Does Ideology Structure Redistribution Preferences? Evidence from Cross-National Variation in Europe

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Abstract: *Why does political ideology shape support for redistribution more strongly in some European countries than in others? Using Round 11 of the European Social Survey across 28 countries, this study examines the political, economic, and value-based foundations of redistribution preferences. Country fixed-effects ordered logit and multilevel models show that right-leaning individuals are consistently less supportive of redistribution. Economic insecurity increases support, while higher household income reduces it. Helping others also has a strong positive association, showing that redistribution preferences extend beyond material self-interest. Trust in parliament further conditions the ideological divide, with stronger ideological differences at higher levels of trust. Most importantly, the effect of ideology varies substantially across countries. A random-slope model significantly improves model fit, confirming that the ideological divide over redistribution is not uniform across Europe. These findings show that redistribution preferences reflect political beliefs, material circumstances, and individual values, while highlighting cross-national variation in how strongly ideology structures public support for redistribution.*

Keywords: ***income redistribution, political ideology, economic insecurity, helping others, institutional trust, European Social Survey***

Introduction

Economic inequality remains a central challenge across European democracies. It raises an important political question: who supports government efforts to reduce income differences, and why? This question has become more important

as European welfare states face demographic change, economic uncertainty, and political polarization. Public support is essential to the legitimacy and sustainability of redistributive policies. Yet citizens differ considerably in how they view the role of government in addressing inequality.

Traditional explanations of redistribution preferences emphasize material self-interest. Individuals with lower incomes or greater exposure to economic risk are expected to support redistribution because they are more likely to benefit from it (Meltzer & Richard 1981; Alesina & Giuliano 2011). Other research shows that these preferences are more complex. Expectations of social mobility, perceptions of economic position, and the structure of inequality can also shape support for redistribution (Piketty 1995; Benabou & Ok 2001; Cruces, Perez-Truglia & Tetaz 2013; Lupu & Pontusson 2011). Economic position therefore matters, but it does not provide a complete explanation.

Political beliefs and personal values add another dimension. Political ideology shapes how individuals understand inequality and the appropriate role of government (Alt and Iversen 2017; Rueda and Stegmueller 2019). Fairness beliefs and concern for others can also influence support for redistribution beyond direct economic interests (Alesina & Angeletos 2005; Fong 2001). Institutional settings matter as well. Research shows that welfare regimes and national political environments are associated with differences in redistribution attitudes across countries (Jaeger 2005; Jaeger 2009). These studies suggest that redistribution preferences emerge from political, economic, and value-based considerations rather than from material self-interest alone.

An important question, however, remains. *Does political ideology structure redistribution preferences in the same way across European countries?* Existing research provides strong evidence that left- and right-leaning individuals differ in their views of redistribution. Yet an average ideological effect may conceal important differences across national contexts. European countries differ substantially in welfare institutions, inequality, political competition, and histories of redistribution (Esping-Andersen 1990; Lupu & Pontusson 2011; Pontusson & Weisstanner 2018). It is therefore important to distinguish between two questions: Does ideology predict redistribution preferences across Europe? And is the strength of this relationship similar across countries?

This paper addresses these questions using Round 11 of the European Social Survey (ESS) across 28 countries. It examines how Political ideology, Economic insecurity, Household income, Trust in parliament, Political interest, Religiosity, Enjoyment, and Helping others are associated with support for income redistribution. These factors capture three broad dimensions of redistribution preferences: political orientation, material position, and individual values. Rather than treating these dimensions as competing explanations, the analysis examines their independent relationships within the same empirical framework.

The paper also moves beyond estimating a single average ideological effect. Country fixed-effects ordered logit models first identify the main individual-level relationships while accounting for country differences. Multilevel ordered logit models then account for the clustering of individuals within countries. Most importantly, a random-slope specification allows the effect of Political ideology to vary across countries. Country-specific estimates provide additional evidence of the extent of this variation. This strategy allows the analysis to test directly whether ideology structures redistribution preferences uniformly across the 28 countries.

The findings show a clear pattern. Political ideology remains a strong and consistent predictor of redistribution preferences. Right-leaning respondents are less supportive of redistribution, even after political, economic, value-based, and demographic characteristics are considered. Economic insecurity is associated with greater support, while Household income is associated with lower support. Helping others also has a strong positive relationship with redistribution support. In contrast, Political interest and Religiosity do not show significant independent associations in the fully specified models. Trust in parliament also conditions the ideological relationship. The divide between left- and right-leaning respondents becomes wider at higher levels of parliamentary trust.

The cross-national results provide an important qualification to the average ideological effect. The relationship between ideology and redistribution varies substantially across countries. The random-slope model fits the data significantly better than the model that assumes a common ideology effect. Country-specific estimates also show that ideology strongly structures redistribution preferences in some countries but has a much weaker relationship in others. The ideological divide over redistribution is therefore not uniform across Europe.

This paper makes three contributions. First, it shifts attention from whether ideology matters to whether it matters equally across countries. This distinction provides a clearer understanding of the political foundations of redistribution preferences. Second, it connects political orientation, material circumstances, and individual values within the same analysis. The results show that Political ideology, Economic insecurity, Household income, and Helping others retain independent relationships with redistribution support. Third, the paper provides direct evidence of cross-national heterogeneity in the ideology–redistribution relationship. It does not claim that particular welfare institutions, levels of inequality, or political systems explain this variation. These country-level mechanisms are not directly tested. Instead, the analysis establishes that the strength of ideological structuring itself differs across countries. This provides a foundation for future research on why these differences emerge.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature and develops the theoretical framework. Section 3 describes the ESS data, variables, and empirical strategy. Section 4 presents and discusses the fixed-

-effects, multilevel, and cross-national results. The final section summarizes the main findings, discusses their implications, and identifies directions for future research.

Literature review and theoretical expectations

Public support for income redistribution reflects more than economic self--interest. Research shows that redistribution preferences are also shaped by political ideology, perceptions of economic security, values, institutional attitudes, and social characteristics (Alesina & Giuliano 2011; Guillaud 2013; Olivera 2015; Rueda & Stegmueller 2019). These explanations are often examined separately. Yet individuals form redistribution preferences through several considerations at the same time.

This study brings these explanations together around three broad mechanisms. The first is political orientation, particularly ideology and institutional trust. The second is material position, including household income and perceived economic insecurity. The third is value orientation, including concern for helping others, enjoyment, and religiosity. These mechanisms are treated as complementary rather than competing explanations. The analysis then examines whether the relationship between ideology and redistribution varies across European countries.

Political ideology and redistribution

Political ideology is one of the most consistent predictors of redistribution preferences. Individuals on the political left generally support a larger redistributive role for government, while those on the right tend to place greater emphasis on markets and limited government intervention (Alt & Iversen 2017; Lupu & Pontusson 2011; Soroka & Wlezien 2010; Bansak et al. 2020; Blanchet, Chancel & Gethin 2020). Ideology provides a political lens through which individuals evaluate inequality and government intervention.

However, ideology does not necessarily structure redistribution preferences equally across countries. Welfare institutions, political competition, and existing levels of redistribution differ considerably across Europe. Earlier research shows that welfare regimes are associated with differences in redistribution attitudes (Jaeger 2005; Jaeger 2009). Comparative studies also demonstrate that redistribution preferences are embedded in broader political and institutional settings (Beramendi & Rehm 2016; Rueda & Stegmueller 2019).

This distinction is important for the present study. Rather than assuming a single ideological divide across Europe, the analysis allows the effect of ideology to vary across countries. The study therefore tests both the average rela-

tionship between ideology and redistribution and the degree of cross-national heterogeneity in this relationship.

H1: Left-leaning individuals are more likely to support income redistribution.

H2: The effect of political ideology on support for redistribution varies across countries.

Material position and economic insecurity

Material self-interest provides a second explanation for redistribution preferences. The median-voter model predicts that individuals with lower economic resources should favor redistribution because they are more likely to benefit from it (Meltzer and Richard 1981). Subsequent research shows that income and socioeconomic position are important predictors of redistribution attitudes (Alesina & Angeletos 2005; Alesina & Giuliano 2011; Corneo & Grüner 2002; Schmidt-Catran 2016).

Objective income, however, captures only part of an individual's economic position. Expectations about future mobility can also influence redistribution preferences. The prospect-of-upward-mobility argument suggests that individuals may oppose redistribution when they expect their economic position to improve, even when their current position is relatively disadvantaged (Benabou & Ok 2001; Piketty 1995).

Subjective economic conditions are therefore also important. Individuals experiencing economic vulnerability may value the protection provided by redistributive policies. Perceptions of relative economic position can also differ from objective circumstances and influence policy preferences (Cruces, Perez-Truglia & Tetaz 2013; Guillaud 2013). Redistribution attitudes may consequently reflect both what individuals have and how secure they feel about their economic circumstances.

This study captures both dimensions. Household income represents objective material position, while Economic insecurity captures respondents' perceived difficulty in living on their household income. Examining both variables helps distinguish the role of economic resources from perceived vulnerability.

H3: Greater Economic insecurity is associated with stronger support for income redistribution.

H4: Higher Household income is associated with lower support for income redistribution.

Other-regarding values and redistribution

Redistribution preferences cannot be explained entirely by material self-interest. Individuals also differ in how much importance they place on the welfare of others. Research on social preferences shows that fairness beliefs and concern

for others can influence demand for redistribution (Alesina & Angeletos 2005; Fong 2001). Individuals may therefore support redistribution even when they do not expect to benefit personally.

Schwartz's theory of human values provides a broader basis for understanding these differences. Values related to benevolence and concern for others emphasize the welfare of people beyond the individual (Schwartz 1992). These orientations are relevant to redistribution because redistribution involves judgments about how resources should be shared and the extent to which society should protect those facing disadvantage.

The present study uses the ESS item concerning the importance of helping people and caring for their well-being to capture this other-regarding orientation. The variable is therefore labeled "helping others" rather than the broader term "moral identity." This narrower label more accurately reflects what the ESS item measures.

The analysis also includes Enjoyment, based on the ESS human-values item concerning the importance of having a good time and enjoying oneself. This measure captures a different personal value orientation and is kept conceptually separate from Helping others. Both are single-item indicators and are not treated as comprehensive measures of moral identity or core values.

H5: Greater importance placed on Helping others is associated with stronger support for income redistribution.

Institutional trust and political interest

Institutional attitudes provide another political dimension of redistribution preferences. Redistribution requires government institutions to collect resources and allocate them across groups. Individuals' confidence in those institutions may therefore be associated with their willingness to support government redistribution.

The direction of this relationship is not necessarily straightforward. Trust may increase acceptance of government intervention when citizens believe institutions can administer redistribution effectively. However, individuals who trust existing institutions may also perceive current arrangements as satisfactory and therefore express less demand for additional redistribution. Earlier research demonstrates that institutional arrangements and perceptions of fairness are important for understanding redistribution attitudes (Jaeger 2005, 2009; Cruces, Perez-Truglia & Tetaz 2013).

The present study therefore examines Trust in parliament directly and also tests whether it conditions the relationship between Political ideology and redistribution. This interaction is important because institutional trust may have different implications for respondents on different sides of the ideological spectrum. Rather than assuming that trust has the same association for every-

one, the model evaluates whether the ideological divide changes across levels of parliamentary trust.

Political interest is included as a separate measure of political engagement. Politically interested individuals may have more structured policy attitudes, but the expected direction of its independent relationship with redistribution is less clear. It is therefore included as a political predictor without a directional hypothesis.

H6: The relationship between Political ideology and support for redistribution varies across levels of Trust in parliament.

Religiosity and redistribution

Religiosity represents a further value orientation that may influence redistribution attitudes. Its theoretical relationship with redistribution is ambiguous. Religious traditions may emphasize compassion and assistance to those in need. At the same time, some religious orientations may be associated with beliefs about individual responsibility and social hierarchy (Laythe, Finkel & Kirkpatrick 2001).

This ambiguity makes a universal directional hypothesis difficult to justify. More importantly, the present analysis does not measure whether respondents live in contexts that specifically emphasize individual responsibility. The previous hypothesis predicting lower redistribution support among religious individuals in such contexts therefore went beyond what the empirical model could test.

Religiosity is consequently retained as an individual-level predictor, but no directional hypothesis is imposed. This allows the analysis to assess whether it has an independent association with redistribution after political ideology, economic circumstances, values, and demographic characteristics are taken into account.

An integrated framework of redistribution preferences

The theoretical argument can now be brought together. Redistribution preferences are understood as the product of three complementary mechanisms.

The first is political orientation. Political ideology structures beliefs about inequality and the appropriate role of government, while Trust in parliament captures attitudes toward the institutions responsible for implementing redistribution. The second is material position. Household income reflects respondents' economic resources, while Economic insecurity captures perceived vulnerability. The third is value orientation. Helping others captures concern for the welfare of others, while Enjoyment and Religiosity represent additional individual value orientations.

These mechanisms need not compete. A respondent may support redistribution because of economic insecurity, left-wing ideology, concern for others, or several of these considerations simultaneously. Conversely, high income, right-leaning ideology, and different value priorities may each contribute to lower support. The empirical models therefore estimate these factors jointly to determine whether each retains an independent association with redistribution preferences.

The comparative dimension adds a second level to this framework. The study does not assume that the ideological relationship is identical across Europe. Instead, country fixed effects account for stable differences between countries, while the multilevel random-slope model tests whether the association between ideology and redistribution varies across the 28 national samples. This provides a direct test of cross-national heterogeneity.

The framework does not, however, claim to identify which specific country-level institutions explain that heterogeneity. Welfare regimes, inequality, political competition, and other national characteristics provide plausible explanations discussed in the comparative literature (Esping-Andersen 1990; Jaeger 2005; Lupu & Pontusson 2011; Pontusson & Weisstanner 2018), but they are not modeled as Level-2 predictors in the present study. The empirical contribution is therefore narrower: it establishes whether meaningful cross-national variation exists rather than attributing that variation to particular national characteristics.

This framework connects political beliefs, material circumstances, and individual values within a single comparative analysis. It provides clear expectations that correspond directly to the variables and relationships tested in the empirical models.

Methodology, data, and model

This study examines public support for income redistribution across 28 countries included in Round 11 of the European Social Survey (ESS 2024). The analysis focuses on how political ideology, economic insecurity, institutional trust, personal values, religiosity, and socioeconomic characteristics shape redistribution preferences. It also examines whether the effect of political ideology varies across countries. The countries included in the analysis are reported in Table A1. The empirical analysis combines country fixed-effects ordered logit models with multilevel ordered logit models. The fixed-effects models estimate individual-level relationships while controlling for differences across countries. The multilevel models account for the nested structure of individuals within countries and allow the effect of political ideology to vary across national contexts.

Data source

The analysis uses data from Round 11 of the ESS (ESS 2024). The ESS provides harmonized cross-national survey data collected using common questionnaires and standardized procedures. This makes it well suited for comparing public attitudes across European countries. The sample size varies across model specifications because of missing observations on some variables. The first fixed-effects model contains 35,727 respondents, while Model 2 contains 35,008. The fully specified Models 3 and 4 use a common sample of 29,027 respondents. The multilevel null model contains 45,355 observations, while the full and random-slope models use 29,027 respondents. The main findings are therefore evaluated primarily using the fully specified models. Descriptive statistics for this common sample are reported in Table A2.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is support for income redistribution. It is measured using the ESS question asking whether the government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels. Responses range from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating stronger support for redistribution. The mean level of redistribution support is 3.909 in the complete-case sample, suggesting relatively high support overall. However, considerable variation exists across countries. Figure 1 presents the country-level differences in average redistribution support. Because the dependent variable is ordinal, ordered logit is used as the main estimation method. An OLS model is also estimated as a robustness check and reported in Table A3.

Independent variables

Political ideology is measured using the ESS 0–10 left–right scale. Higher values indicate a more right-leaning political position. Political ideology is the main explanatory variable because the study asks whether ideology structures redistribution preferences and whether this relationship varies across countries.

Trust in parliament is measured on a 0–10 scale, with higher values indicating greater institutional trust. Political interest measures respondents' reported interest in politics. The term "political interest" is used throughout the paper because it more accurately reflects the ESS measure than the broader concept of political engagement.

Economic insecurity measures how difficult respondents find it to live on their current household income. Higher values indicate greater economic insecurity. Household income is measured using income deciles and captures respondents' objective economic position.

The analysis also includes two value measures. Enjoyment captures the importance respondents place on having a good time and doing things that provide pleasure. Helping others captures the importance respondents place on helping people around them and caring for their well-being. These labels replace the broader terms "core values" and "moral identity" used in the previous version of the manuscript. They more closely reflect the specific ESS questions and avoid treating single items as comprehensive value scales.

Religiosity is measured on a 0–10 scale, with higher values indicating greater religiosity. The models also control for gender, age, age squared, education, residence type, and employment status. Descriptive statistics for the variables are presented in Table A2.

Modeling strategy

The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, four country fixed-effects ordered logit models are estimated. Model 1 examines political ideology while controlling for demographic characteristics. Model 2 adds Enjoyment, Political interest, and Trust in parliament. Model 3 adds Economic insecurity, Religiosity, Helping others, and Household income. Model 4 introduces an interaction between Political ideology and Trust in parliament. The results are reported in Table 1.

Second, multilevel ordered logit models are estimated to account for respondents being nested within countries. The null model includes a country random intercept. The next model introduces Political ideology and demographic controls. The full model includes all main explanatory variables. Finally, the random-slope model allows the effect of Political ideology to vary across countries.

The multilevel model can be expressed as:

$$\text{logit}\left[P\left(Y_{ij} \leq k\right)\right] = \tau_k - \left[\beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}\text{Ideology}_{ij} + \sum \beta_p X_{pij}\right]$$

where i represents individuals, j represents countries, and X represents the individual-level predictors and controls. The country-specific ideology coefficient is allowed to vary as:

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + u_{1j}.$$

This specification provides a direct test of whether the relationship between ideology and redistribution support differs across countries.

The random-slope model performs significantly better than the full random-intercept model, LR $\chi^3(2) = 536.54$, $p < .001$. The estimated ideology slope variance is 0.016. This provides evidence that the effect of political ideology is not uniform across the 28 countries. The complete multilevel results are reported in Table 2.

Importantly, this analysis establishes cross-national heterogeneity but does not identify which national characteristics explain it. Factors such as welfare institutions, inequality, and party competition may contribute to these differences, but they are not directly tested as country-level predictors in the current analysis. The interpretation of the results is therefore limited to demonstrating that the strength of the ideology–redistribution relationship varies across countries.

Descriptive statistics and robustness check

Descriptive statistics for the common sample of 29,027 respondents are reported in Table A2. The table summarizes the distributions of Redistribution support, Political ideology, Enjoyment, Political interest, Trust in parliament, Economic insecurity, Religiosity, Helping others, Household income, and Age.

As an additional robustness check, the full model is estimated using OLS on the same sample. The results are reported in Table A3. This analysis assesses whether the main findings remain similar when an alternative estimator is used. The ordered logit models remain the primary specifications because the dependent variable is ordinal.

Results and discussion

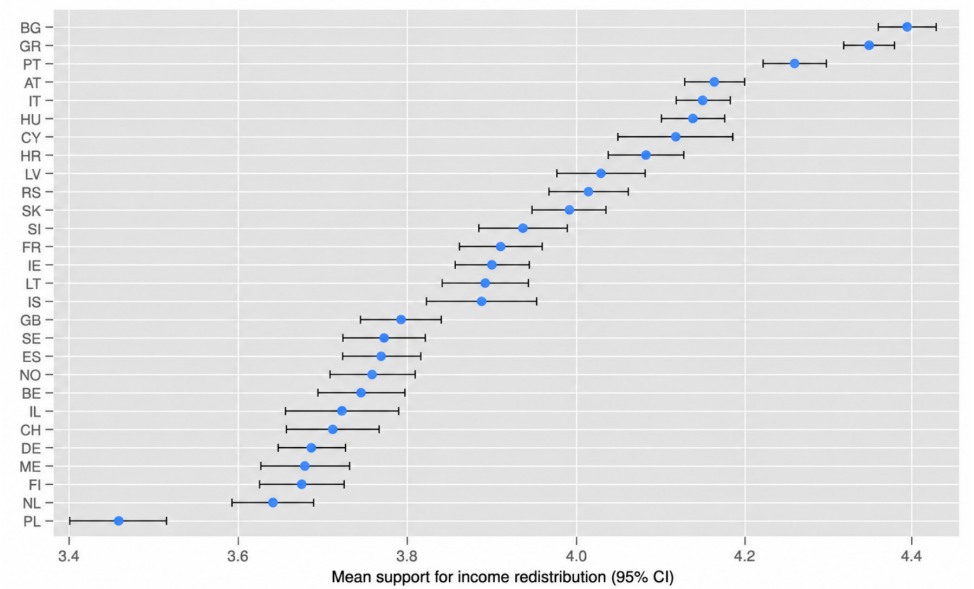
Cross-national variation in redistribution support

Figure 1 shows clear cross-national variation in support for income redistribution across the 28 countries. Average support is relatively high overall, but the level differs considerably across countries. Bulgaria and Greece show the highest average support, followed by Portugal, Austria, and Italy. At the other end, Poland reports the lowest average support, followed by the Netherlands, Finland, Montenegro, and Germany. Most countries fall between these two ends of the distribution.

The 95% confidence intervals provide additional evidence that some of these differences are unlikely to reflect sampling variation alone. At the same time, Figure 1 should be interpreted as descriptive evidence rather than as a test of why countries differ. The figure establishes an important starting point for the analysis: redistribution preferences are not distributed uniformly across European countries. This variation supports the use of models that account for national context.

Importantly, differences in average support do not necessarily mean that the same individual-level factors operate differently across countries. A country may have relatively high redistribution support while still showing a strong ideological divide, or relatively low average support while showing a weaker ideological divide. The multilevel analysis therefore examines this question more directly by testing whether the effect of political ideology itself varies across countries.

Figure 1: Cross-National Variation in Support for Income Redistribution



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Individual-level determinants of redistribution support

Table 1 presents the country fixed-effects ordered logit models. The results show that political ideology is the strongest and most consistent political predictor of redistribution preferences. Across all four specifications, the coefficient remains negative, highly significant, and remarkably stable. It ranges only from −0.163 to −0.166 ($p < .001$). Since higher values indicate more right-leaning positions, this means that moving to the political right is consistently associated with lower support for redistribution.

The stability of this relationship is important. The ideology coefficient changes very little when political attitudes, economic insecurity, personal values, religiosity, and household income are added to the models. The relationship therefore cannot be explained simply by differences in economic position or the other individual characteristics included in the analysis. Political ideology has an independent association with redistribution preferences even after these factors are taken into account.

Economic circumstances also matter. Economic insecurity has a positive and statistically significant coefficient in Model 3 ($\beta = 0.174$, $p < .001$), and the estimate remains unchanged in Model 4. Respondents who experience greater difficulty living on their current income are more supportive of redistribution. Household income shows the opposite relationship. Higher-income respondents are significantly less supportive of redistribution ($\beta = -0.055$, $p < .001$ in

Model 3). These findings provide support for the role of material interests, but they also show the importance of subjective economic vulnerability. Economic insecurity remains strongly associated with redistribution preferences even when household income is included in the same model.

The value measures provide another important result. Helping others has one of the largest positive coefficients in the full models ($\beta = 0.205$, $p < .001$ in Model 3). Respondents who place greater importance on helping others and caring for their well-being are more supportive of redistribution. Enjoyment also has a positive association, although its effect is considerably smaller ($\beta = 0.027$, $p < .01$ in Model 3). These results suggest that redistribution preferences are associated not only with political ideology and economic position but also with individual value orientations.

By contrast, political interest and religiosity do not have statistically significant independent associations with redistribution support in the fully specified models. Political interest remains small and insignificant after the other predictors are introduced. Religiosity is also insignificant in Models 3 and 4. These null findings are important because they indicate that these characteristics do not independently predict redistribution preferences once the other factors in the model are taken into account. No claim is made that they operate indirectly, since such a mechanism is not tested in the present analysis.

Trust in parliament shows a negative association with redistribution support. Its coefficient declines from −0.045 in Model 2 to −0.029 in Model 3 but remains statistically significant ($p < .001$). Thus, conditional on the other characteristics included in the model, respondents reporting greater trust in parliament tend to express somewhat lower support for redistribution.

Model 4 examines whether this relationship also depends on political ideology. The interaction between ideology and trust in parliament is negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.015$, $p < .001$). This means that the negative association between right-leaning ideology and redistribution support becomes stronger as trust in parliament increases. Conversely, the ideological gap is smaller among respondents with lower levels of parliamentary trust.

This interaction should not be interpreted as evidence that trust causes respondents on the political right to oppose redistribution. The model identifies a conditional association rather than a causal mechanism. Figure 2 therefore presents predicted probabilities to make the interaction easier to interpret substantively.

In sum, Table 1 provides evidence for three distinct dimensions of redistribution preferences. Political ideology remains strongly associated with support even after extensive controls are introduced. Economic vulnerability is also important, with greater insecurity associated with stronger support and higher household income associated with weaker support. Finally, Helping others remains independently and positively associated with redistribution. Redistribution preferences therefore cannot be reduced to economic self-interest alone.

Political orientation, material circumstances, and individual values each retain independent associations with attitudes toward redistribution.

The country fixed-effects models, however, tell us whether these relationships hold across the pooled sample after controlling for country differences. They do not establish whether the magnitude of the ideological relationship is the same in every country. This distinction is central to the paper's main argument. The multilevel and country-specific analyses presented below therefore examine whether the ideological structuring of redistribution preferences varies across national contexts.

Table 1: Determinants of Support for Income Redistribution (Ordered Logit Models)

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Political ideology	−0.166***	−0.163***	−0.163***	−0.164***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Enjoyment		0.039***	0.027**	0.027**
		(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Political interest		0.017	0.023	0.023
		(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Trust in parliament		−0.045***	−0.029***	−0.028***
		(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Economic insecurity			0.174***	0.174***
			(0.017)	(0.017)
Religiosity			−0.007	−0.006
			(0.004)	(0.004)
Helping others			0.205***	0.206***
			(0.012)	(0.012)
Household income			−0.055***	−0.054***
			(0.005)	(0.005)
Ideology × trust				−0.015***
				(0.002)
Observations	**35,727**	**35,008**	**29,027**	**29,027**
Log likelihood	−44,794.09	−43,805.18	−36,195.50	−36,158.22
Model χ^2	3,874.59	3,958.18	3,780.10	3,854.66

Note: *Entries are ordered-logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Higher values of the dependent variable indicate stronger support for income redistribution. Higher values of political ideology indicate more right-leaning positions, and higher household income values indicate higher income deciles. All models include country fixed effects and controls for gender, age, age squared, education, residence, and employment status. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Ideology and trust in parliament

Figure 2 illustrates the interaction between political ideology and trust in parliament using predicted probabilities of strong support for redistribution. The results show a clear ideological divide. As respondents move from the left to the right, the predicted probability of strongly supporting redistribution declines at all three levels of parliamentary trust. However, the size of this decline differs depending on trust.

Among respondents with low trust in parliament, the predicted probability of strong redistribution support declines from approximately 0.38 among those on the left to 0.26 among those on the right. The decline is larger at the average level of trust, from approximately 0.38 to 0. 23. It is strongest among respondents with high trust, where the predicted probability falls from approximately 0.38 to 0. 21.

This pattern is consistent with the negative interaction between political ideology and trust in parliament reported in Model 4 of Table 1 ($\beta = -0.015$, $p < .001$). The ideological divide in redistribution preferences becomes wider as trust in parliament increases. Trust therefore conditions the relationship between ideology and redistribution support rather than simply having the same association across the ideological spectrum.

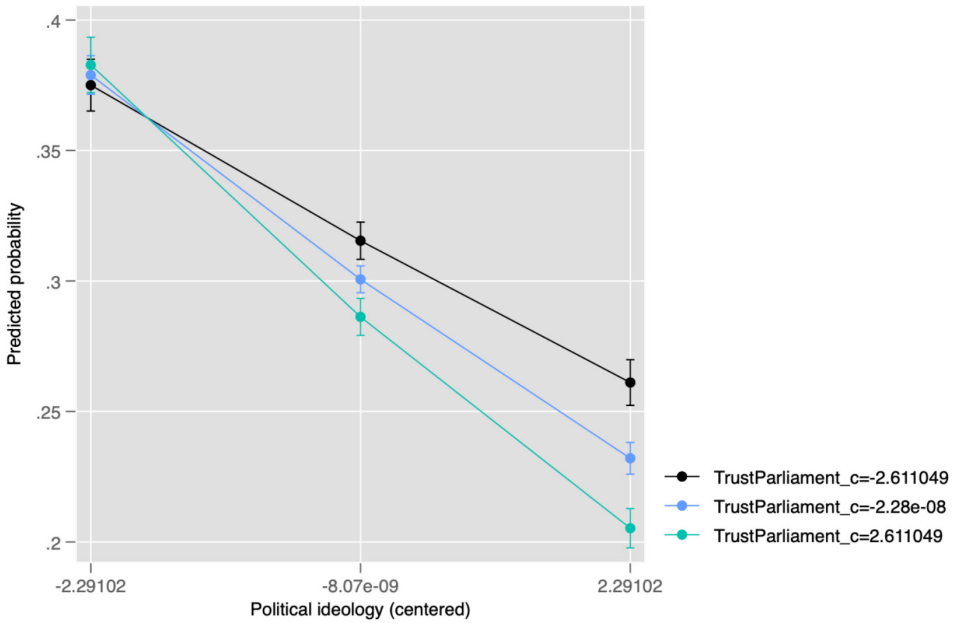
The pattern is particularly interesting because differences by trust are small among left-leaning respondents but become much larger as respondents move to the right. Among right-leaning respondents, those with high trust in parliament have the lowest predicted probability of strong redistribution support, while those with low trust show substantially greater support. This suggests that institutional trust is associated with redistribution preferences differently across ideological positions.

These findings should be interpreted as conditional associations rather than causal effects. The analysis does not establish why trust strengthens the ideological divide or whether trust itself causes changes in redistribution preferences. Instead, Figure 2 provides evidence that the relationship between political ideology and redistribution support depends on respondents' level of trust in parliament. This individual-level interaction also provides a useful transition to the next question: whether the strength of the ideology–redistribution relationship varies across countries.

Cross-national heterogeneity in the effect of ideology

Figure 3 provides stronger evidence for the paper's central argument by showing substantial cross-national variation in the relationship between political ideology and redistribution support. The country-specific coefficients range from strongly negative values to small positive values. This indicates that ideol-

Figure 2: Predicted Probability of Strong Redistribution Support



Source: Author's own elaboration.

ogy does not structure redistribution preferences with the same strength across the 28 countries.

The negative relationship is particularly strong in Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. In these countries, moving to the political right is associated with a substantially larger decline in support for redistribution. A similarly clear negative relationship appears in Iceland, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, and France. These patterns indicate a pronounced ideological divide over redistribution in a substantial group of European countries.

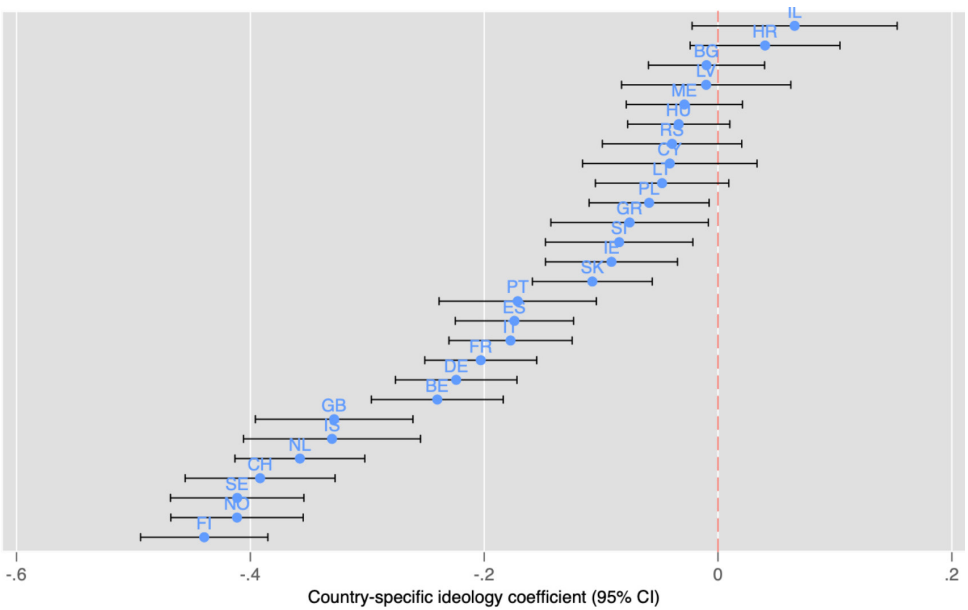
In contrast, the ideology effect is considerably weaker in several other countries. Lithuania, Cyprus, Serbia, Hungary, Montenegro, Latvia, and Bulgaria have estimates closer to zero. Their confidence intervals also approach or cross zero in several cases. Israel and Croatia stand out because their point estimates are slightly positive, although their confidence intervals include zero. The evidence therefore does not support a statistically reliable positive ideological effect in these countries. Rather, it indicates that the conventional negative relationship between right-leaning ideology and redistribution support is weak or statistically uncertain.

Figure 3 therefore adds an important qualification to the pooled results in Table 1. The fixed-effects models show a strong average negative relationship

between right-leaning ideology and redistribution support. The country-specific estimates show that this average masks considerable variation. Political ideology is a powerful organizing factor in some countries but a much weaker predictor in others.

This finding supports the paper's argument that the ideological structuring of redistribution preferences is not uniform across national contexts. However, the figure does not establish why these differences occur. Institutional arrangements, welfare-state characteristics, inequality, or patterns of political competition may be relevant, but these country-level factors are not directly modeled in the present analysis. The evidence therefore demonstrates cross-national heterogeneity in the ideology effect without attributing that heterogeneity to a specific national-level mechanism.

Figure 3: Cross-National Variation in the Ideology Effect



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Comparing the fixed-effects estimates

Figure 4 provides a visual comparison of the coefficients across the four fixed--effects ordered logit models. The figure reinforces the main results reported in Table 1 and shows that the key relationships remain stable as additional variables are introduced.

Political ideology is the most consistent political predictor across all four models. Its coefficient remains close to −0.16, with little change across specifica-

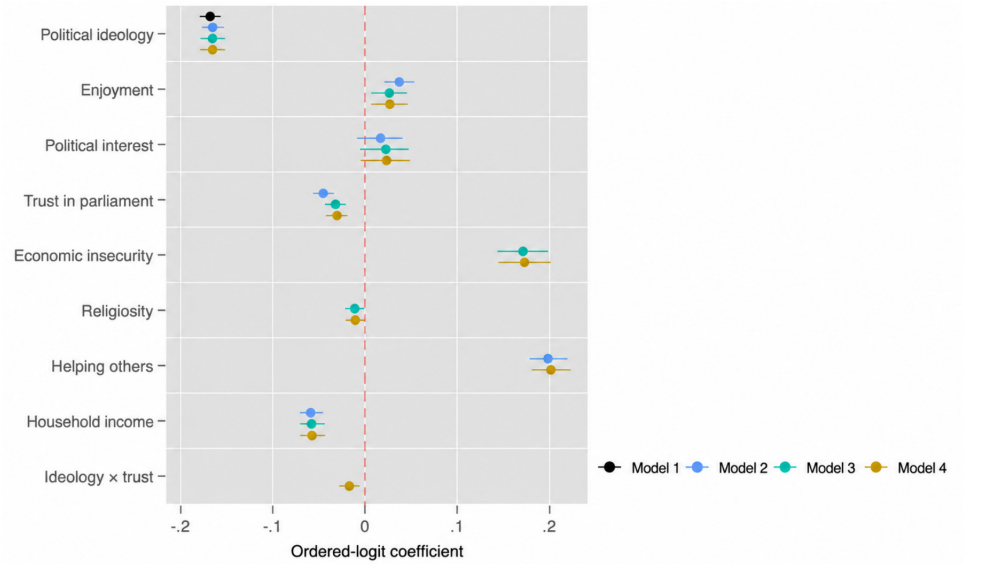
tions. This stability is important because the association remains strong after political attitudes, economic circumstances, personal values, and demographic characteristics are taken into account. Right-leaning respondents are therefore consistently less supportive of redistribution.

Economic insecurity and Helping others show the largest positive coefficients in the fully specified models. Greater economic insecurity is associated with stronger support for redistribution, while respondents who place greater importance on helping others also show higher support. Household income has a clear negative association, indicating that respondents in higher income groups are less supportive of redistribution. Together, these findings show that both material circumstances and value orientations contribute to redistribution preferences.

Enjoyment has a smaller positive association. In contrast, Political interest and Religiosity remain close to zero and their confidence intervals cross zero in the full specifications. The figure therefore makes clear that these variables do not show significant independent associations once the other predictors are included.

Trust in parliament remains negatively associated with redistribution support. Model 4 also shows a negative Ideology × trust interaction, consistent with the predicted probabilities presented in Figure 2. The interaction indicates that the negative relationship between right-leaning ideology and redistribution support becomes stronger at higher levels of parliamentary trust.

Figure 4: Fixed-Effects Ordered Logit Estimates



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Overall, Figure 4 shows considerable stability in the main coefficients across the fixed-effects specifications. Political ideology, Economic insecurity, Helping others, and Household income remain the most consistent predictors. The next section examines whether these relationships remain similar when the hierarchical structure of the ESS data is explicitly modeled and, most importantly, whether the effect of political ideology varies across countries.

Multilevel analysis of redistribution preferences

Table 2 presents the multilevel ordered logit results. These models account for the clustering of respondents within countries and provide a more direct test of whether the relationship between political ideology and redistribution support varies across national contexts. Figure 5 summarizes the main coefficients and shows how the estimates change across the multilevel specifications.

The results are highly consistent with the fixed-effects analysis. Political ideology remains negative and statistically significant. In the full random-intercept model, the coefficient is −0.163 ($p < .001$). In the random-slope model, the average ideology coefficient remains negative at −0.155 ($p < .001$). Thus, right-leaning respondents are generally less supportive of redistribution even when the hierarchical structure of the data is taken into account.

The other main predictors also remain stable. Economic insecurity has a strong positive association with redistribution support ($\beta = 0.173$, $p < .001$ in the random-slope model). Helping others also remains strongly positive ($\beta = 0.202$, $p < .001$). In contrast, Household income is negatively associated with redistribution support ($\beta = -0.051$, $p < .001$). Enjoyment has a smaller positive effect ($\beta = 0.028$, $p < .01$), while Trust in parliament remains negative ($\beta = -0.036$, $p < .001$). Political interest and Religiosity are not statistically significant. These results closely correspond to the fixed-effects estimates and strengthen confidence in the main individual-level findings.

The most important contribution of the multilevel analysis concerns political ideology. The random-slope model allows the ideology coefficient to vary across countries rather than assuming a common effect. The estimated ideology slope variance is 0.016, indicating meaningful cross-national variation in the strength of the ideology–redistribution relationship. The country intercept variance in this model is 0.144, showing that countries also differ in their underlying levels of redistribution support.

The model comparison provides further evidence that allowing ideology to vary across countries improves the analysis. The random-slope model fits the data significantly better than the full random-intercept model, LR $\chi^3(2) = 536.54$, $p < .001$. The log likelihood improves from −36,262.13 in the full model to −35,993.86 in the random-slope model. This provides formal statistical support for the cross-national heterogeneity illustrated earlier in Figure 3.

Figure 5 also shows that introducing the random ideology slope does not substantially alter the other main relationships. Economic insecurity and Helping others remain positive, while Household income and Trust in parliament remain negative. Political interest and Religiosity remain close to zero. The main difference concerns the uncertainty around the ideology coefficient, which becomes wider once its effect is allowed to vary across countries. This is expected because the random-slope model no longer assumes that ideology has exactly the same relationship with redistribution support in every country.

Table 2 and Figure 5 strengthen the paper's central finding. Political ideology is an important predictor of redistribution preferences across the pooled European sample, but its effect is not uniform across countries. The multilevel results therefore move beyond simply observing different country-specific coefficients. They formally show that allowing the ideological effect to vary across national contexts provides a significantly better representation of the data.

At the same time, these findings should not be interpreted as identifying why the ideology effect differs across countries. The models demonstrate cross-national heterogeneity, but they do not test specific country-level explanations such as inequality, welfare-state institutions, or party competition. Identifying the national characteristics that account for this variation remains an important direction for further research.

Table 2: Multilevel Ordered Logit Models of Support for Income Redistribution

Variables	(1) Null Model	(2) Ideology + Controls	(3) Full Model	(4) Random-Slope Model
Political ideology		−0.165***	−0.163***	−0.155***
		(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.025)
Enjoyment			0.027**	0.028**
			(0.009)	(0.010)
Political interest			0.022	0.013
			(0.014)	(0.014)
Trust in parliament			−0.030***	−0.036***
			(0.005)	(0.005)
Economic insecurity			0.177***	0.173***
			(0.017)	(0.017)
Religiosity			−0.007	−0.006
			(0.004)	(0.004)
Helping others			0.205***	0.202***
			(0.012)	(0.012)

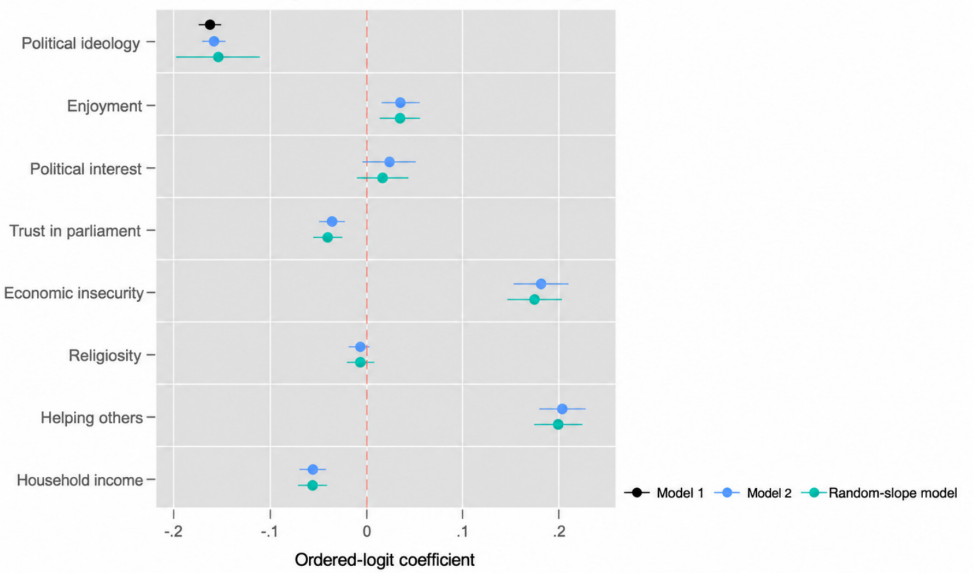
Variables	(1) Null Model	(2) Ideology + Controls	(3) Full Model	(4) Random-Slope Model
Household income			−0.055***	−0.051***
			(0.005)	(0.005)
Demographic controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country random intercept	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Random ideology slope	No	No	No	Yes
Ideology slope variance				0.016
Country intercept variance				0.144
Observations	45,355	35,727	29,027	29,027
Countries	28	28	28	28
Log likelihood	−57,680.45	−44,867.16	−36,262.13	−35,993.86

Model comparison: *Random-slope model versus full random-intercept model: LR $\chi^2(2) = 536.54$, $p < .001$.*

Note: *Entries are multilevel ordered-logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is support for income redistribution, with higher values indicating stronger support. Higher values of political ideology indicate more right-leaning positions. Models 1–3 include a country-level random intercept. Model 4 additionally allows the effect of political ideology to vary across countries. Demographic controls include gender, age, age squared, education, residence type, and employment status. Blank cells indicate that the corresponding predictor or random-effect parameter is not reported for that model. The likelihood-ratio test compares Model 4 with Model 3. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Figure 5: Multilevel Ordered Logit Estimates



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Robustness check

As an additional robustness check, the fully specified model is re-estimated using OLS. The results are reported in Table A3. Although ordered logit remains the preferred estimator because redistribution support is measured on an ordinal scale, the OLS model provides a useful test of whether the main findings depend on the estimation method. The results are broadly consistent with the ordered logit analysis. Political ideology remains negatively and statistically significantly associated with redistribution support. Economic insecurity and Helping others remain positive predictors, while Household income continues to show a negative association. Trust in parliament also remains negatively associated with redistribution support. In contrast, Political interest and Religiosity do not show strong independent effects. The consistency of these results across alternative specifications strengthens confidence in the main findings. In particular, the relationships involving Political ideology, Economic insecurity, Helping others, and Household income are not specific to the ordered logit estimator. The robustness analysis therefore supports the overall stability of the individual-level results, while the ordered logit models remain the primary basis for interpretation because they better reflect the ordinal nature of the dependent variable.

Discussion of the main findings

The results provide three main findings. First, political ideology is a strong and consistent predictor of redistribution preferences. Across both fixed-effects and multilevel models, right-leaning respondents are less supportive of income redistribution. This relationship remains stable after accounting for economic circumstances, institutional trust, personal values, and demographic characteristics. Political ideology therefore represents an important dimension of how individuals evaluate redistribution.

At the same time, the effect of ideology is not uniform across countries. Figure 3 shows substantial differences in country-specific ideology coefficients, while the random-slope model provides formal evidence of this heterogeneity. The significant improvement in model fit when the ideology slope is allowed to vary confirms that a single average ideological effect does not fully capture the European pattern. Ideology structures redistribution preferences much more strongly in some countries than in others.

Second, economic circumstances remain important. Greater Economic insecurity is associated with stronger support for redistribution, while higher Household income is associated with lower support. These findings suggest that both subjective economic vulnerability and objective economic position matter. Individuals who feel economically insecure may see greater value in redistribu-

tive protection, while those with greater economic resources tend to show less support. Importantly, these relationships remain significant alongside Political ideology. Redistribution preferences therefore reflect both political orientation and material circumstances rather than either dimension alone.

Third, individual values also contribute to redistribution preferences. Helping others shows a strong and consistent positive association with redistribution support. Enjoyment has a smaller but positive association. These findings suggest that preferences for redistribution are not based solely on material self-interest. Other-regarding values also matter. However, the results do not support equally strong roles for all attitudinal characteristics. Political interest and Religiosity are not significant in the fully specified models. This distinction helps identify which individual characteristics retain independent associations once political, economic, and demographic factors are considered.

The interaction between Political ideology and Trust in parliament adds another dimension to these findings. The ideological divide becomes wider at higher levels of parliamentary trust. As Figure 2 shows, differences by trust are relatively small among left-leaning respondents but become more pronounced among right-leaning respondents. This suggests that institutional attitudes and ideology are jointly associated with redistribution preferences rather than operating entirely independently.

The findings show that redistribution preferences have political, economic, and value-based foundations. Political ideology provides the most consistent political divide, but its strength varies substantially across countries. Economic vulnerability and income remain important, while Helping others adds an independent normative dimension. This combination helps explain why redistribution preferences cannot be reduced to a single mechanism based only on ideology or economic self-interest.

The cross-national finding requires careful interpretation. The analysis demonstrates that the ideology–redistribution relationship varies across the 28 countries, but it does not establish why this variation occurs. Differences in welfare institutions, inequality, party competition, or other national characteristics may help explain the pattern, but these mechanisms are not directly tested in the present study. The contribution of the current analysis is therefore to establish the existence and statistical significance of cross-national heterogeneity. Identifying the country-level factors that explain this heterogeneity provides an important direction for future research.

Conclusion

This study examines the political, economic, and value-based foundations of support for income redistribution across 28 countries. The findings show that redistribution preferences cannot be explained by material self-interest alone.

Political ideology, economic circumstances, and individual values each contribute to how citizens view redistribution.

Political ideology is the most consistent political predictor. Right-leaning respondents are less supportive of redistribution across all model specifications. Economic circumstances also matter. Greater Economic insecurity is associated with stronger support for redistribution, while higher Household income is associated with lower support. Helping others has a strong positive relationship with redistribution support. This shows that other-regarding values remain important even after political and economic factors are considered.

The analysis also shows that the ideological divide is not uniform across countries. Country-specific estimates reveal substantial variation in the effect of Political ideology. The random-slope model confirms this pattern and significantly improves model fit. Trust in parliament further conditions the ideological relationship, with a wider ideological divide at higher levels of trust.

These findings contribute to research on redistribution by showing that political beliefs, material circumstances, and individual values provide complementary explanations of public preferences. They also show that a single average ideological effect can conceal important cross-national differences.

The study has an important limitation. It establishes cross-national heterogeneity but does not identify the country-level factors that explain it. Future research should examine whether welfare institutions, inequality, party competition, and other national characteristics account for differences in the strength of the ideology–redistribution relationship. This would provide a clearer understanding of why political ideology structures redistribution preferences more strongly in some European countries than in others.

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Appendix

Table A1: Countries Included in the Analysis

Country ID	Country Code	Country
1	AT	Austria
2	BE	Belgium
3	BG	Bulgaria
4	CH	Switzerland
5	CY	Cyprus
6	DE	Germany
7	ES	Spain
8	FI	Finland
9	FR	France
10	GB	United Kingdom
11	GR	Greece
12	HR	Croatia
13	HU	Hungary
14	IE	Ireland
15	IL	Israel
16	IS	Iceland
17	IT	Italy
18	LT	Lithuania
19	LV	Latvia
20	ME	Montenegro
21	NL	Netherlands
22	NO	Norway
23	PL	Poland
24	PT	Portugal
25	RS	Serbia
26	SE	Sweden
27	SI	Slovenia
28	SK	Slovakia

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Table A2: Descriptive Statistics of Variables Used in the Analysis

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Redistribution support	29,027	3.909	0.995	1	5
Political ideology	29,027	5.030	2.291	0	10
Enjoyment	29,027	4.149	1.281	1	6
Political interest	29,027	2.525	0.907	1	4
Trust in parliament	29,027	4.727	2.611	0	10
Economic insecurity	29,027	1.847	0.810	1	4

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Religiosity	29,027	4.534	3.092	0	10
Helping others	29,027	4.877	0.969	1	6
Household income	29,027	5.779	2.650	1	10
Age	29,027	52.973	17.233	15	90

Note: *Statistics are based on the complete-case sample used in the full models. Higher values indicate greater support for income redistribution, a more right-leaning political ideology, greater endorsement of enjoyment, greater political interest, greater trust in parliament, greater economic insecurity, greater religiosity, greater endorsement of helping others, and higher household income, respectively.*

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Table A3: Robustness Check: OLS Model of Redistribution Support

Variable	Coefficient
Political ideology	–0.080***
	(0.012)
Enjoyment	0.009
	(0.006)
Political interest	0.000
	(0.009)
Trust in parliament	–0.009
	(0.005)
Economic insecurity	0.073***
	(0.017)
Religiosity	–0.003
	(0.004)
Helping others	0.091***
	(0.013)
Household income	–0.030***
	(0.005)
Observations	**29,027**
R^2	**0.117**

Note: *Entries are OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. The model is estimated using the same complete-case sample as the full ordered-logit specification. The dependent variable is support for income redistribution, coded from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating greater support. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*

Source: Author's own elaboration.

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