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The Politics of Women's Economic Independence

Abstract

We identify the political conditions that shape the economic position of married/cohabiting women and of the economically most vulnerable group of women—single mothers. Specifically, we examine the determinants of reductions in single mothers' poverty rate due to taxes and transfers, and women's wages relative to spouses'/ partners' wages. The Luxembourg Income Study archive yields an unbalanced panel with 71 observations on 15 countries. The principal determinants of poverty reduction due to taxes and transfers are left government, constitutional veto points, and welfare generosity. The relative wage of women in couples is a function mainly of female labor force participation, part time work among women, and women's mobilization. In explaining the causal pathways to these outcomes, we highlight the interrelationships of welfare state, care, and labor market policies.

Over two centuries or so of industrial development, the average situation of women with respect to fertility, family roles, political participation, and access to education and to occupations outside the household has changed enormously (Nolan and Lenski

1999, 311–21). A reasonable case can be made that the status of women is more nearly equal to that of men in advanced industrial societies than it has ever been in history. Despite the general trend of increasing equality between men and women it is undeniable that many economic, political, and cultural inequities remain. Furthermore, indicators of gender inequality vary conspicuously among industrial societies, even among those rooted in similar Western European cultural traditions (e.g., Blau and Kahn 1995 for wage ratios; Kenworthy and Malami 1999 for political representation).

The purpose of this study is to examine the political determinants of some important aspects of the economic position of women in advanced industrial societies in the late twentieth century, as they vary across societies and over time. We look at two indicators that respond to different institutional configurations—welfare state, labor market, and care regimes—which are shaped by politics and are relevant for different groups of women. The first indicator, poverty (or, more importantly, poverty reduction) among single mothers, responds primarily to welfare state efforts and taps their effects on the most vulnerable group of women. The second indicator, the proportion of women’s earnings relative to that of their husbands/partners, responds primarily to women’s position in the labor market and taps its effects on married/cohabiting women in a variety of class positions. However, women’s position in the labor market is heavily influenced by social policy, most notably provision of day care, but also a wider range of social and labor market policies.

We look at both of these indicators because they capture different aspects of women’s position in the family and the larger society. Moreover, together these indicators of economic position give us some indication of power relations between men and women in different societies. Women’s economic dependence/independence is central in shaping gender inequality in society. Hobson (1990) was among the early authors making a compelling case for focusing on economic dependency in comparative welfare state studies as the pivotal outcome dimension of women’s subordination. She cites numerous studies which show that power in decision-making in the household is related to the relative earning power of spouses and cites at least some evidence that it influences the division of labor within the household. Drawing on Hirschman’s (1970) analysis in *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, she reasons that the greater the earning power of a married woman relative to her spouse, the greater the voice she will have because she will have a greater possibility of exiting an unsatisfactory relationship, hence the title of her article “No Exit, No Voice.”

Extending this line of reasoning, we argue that a woman's ability to exit marriage is influenced by the probability that she will end up in poverty. Thus, poverty among single mothers will influence both exit and voice. Moreover, it has face validity as a measure of the economic well being of the most vulnerable group of women.

Both poverty among single mothers and women's earnings relative to those of husbands/partners are profoundly shaped by welfare state and labor market configurations, particularly their organization of care work. Women are still the primary care-givers in the overwhelming majority of cases; the proportion of single-father families pales in comparison to the proportion of single mother families, and a full sharing of care-giving duties between husbands and wives is still the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, a study based on time diaries showed that in the United States in the 1990s women spent about twice as much time as men in childrearing in married couple families (Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson 2004). However, there are significant differences between countries in the extent to which care work has been moved out of the family and is publicly provided and/or subsidized or purchased on the private market. Either one of these options allows women with children in principle to maintain a stronger connection to the labor market and thus to an independent source of income, but in practice the second option privileges more highly educated/skilled women who can command an income that allows them to pay for private care.

In the case of poverty among single mothers, labor market and welfare state policies are crucial in three respects: The organization of care work affects them in the same way but to an even greater extent than married women, because the latter can generally count on at least some help with care work. Second, the nature of the labor market, particularly the availability of part-time work and the pay levels and benefits associated with it, shape the chances of earning an above-poverty income. Third, the generosity of transfers shapes the chances of being lifted out of poverty if the earned income is insufficient for this purpose.

In sum, we make the following theoretical and empirical contributions. Theoretically, we bridge the concerns of the literature on women's dependence within the family and those of the literature on women's dependence on the family by treating women's earnings relative to those of their husbands and poverty among single mothers as indicators of larger gendered power relations and explaining their political determinants through the theoretical lens of welfare state, labor market, and care regimes. So far, these concerns have been dealt with in two separate bodies of literature, studies of women's economic position within the household

(Bianchi, Casper, and Peltola 1999; Sorensen and McLanahan 1987; Stier and Mandel 2003; Van Berkel and De Graaf 1998) and studies of gendered effects of welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1999; O'Connor 1996; Orloff 1993; Sainsbury 1999). Studies of women's economic position within the household have focused primarily on individual and household level variables, that is, they have used gender differences in demographic characteristics and labor market participation to explain temporal or cross-national variation in women's relative economic position and, with very few exceptions, have ignored macro-level variables.¹ Labor markets are shaped by labor market regimes and are thus profoundly political creations to begin with, standing in a mutually supportive relationship with welfare state regimes (Ebbinghaus and Manow 2001; Huber and Stephens 2001).

To explain variation in married women's economic position in the household and single mothers' economic position, we build on the welfare state literature and emphasize political power distributions. Partisan incumbency and women's mobilization shape welfare state regimes and in addition shape differences over time and between countries within the basic regime types. Our explanation focuses on women's mobilization as a causal political factor in its own right, in addition to partisan politics. The three basic welfare state regime types—liberal, Christian democratic, and social democratic—are associated with different labor market and care regimes and thus constitute a useful conceptual tool for the analysis of our two indicators of women's economic position.²

Empirically, we provide the first pooled cross-sections and time series analysis of reduction in poverty among single mothers through the tax and transfer system (which in turn accounts for the lion's share of the variation in poverty among single mothers) and of women's earnings relative to those of their husbands.³ Numerous studies based on Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) micro data have shown that generous welfare states reduce poverty among single mothers, but nobody has shown that variation in poverty reduction across countries and through time is due to the political variables highlighted here, because only pooled cross-sections and time series analyses allow for an adequate number of control variables.⁴

We also develop a new measure for women's mobilization based on women's participation in nonreligious organizations, a factor that has been hypothesized to be an important determinant of welfare-state development in general and "women friendly" policies in particular. Thus, we contribute a new quantitative comparative study of the determinants of "women friendly" or gender egalitarian policies and outcomes based on a sufficient number of cases to be

the basis for generalization, adding to a corpus of research that already includes broad-based qualitative comparisons (O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999; Stetson and Mazur 1995) besides a few quantitative studies (Hill and Tigges 1995; Huber and Stephens 2000; Wilensky 1990).

Literature and Hypotheses

The literature on the determinants of gender egalitarian policies mentioned above (Hill and Tigges 1995; Huber and Stephens 2000, 2006; O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999; Stetson and Mazur 1995; Wilensky 1990) offers some broad hypotheses on the general causes of these cross-national variations, by far the most important being the strength of women's movements, women's organizational capacity, and left parties in government. Sainsbury (1996) shows that, in addition to policies aimed specifically at gender equality, overall welfare-state generosity makes a large contribution to equality between the sexes. However, beyond these broad strokes, we expect the determinants of our two dependent variables to be largely distinct. Therefore we present separate literature reviews and hypotheses for them. Our focus is on the political variables, and we treat demographic and economic variables as controls.

Determinants of Reduction in Poverty among Single Mothers

Politics

Long-term incumbency of both left (mainly social democratic) and Christian democratic parties is associated with higher levels of taxes and transfers (Huber and Stephens 2001). Left parties promote welfare states with a more redistributive profile than Christian democratic parties and thus lower income inequality more effectively (Bradley et al. 2003). Welfare states built under left governments are more service-oriented and generally more gender egalitarian than welfare states built under Christian democratic governments (Huber and Stephens 2000). They provide more support for employment of mothers with young children than Christian democratic welfare states, though Christian democratic welfare states provide more such support than liberal welfare states (Ferrarini 2003; Gornick, Meyers, and Ross 1997). Christian democratic parties support traditional family patterns, for instance, by directing family allowances to the father and supporting stay-at-home mothers (Bussemaker and van Kersbergen 1999; Ferrarini 2003; Wennemo 1994). As a result of these factors, we expect both left and Christian democratic

incumbency to lower poverty of single mothers, but left incumbency to have a stronger effect.

Organization is a source of power, and we know that strong women's organizations in collaboration with strong left-wing parties have been able to establish effective state agencies in charge of promoting women's interests (Hobson and Lindholm 1997; Jenson and Mahon 1993; Lewis and Åström 1992; O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999; Sainsbury 1999; Stetson and Mazur 1995). Huber and Stephens (2000, 2001, 2006) and Sørensen (2004) argue that it is not simply membership in feminist organizations but a broader process of women's mobilization in existing unions, parties, and other nonreligious organizations that promotes gender egalitarian policies. Accordingly, we might expect greater reduction of poverty among single mothers where women's mobilization is high. However, not all women's movements have worked with left parties and adopted poverty reduction—be it in general or among single mothers in particular—as a goal. The American women's movement, for instance, has been heavily oriented towards the concerns of more highly educated, professional women and has emphasized nondiscrimination more than welfare state policies (O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999, 200–203). Thus, we may not find any statistically significant direct effects of women's mobilization on poverty reduction among single mothers. We would expect indirect effects via generosity of the welfare state since women's mobilization has been shown to have a strong effect on a range of indicators of welfare state generosity (Huber and Stephens 2006).

A country's constitutional structure is an important determinant of welfare state development (Skocpol and Amenta 1986) and thus of the extent of redistribution through the tax and transfer system. An important aspect of the constitutional structure is the presence of “veto points,” that is, points in the political process at which legislation can be blocked. A relatively large number of veto points in a country's constitutional structure depress welfare state expansion, as it enables relatively small groups to obstruct legislation (Bradley et al. 2003; Huber, Ragin, and Stephens 1993; Huber and Stephens 2000, 2001). The extreme types are represented by, on the one hand, the unicameral, unitary parliamentary systems of Scandinavia or New Zealand in which the party or coalition of parties with a single seat majority in the national legislature can pass any policy it desires, and, on the other hand, the strongly bicameral, federal systems of the United States or Switzerland, in which legislation may not only find itself blocked by either house, but may not even be under full control of the federal government. We expect that polities with more veto points will be associated with less poverty reduction.

Policies

Previous studies have demonstrated that the welfare state is an important determinant of poverty reduction in general (Moller et al. 2003), and we expect it to be a crucial determinant of poverty reduction among single mothers as well. Larger welfare states have lower posttransfer poverty rates (Burtless, Rainwater, and Smeeding 2001; Kenworthy 1999; Kim 2000; Korpi and Palme 1998; McFate, Smeeding, and Rainwater 1995). Cross-sectional research has also shown that they distribute more income and reduce poverty to a greater extent (Goodin et al. 1999; Kenworthy 1999; Kim 2000).

The extent to which taxes and transfers reduce poverty is determined not only by their overall amount but also by their distributive profile, i.e., the distribution of welfare spending among different types of benefits, and the resulting impact on different categories of the population. If we had a perfect measure of the distributive profile of taxes, transfers, and public services, we would expect the effect of political variables to disappear. However, the LIS data do not include the value of services, for instance, nor do we have a measure for the redistributive profile of the tax system. Thus, we expect the political variables that are important for the formation of the size and profile of the welfare state to have an effect on poverty reduction among single mothers even controlling for welfare state generosity. The composition of welfare state transfer expenditures provides an approximation to measuring welfare state structure. In the case of poverty reduction among single mothers, the proportion of transfers going to child, family, and maternity allowances should be a good predictor of a favorable distributive profile and of poverty reduction.

We have found the concept of welfare state regimes a useful heuristic to think about differences between major structural configurations of welfare-state programs. Accordingly, we measure the impact of regime dummies on poverty reduction among single mothers, and we expect both social democratic and Christian democratic regimes to have a poverty-reducing effect, with a stronger effect for social democratic regimes. However, regimes have been shaped and re-shaped over prolonged periods of time by political forces and are by no means frozen. Thus, we expect our incumbency variables in combination with our other causal variables to have stronger explanatory power than the regimes dummies.

Control Variables

According to Estevez-Abe, Iversen, and Soskice (2001) strong systems of vocational education are associated with the prevalence

of firm-specific skills among employees, thus higher vulnerability to unemployment, and stronger demands for generous welfare-state transfers and services which should also benefit single mothers. This effect should be captured by the introduction of welfare-state generosity into the model. Unemployment works as a need variable and thus increases poverty reduction in welfare states with generous unemployment benefits. Single mothers are likely to be affected by higher overall unemployment rates. We use wage coordination as an indicator of corporatism, which is strongly associated with generous welfare states (Hicks 1999; Swank 2002) and with poverty reduction among the working age population (Moller et al. 2003). We expect it to have the same effect on single mothers.

Determinants of Women's Earnings as Proportion of Both Spouses' Earnings

We group related variables into more and less proximate causes of our dependent variable and order them in tables 2 and 5 according to where they stand in the hypothesized causal chain. For example, public service employment and private service employment are two of the most important determinants of female labor force participation (Daly 2000), which, in turn, is certain to be one of the strongest proximate causes of married women's earnings as a proportion of both spouses' earnings. The variable groups at the bottom of table 2 and to the right in table 5 are the proximate causes of the dependent variable. The variables in the groups further up in table 2 and to the left in table 5 may show no direct effects on the dependent variable in the final equation but nonetheless may have indirect effects through their effect on variables lower down or to the right.

Proximate Causes

As Gornick (1999, 212, also 227) points out in her discussion of a measure similar to our dependent variable, women's share of total labor market earnings,⁵ her measure (and ours) is a composite indicator which "aggregates gender differences in employment rates, hours worked, and wages". Logically, then, one would expect women's employment, the volume of women's work, and the gender wage gap to be the proximate causes of women's earnings as a proportion of both spouses' earnings. Clearly one would expect women's labor force participation to have a positive effect and the gender wage gap to have a negative effect on married women's earnings as a proportion of both spouses' earnings. While part time work, measured here as the percentage of working women who are

working part time, facilitates women's labor force participation, we expect it to have a negative effect on the dependent variable when women's labor force participation is held constant. *We expect the other variables to operate through female labor force participation, hours worked and the gender wage gap, and thus we expect direct effects of these other variables on the dependent variable only to the extent that we are unable to measure the three proximate variables accurately.*

Policies

Studies have identified a number of policies that enable or facilitate women's employment (e.g., day care, uninterrupted school days, labor market regulations, maternity leave, individual taxation). A number of authors have mapped variation across countries on these policies,⁶ and Gornick, Meyers, and Ross (1997) present a comprehensive index of policies that, as Daly (2000) points out, increase the supply of women workers. We again use welfare-state generosity as a crude proxy, because these data are not available across time.

Labor Force and Demography

Daly (2000) represents the consensus in the field in arguing that high levels of public and private service employment are favorable to high levels of women's employment.⁷ Indeed, they represent two distinctive paths to high levels of female labor force participation, one associated with social democratic and the other one with liberal welfare state and labor market regimes. In addition, we hypothesize a negative relationship between youth proportion of the population and the outcome variable because larger families reduce the propensity of women to enter the labor force full time and in particular to pursue a demanding and well paid career.

Politics

Parties of the left have increasingly become the main proponents of gender equality, along with women's movements. Even before embracing a full commitment to gender equality, the social democratic policy of expanding public health, education, and welfare services furthered women's interests as it increased the demand for women's labor in these heavily female occupations (Huber and Stephens 2000). With the development of an explicit commitment to gender equality, left governments have passed policies extending maternity and parental leave, day care, elder care, statutory rights to a shortened workday for parents, etc. We hypothesize strong effects of left government on women's employment. Once labor market institutions are controlled for, we expect moderate effects of left

government on the gender pay gap directly due to antidiscrimination and affirmative action legislation and indirectly via low wage dispersion due to minimum wage laws.

In contrast to the intermediate position they held in terms of single mothers in poverty, the Christian democratic welfare states rank lowest on our measure of women's relative earnings (see table 3), despite the fact that social policy for mothers' employment is actually more generous in Christian democratic than in liberal welfare states (Gornick, Meyers, and Ross 1997). We contend that this is in large part due to other aspects of Christian democratic social policy, such as child care allowances for stay at home mothers, school days with long interruptions, and low levels of public provision of day care and other health, education, and welfare services, all of which depress the volume of paid work performed by married women. In addition, labor market policies characteristic of the production regimes prevailing in the northern tier of Christian democratic welfare states, such as high minimum wages and curtailed opening hours for retail establishments depress demand for female labor. Due to the relatively low levels of wage dispersion and the high minimum wages, the wage determination system still delivers male breadwinner wages even at the low end of the distribution, that is, sufficiently high wages to keep families with one full-time worker out of poverty. By the same token, Scharpf (2000) has argued that high wages at the bottom impede the development of low-wage private service sector jobs, a source of employment for women in liberal welfare states.

In contrast, women's employment levels are intermediate in liberal welfare states, despite low levels of public policy support for women's employment, due to a combination of "employment forcing" and "employment facilitating" factors (Gornick 1999, 230). Employment forcing factors include low pay for the unskilled and low or no family allowances, which combine to make mothers' employment essential to keep families above the poverty line. Employment facilitating factors include antidiscrimination legislation and affirmative action programs, which can be attributed to the relatively strong women's movements in these countries (Gornick 1999, 230; O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999). Part-time work is facilitated in liberal countries by deregulated labor markets.

We hypothesize that women's mobilization will be positively related to married women's earnings as a proportion of both spouses' earnings. As in the case of left government, we expect a strong relationship of women's membership in nonreligious organizations to women's employment and the gender wage gap and an ambiguous relationship to volume of work, since women's

movements press to expand part-time work but also for policies that enable women to increase the time of work if they so choose. We expect the impact of women's mobilization to be stronger than that of left government because left parties have other constituencies than women and the interests of those constituencies sometimes conflict (e.g., unions on part time work) or compete for resources (e.g., extending maternity leave versus extending paid vacation).⁸

In the case of poverty reduction, we argued that there would be no direct party effects if we had highly accurate measures of policy. While this is largely the case with this dependent variable, we might expect "ideological effects" of party strength and women's mobilization on women's employment and the volume of work. That is, where women's mobilization and/or left parties are strong and Christian democratic parties are weak, one might expect more women (and men) to adopt a gender egalitarian ethic and thus more women to enter the labor force and work more hours.⁹

Again, we use regime dummies to explain relative earnings of women, in order to capture the impact of the whole configuration of welfare-state transfers and services. Again, we expect their explanatory power to be lower than that of political power distributions and more proximate causes.

Labor Market Institutions and Outcomes

Early work on the gender wage gap (e.g., Rosenfeld and Kalleberg 1990) focused on employment, family policies, and occupational segregation as primary determinants of the gender gap in hourly wages. In a series of articles, Blau and Kahn (1992, 1996, 2001) show that wage dispersion among males is such an important determinant of cross-national differences in the gender wage gap that it swamps all alternative explanations. Quite simply, since women are concentrated in lower paying occupations in all countries, where wage differences between low and high paying occupations are small, gender differences will also be small. Thus we expect wage dispersion to have an indirect negative effect on married women's relative earnings via the gender wage gap.

Wallerstein (1999), Rueda and Pontusson (2000), and Pontusson, Rueda, and Way (2002) demonstrate that wage coordination/bargaining centralization, union density, and union contract coverage are powerful predictors of reduced wage dispersion and thus should have an indirect negative effect on the gender wage gap. Blau and Kahn (2001) confirm this and additionally show that union coverage has a direct effect in reducing the gender wage gap even when controlling for wage dispersion.

The relationship of union strength to gender labor market equity is ambiguous because, though unions promote the interests of low wage workers, they have also been defenders of the male breadwinner wage and have opposed part time work and other measures, such as extended hours for retail stores, which encourage women's employment. The move of unions in the Nordic countries to drop their opposition to part time work was one factor behind the increase in part time work and women's labor force participation there (Klausen 1999, 275), as it was later in the Netherlands (Visser and Hemerijck 1997). Conversely, continued union opposition to part time work is certainly one reason for the low levels of women's labor force participation in the rest of continental Europe (Klausen 1999).

Measures of Dependent and Independent Variables

Dependent Variables

The measures of poverty reduction among single mothers and of women's share of earnings relative to those of their husbands come from the LIS database, which provides the most comparable income and earnings data available across a large number of OECD countries.¹⁰

In order to construct a measure for the reduction in poverty effected by taxes and transfers, we calculated pre tax and transfer poverty and post tax and transfer poverty among single mothers from the LIS data (see tables 1 and 3). The pre tax and transfer poverty calculations are based on market income. Market income is the total income from wages and salaries, self-employment income, property income, and private pension income. The post tax and transfer poverty measure is based on disposable personal income. Disposable personal income includes all market income, social transfers, and taxes. Both market income and disposable income figures were bottom coded at 1 percent of mean income and top coded at 10 times the median income, adjusted for the number of children. We did not exclude market incomes with a value of zero but did exclude disposable personal incomes with a value of zero. Because we are using an income concept based on households, adjustments had to be made for household size. Equivalence scales are used to adjust the number of persons in a household to an equivalent number of adults. If one chooses not to use an equivalence scale, one ignores the economies of scale resulting from sharing household expenses and assumes that each additional equivalent adult (or child in this case) in a household has the same "cost" as other members of the household. We chose a commonly used scale of the square

Table 1. Variable Descriptions, Data Sources and Hypothesized Effects for the Analysis of Single Mothers' Poverty.

Variable	Description	Hypothesized impact
<i>Dependent variables</i>		
Pre tax/transfer poverty among single mothers	Percentage of households in which the head is a single woman with children with disposable incomes below 50 percent of the average disposable household income before taxes and transfers ^a	
Reduction in poverty among single mothers	Proportional reduction in poverty effected by taxes and transfers for households in which the head is a single mother $[(1 - \text{post tax/transfer poverty rate}/\text{pre tax/transfer poverty rate}) \times 100]$ ^a	
<i>Independent variables</i>		
<i>Controls</i>		
Unemployment	Percentage of total labor force unemployed ^{b,c}	+
Vocational education	Percentage of an age cohort in either secondary or post-secondary vocational training ^d	+
Wage coordination/corporatism	Degree of coordination of wage bargaining ^e	+
<i>Politics</i>		
Left cabinet	Scored 1 for each year when the left is in government alone, scored as a fraction of the left's seats in parliament of all governing parties' seats for coalition governments, cumulative 1946 to date ^b	+
Christian democratic cabinet	Religious parties' government share, coded as for left cabinet ^b	+

Continued

Table 1. *Continued*

Variable	Description	Hypothesized impact
Women's mobilization	Estimated percentage of women who are members of at least one nonreligious organization (see text)	+ / 0
Constitutional structure (veto points)	Veto points created by constitutional provisions ^b	–
<i>Policies</i>		
Welfare generosity	Sum of the standardized values of government revenue as a percentage of GDP and social security transfers as a percentage of GDP ^{b,c}	+
Family and maternity allowances	Percentage of social transfers that are child, family, and maternity allowances ^a	+

^aLuxembourg Incomes Surveys (various years).

^bHuber *et al.* (2004).

^cOECD (various years).

^dEstevez-Abe *et al.* (2001).

^eKenworthy (2001).

Table 2. Variable Descriptions, Data Sources and Hypothesized Effects for the Analysis of Married Women's Earnings.

Variable	Description	Hypothesized
Dependent variable		
Women's earnings as proportion of both spouses' earnings	Married women's earnings income as a percentage of the aggregate earnings of both spouses ^a	
Independent variables		
<i>Labor market institution variables</i>		
Union density	Union membership as a percentage of total wage and salary earners ^{b,c}	+
Contract coverage	Percentage of the labor force covered by union contracts ^d	+
Wage dispersion	Ratio of the median income to the income of the tenth percentile of full-time male wage and salary earners ^{b,e}	-
Wage coordination/corporatism	Degree of coordination of wage bargaining ^f	+
<i>Politics</i>		
Left cabinet	Scored 1 for each year when the left is in government alone, scored as a fraction of the left's seats in parliament of all governing parties' seats for coalition governments, cumulative 1946 to date ^f	+
Christian democratic cabinet	Religious parties' government share, coded as for left cabinet ^f	-
Women's mobilization	Estimated percentage of women who are members of at least one nonreligious organization (see text)	+
Constitutional structure (veto points)	Veto points created by constitutional provisions ^f	-
<i>Labor force and demography</i>		
Private service employment	Percentage of the population 15-64 in private service employment ^{b,e}	+
Public sector service employment	Percentage of the population 15-64 in public sector service employment ^{b,g}	+

Continued

Table 2. *Continued*

Variable	Description	Hypothesized
Young	Percentage of the population under 15 years of age ^{b,e}	–
<i>Welfare state</i>		
Welfare generosity	Sum of the standardized values of government revenue as a percentage of GDP and social security transfers as a percentage of GDP ^f	+
<i>Proximate causes</i>		
Female labor force participation	Percentage of women age 15–64 in the labor force ^{b,e}	+
Women's part time work	Percentage of working women who are working part time ^h	–
Gender wage gap	Women's median earnings as a proportion of men's median earnings among full-time employees ^h	–

^aLuxembourg Incomes Surveys (various years).

^bHuber *et al.* (2004).

^cEbbinghaus and Visser (1992).

^dTraxler (1994).

^eOECD original data source.

^fSee table 1 for source.

^gWelfare State Exit Entry Project, Science Center—Berlin.

^hOECD website.

root of the number of persons in the household. The poverty level was set at 50 percent of median income. This is the conventional level used in studies done by the OECD (OECD 1995). Moreover, most comparative studies of poverty in advanced industrial societies use relative poverty levels. We define a “single mother” household as one in which there is a single female head of household and children under eighteen years of age are present. We chose not to restrict the sample further by excluding other adults in the household.¹¹ While including other adults (and their income), it picks up on private adaptations that female heads of household may choose to deal with the fiscal stress of single motherhood.

Table 3 demonstrates the large differences across units in both dependent variables. Even in women's relative earnings, the variable with less variation, the top country (Finland) shows almost twice the level of the bottom countries (Netherlands and Switzerland). There is also variation across time in individual countries, more so in women's relative earnings than in reduction of poverty among single

Table 3. Mid-1990s Values of Key Variables by Country.

	Pre tax and transfer poverty	Post tax and transfer poverty	Reduction in poverty due to taxes and transfers	Wife's earnings % of both spouses' earnings	Female labor force participation	% Women part time	Women's mobilization	Left cabinet	Welfare generosity
Social democratic welfare states									
Sweden 1995	52.3	6.7	87.2	41.8	82.8	24.1	45.6	39.9	3.06
Norway 1995	63.7	13.1	79.4	40.5	72.3	37.5	39.8	37.9	0.91
Denmark 1992	49.9	12.4	75.2	38.4	79.0	29.0	38.4	25.4	2.44
Finland 1995	43.7	4.5	89.7	46.4	70.3	11.7	46.9	19.8	2.60
Mean	52.4	9.2	82.9	41.8	76.1	25.6	42.7	30.8	2.25
Christian democratic welfare states									
Austria 1994	49.2	27.5	44.1		62.1	21.6	26.6	30.5	0.87
Belgium 1992	48.6	9.2	81.1	24.3	54.1	31.6	22.0	14.8	2.44
Netherlands 1994	78.4	25.4	67.6	23.9	57.4	54.3	32.9	11.1	3.16
Germany 1989 ^a	49.9	28.4	43.1	24.5	54.9	26.6	27.0	12.3	-0.62
France 1994	47.1	23.7	49.7	26.7*	59.6	24.0	32.8	12.6	1.21
Switzerland 1992	40.7	14.1	65.4	23.9	67.4	44.0	21.2	11.9	-2.15
Mean	52.3	21.4	58.5	24.2	59.3	33.7	27.1	15.5	0.82
Liberal welfare states									
Australia 1994	74.6	41.9	43.8	32.9	62.0	40.1	33.4	18.8	-1.62
Canada 1994	61.3	41.7	32.0	38.3	67.8	28.6	36.9	0.0	-0.74

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Continued

Table 3. *Continued*

	Pre tax and transfer poverty	Post tax and transfer poverty	Reduction in poverty due to taxes and transfers	Wife's earnings % of both spouses' earnings	Female labor force participation	% Women part time	Women's mobilization	Left cabinet	Welfare generosity
Ireland 1995	81.1	40.6	49.9		47.8	26.6	21.5	5.3	-1.30
UK 1995	81.4	40.5	50.2	39.1	66.0	40.7	37.3	16.2	-1.70
USA 1994	62.3	49.3	20.9	34.1	70.5	20.5	35.8	0.0	-2.08
Mean	72.1	42.8	39.4	36.1	62.8	31.3	33.0	8.1	-1.49
Grand Mean	59.8	26.4	50.7	33.6	65.0	30.8	33.2	16.5	0.3

^aThe 1989 figures for Germany are used because the 1994 figures show large changes due to unification and are unrepresentative of the rest of the German data.

*1984

mothers. Even there, however, we can find great variation in some cases. For instance, poverty reduction increased in Sweden from 36 percent in 1967 to 75 percent in 1995. In the UK, it fell during the period of Conservative government from 62 percent in 1979 to 50 percent in 1995.

Independent Variables

We coded left cabinet and Christian democratic cabinet as 1 for each year that these parties were in government alone, and as a fraction of their seats in parliament of all governing parties' seats for coalition governments. In order to capture the long-term impact of incumbency, we cumulated these measures from 1946 until the year of observation.

Unfortunately, there are no good comparable data on strength of feminist movements across countries, much less both across countries and through time within countries. In fact, it is not even clear what should qualify as a feminist or "gender equality movement" (O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999, 199–200). For instance, social democratic women's organizations were once primarily women's support groups for the parties but transformed themselves into "gender equality movements" at differing speeds and points of time over the past four decades in almost all advanced industrial countries. We were able to measure women's mobilization in the form of women's organizational membership, or the extent to which women are members of nonreligious organizations. Membership in such organizations is a valid indicator of women's mobilization because it captures the extent to which women are actively participating in public life.

Comparable data on participation by women in organizations for the fifteen countries in our data set are available from the World Values Surveys (Inglehart 1997), which asked respondents to list organizations in which they are members. But the World Values Surveys have data for only 31 country/year data points between 1981 and 1997 and often not for the year for which the LIS data exist. However, the measure we developed from the World Values Surveys was highly correlated with the proportion of women in the lower house of the national legislature, which is available in an annual time series from the end of World War II to 2000 [Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 1995].¹² The notion that women's mobilization both within and outside political parties should be reflected in larger proportions of female legislators has face validity. One weakness in this link is that electoral rules strongly influence the proportion of female legislators. In proportional representation systems, parties can more easily increase the proportion of women

in their parliamentary delegation by changing the gender composition of their lists of candidates. As citizens in these systems tend to vote for parties, not candidates, more women end up being elected. In single-member district systems, the strong incumbent advantage also works against increasing the representation of women, as the overwhelming majority of incumbents are men. Thus, women's movements of equivalent strengths will produce more women representatives in proportional representation systems. An additional problem specific to the World Values Survey Data is a wording change in questions on organizational membership in the last wave of the survey (mid-1990s).¹³

Our measure of women's organizational membership is the percentage of women in at least one nonreligious organization. We excluded religious organizations, reasoning that these were unlikely to favor gender egalitarian social policies. To deal with the two distortions just mentioned, we regressed the measure of women's organizational membership on women in parliament (results not shown), an indicator for proportional representation and an indicator for the last World Values Study wave. The fit was very good, with an R^2 of 0.82. We then calculated the predicted value of women's organizational membership for the country/years of the LIS using the coefficients for women's parliamentary representation, the proportional representation indicator, and a constant.¹⁴ The equation was:

$$\text{Membership} = 30.39 + 1.58(\text{women in parliament}) - 16.36 \\ (\text{proportional representation})$$

Our indicator, then, is shaped by both grassroots mobilization of women and women's recruitment into political positions. Because we expect that policy would reflect the long-term strength of women's organizational membership and not any sudden increases in participation by women in organizations, we calculated the cumulative average of the membership variable. This procedure makes this variable consistent with long-term measurement of the cabinet variables.

Our measure of constitutional structure is an additive index of federalism (none, weak, strong), presidentialism (absent, present), bicameralism (absent, weak, strong), and the use of popular referenda as a normal element of the political process (absent, present). Thus, a high score indicates high dispersion of political power and the presence of multiple veto points in the political process.

The operationalization of the control variables is in most cases straightforward and explained in tables 1 and 2. Some additional comments are in order regarding decisions on a few measures.

The male–female wage gap is measured as the ratio of the median earnings of female full-time employees to male full-time employees. There are no data for Denmark and Norway, so we do not include this variable in our general analysis but test it and comment on it separately. Female labor force participation is measured by females in the labor force as a percentage of females aged 15–64.

Public sector service employment is measured as a percentage of the working age population. Private sector service employment is measured as total service employment minus public sector service employment, again as a percentage of the working age population.

Following Blau and Kahn (2001), we measure wage dispersion as the ratio of the median income to the income of the tenth percentile of full-time male wage and salary earners. For Denmark and Norway, the data were not separated out by gender, so we used the data for both genders, which is highly correlated (0.95) with the 50:10 ratio for men in the countries for which we have the data broken down by gender.

For the analysis of poverty reduction, fifteen of the eighteen large advanced industrial countries that have been democracies since World War II and constitute the standard set of countries analyzed in welfare state studies are included in the analysis. New Zealand and Japan are excluded, as there are no LIS surveys for these countries. The Italian LIS data contain no information on pre tax and transfer poverty. For the analysis of married women's relative earnings, data for the dependent variable are not available for Austria, Italy, and Ireland, so there are thirteen countries in that analysis. The omission of these cases does not introduce any systematic bias as they represent different types of welfare state regimes. The values for the mid-1990s, the last complete wave of LIS data, for the dependent variables and some of the independent variables are listed by country grouped by welfare state regime in table 3. We use this grouping because it highlights systematic differences between welfare state regime types.

Methods

Unbalanced Panel Data and Correlated Errors

We use an unbalanced panel data set with 71 (47) observations on 15 (13) countries, with countries providing different numbers of observations according to data availability. There are a minimum of two and a maximum of eight observations per country. The time span between observations is irregular, varying across countries and time points. A central problem in estimating regression models from

panel data is that the assumption of independence of errors across observations is unlikely to be satisfied. As a result OLS produces incorrect standard errors for the regression coefficients (Greene 1993). We adopt an alternative estimation strategy that addresses the correlation problem while requiring a minimum of assumptions on the behavior of the errors. We combine OLS estimation of the regression coefficients, which provides consistent estimates of the regression coefficients, with the use of a *robust-cluster* estimator of the standard errors. The standard (i.e., noncluster) Huber-White or “sandwich” robust estimator of the variance matrix of parameter estimates was discovered independently by Huber (1967), White (1980) and others (see Long and Ervin 2000 for a detailed description). It provides correct standard errors in the presence of any pattern of heteroskedasticity (i.e., unequal variances of the error terms) but not in the presence of correlated errors (i.e., nonzero off-diagonal elements in the covariance matrix of the errors). The robust-cluster variance estimator is a variant of the Huber-White robust estimator that remains valid (i.e., provides correct coverage) in the presence of *any* pattern of correlations among errors *within* units, including serial correlation and correlation due to unit-specific components. Thus the robust-cluster standard errors are unaffected by the presence of unmeasured stable country-specific factors causing correlation among errors of observations for the same country, or for that matter any other form of within-unit error correlation.

The robust-cluster estimator of the standard errors is only imperious to correlations of errors *within* clusters. It requires errors to be uncorrelated *between* clusters. The latter assumption might be violated if unmeasured factors affect the dependent variable in all units at the same point in time. Global economic fluctuations could produce such contemporaneous effects. To evaluate the potential impact of such unmeasured period specific factors, we re-estimated the models with indicator variables for the 1980s and for the 1990s; the baseline category corresponds to the 1970s and includes two observations from the late 1960s. None of the two indicators reached significance in any of the models (for any dependent variable or estimation procedure), suggesting that period-specific effects are not present.¹⁵

Model Building Strategy

We specified regression models by successively introducing substantively related sets of independent variables. With each model we conducted an F-test of the joint significance of all variables with nonsignificant individual coefficients (at $p < 0.10$)¹⁶ to see if they

could be safely dropped from the model. When using robust standard errors, the degrees of freedom of the F-test of joint significance are in principle equal to the number of clusters (countries). We relied instead on the more conservative F-test using degrees of freedom equal to the total number of data points, which is more likely to conclude that the variables in a subset are jointly significant and thus must be kept in the model.

Results

Table 4 shows the results of the regressions for reduction in poverty among single mothers from pre- to post tax and transfers. Models 1–3 regress the reduction in poverty among single mothers on the control variables, the political variables and the policies, respectively. Model 4 presents the results of the regression with all variables significant at the 0.1 level or better in the first three equations. Model 5 presents the reduced equation. Though constitutional structure is not significant in model 4, dropping this variable significantly reduces the explanatory power of the model [$F(3, 64) = 3.15; p = 0.03$]. Thus, this variable is included in the reduced equation. The fit of the model is extremely good, as the final model explains three quarters of the variation in the dependent variable.

Generous welfare states are clearly effective in reducing poverty among single mothers through transfers, which are partially captured in our aggregate measure of welfare state generosity. Indeed, this variable alone accounts for 58 percent of the variation in reduction in poverty. However, our measure of welfare state generosity does not capture the composition of transfers, that is, it does not identify how much of the total goes to single mothers versus, say, to people on disability pensions, etc. The strong effect of left incumbency indicates that social democratic governments structure welfare-state transfers in a way that is favorable for single mothers, which is fully consistent with the general tendency of social democratic governments to spend higher amounts on the nonaged and to invest in human capital. Our measure of composition of transfers, the percentage of total transfers accounted for by child or family allowances, apparently does not capture transfers directed specifically at single parents well enough, as it is not significant in any of the estimations. The significant negative effect of constitutional structure, independent of its effect on welfare-state generosity suggests that power dispersion makes it particularly difficult to structure welfare states in ways favorable to single mothers, who are a small though growing minority in all of these countries. The oversized majorities needed in such systems to get important legislation passed are easier to form

Table 4. Coefficients from OLS Regressions with Robust Cluster Error Estimates of Reduction in Poverty Among Single Mothers Resulting from Taxes and Transfers.

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Controls						
Unemployment	0.31					
Wage coordination	4.23***			2.89+	2.94*	
Vocational education	0.81***			0.28		
Political						
Women's mobilization		0.29				
Christian democratic cabinet		0.92***		-0.17		
Left cabinet		0.88**		0.40+	0.52*	
Constitutional veto points		-5.50***		-1.93	-2.39*	
Policies						
Family and maternity allowances			0.03			
Welfare generosity			9.33***	4.80**	5.64***	
Welfare regimes						
Social democratic						42.35***
Christian democratic						22.58*
Constant	19.03**	35.86*	52.00***	36.87***	41.39***	35.05***
R ²	0.58	0.67	0.58	0.76	0.75	0.54
Test of dropping variables, $p < 0.1$	$F(1,67) = 0.39$	$F(1,66) = 0.91$	$F(1,68) = 0.12$	$F(2,64) = 1.52$		

*** $p < 0.001$.** $p < 0.01$.* $p < 0.05$.+ $p < 0.1$.One-tailed test $n = 71$.

around programs that benefit large majorities, such as public pensions. The lack of any significant direct effect of women's mobilization might be attributed to differences in the priority given to poverty reduction (in general and among single mothers in particular) by women's movements in different countries, a point we will return to in the conclusion.

Table 3 indicates that there are large welfare-state regime differences in single mothers' poverty and in poverty reduction. Model 6 in table 4 enters indicators for social democratic and Christian democratic regimes with liberal regimes as the absent category (as classified in table 3) as independent variables. It confirms the large regime differences as the two indicators explain 54 percent of the variation in the dependent variable. A comparison of the variation explained by models 5 and 6 indicates that the four independent variables in model 5 explain 21 percent more variation. They account for not only the regime differences but also for variation between countries and through time within the regimes. This is confirmed by the fact that the regime indicators, when added to model 5 (data not shown), are insignificant and add nothing to the variation explained.

Given the dependence of significance tests on sample size, they do little to tell one about the size of the effects of different variables. Given the different metrics of the independent variables, the effects of unit changes in the variables are not good indicators of the relative effects. The most convenient way to compare the effects of independent variables is to compare the effect of a two standard deviation increase in the independent variable on the value (increase or decrease) of the dependent variable. An increase in taxes and transfers of this size (3.76 on our measure) results in a 21 percent increase in the reduction of poverty effected by taxes and transfers. A similar increase in left government (23.3 years) results in a 12.1 percent increase in the reduction in poverty effected by taxes and transfers. However, the effect of left government is not limited to its direct effect, as left government along with Christian democratic government and women's organization are among the strongest determinants of welfare effort including total taxation and transfers (Huber and Stephens 2001, 2006). The indirect effect of a two standard deviation increase in left government via taxes and transfers is a 12.9 percent increase in the reduction in poverty effected by taxes and transfers for a total (direct and indirect) increase of 25 percent.¹⁷ Thus, differences in left government between the different regimes account very well for differences in reduction in poverty among single mothers shown in table 3.

Table 5 presents the results of the regressions explaining women's earnings as a percentage of both spouses' earnings. Models 1–6 show

the regressions of the dependent variable on labor market institutions, wage dispersion, the political variables, labor force and demography, policies, and the proximate causes, respectively. Model 7 contains all the variables that were significant at the 0.1 level or above in the first six regressions, and model 8 shows the reduced regression. Again, the fit is very good, with 67 percent of the variation explained. Female labor force participation alone explains 56 percent of the variation in women's earnings as a percentage of both spouses' earnings. As expected, the two proximate causes for which we have data for all countries, women's labor force participation and part time work, show up in the final equation. It makes a lot of intuitive sense that the more women work and the more they work full time, the greater their contribution to household income will be. The direct statistical effect of women's mobilization on women's wages most likely works via labor market legislation, such as on nondiscrimination and comparable worth goals, which are shared by all women's movements. In addition, as explained above, one might expect an ideological effect of high women's mobilization in the form of stronger gender-egalitarian attitudes and thus women's desire and men's support for them to enter the labor market and work more hours.

As we mentioned above, we had no data on the gender wage gap for Norway and Sweden. In the analysis without these two countries, we found that the measure of the gender wage gap, the ratio of women's to men's median earnings for a full-time employee, did not approach significance in an equation with the other two hypothesized proximate causes of married women's earnings as a proportion of both spouses' earnings (data not shown). This is consistent with our finding that wage dispersion among males, which Blau and Kahn (2001) found to be strongly related to the gender wage gap, had no effect on our dependent variable (see model 2).

We enter regime indicators as independent variables in model 9. Again, as in the case of poverty reduction, the regime indicators explain substantial variation but much less than our final model. The regime indicators were also not significant when added to our final model. These findings indicate that our final model not only explains the variation between the regimes but also variations across countries and through time within the regimes.

The fact that the partisanship variables do not appear in the final model and are not even significant in model 3 might seem to indicate that the association between women's earnings as a percent of both spouse's earnings and the regime types is not even in part a product of partisanship. A closer inspection of the causal chain leading to high levels of female labor force participation, by far the most important determinant of the dependent variable, argues otherwise.

Table 5. Coefficients from OLS Regressions with Robust Cluster Error Estimates of Women's Earning as a Proportion of Both Spouses' Earnings.

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Labor market institution variables									
Union density	0.27***						0.01		
Wage coordination	0.01								
Contract coverage	-0.20		-				0.00		
Wage dispersion	-	2.67	-						
Political									
Christian democratic cabinet			-0.17						
Left cabinet			0.11						
Constitutional veto points			0.63						
Women's mobilization			0.68**				0.33+	0.33*	
Labor force and demography									
Private service employment				0.43+			0.08		
Public service employment				1.08***			0.06		
Young				0.11					
Welfare state									
Welfare generosity					0.38				
Proximate causes									
Female labor force participation						0.57***	0.39*	0.44***	
Women's part time employment						-0.20**	-0.17+	-0.15*	

Continued

Table 5. *Continued*

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Welfare regimes									
Social democratic									6.5***
Christian democratic									-8.77**
Constant	34.33***	28.90**	7.34	3.04	33.41***	2.04	-2.40	-2.48	33.28
R^2	0.42	0.01	0.50	0.39	0.01	0.63	0.67	0.67	0.48
Test of dropping variables, $p < 0.1$	$F(1,43)$ = 0.00	$F(1,45)$ = 0.50	$F(3,42)$ = 1.22	$F(1,43)$ = 0.07	$F(1,45)$ = 0.42		$F(4,39)$ = 0.02		

One-tailed test $n = 470$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

** $p < 0.01$.

* $p < 0.05$.

+ $p < 0.1$.

Table 6. Summary of Annual Pooled Time Series Analysis of the Determinants of Women's Employment and Employment Enhancing and Retarding Policies.

1	2	3	4
	Effects of Column 1 variables on women's employment	Effect of Left government on Column 1 variables ^a	Effect of Christian democratic government on Column 1 variables ^a
Unemployment replacement rate			
1 year	++	++	0
4–5 year	–	0	+
Sickpay generosity	++	++	++
Daycare spending	++	++	–
Payroll taxes	–	–	++
Active labor market policy	++	++	0
Employment protection laws	–	0	++

0 not significant, – negative and significant at the .05 level, – negative and significant at the 0.01 level, + positive and significant at the 0.05 level, ++ positive and significant at the 0.01 level.

^aNet of ten control variables.

The variables in models 1–5 tap into this causal chain. Annual data for most of these variables, including all the variables which are significant in models 1–5, are available and we have analyzed these data to trace this causal chain (Nelson and Stephens 2008). It is beyond the scope of this paper to present this full analysis here. We summarize this analysis in table 6. The first column summarizes the results of a regression of women's employment on a number of hypothesized determinants. Generosity in short-term unemployment replacement rates, sickpay, daycare spending, and active labor market policies are positively related to women's employment, while high long-term unemployment replacement rates, payroll taxes, and rigid employment protection laws are negatively related to women's employment.¹⁸

Columns 2 and 3 summarize the results of regressions of the policy variables in column 1 on ten control variables and the social democratic and Christian democratic government variables used in

this paper, (Huber and Stephens 2006; Huo, Nelson, and Stephens 2008). As one can see, social democratic government is a strong determinant of *all* of the women's employment enhancing policies and *none* of the employment retarding policies. By contrast, Christian democratic government is strongly associated with *all* of the women's employment retarding policies, and only positively associated with sickpay and among the employment improving policies. Since the total variation explained in all of the regressions summarized in table 6 is very high, the high levels women's employment in social democratic regimes and low levels in Christian democratic regimes are in large part due to the policies pursued by social democratic and Christian democratic governments, respectively. The intermediate level of women's employment in liberal welfare regimes is explained in part by the fact that they are low on all of the policies in column 1, both the employment enhancing and the employment retarding ones.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated that macro-level variables are powerful determinants of women's economic position in advanced industrial societies. The strongest proximate causes of our two dependent variables, reduction in poverty among single mothers and women's earnings relative to those of their partners, are welfare state generosity and women's labor force participation, respectively. Left government has a direct effect on reduction of poverty among single mothers, and women's mobilization has a direct effect on women's earning as proportion of both spouses' earnings. Based on the analysis presented here and previous and current research (Huber and Stephens 2001; 2006, Nelson and Stephens 2008), we argue that the proximate causes are very powerfully shaped by political variables. Political power constellations, in particular, prolonged incumbency of parties with different ideological orientations and mobilization of women with different policy priorities, shape levels of welfare state generosity and structures of welfare state transfers and services that help single mothers stay out of poverty. They also shape labor markets in ways that affect women's employment levels.

The size of the welfare state is the single most important determinant of variations in governmental reduction in poverty; it alone accounts for 58 percent of the variation in the dependent variable. In addition to its indirect effect via welfare-state generosity, left government has a direct effect on poverty reduction among single mothers indicating that left governments structure taxes and transfers to reduce poverty in this group. Independent of their effect on

the size of the welfare state, constitutional structure veto points have a negative effect on poverty reduction. This makes theoretical sense: In systems with many veto points, oversized majorities are necessary to push legislation through the system, thus programs with small constituencies, like single mothers, are difficult to pass in the first place and vulnerable to cuts once passed. The comparative fate of Social Security, a program with a very broad constituency, and AFDC in the United States is a good illustration of this dynamic.

Social democratic welfare states are generous not only in transfers but also in providing public child care, which frees up mothers—single or not—to engage in paid work outside the home. We have no data specifically on the employment status of single mothers, but female labor force participation overall is higher and the proportion of working women who work only part-time is lower in the social democratic than in the other two regimes.

As we noted, women's mobilization did not have a significant direct effect on poverty reduction among single mothers in our regressions. Poverty reduction is greatest in social democratic welfare states, followed at some distance by poverty reduction in the Christian democratic and again at some distance in the liberal welfare states. Women's mobilization follows a different order; it is also strongest in the social democratic welfare states, but followed by the liberal and then quite closely the Christian democratic ones. Moreover, women's movements in different countries have assigned different priorities to poverty reduction in general and the status of single mothers in particular. For women's movements in countries with strong social democratic parties, reduction of poverty has long been a policy priority, whereas in countries dominated by forces favoring liberal regimes nondiscrimination and equal pay for equal work have been at the top of women's movement's agendas (O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999, 200–203). However, both women's mobilization and Christian democratic government have strong positive effects on various measures of welfare-state generosity (Huber and Stephens 2001, 2006). Thus, they contribute indirectly to poverty reduction among single mothers.

Women living with husbands or partners are also treated differently in countries dominated by different political forces in terms of their earnings. Again, they do best where the left has been the dominant political force and worst where Christian democratic governments have been frequent. As our regressions showed, the key determining factor of women's earnings is women's position in the labor market, whether women work at all and how much they work. The differences in women's employment can be directly linked to the different sets of labor market and social policies pursued by social democratic and Christian democratic governments, respectively.

When it comes to women's earnings relative to those of their husbands, women's mobilization has the strongest direct effect of our political variables. We speculate that this is explained in part by the fact that (nonreligious) women's organizations of all stripes support nondiscrimination in the labor market and in part by the phenomenon that women's mobilization is arguably associated with higher levels of ideological support for gender equality.

Our results have demonstrated that if the goal is to gain a broad and policy-relevant picture of the determinants of women's capacity to maintain autonomous households above the poverty line and to make significant contributions to family income, the way in which welfare state, labor market, and care policies shape employment opportunities and the availability of transfers for women becomes highly relevant. Welfare states in turn are political creations, shaped by the political commitments and strengths of different parties and by the level of mobilization and policy priorities of women themselves.

Do our findings indicate that partisan government will continue to affect the economic position of women in the future? We expect a continued contrast between the policies and outcomes for women of social democratic and secular center and right governments. The contrast in the policies pursued by the Blair government in the UK and the Howard government in Australia shows that partisan government matters even given the same welfare state regime legacy (Brennan 2007; Lewis and Campbell 2008). However, we do not expect Christian democratic governments to continue to promote the policies that discourage women's employment with the same vigor that they did in the past. Not only do such policies result in low levels of total employment and thus impose a fiscal burden on the welfare state, they also discourage the combining of work and family and thus result in extremely low levels of fertility and, as a result, pose a yet larger fiscal threat to future generations. These traditional Christian democratic policies are unviable, and this is increasingly recognized even by Christian democratic politicians. Thus, we would expect Christian democratic welfare states to be reformed in a liberal or social democratic direction, both of which are compatible with higher women's employment but which have very different implications for single mothers' poverty.¹⁹

NOTES

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1. The exception is Stier and Mandel (2003); their macro level variables are maternity leave and child care arrangements.

2. For different points of view on the usefulness of welfare state regime types, a concept first developed by Esping-Andersen (1990), for analyses of gender see Lewis (1992) and Stier, Lewis-Epstein, and Braun (2001). We find the concept useful, even though we recognize that some countries have very mixed characteristics and do not fit as well into these categories as some other countries. This is the case, for instance, with France (Levy 2000) which has had no Christian democratic party since the demise of the Fourth Republic and also with Britain, where the Old Labour legacy of the postwar years lives on in the National Health Service and where New Labour has expanded child care services in a clear departure from the liberal model. The labels we use are descriptive and not analytic. We could have used the Esping-Andersen labels of conservative, social democratic, and liberal or simply continental, Nordic, and Anglo-American.

3. In our data, governmental reduction in poverty accounts for 88 percent of the variation in single mothers' poverty. In an earlier version of this paper (LIS working paper 279, 2004), we present an analysis of pre tax and transfer poverty also. For economy of presentation, we do not include that here but refer the reader to that paper (<http://www.lisproject.org/php/wp/wp.php>).

4. A sampling of these studies can be found at <http://www.lisproject.org/php/wp/wp.php>.

5. Gornick's variable includes both married and unmarried persons.

6. For recent efforts, see, for example, Ferrarini (2003), Gornick and Meyers (2003), Kilkey (2000), Korpi (2000), and Orloff (2002).

7. These labor force characteristics in turn are in part, arguably in large part, the products of policies of governments with different political orientation and of varying labor market institutions (see below).

8. The example in the text is taken from the debates in Swedish Social Democracy at the time of the 1988 election, when the women's organization favored extending maternity leave while the unions favored extending paid vacation.

9. We thank Janet Gornick for pointing this out to us.

10. See <http://www.lisproject.org/> for a general introduction to the LIS database and a complete list of countries, years, and variables.

11. Note that LIS treats co-habiting couples as married couples, so the additional adults are not male partners of the single mother.

12. The 1996–2000 data are available at the IPU website (<http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>).

13. It is clear that this change inflated organizational membership because reliable aggregate membership data for union density, for example, show that the lower figures from the early waves were more accurate.

14. Because the last wave indicator measured error in the World Values Study last wave data, it was excluded from the prediction equation.

15. To test the robustness of our results, we also employed OLS and REM (random effects model) estimation. These estimation procedures yield substantially the same results for the main independent variables of interest. These results are available in Bradley et al. (2004).

16. Our hypotheses are directional, so we use one-tailed tests. When our directional hypotheses are incorrect and a variable would have been significant had we specified the opposite relationship, we keep that variable in the model.

17. For the technical details of this calculation, see Bradley et al. (2003, 223).

18. The models also included union density, wage dispersion, wage coordination, inward direct foreign investment, and trade openness. Union density, wage dispersion, and wage coordination were not significant. Inward DFI was positively related to women's employment while trade openness was negatively related to women's employment.

19. See Palier and Martin (2008) on recent reforms in Bismarckian welfare states.

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