

The exclusion of migrants and refugees from welfare programs in Austria: the “legitimizing explanations” across different policy areas

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Different forms
of welfare
chauvinism in
Austria

159

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Abstract

Purpose – The present article deals with the topic of migrants’ exclusion from welfare benefits in European host countries from the angle of the research on the so-called “welfare chauvinism” (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990, p. 212). More specifically, it explores the political justifications behind welfare chauvinism in the policy debate surrounding some recent chauvinist-oriented social policies. Drawing on that, the article develops a theoretical argument to generate expectations about how politicians use different types of justifications. The fundamental proposition is that the chauvinistic arguments used are shaped by the different types of social programs, i.e. either universal or means-tested programs.

Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative content analysis of several selected parliamentary debates in the period 2017–2019 in Austria is carried out. In order to improve the efficiency of the research, the author relies on MAXQDA, an advanced piece of software for qualitative data analysis, to code the qualitative data and analyze them. The author prefers this to other similar programs as it is considered a valid and reliable tool within the academic research world.

Findings – The article points out that programs design works as an explanatory factor to highlight variations of welfare chauvinist arguments.

Originality/value – It develops for the first time a theoretical argument explaining the presence and variation of welfare chauvinist arguments based on social programs design.

Keywords Social exclusion, Qualitative method, Welfare state, Migrant exclusion, Western Europe

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Migrants’ exclusion from social benefits and programs in the established welfare states of European host countries [1] represents a major challenge to the achievement of migrants’ social rights (Sainsbury, 2012). This topic has been extensively studied by political and social scientists. The present article deals with that from the angle of political research, and specifically the literature on the so-called “welfare chauvinism” (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990, p. 212). This political view claims that national welfare benefits should be reserved exclusively (or mostly) to members of the native in-group, as delineated by citizenship,

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ethnicity, race or religion. By contrast, the out-group (migrants and refugees) should be excluded or receive limited access only (Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990).

Since its first conceptualization by Andersen and Bjørklund in 1990, scholars have been investigating welfare chauvinism in public opinion and in party manifestos, as well as social policies (Mudde, 1999, 2007; Careja *et al.*, 2016; Lange, 2007; Kriesi *et al.*, 2016; Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016; Lefkofridi and Michel, 2014; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018, 2020; Chueri, 2019). However, the literature has not exhausted research interests. In particular, we still know very little about the ways in which politicians promote welfare chauvinism in the policy debate – i.e. the arguments they use to justify and legitimate migrants' exclusion or limited access to national welfare.

The most notable exceptions are the recent studies on welfare chauvinism in the Scandinavian countries by Jorgensen and Thomsen (2016), Keskinen (2016) and Norocel (2016). They point out a number of different types of “welfare chauvinist arguments” (Keskinen, 2016, p. 354) used by politicians for legitimately restricting access to welfare programs, differentiating between economic-based and cultural-rooted arguments (Jorgensen and Thomsen, 2016; Keskinen, 2016; Norocel, 2016). Nevertheless, they do not examine how nativist politicians use the different types of justificatory arguments in the policy debate: do they use the economic and the cultural justifications invariantly or in different ways? Which factors do lead them to prefer one argument over the others to limit migrants' access to national welfare?

The present article aims at increasing scholarly attention on the political justifications behind welfare chauvinism in European host countries. It takes a step forward than the former studies, developing a theoretical argument that generates expectations about the above questions. It argues that the chauvinist arguments used are shaped by the different types of social programs observed. These are specific types of public programs aimed at advancing the social conditions of the beneficiaries (Sainsbury, 2012). Based on their design, we can distinguish between universal and means-tested programs (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018).

The main targets of the welfare chauvinist appeals and restrictive social policies in European host countries are typically non-Western migrants [2], including asylum seekers (Careja *et al.*, 2016; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018). Besides, welfare chauvinist rhetoric and laws sometimes target refugees and migrants from Eastern European countries too, although they are protected by the international refugee law and (those from inside the European Union [EU]) the EU social security coordination framework, respectively (Barbulescu *et al.*, 2015; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2020; Lafleur and Vintila, 2020). In light of that, the article's theoretical argument is designed so as to include all these different categories.

I start by illustrating the state of the art. Thereafter, I move on to illustrate the article's theoretical proposition, the hypotheses and the specific method and data used. Finally, I apply the broader theoretical proposition in a specific case study, i.e. Austria, during the 2017–2019 political mandate (Kurz I Cabinet).

2. State of the art

The literature on welfare chauvinism is commonly grouped into two strands: one focused on individual preferences with regard to redistribution to migrants and refugees (i.e. the demand side) and the other centered on parties' ideology and policy platforms, namely political manifestos and, most recently, social policies (the supply side). In the former line of research, scholars focus primarily on voter preferences about redistribution to migrants, across several European countries. It emerges that the prevailing (still not the only one) logic in discussions of migrants' entitlements is the so-called deservingness logic (van Oorschot, 2006, 2008). According to that, individuals deem different population subgroups worthy or unworthy of receiving help from the welfare state to different extents (van Oorschot, 2006, 2008).

Several survey-based studies have identified non-Western migrants as the least deserving social group in almost all European states (van Oorschot, 2008; Van Der Waal *et al.*, 2013; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Nielsen *et al.*, 2020). Citizens justify the perceived lower deservingness of migrants by relying on several “deservingness criteria” (van Oorschot, 2006), especially the reciprocity and the identity criteria (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020). Reciprocity states that one has to “give something back to society” in exchange of social support (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020). These are typically economic-based substitutes, e.g. one’s working activity and tax records (van Oorschot, 2006; Nielsen *et al.*, 2020). Namely, migrants and refugees have a lower level of deservingness since they do not work nor sufficiently financially contribute to the national economy (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020). The identity criterion states instead that the closer to the ethnocultural majority, the more deserving, the farthest the less deserving (Nielsen *et al.*, 2020). Thus, migrants and refugees are excluded because they are perceived as too culturally distant.

Moving to the supply side, scholars highlight that welfare chauvinism is an important feature in the policy programs and electoral manifestos of the so-called populist radical right parties (PRRPs) in several European countries, notably populist radical right ones (Careja *et al.*, 2016; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018, 2020; Lange, 2007; Kriesi *et al.*, 2006; Lefkofridi and Michel, 2014; Mudde, 1999, 2007; Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016) and sometimes mainstream rights too, as in Denmark (Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016) and Austria (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2020). Furthermore, PRRPs also play an important role in the adoption of restrictive social policies affecting migrants (Chueri, 2019).

Most importantly for the present purpose, the chauvinist logic not only differs between right and left-wing party families, but it is also conditioned by the design of social benefits and programs, especially the principles of redistributive justice underpinning them (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016, 2018, 2020). Namely, the research by Ennser-Jedenastik shows that equality and need-based benefits, i.e. universal and means-tested ones, are more vulnerable to welfare chauvinism, and they usually attract a stronger form of chauvinism. By contrast, social equity-based insurance systems are usually less vulnerable to the nativist appeals. In the very few cases in which we find welfare chauvinism in insurance-run programs, this is generally weaker [3] (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016, 2018, 2020). These findings support the article’s notion that programs’ design can help explaining variation in the welfare chauvinist discourse (cfr. next paragraph).

Researchers have only recently started to investigate the “welfare chauvinist arguments” (Keskinen, 2016, p. 354) behind welfare chauvinism, in policy debates and policy frameworks, especially in the Scandinavian countries. These are also defined as “legitimizing explanations” (Jorgensen and Thomsen, 2016, p. 331) and/or “political justifications” (p. 334) for the exclusion or limited access to national welfare for migrants. It emerges politicians rely on three main types of arguments.

The first welfare chauvinist argument points back to a very popular trope in both the Danish and Finnish policy debate, i.e. that of “welfare tourism” (Jorgensen and Thomsen, 2016, p. 341; Keskinen, 2016, p. 364). This argument focuses on migrants’ individual behaviors and contributions in the economic sphere and the labor market. Namely, politicians argue that migrants take benefit from national welfare programs without yet sufficiently working and contributing to the public tax system through which such programs are funded (Jorgensen and Thomsen, 2016; Keskinen, 2016). They therefore behave as abusers, living at the expense of natives working and regularly paying taxes (i.e. the natives). For these reasons, they should be excluded or receive limited access to national welfare (Keskinen, 2016). The welfare tourism argument points back to the deservingness logic, especially the reciprocity criterion (Jorgensen and Thomsen, 2016; Keskinen, 2016). It especially emerges in the parliamentary debates and speeches surrounding and leading to the approval of the 2013 Social Security reform in Denmark (Jorgensen and Thomsen, 2016).

A further widespread economic-based argument, especially in the Finnish policy debate, portrays migrants as an “economic burden” for the host society and economy (Keskinen, 2016, p. 366). Accordingly, migrants should be excluded or receive limited access because they impose a heavy burden upon the public finances that may in the long-term lead to the collapse of the economic system of the country. This type of argument is also exploited to justify the 2013 Social Security reform in Denmark (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016) as well as several policy changes in the asylum law in 2009–2011 in Finland, tightening welfare benefits for asylum seekers (Keskinen, 2016).

The third and last argument focuses instead on the cultural differences between natives and migrants, linking these to welfare considerations (Norocel, 2016; Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016). Migrants, especially from non-Western countries, are therefore excluded – or given limited access only – from social programs since they are culturally deviant from the ethnic majority. Namely, they have different cultural and religious habits (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016; Norocel, 2016). This discourse points back the deservingness logic and specifically the identity principle of deservingness (Norocel, 2016). It is exploited especially by the Swedish PRRP and the Sweden Democrats in parliamentary speeches and politicians’ public speeches in TV (Norocel, 2016). It is also observed in the Danish context, although to a minor extent (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016).

Besides, the cultural argument has also to be framed into the broader political discourse opposing multiculturalism in European societies (Mudde, 2007). It puts forwards a narrower definition of national community, based on stricter ethnocultural criteria. Accordingly, social rights (as well as other rights) are reframed as exclusive rights of cultural and/or ethnic members of the narrowly defined nation state (Mudde, 2007; Norocel, 2016). All those outside of such community are a threat and necessarily excluded. Entitlement to social rights is therefore a sort of reward for successful integration and limitation/exclusion is justified in order to protect national cultural heritage and tradition threatened by the negative effect of multiculturalist policies (Norocel, 2016).

Table 1 shows at a glance the main welfare chauvinist arguments, as conceptualized in the literature (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016; Keskinen, 2016; Noricel, 2016). I summarize and put them together in this table.

3. Hypotheses

3.1 Developing a new theoretical argument

The article develops a theoretical argument to generate expectations about how politicians use the different political justifications to legitimate and promote welfare chauvinism. Namely, I want to explore which factors lead them to prefer one of the above justifications over the others in policy debates. My theoretical argument is intended to encompass a broad number of European host countries, although it is applied to a single case study (cfr. paragraph 3). The type of political justifications/chauvinist arguments is the dependent variable, and the type of social programs is the main independent variable. I argue that the variation in the type of program is the key explanatory mechanism to highlight variation in the political justifications/chauvinist arguments used by politicians to exclude migrants.

Table 1.
Welfare chauvinist arguments (elaboration from the literature)

| Welfare chauvinist argument | Framing of migrants |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Welfare tourism | “Abusers”: Taking free welfare benefits, without contributing |
| Economic burden | Imposing heavy costs upon the welfare state and public economy |
| Cultural belonging | Culturally distant from the country’ ethnocultural majority |

The different types of programs vary in the way they are designed, i.e. including the following characteristics: the eligibility rules, the funding mechanisms, the underlying redistributive logic and the real-world outcomes such logic produces (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018). Based on these characteristics, we can have either universal or means-tested social programs. To be sure, a third type of social program exists, namely the insurance-based one. However, the article's hypotheses do not take it into consideration. Being insurance-run programs usually less vulnerable to welfare chauvinism (Ennser-Jedenastik 2018, 2020), it is assumed that they do not provide leverage in examining the justificatory arguments behind welfare chauvinism.

The justificatory arguments vary according to whether they are based on economic or rather cultural considerations (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016; Keskinen, 2016; Noricel, 2016). Based on that, the literature has distinguished between a culturally-rooted justification, namely the cultural belonging argument (stressing migrants' cultural deviance) and two distinct economic-based justifications, i.e. the welfare tourism (looking at migrants' economic behaviors and contributions) and the economic burden (concerned about national economic collapse due to migration) argument.

My theoretical argument builds partially on Ennser-Jedenastik's (2016, 2018, 2020) recently developed theory (cfr. previous paragraph). However, it also differs from that to a significant extent. In Ennser-Jedenastik's theory, the programs' design works as an independent variable to explain variation in the strength and presence of welfare chauvinism in a country. While relying on the same independent variable, I explore its impact on the justifications behind welfare chauvinism, independently from its strength. My argument therefore complements and somehow further specify the previous theory (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018, 2020).

3.2 Universal social programs and welfare chauvinist arguments

Universal programs are the practical realization of the equality principle of redistributive justice (Deutsch, 1975; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018). This principle states that all members of the community should be treated equally and receive the same amount of social support from the community, usually identified in citizenship and (especially today) residency status. The primary redistributive outcome such a principle produces is that all legal residents in a country should receive equal benefits – both natives and migrants – regardless of their income and employment situation (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018).

As for the funding mechanism, in almost all European countries universal programs are financed through taxes, raised by employed adults (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018). Recent survey research highlights that migrants typically pay less taxes than natives in European host countries (Nannestad, 2007; Herwig *et al.*, 2015; European Commission, 2020). This is especially true for non-Western migrants, including asylum seekers, and refugees since they usually have below-average incomes and lower levels of labor market integration than nationals (Nannestad, 2007; Herwig *et al.*, 2015). The 2019 European Commission, 2020 on Intra-EU Mobility points out that several migrants from Eastern European countries [4], have better employment rates than non-Western migrants but they are usually low-skilled and engaged in temporary underpaid jobs. Thus, they have overall lower incomes and levels of tax payments than natives too (European Commission, 2020).

From the intersection between the funding mechanism and real-world redistributive patterns, universal programs should therefore attract the welfare tourism argument (H1a). Accordingly, politicians are likely to argue that migrants do not adequately contribute to the national tax system whilst benefiting from tax-funded universal programs on equal basis than natives regularly paying taxes. Due to the same reason, universal programs should also attract the economic burden argument (H1b). More precisely, I would expect politicians to

claim that migrants' dependency on universal programs will lead to an increase in the fiscal expenditure on the public finances, especially in the form of public taxes paid by natives. As a consequence, politicians will claim that this process will ultimately undermine the economic sustainability of the country.

Since belonging to the community is usually defined by residence, entitlement to universal programs in most European countries is ultimately based on the residence status (Sainsbury, 2012). Historically, residence has in several cases replaced the legal citizenship as the ground for entitlement to most universal social services, thus leading to the so-called "denationalization" of welfare (cfr. Sainsbury, 2012; Nordensvarda and Ketola, 2015). Consequently, a growing number of migrants with permanent residency have obtained access to universal programs, which are usually part of citizenship rights (Nordensvarda and Ketola, 2015).

I argue that this shift in eligibility rules comes into contrast with the view of parties and politicians who reject the multiculturalist discourse (Mudde, 2007). They assert the exact contrary, namely that social rights are exclusive rights of cultural and/or ethnic members of a narrowly defined nation state, historically defined by strict citizenship rules (Mudde, 2007). Accordingly, universal programs should attract the argument of cultural belonging as well (H1c). Namely, I expect politicians to frame migrants as culturally deviant from the ethnocultural majority, having different ethnocultural backgrounds. They therefore fall outside the universalist provision of benefits that should apply (in their view) only to the members of the ethnic-defined community.

3.3 Means-tested social programs and welfare chauvinist arguments

Differently from universal ones, means-tested programs empirically embody the need principle (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018). This implies that social support should be extended primarily (if not exclusively) to the less fortunate, in terms of income and earnings. Looking at the redistributive outcomes, such programs usually benefit migrants, especially non-Western ones, to a significantly larger extent than natives (Deutsch, 1975; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018). In fact, they are typically overrepresented within the worst-offs in terms of income and earnings (Herwig et al., 2015). As for universal ones, means-tested programs are financed through taxes. As seen before, migrants typically pay less than natives since they usually have below-average incomes and/or lower levels of labor market integration (Nannestad, 2007; Herwig et al., 2015; European Commission, 2020).

I therefore argue that, as for the universal ones, means-tested programs should attract the welfare tourism argument, because of their underlying design (H2a). The combination of the funding mechanism and the redistributive patterns allows politicians to frame migrants as welfare tourists who take benefits without adequately contributing to financing them through taxes. Likewise, means-tested programs should be linked to the economic burden argument (H2b). Politicians could blame migrants for imposing increased fiscal expenditures upon natives to finance means-tested programs of which migrants are often the primary beneficiaries (Deutsch, 1975; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018).

In terms of eligibility rules, the entitlement to means-tested programs is based on the principle of demonstrable need, e.g. income and wealth (Deutsch, 1975; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018). Historically, the concept of "need" has always been defined economically and not in ethnic or racial terms (Sainsbury, 2012; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018). Neither have means-tested programs undergone a real process of de-nationalization, as opposed to universal programs (Sainsbury, 2012; Nordensvarda and Ketola, 2015). Conversely, noncitizens could already formally access this type of programs if they fulfilled the income criteria (Sainsbury, 2012).

Consequently, I argue that this type of eligibility rules is less likely to come into contrast with the antimulticulturalist political view. Thus, while we cannot rule out the possibility that

politicians sometimes evoke cultural otherness and racial definitions of need, we can expect that means-tested programs are less likely to attract the argument of cultural belonging. Table 2 summarizes the expectations regarding the link between the type of programs and the justificatory arguments.

4. Methodology and data

4.1 Data and time-span

The article empirically examines the justificatory arguments behind welfare chauvinism by focusing on the case of Austria in the period between 2017 and 2019, i.e. the Kurz I Cabinet. This is a particularly interesting period because some significant welfare chauvinist instances, i.e. chauvinist-oriented turns in social policies, have taken place. The policy areas affected by welfare chauvinism are family policies, with the Amendment 83/2018 to the 1967 Family Burden Equalization Act, and social assistance, with the 2019 Basic Act on Social Assistance. These are universal and means-tested types of programs, respectively. Accordingly, Austria provides me with a case in which I have very good conditions for testing the hypotheses: having variation in my independent variable, i.e. the type of social program, I can explore whether this can explain variation in the dependent variable, the chauvinist arguments, as well, as expected in the hypotheses.

The chauvinist policies have been promoted by the governmental parties at that time, namely the Austrian People's Party *Österreichische Volkspartei* (ÖVP hereafter), the main Austrian mainstream right party and its junior partner in a coalition government, the Austrian Freedom Party, *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ hereafter), one of the strongest antiimmigration radical right parties in Europe, and (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2020). In May 2019, the coalition was terminated as a consequence of the now infamous Ibiza gate (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2020).

In conformity with previous research on chauvinist arguments (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016; Keskinen, 2016), the analysis examines how these arguments emerge within the debates and the speeches made during parliamentary debates and speeches. Parliamentary speeches are considered a valid tool to explore the arguments behind welfare chauvinism (Keskinen, 2016). Namely, during parliamentary debates, politicians often have to provide long and well-developed explanations for their policy preferences, also to answer to political opposition's criticism. Thus, they generally put forward their arguments in an explicit and clearer way (Keskinen, 2016). I specifically focus on the plenary sessions of the National Council (Nationalrat, NC hereafter) and the Federal Council (Bundesrat, FC hereafter). I select those parliamentary debates during which politicians discuss on the new exclusionary policies, namely the 2019 Basic Act on Social Assistance and the Amendment 83/2018 to the 1967 Family Burden Equalization Act.

I chose to focus on the Kurz I Cabinet merely, although welfare chauvinism has been present in Austria, and notably in party manifestos by the FPÖ, already since 2005 (cfr. next

| Hypotheses | Social program (independent variable) | Welfare chauvinistic arguments (dependent variable) |
|------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| H1 | Universal benefits | <i>Economic arguments</i> (1) Welfare tourism (H1a) (2) Economic burden (H1b) <i>Cultural argument</i> (3) Cultural belonging (H1c) |
| H2 | Means-tested benefits | <i>Economic arguments</i> (1) Welfare tourism (H2a) (2) Economic burden (H2b) |

Source(s): Own elaboration

Table 2.
Expectations
regarding types of
social programs and
welfare chauvinistic
arguments

paragraph). I did that because in this period welfare chauvinism becomes a more relevant topic at parliamentary level too, due to the policy debate surrounding the approval of the new exclusionary social policies. For this same reason, in this period politicians make chauvinist proposals referred to precise policy framework bills rather than generic proposals only, as in manifestos and electoral campaign (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2020). Finally, a shorter period of time allows for a deeper and more detailed analysis. Parliamentary speeches in the case in point are taken from the official website of the Austrian Parliament (<https://www.parlament.gv.at/>), where the relevant transcriptions, i.e. the stenographic protocols are made available.

4.2 *The Austrian context*

Welfare chauvinism is present in Austria, and notably in party manifestos by the FPÖ, already since 2005 (Pelinka, 2002). Thus, the country has already been object of studies about welfare chauvinism (Pelinka, 2002; Kriesi *et al.*, 2006; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2020), among which those by Ennser-Jedenastik are particularly relevant for us (cfr. paragraph 2). These studies have especially examined the evolution of the FPÖ from a mainstream (liberal conservative) to a radical populist right one, as one of the consequences of globalization on the national political space (Kriesi *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, the work by Ennser-Jedenastik (2020) has applied the recently developed theory about the link between welfare chauvinism and types of social programs to the case of the FPÖ. It has assessed in Austria a similar pattern found in other European countries, i.e. that welfare chauvinism affects primarily means-tested and universal programs rather than insurance-run ones.

However, previous studies have not explored the justificatory arguments behind welfare chauvinism and how these vary in the Austrian political context (cfr. paragraph 2). Furthermore, most of these studies have focused on electoral campaign and manifestos, in the period before 2017. Thus, we still lack a systematic analysis of the policy debate surrounding welfare chauvinism and the approval of the new exclusionary social policies during the Kurz I Cabinet. This topic needs to be addressed more in detail since it represents a significant nativist-turn in the Austrian politics. Besides, the Austrian case provides a precedent that may encourage the creation of new exclusionary social policies in other countries in the future. My research therefore fills these gaps and complements previous studies about welfare chauvinism the country.

Welfare chauvinism in Austria, both before 2017 and in the post-2017 new policy frameworks is mainly addressed toward non-Western migrants, refugees and (in the case of family policies) to Eastern European migrants. In particular, Eastern European migrants and refugees are considered the most important groups of migrants in Austria in terms of magnitude and political saliency (Pelinka, 2002; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018). In fact, the number of asylum seekers continued to rise, reaching roughly 10% in 2020 (Austrian Federal Ministry, 2021). In the same year, 68.97% of the applications for international protection were accepted (Austrian Federal Ministry, 2021). In line with the statistical findings for most EU countries, most refugees in Austria typically have below-average incomes and lower levels of labor market integration than Austrians. Eastern Europeans score better than refugees in terms of labor market integration, yet they tend to have temporary underpaid jobs and thus lower incomes than Austrians (Herwig *et al.*, 2015; European Commission, 2020).

4.3 *Inside the method: qualitative content analysis*

The analysis proceeds by policy area, exploring the welfare chauvinist arguments in the policy debates surrounding the Amendment to the family policy first and the Basic Act on Social Assistance afterwards. It tests the hypotheses through an in-depth qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014; Kuckartz, 2019) of the written transcripts of parliamentary debates and politicians' speeches where these new laws are being discussed. Differently from the

traditional quantitative content analysis, the qualitative one does not count words and occurrences within the texts. Conversely, it systematically examines themes and patterns and the overall sentiments within the selected texts. Thus, it is suitable to the article's research question since it allows for an in-depth and systematic examination of welfare chauvinism's legitimization.

Qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to simultaneously capture both politicians' explicit and implicit references to the welfare chauvinist arguments (Schreier, 2014; Kuckartz, 2019). Indeed, it may sometimes be the case that politicians do not explicitly refer to some of the existing arguments, but they rather develop the discourses in a way that they point back to one or more of them, or eventually to additional and still unexplored frames. By contrast, a purely quantitative analysis of the texts fails to capture these latent meanings since it only focuses on the explicit meanings (Kuckartz, 2019).

Besides, qualitative content analysis is a more appropriate method for testing hypothesis than other similar methods used by previous research, like discourse analysis (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016; Keskinen, 2016). Discourse analysis is more appropriate to build new hypotheses and theories leading to the conceptualization of new chauvinist arguments (Schreier, 2014; Willig, 2014). By contrast, the main scope of the article is to test already conceptualized arguments and the hypothesized argument-program links (Schreier, 2014; Kuckartz, 2019).

The texts' passages under examination are those reporting the speeches made by the FPÖ and the ÖVP. The specific units of analysis are the sentences by politicians. I specifically focus on the passages and sentences where they speak in support of the newly introduced chauvinist measures. By focusing on them, I explore the specific justificatory arguments they use to legitimate welfare chauvinism and whether such arguments vary between means tested and universal policy areas. By contrast, the analysis leaves the speeches by the opposition parties uncoded since they are not relevant to the article's research question (Schreier, 2014; Kuckartz, 2019). Since they criticize the chauvinist turns, one does not expect to find any welfare chauvinist arguments in their speeches.

Specifically, the article explores the chauvinist arguments and their variation by assigning the relevant sentences a number of "categories" (or "codes"), i.e. several conceptual labels that foster understanding of the data. Empirically speaking, categories are "those aspects of the material about which researchers would like more information" (Schreier, 2014, p. 75), namely the welfare chauvinist arguments in this article. Categories can be created before or while analyzing the content (Kuckartz, 2019). *Ex ante* categories are called deductive because they originate from previous knowledge of the researcher, from the research question or from the existing literature. They are concepts that exist and have been formulated before reading the text and independently of it. *In vivo* categories are created from the text itself, during the analysis: they are inductive (Kuckartz, 2019).

This work deals with deductive categories that correspond to the existing concepts of justificatory arguments, formulated in the contributions by Jørgensen and Thomsen (2016), Keskinen (2016), Norocel (2016) on Scandinavian countries. In line with the traditional qualitative content analysis, each category is marked by one or several indicators. These are words and sentences in the texts which enable me to immediately recognize the category at play (Kuckartz, 2019).

The first category corresponds to the first arguments conceptualized in the literature, i.e. the "welfare tourism" argument (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016, p. 341; Keskinen, 2016, p. 364). The relevant indicators in the texts are as follows: (1) specific terms, e.g. "abusers", "welfare tourists" or similar ones and/or (2) broader discourses emphasizing the lack of adequate contributions by migrants to the host society. The second category derives from the economic burden argument (Keskinen, 2016, p. 366). The relevant indicators are (1) specific terms, e.g. "burned", "costs", "expenditure" and/or (2) broader discourses about the heavy

costs raised by migrants upon national economy and welfare. The third and final category is deducted from the cultural argument (Norocel, 2016; Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016). The main indicators are (1) specific terms such as “cultural threat”, “culturally deviant” or similar ones and/or (2) discourses representing migrants as a threat to the preservation of the ethnocultural nation-state.

Relying on well-defined indicators is useful to make clear where one code ends and another one starts. In fact, each category is applied to one or more sentences only when words and discourses are consistent to that category’s indicators, thus simultaneously excluding all the others. This in turn allows for the assessment of how the different arguments vary when politicians talk about means-tested and universal programs and whether the observed variation corresponds to the one that has been hypothesized. Besides, indicators are useful to apply the same categories to all the material in a consistent manner, i.e. always applying the same category when the same indicator is observed. The consistency of the coding frame increases in turn the reliability and replication of the overall analysis. In order to improve the efficiency of the research, I rely on MAXQDA, an advanced piece of software for qualitative data analysis, to code the qualitative data and analyze them (Kuckartz, 2019).

5. Analysis: welfare chauvinist turns in family allowances

The two most important cash benefits for Austrian families are the child care allowance and the family allowance. Both are universal flat-rate benefits. Child care allowance is paid for up to three years after childbirth. Family allowance is paid to parents with children up to age 24 (25 for men who complete mandatory military or alternative civilian service) and increases with age and the number of children. The 2018 Amendment 83/2018 to the 1967 Family Burden Equalization Act, passed in December 2018, mainly affects family allowances. It envisages an indexation of family allowances to local purchasing power for children permanently residing in another Member State of the EU/EEA or Switzerland, even if the parents are residents in Austria (Art. 8a.1 and 8a.2). This can be considered a form of welfare chauvinism, in that it reduces the financial support granted to non-Austrian families and children, who were previously entitled to the same amount as Austrian citizens.

Labor migrants from Eastern Europe are the target group most affected by such restrictions since many of them, especially those coming from Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, work and live in Austria but left their children in the home countries. While the EU framework of social security coordination should protect them from welfare chauvinism, they rather see a reduction in family allowances for their children living at home. In May 2020, the European Commission referred Austria to the EU Court of Justice for such measure and the Court invalidated it a few months later (Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2020).

5.1 Justificatory arguments during the 43rd NC’s plenary session

Following the submission of the draft legislation to the NC, the first parliamentary debate is held on the 24th of October 2018 (43rd NC plenary session). During the debate, ÖVP and FPÖ politicians illustrate the functioning and scope of indexation. They also answer to the criticism advanced by the opposition parties. The main criticism is that such a measure contrasts with the EU law and common values, following which all EU citizens working in Austria are entitled to Austrian social benefits and programs on equal bases with Austrian citizens.

Contrary to expectations, politicians do not rely on any of the hypothesized arguments to promote indexation. Conversely, most of them speak in favor of this measure by generically referring to it as necessary to grant “an advancement in terms of fairness and justice” (NC Deb 24 October 2018, p. 115) and to save significant amount of money on social programs for

children in Austria. The speech by FPÖ deputy Schimanek makes this point clear. She refers to an alleged “inequality” (NC Deb 24 October 2018, pp. 115–116) affecting the social redistributive system, meaning that distribution of this benefit to families across EU countries is not equally and fairly made.

Namely, families whose children reside in more expensive countries (with lower purchasing power), such as Austria, can afford much less than those whose children reside in less expensive countries, with the very same amount of money received through the family allowance (NC Deb 24 October 2018). Basing on this reasoning, indexation is necessary to ensure and restore equality in terms of equal and fair social redistribution for Austrian families, enabling them to ensure their children’s needs properly (NC Deb 24 October 2018, p. 116).

With the very same amount of money, a Hungarian or a Polish family in Hungary and Poland can afford much more than an Austrian family living in Austria. That is the crux of the matter! If we do not adjust the family allowance to the cost of living in the respective countries, it will result in a disadvantage for our own families (p. 115).

5.2 Justificatory arguments during the 885th FC’s plenary session

Since most of the deputies voted in favor of it, the draft law is finally adopted by the NC. Thereafter, it is further discussed during the 885th FC’s plenary session on the 8th of November 2018 which also adopts the proposal. As in the previous session, most politicians use the equality argument to promote indexation. In particular, the Federal Councilor Georg Schuster stresses again the difference in purchasing power between Austria and other EU countries, especially Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland.

Based on that, the Federal Councilor Steiner-Wieser (FPÖ) claims that the current system of family benefits is generating a real “discrimination against Austrian children” (NC Deb 8 November 2018, p. 110), who can afford much less since they live in a more expensive country. Hence, indexation is meant to eliminate disadvantage at the expense of Austrian families and children and rather saving money for them.

Do you want to discriminate against Austrian children? They can do nothing to grow up in a country where life is extremely expensive, where you may get only half or even a third of what you get in other European countries for one euro. Therefore, in future, the family allowance must be adapted to the purchasing power of the child’s country of residence (p. 110).

6. Analysis: welfare chauvinist turns in social assistance

The Austrian social assistance program (Sozialhilfe, or Bedarforientierte Mindestsicherung between 2010 and 2019) is a means-tested income replacement program. Between 2010 and 2016, an agreement is in place between the federal government and the Austrian Länder about uniform standards (Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2020). Once the agreement expired, the social assistance program is decentralized, with each Land administrating it differently. On the 22nd of May 2019, the New Basic Act on Social Assistance is passed by the ÖVP and the FPÖ coalition. This sets up the new legal and policy framework for social assistance, centralizing the governance of such programs, previously administrated by the Austrian Lander. The main groups of migrants targeted are refugees, subsidiary protection holders and non-permanent resident TCNs (mainly non-Western migrants), also including asylum-seekers. They are only awarded the full amount of benefit at the condition that they successfully attended such courses and obtained a sufficient knowledge of either German (B1) or English (C1).

This measure has been repeatedly accused of discriminating against these categories of migrants, imposing severe legal and practical limitations on their access to social assistance. A few days after the approval of the Basic Act, the opposition parties appealed against it at the Austrian Constitutional Court. The court ruled in December of 2019 that the language requirements were unconstitutional (G 164/2019-25). Today, it does not longer apply.

6.1 Justificatory arguments during the 66th NC's plenary session

The first parliamentary debate on the new reform is held on the 27th of March (66th plenary session of the NC), a few months after the submission of the draft legislation to the NC. The findings comply to the second hypothesis, H2a, about means-tested programs. Politicians from the ÖVP and notably the FPÖ speak in favor of the new law, especially by exploiting the welfare tourism argument (category 1 in the coding frame).

This point is clearly made by the FPÖ deputy Rosenkranz who compares refugees and non-Western migrants, on the one hand, and Austrian citizens, on the other hand (NC Deb 27 March 2019, pp. 45–46). The earlier rely on social assistance to a larger extent but do not have a job and do not pay taxes whilst the latter usually have lower dependency rates but finance the social assistance program thorough their job and regularly paying taxes (NC Deb 27 March 2019). In her speech, we can observe several words and rhetorical forms referring to migrants and refugees as “welfare tourists” and “abusers” (NC Deb 27 March 2019, pp. 45–46).

In most recent times, so many migrants from non-Western countries, including many refugees, have come to Austria and they are now receiving huge amount of money through the social assistance system, although they have not worked here for a single day. By contrast, there are countless Austrian people who work and pay taxes in this country, and they receive significant lower amount of social assistance. Migrants and refugees are abusing of our social system and behaving as welfare tourists to Austria. If you do not do something, this will incentive further welfare tourism (p. 45).

Moreover, refugees and non-Western migrants are also portrayed as a burden upon the social and economic system (H2b and category 2), especially in the speech by the FPÖ' deputy Dagmar Belakovich (NC Deb 27 March 2019, p. 48). She argues that social assistance for non-Western migrants and refugees, and notably Syrian families, is too expensive for Austrian citizens who are financing that through their taxes. In spite of any humanitarian considerations, the Austrian welfare state which cannot economically afford that (NC Deb 27 March 2019, p. 48).

[...] in 2016 alone, only Syrian asylum seekers transferred €2 million to their homeland to Syria. Who paid for that? Austrian citizens paid! [...] Austria is not in an economic position to rebuild the economy in all these countries with its social assistance, and we do not want that either. That is why it is so urgent that this reform should take place (p. 48).

Given all that, the new chauvinist measures are deemed necessary to stop the unconditioned welfare tourism by migrants and refugees and protect Austrian citizens regularly paying taxes. Besides, making social assistance conditional to the language and professional test is a way to create incentives for non-Western migrants and refugees to integrate into the Austrian labor market and to actively contribute to the national economy. Great emphasis is given to the learning of German by refugees. The idea behind is that a good knowledge of German facilitates the search for an employment and at the same time makes migrants more appealing for national employers (NC Deb 27 March 2019, p. 47). The Federal Minister Hartinger-Klein makes these points very clear by claiming that “only after establishing a fundamental employability on the Austrian labor market and a corresponding will to provide services for our society has been shown, is it justified to grant social assistance” (p. 49).

6.2 Justificatory arguments during the 892nd FC's plenary session

Since most of the deputies voted in favor of it, the draft law is finally adopted by the NC, thus passing to the FC's discussion in April 2019. Following a technical analysis and favorable deliberation by the Committee on Labor and Social Affairs of the Federal Council, the draft law is discussed for the last time during the 892nd plenary session of the Council on the 9th of May.

Government politicians (FC Deb 9 May 2019, pp. 78–82) promote the new law by using the welfare tourism argument again (H2a, category 1). Among others, the point by the Councilor Bruno Aschenbrenner is particularly noteworthy (FC Deb 9 May 2019, p. 79). He mentions some statistical figures regarding social assistance to highlight that, from 2011 onwards, the number of migrants and refugees receiving such a benefit has exceeded that of Austrian citizens. However, he claims, most of them have never worked nor paid taxes necessary to finance social assistance. To further stress this point, the Councilor Steiner-Wieser makes some examples from the city of Salzburg, where several employed and tax-payer Austrian citizens have seen their amount of social assistance being drastically reduced to provide social assistance to refugees. We can observe words and expressions (indicators) such as “behave as tourists” and “social abuse.”

Salzburg families, Salzburg households have seen their amount of social assistance reduced because the money was devoted to provide social assistance to refugees who behave as tourist and do not even work and pay taxes regularly! That is definitively a social abuse (p. 79).

In light of that, the new law is intended to “bring more justice for people working in this country” (FC Deb 9 May 2019, p. 80). Namely, it grants social assistance to refugees and migrants only when they make the necessary contribution to the national economic and social system. This is therefore intended to stop social tourism by refugees and migrants who “may not want to work at all.” Conversely, it is worthier to make the country attractive for all those migrants who are “willing to work and contribute” and make a “greater effort to integrate into Austrian society and into the labor market” (p. 82). As in the previous session, great emphasis is given to the acquisition of the German language, as a mean to economically integrate and actively contribute.

The German language is the best way to integrate in Austria, into our society, into our national labor market. And labor integration is the best way to get social assistance (p. 82).

7. Summary and discussion of the findings

Table 3 summarizes the findings. Overall, the premise that the social programs' design works as an explanatory factor to highlight variations in the justificatory arguments is supported by empirical evidence. However, the links between types of programs and types of arguments do not always correspond to those hypothesized.

| Hypotheses | Type of social programme | Expected welfare chauvinist argument | Observed welfare chauvinist argument |
|------------|--------------------------|--|--|
| H1 | Universal | Welfare tourism (H1a) Economic burden (H1b) Cultural belonging (H1c) | Not observed Argument about “fairness and equality” |
| H2 | Means-tested | Welfare tourism (H2a) Economic burden (H2b) | Observed Observed |

Table 3.
Main findings

The universal family benefit program does not attract the economic nor the cultural arguments, in contrast to the first hypothesis. Instead, politicians use the argument of an alleged “inequality” in social redistribution affecting Austrian families and the need for indexation to protect their social rights. In compliance to the second hypothesis, the Austrian means-tested social assistance program attracts the welfare tourism argument (H1a) and also the economic burden arguments (H1b). The analysis has voluntarily neglected the recently developed differentiation between direct and indirect forms of welfare chauvinism (Careja *et al.*, 2016). It is assumed that welfare chauvinist arguments are hardly observable in the cases of indirect welfare chauvinism since politicians promote welfare retrenchment without explicitly referring to migrants (Careja *et al.*, 2016).

As with all studies of individual cases, it is clear that the analysis of Austria cannot fully answer the article’s research question by itself. However, the hypotheses and the theoretical argument are applied in Austria merely, yet they are designed so as to be able to encompass a broader number of cases (cf. paragraph 2 on hypotheses). To be sure, future research has to establish the further applicability of the findings presented in the Austrian case in a comparative context.

8. Conclusions

Starting from the Austrian case, this study wants to pave the way to additional research exploring the legitimizing explanations behind welfare chauvinism in the political context of a larger number of European host countries. This topic is theoretically and empirically relevant. From the theoretical perspective, the article suggests for the first time that a variety of forms of welfare chauvinism may exist in policy discussion and policy frameworks both in Austria and in other European host countries (if the findings are generalized). In its traditional understanding (Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990), welfare chauvinism is defined by two overarching characteristics:

- (1) The separation of society into a native in-group (delineated by citizenship, ethnicity, race or religion) and a nonnative out-group (migrants and refugees) and
- (2) The exclusion or limited access to welfare benefits and programs at the expense of nonnatives.

The various forms share these same overarching characteristics, but they differ in terms of the justificatory arguments supporting them. Namely, Austrian politicians each time justify the exclusion (or limited access) of the nonnative out-group by exploiting different arguments. Namely, that on the Austrian means-tested social assistance program is an economic form of welfare chauvinism. Accordingly, politicians exclude migrants on the basis of their economic performances/behaviors and, notably, the extent to which they reciprocate for the social help received through their engagement in the labor market. It is also an economic form of welfare chauvinism because it looks at the cost migrants impose upon the welfare state and public economy.

Instead, that on the universal family benefit program is a slightly different form of welfare chauvinism. Politicians do not focus on migrants’ individual economic behaviors and performances nor the economic consequences they produce. They reduce the amount of family allowances for EU migrant children on the basis of broader considerations regarding the features and overall well-functioning of the social system. In their view, this measure is necessary to safeguard an equal social distribution and avoid that Austrian children and family receive less than others social groups. This form of welfare chauvinism does not necessarily portray migrants in negative terms, but it rather builds on national protectionism, reducing solidarity to a national concern merely.

Such a conceptual differentiation has empirical implications as well. If welfare chauvinism continues to gain foothold in national legislation, as it is currently doing (Chueri, 2019), migrants will see their social rights challenged (Chueri, 2019). However, they may be more or less likely to counter exclusion from social programs according to the type of welfare chauvinism at play. When we have an economic form of welfare chauvinism, as in the case of the 2019 Basic Act on Social Assistance, migrants can shift to the in-group if they are willing to “reciprocate back,” and they put an effort to integrate into the labor market (cfr. Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016).

Instead, when we have a form of welfare chauvinism based on national protectionism and equality (as in the case of the Austrian reform to family allowances), migrants may remain excluded for the sake of the overall well-functioning of the social system, independently from their willingness and all their efforts. If the findings in Austria are generalized, this would mean that they are more likely to be excluded from universal types of programs that constitute nowadays an important part of social protection in several European countries (Palier, 2010).

The theoretical discussion presented in the article focuses mainly on what justificatory arguments are used and how they may depend on the different types of social programs. However, complex sociopolitical phenomena, such as welfare chauvinism, are hardly explicable by a single element. Thus, we may have other potential explanations/independent variables for the chauvinist arguments, beyond the types of social programs. Further potential factors shaping the justificatory arguments may be for instance the different types of groups/categories of migrants targeted. The present article has only focused on the characteristics shared by most groups of migrants, such as below-average incomes and typically lower levels of labor market (cfr. paragraph 2 on hypotheses). Instead, migrants’ groups also differ in several other characteristics, both in Austrian and elsewhere (Koser, 2007). In light of that, future analysis can address this question more in depth.

Other potential explanations are, for example, politicians’ ideological positions or their broader stances on immigration and/or welfare, the different types of welfare state and socioeconomic context in the host country, citizenship rules, etc. While being far from providing an exhaustive explanation accounting for the variation in welfare chauvinist arguments, this article provides a first step in explaining a part of such a variation. The present findings could provide an interesting avenue for future research to further refine the theoretical argument presented in this paper in order to better understand the variation in welfare chauvinism that is left unexplained in the above analysis.

Notes

1. In this article, I speak about “European host countries” to refer to the countries classified as Western, Northern and Southern Europe by the UN geoscheme classification of the United Nations.
2. They are migrants coming from a country in Africa, South America or Asia (Koser, 2007). In countries which are part of the EU, they can sometimes be referred as third-country nationals, TNCs (Koser, 2007).
3. Strength/weakness of welfare chauvinism is measured by Ennsner-Jedenastik in qualitative terms: stronger appeals directly and explicitly affect migrants, while weaker appeals do not explicitly mention migrants but target broader groups of people, in which migrants are overrepresented.
4. To be sure, this Report refers to migrants from Eastern countries that are members of the EU. This does not include all Eastern countries but a significant part of them.

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Appendix

The Appendix file is available online for this article.

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