gampfer, Bernauer, and Kachi 2014, Bechtel, Genovese, and Scheve 2019, Beiser-McGrath and Bernauer 2019, and Kantorowicz, Collewet, DiGiuseppe, and Vrijburg 2024), economic policies (e.g., Bechtel, Hainmueller, and Margalit 2017 and Bansak, Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2021), foreign policies (e.g., Doherty, Bryan, Hanania, and Pajor 2020 and Escribà-Folch, Muradova, and Rodon 2021), democratic innovations and principles (e.g., Strebel, Kübler, and Marcinkowski 2019, Christensen 2020, van der Does and Kantorowicz 2021, 2023 and Gutmann, Kantorowicz, and Voigt 2024), and counter-terrorism strategies (e.g., Kantorowicz, Kantorowicz-Reznichenko, and de Vries 2023).

Figure 1.

Number of articles employing conjoint experiments in years 1995–2021



Source: Based on the data retrieved from the Web of Science, search query: “conjoint experiment”. Retrieval date: September 14, 2021.

Research Design

This study employs a survey-embedded conjoint experiment to examine public preferences regarding the 500 Plus program and its reform. 500 Plus is a flagship social program introduced by the PiS government shortly after it came to power in 2015. The program was initially criticized by the main opposition party (PO), but by 2019 (i.e., when the next parliamentary elections were approaching), it was almost unconditionally supported by all the main parties.

The 500 Plus program is an unconditional child allowance of PLN 500 (approx. USD 125 or EUR 115, which is roughly equivalent to 1/4 of the minimum wage). Initially, firstborn children did not qualify, but all children below the age of 18 are now eligible. Politicians and the media frequently discuss reforming the program,

and these debates intensify as elections approach. The major points of contention are the program's lack of means testing, the broad eligibility of children under 18, and the diminishing purchasing power of its benefits due to high and persistent inflation. A conjoint (survey) experiment was used to identify the most important design elements of the 500 Plus program. A reformed design that aligns most closely with public preferences (or the preferences of political subgroups in the population) was formulated on the basis of the results. The survey consisted of seven attributes: size of benefits, number of children eligible for the benefit, eligible age of the children, income and nationality of the beneficiaries, sources of financing, and indexation of the benefits.

As discussed in the introduction, social spending impacts a country's macroeconomic outlook. Social safety nets can be assessed along three macro-critical dimensions (Coady, Palomba, Brollo, Matsumoto, Atashbar, Kale, Shang, and Tokuoka 2022): (a) spending adequacy; (b) spending efficiency; and (c) fiscal sustainability:

- (a) *Spending adequacy* refers to whether social spending is sufficient to achieve social policy objectives. In the present study, it depends on such variables as the amount spent on benefits, the number of eligible children, and the age at which they become eligible. From a microeconomic perspective, the size of the benefits corresponds to generosity, while the number of children eligible and their eligible ages correspond to the coverage of the targeted population.
- (b) *Spending efficiency* refers to whether social spending meets the government's policy objectives cost-effectively and without causing undue labor (or other) market distortions. Spending inefficiencies can arise through various channels, including targeting efficiency, administrative and implementation costs, and work disincentives. Increasing the birth rate and decreasing the poverty rate are the income and national criteria used in the present study. Benefits transferred to high income households or immigrants are not efficient in meeting either of these of these criteria.³ From a microeconomic perspective, the income and nationality criteria relate to targeting.
- (c) *Fiscal sustainability* refers to whether social spending can be financed without undermining government debt sustainability or crowding out other high-priority spending. These challenges arise from high debt levels, increasing age-related spending pressures, and a changing world of work. Microeconomic categorization is not applicable to funding and indexation, as these are macroeconomic aggregates.

Ensuring that social spending is adequate, efficient, and sustainable helps maintain macroeconomic stability and achieve long-term development goals. Table 1 presents the survey attributes of the 500 Plus conjoint experiment grouped along the aforementioned macro-critical and microeconomic dimensions with the set of options in each attribute.

³ As is the case in many European countries, a person's nationality in Poland is determined based on the nationality of their parents at the time of birth (i.e., *Jus Sanguinis*).

Table 1.
Attributes and levels of the 500 Plus program

		Attribute	Options	
Macro-critical dimension	Spending adequacy	1 Size of benefits	PLN 300 PLN 500 (*) PLN 700	Generosity
		2 Number of children eligible	All children in the family (*) Second and each subsequent child in the family Third and each subsequent child in the family	Coverage
		3 Eligible age of children	Up to 18 years of age (*) Up to 12 years of age Up to 6 years of age	
	Spending efficiency	4 Income	Income below the national average Income below the poverty line Irrespective of income (*)	Targeting
		5 Nationality	Polish families Polish families taxed in Poland All families taxed in Poland (*)	
	Fiscal sustainability	6 Source of financing	Income tax Public debt Savings in other public spending	N.a.
		7 Indexation of benefits	No (*) Yes, for inflation	

Microeconomic dimension

Notes: (*) denotes the attributes of the 500 Plus program that were in place at the time the survey was conducted, i.e., June/July 2020.

Source: Based on own conjoint experiment design.

A paired-profile conjoint experiment was conducted, i.e., two reform profiles were juxtaposed. While it is possible to display either a single profile or more than two profiles simultaneously, the multiple-profile format is particularly useful when selecting from a set of alternative reforms or policies. This setup encourages respondents to thoroughly evaluate the trade-offs between the reform profiles. However, presenting multiple profiles simultaneously can also lead to excessive cognitive strain on participants. Therefore, the paired profile format, which juxtaposes two reform profiles, was deemed the most effective approach in this case. An example of a randomly generated conjoint (paired profile) task in the experiment is shown in Table 2⁴. Each respondent received six such tasks to evaluate and their task was to choose one of the two profiles. Hence, the respondents were presented with a forced-choice task (a „don't know” response was not available, although respondents could refuse to answer). Likewise, it should be noted that the order of attributes was randomized between respondents, but was held constant for each respondent in order to reduce the cognitive burden that this sort of randomization of order can impose.

⁴ At the beginning of the conjoint survey, participants read the following instructions: “In the next question, we will ask you to choose between two potential proposals for reforming the Family 500 Plus program. We will ask you to make this choice six times. Read each proposal carefully. Only after 20 seconds will the ‘NEXT’ button appear. Choose the proposal for reforming the Family 500 Plus program that you would support to a greater extent if such a reform were to be carried out today”. Then, before each conjoint task, the respondents saw: “Check out the potential reforms to the Family 500+ program below. Which reform do you prefer?”

Table 2.
An example of the paired-profile conjoint experiment

Attribute	Reform 1	Reform 2
1 Size of benefits	PLN 500	PLN 500
2 Number of children eligible	Second and each subsequent child in the family	All children in the family
3 Eligible age of children	Up to 18 years of age	Up to 12 years of age
4 Income criterion	Income below the national average	Income below the national average
5 Nationality criterion	Polish families taxed in Poland	Polish families taxed in Poland
6 Source of financing	Public debt	Savings in other public spending
7 Indexation of benefits	No	No

Source: Own table.

The study was conducted in Poland, and in the Polish language, between June 30 and July 4, 2020. At the time, there was fierce political competition leading up to the second round of a presidential election. The PiS-backed incumbent conservative candidate (Andrzej Duda) defeated the PO-backed progressive contender Rafal Trzaskowski by roughly 2 percentage points. The competition between PiS and PO is the main political and ideological fault line in Polish society. According to a recent poll, this polarization is one of the most prevalent in the world (after Hungary and the US)⁵.

Every effort was made to obtain a quota-representative sample in terms of age, gender, education, and place of residence (rural, small towns and large cities). Participants were recruited through the survey firm Pollster, which delivered on-line panelists, and the data were recorded in Qualtrics. The final sample, i.e., the number of respondents who completed the survey experiment, was $N = 1,620$ ⁶. Descriptive statistics of the sample are presented in Table 3. Note that the number of observations differ per variable as respondents were allowed to progress with the survey even if they declined to respond to a particular question. For example, it can be seen that some respondents declined to indicate whether they would support the incumbent candidate in the second round of the presidential election.

⁵ See: <https://www.economist.com/interactive/essay/2024/10/31/when-politics-is-about-hating-the-other-side-democracy-suffers> (accessed November 2024).

⁶ The target sample size of min. 1,458 was established with the following parameters: power = 0.9, AMCE = 0.03, max. number of attribute levels = 3, alpha = 0.05, number of conjoint tasks = 6, number of profiles displayed per task = 2. The final sample of 1,620 complies with the derived target. It should further be noted that the final sample was set after removing 76 respondents who withdrew after reading the consent form and 463 who failed an attention check question that required them to indicate a value of 10 on a 0–10 slider.

3. Results

The estimator of interest is the average marginal component effect (AMCE). This measures the average impact of changing the value of a single attribute while holding the values of all the other attributes constant and averaging over the joint distribution of the remaining attributes. The AMCE is based on an ordinary least squares regression with standard errors clustered at the respondent levels. It estimates how much a given change in a specific component (attribute level) affects the outcome (e.g., the probability of choosing a particular profile) as compared to a baseline level. As the sample in the study is fairly representative of the target population, survey weights were not applied.

Figure 2 plots the AMCE for the entire sample. The preferences are presented in relation to the baseline, i.e., the preference for the least preferable option for a given attribute. The formal regression models are presented in Table 4 in the Annex.

Table 3.
Summary statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min
Age	1,620	44	17	18
Political ideology (0–10 scale)	1,607	4.8	2.9	0
Gender	1,616			
... Male	716	44%		
... Female	900	56%		
% voting conservative (PiS, Duda)	1,596			
... Not Duda	1,086	68%		
... Duda	510	32%		
Education	1,620			
... Below higher	1,182	73%		
... Higher	438	27%		
% of urban population	1,620			
... Village	632	39%		
... Urban	988	61%		

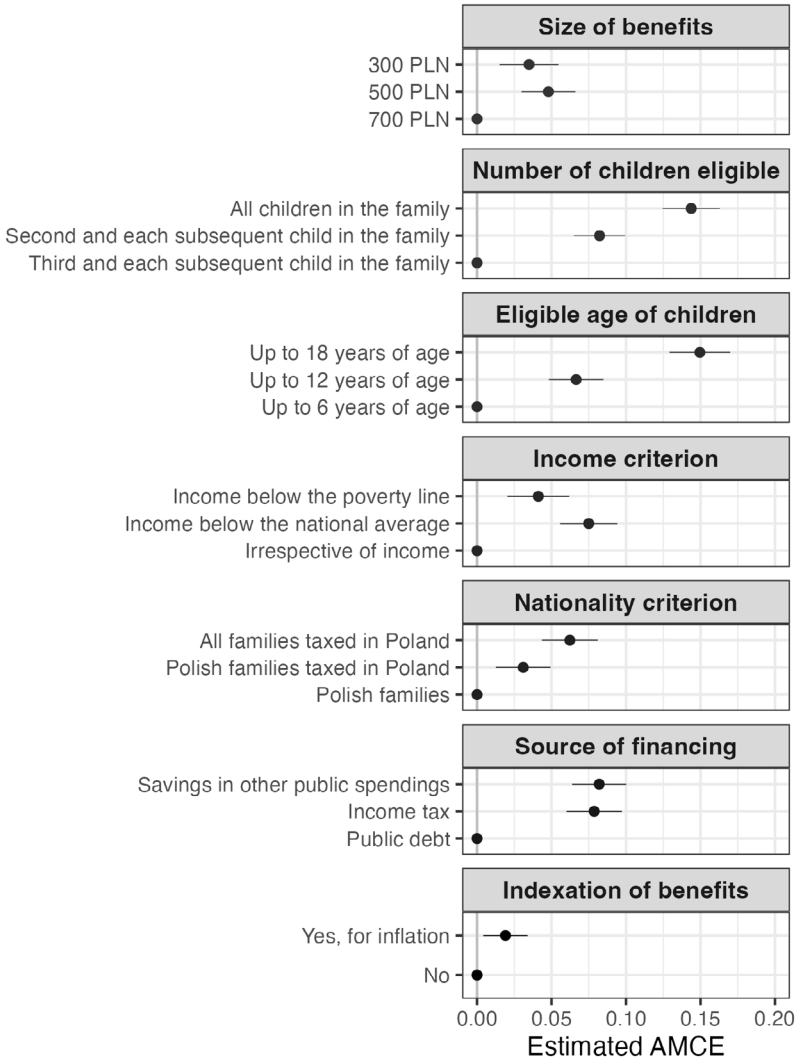
Source: Based on own survey data.

Moderate benefits (PLN 500) are preferred to small benefits (PLN 300) and—surprisingly—to large benefits (PLN 700). Wider coverage (for all children as opposed to excluding the first child or the first two children) and coverage over a longer period (up to 18 as opposed to 6 or 12) are preferred by a large margin. This suggests that spending adequacy preferences favor moderate but extensive welfare benefits. It further suggests that people understand the trade-offs in welfare spending adequacy between generosity and coverage under budget constraints and limited fiscal space.

As for spending efficiency, people prefer that benefits target families on below-average incomes, rather than those below the poverty line, and that they be means

tested. This result indicates that the program is perceived as redistributive in nature. Moreover, people prefer that the program be targeted to all families liable to be taxed in Poland, i.e. that it not be restricted to Polish families liable to be taxed in Poland or to Polish families regardless of tax residence⁷.

Figure 2.
Estimated AMCE for the population



Source: Based on own survey data.

⁷ The survey was conducted before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which resulted in a massive absorption of refugees by Poland.

When it comes to fiscal sustainability, people prefer that the program be financed from savings in other areas of public spending (e.g., public wages and investments) or from increasing income taxation (i.e., redistribution) rather than through public borrowing (to be repaid by future generations), and that the benefits be indexed to inflation rather than adjusted at government discretion or unindexed/unadjusted. As for welfare funding, there is a preference for fiscal consolidation over large deficits, and within fiscal consolidation, for decreasing expenditure rather than increasing taxation.

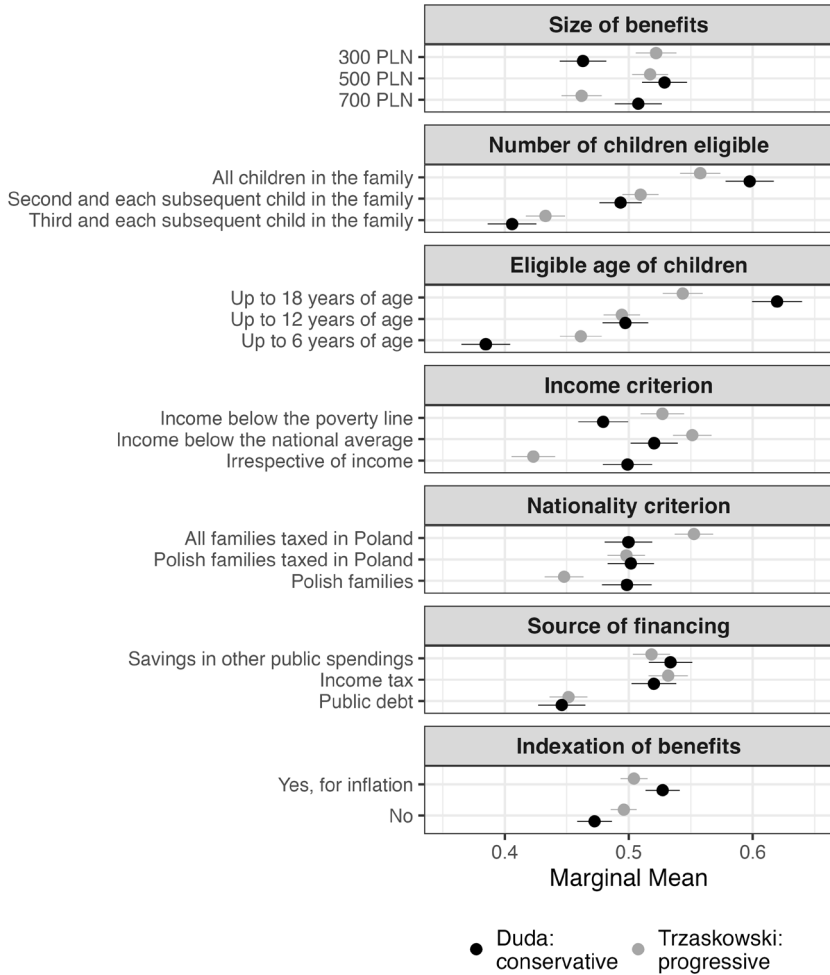
Next, these preferences are disaggregated and analyzed by political leaning captured by an intension to vote for a conservative (Andrzej Duda) or center-progressive (Rafal Trzaskowski) presidential candidate. As the comparisons of conditional AMCEs can be misleading since regression interactions are sensitive to the (arbitrary) reference category, the common practice is to estimate marginal means (MMs) for the analyses of subgroup differences (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020). The present study uses political preferences as a moderating variable to study the heterogeneity of treatment effects, i.e., political preferences are not manipulated (primed) experimentally. A priori, we would expect PiS (conservative) voters to prefer generous benefits that target Polish families and which are financed through income taxes and PO (center-progressive) voters to prefer less generous benefits that target families below the poverty line and which are financed through spending cuts. Figure 3 plots the MMs by partisan leaning, whereas Figure 4 displays differences between MMs (more specifically the estimated differences between MMs for respondents supporting progressive and conservative presidential candidate, respectively). Table 5 in the Annex displays formal regression results.

The general dividing line is that which separates the fiscally expansionary but socially conservative PiS from the budget-conscious but socially liberal PO. Significant differences between partisan preferences only appear in a few categories. Arguably, the 500 Plus program is such a strong *reference point* that any pronounced deviation from it (e.g., by switching from benefits to each child to excluding the first two) would be a risky political gamble. PiS voters favor generous and universal benefits, while PO voters prefer lower benefits targeting those in need. PO voters are generally against national discrimination in social benefits, while PiS voters are indifferent to it. It is unclear to what extent voters internalize the fiscal costs and trade-offs when they state their preferences (e.g., including the first child in the childhood allowance at the expense of 1,000 km less road construction or PLN 100 lower salaries for nurses).

The results for self-declared ideological leaning are provided in the Annex. These were elicited by asking: "Generally speaking, how would you describe your political views on social and cultural issues (e.g., abortion or LGBT)?" The answers were registered on a 0–10 scale where 0 meant "very left-leaning views" and 10 meant "very right-leaning views". Answers 0–4 were classified as left-leaning/progressive and answers 6–10 as right-leaning/conservative. Figure 5 shows the subgroup analysis that utilizes the categorization based on this generic question. It should be noted that these results are similar to those obtained in Figure 3. Note that respondents who identify as left-leaning/progressive mostly declared their intention to vote

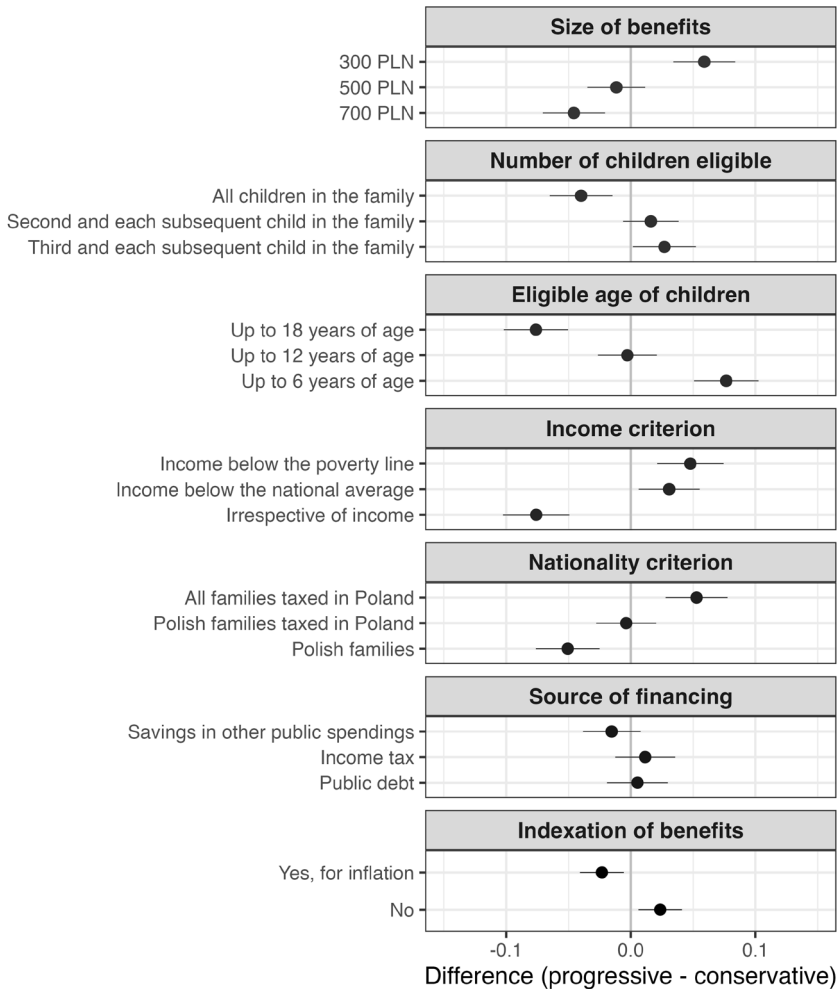
for progressive candidate Rafal Trzaskowski, whereas right-leaning/conservative respondents mostly declared their intention to vote for Andrzej Duda.

Figure 3.
Estimated MMs by partisan leaning



Source: Based on own survey data.

Figure 4.
Estimated differences in MMs across partisan leaning



Source: Based on own survey data.

4. Conclusions

The results of the conjoint survey experiment provide nuanced insights into Polish politics, particularly regarding how political leanings correlate with preferences for the macro-critical dimensions of social spending programs. The study underscores the polarized nature of public opinion around the 500 Plus program, Poland’s flagship social protection initiative. Supporters of the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party prefer enlarging the program’s spending adequacy for Polish families. This is consistent with their broader ideological stance on strong social protection

measures to support mainly national families. In contrast, voters supporting the progressive Civic Platform (PO) favor more targeted benefits that prioritize efficiency and fiscal responsibility, reflecting their pro-European, budget-conscious values. This ideological divide mirrors broader global trends. Conservative and populist parties often favor direct social transfers, while progressive parties emphasize fiscal constraints and targeted redistribution.

While transformative in reducing child poverty and bolstering financial stability for families, the 500 Plus program remains a point of contention. Its unconditional design and universal applicability are broadly supported across demographics, particularly among rural and low-income families. However, debates persist about its efficiency, fiscal sustainability, and long-term effectiveness in achieving its original goals, such as increasing birth rates. The findings suggest that while the program enjoys substantial public support, especially among PiS voters, it is not immune to controversy. Key points of contention include its lack of means testing, the perceived trade-offs in public spending priorities, and the diminishing purchasing power of the benefits due to inflation.

In the broader context of Polish politics, the 500 Plus program exemplifies the country's polarized political landscape. The program has become a political symbol, with PiS leveraging it to consolidate support among its conservative base, while PO critiques it as fiscally unsustainable and inefficient. This polarization reflects the challenge of crafting social policies that achieve broad-based support in a deeply divided political environment. Nonetheless, the continued popularity of the program suggests that it has reshaped expectations of state responsibility for family welfare, making it a central fixture in Polish social policy discourse.

The results also indicate that the controversy surrounding the 500 Plus program is less about its existence and more about its design and implementation. While the public broadly supports moderate benefit levels and inclusive eligibility, debates about the program's targeting and funding reveal underlying tensions about fairness and resource allocation. Future reforms will have to navigate these competing priorities carefully, balancing adequacy, efficiency, and sustainability to ensure the program's long-term viability without deepening political divides.

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Appendix

Table 4.

AMCE: Regression results

Term	Estimate	Std. Error	Statistic	p-value	Conf. Low	Conf. High
1 300 PLN	0.03	0.01	3.46	0.00	0.02	0.05
2 500 PLN	0.05	0.01	5.18	0.00	0.03	0.07
3 Second and each subsequent child in the family	0.08	0.01	9.34	0.00	0.06	0.10
4 All children in the family	0.14	0.01	14.65	0.00	0.12	0.16
5 Up to 12 years of age	0.07	0.01	7.13	0.00	0.05	0.08
6 Up to 18 years of age	0.15	0.01	14.41	0.00	0.13	0.17
7 Income below the poverty line	0.04	0.01	3.89	0.00	0.02	0.06
8 Income below the national average	0.07	0.01	7.65	0.00	0.06	0.09
9 Polish families taxed in Poland	0.03	0.01	3.31	0.00	0.01	0.05
10 All families taxed in Poland	0.06	0.01	6.51	0.00	0.04	0.08
11 Income tax	0.08	0.01	8.30	0.00	0.06	0.10
12 Savings in other public spendings	0.08	0.01	8.85	0.00	0.06	0.10
13 Yes, for inflation	0.02	0.01	2.51	0.01	0.00	0.03

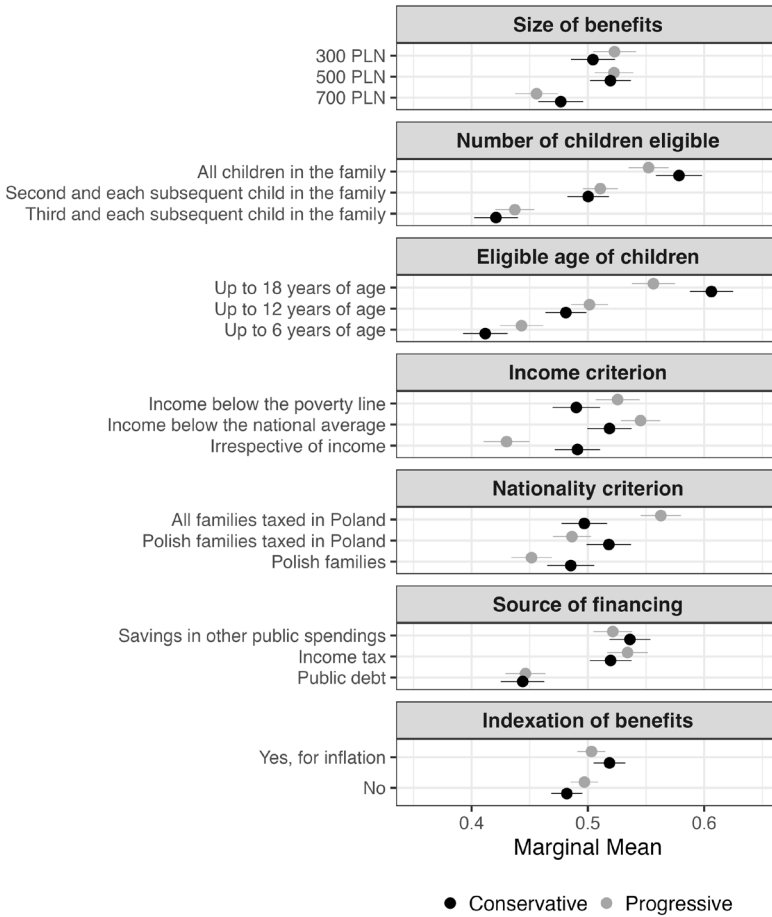
Source: Based on own survey data.

Table 5.
Differences in MMs: Regression results

Term	Estimate	Std. Error	Statistic	<i>p</i> -value	Conf. Low	Conf. High
1 700 PLN	0.02	0.01	1.53	0.12	-0.01	0.05
2 300 PLN	-0.02	0.01	-1.37	0.17	-0.05	0.01
3 500 PLN	-0.00	0.01	-0.25	0.81	-0.03	0.02
4 Third and each subsequent child in the family	-0.02	0.01	-1.26	0.21	-0.04	0.01
5 Second and each subsequent child in the family	-0.01	0.01	-0.88	0.38	-0.03	0.01
6 All children in the family	0.03	0.01	1.96	0.05	-0.00	0.05
7 Up to 6 years of age	-0.03	0.01	-2.29	0.02	-0.06	-0.00
8 Up to 12 years of age	-0.02	0.01	-1.69	0.09	-0.04	0.00
9 Up to 18 years of age	0.05	0.01	3.72	0.00	0.02	0.08
10 Irrespective of income	0.06	0.01	4.32	0.00	0.03	0.09
11 Income below the poverty line	-0.04	0.01	-2.51	0.01	-0.06	-0.01
12 Income below the national average	-0.03	0.01	-2.06	0.04	-0.05	-0.00
13 Polish families	0.03	0.01	2.47	0.01	0.01	0.06
14 Polish families taxed in Poland	0.03	0.01	2.47	0.01	0.01	0.06
15 All families taxed in Poland	-0.07	0.01	-4.95	0.00	-0.09	-0.04
16 Public debt	-0.00	0.01	-0.18	0.85	-0.03	0.02
17 Income tax	-0.01	0.01	-1.13	0.26	-0.04	0.01
18 Savings in other public spendings	0.01	0.01	1.20	0.23	-0.01	0.04
19 No	-0.02	0.01	-1.66	0.10	-0.03	0.00
20 Yes, for inflation	0.02	0.01	1.67	0.09	-0.00	0.03

Source: Based on own survey data.

Figure 5.
Estimated MMs by respondents classified as left- and right-leaning



Source: Based on own survey data.