I appreciate the opportunity to revise my manuscript in light of the comments and questions of the reviewers. The most significant change to the manuscript is the creation of two new Appendices. Appendix A is designed principally in response to the questions raised by Reviewer 3 and describes the different variables used in the analysis more clearly. Appendix B presents the results of the analysis broken down by individual countries as a means of responding to the concerns of Reviewer 1. Either Appendix might be included with the print edition or as online appendices on the author’s or some other website. Below, I have placed my responses to the specific reviewer comments (in blue).

Reviewer 3

Reviewer three poses a number of questions, most of which ask for greater clarity in the methodology used for the analysis. In addition to the changes described below, the author will make full replication code publicly available, allowing any interested individual to run the complete analysis from variable recoding to final table construction using only the original raw data from the European Social Survey. Below, I have listed my responses to the reviewer’s specific comments.

1. First, I would have liked to see some indicator of goodness of fit in the regression models (be it R square or regressions’s standard errors S).

Tables 2 & 3 now contain McFadden’s Pseudo-r squared statistics. In the case of ordered probit models, a pseudo-r squared value above .20 is considered a well-fit model. The r-squares here fall below those values. I would argue that this is largely endemic in the literature on cross-national welfare attitudes, in which r-square statistics are rarely reported. The low levels of explained variance are partially the result of the use of ordered probit, but more importantly reflect the high degree of measurement error in cross-national opinion analysis, particularly when addressing questions of complex public policy.

1. The effect of the interactions is quite moderate, and perhaps this should be stressed in the text.

In the analysis, Figures 1-4 demonstrate the substantive strength of the interaction terms. They demonstrate that the expected relationships between core variables (e.g. income and redistributive preferences) are not present at low awareness, but do appear quite strong for those at higher levels of awareness. Whether these effects are moderate or quite strong is to some degree a matter of opinion, but the text presents their substantive strength both in text and in the figures, allowing the reader to determine for themselves whether these effects are moderate or substantial.

1. Significance tests for the results showed in Figures 1-4 should be provided.

In the original manuscript, Figures 1-4 contained error bars for the predictions at each level of the dependent variable, which allow the reader to determine the statistical significance of the individual point predictions. A note has been added to each figure, which clarifies the meaning of these error bars.

1. An annex specifying more in-depth how the different indexes used were built, the descriptive statistics for the variables used in the models, and the recoding of some of them (in that is the case) would have also been useful.

Each of the three indexes (moral hazard, welfare support, and political awareness) are now described in more complete detail in Appendix A. Full descriptive statistics for each variable were also provided. There is no major recoding of variables not described in text. As discussed above, upon publication, full-replication code will be made publicly available, allowing any interested reader to follow all coding and modeling choices.

1. More details on how the imputation mentioned in footnote 1 works would also be worth to include.

Footnote 1 now includes all of the variables used in the imputation equation. The imputation process will also be included in the full-replication code upon publication.

1. Similarly, one would expect a clearer explanation of what are “typical” individuals referred to in footnote 2.

The comparison of predicted probabilities is by its nature an abstract process and the definition of a “typical” individual highly arbitrary. This project follows convention by defining the typical individual as someone with all control variables at their median values. The following text was added to footnote two to describe in greater detail the values of these different control variables: “A ‘typical’ individual is defined as someone with all control variables held at their median values. In this sample, the typical individual is a median income, working class woman aged 47 who is employed with an education equivalent to completion of upper secondary schooling and who places herself at the political center.”

1. The income decile brackets for each country could also be described in an annex (perhaps they could also be compared with those derived from other sources, such as EU-SILC).

The income brackets and their derivation is fully described in the codebook for the European Social Survey, which is available online. The process is intended to ensure that the variable largely reflects individual’s placement into income deciles for the society. Replicating this information verbatim in an Appendix seems unnecessary. Given that this measurement process is fixed in the data, it would seem beyond the scope of this study to compare these income brackets to those from alternative sources.

Reviewer 1

Reviewer 1 makes a number of interesting comments, which, as I understand them, can be grouped into two main categories. The first set of questions concern whether it is appropriate to include particular welfare questions (e.g. social spending preferences, the moral hazard index, etc.) in an analysis of ideological constraint. These arguments suggest that the absence of a correlation between particular variables may demonstrate a more nuanced set of preferences not easily placed into a simple “pro or anti-welfare state” continuum, rather than an absence of preference consistency. The second set of related but distinct questions suggest that for a number of reasons there may be cross-national differences in how these variables relate to one another that make it inappropriate to assume that these different variables should form a consistent index in particular societies. The reviewer suggests that these cross-national differences may be masked by the particular methodology of pooling the data into a single cross-national statistical analysis. Below, I have reorganized the reviewer’s specific comments into these two categories, providing an overall response to each argument, along with specific responses to each comment.

# Specific Questions and Ideological Constraint

Reviewer 1 raises concerns about the inclusion of a number of specific variables into a single index as a measure of “ideological constraint.” Before addressing the questions about specific measures, it is important to first note that the analysis of inter-item correlations (Table 1) includes a wide variety of measures in order to determine whether they reflect a broad underlying set of attitudes toward the welfare state, as assumed in much of the cross-national literature on welfare preferences, or whether they form a largely disconnected and at times incoherent mix of preferences. Though each measure is imperfect, the theoretical expectations linked to each indicator suggest that they should be correlated with one another (e.g. lower income individuals should show strong support across all measures). Additionally, the central claim of the manuscript is not that the measures are, or should be, perfectly correlated, but rather that the extent to which they are linked will be influenced by the extent to which individuals are politically engaged and develop more complex understandings of welfare policy. The question thus is not how well the measures are correlated per se, but rather whether their correlation increases as political awareness increases, which the evidence here strongly supports. In other words, though it may be true that there are ways to respond positively to some and negatively to other variables, the notable findings here are that the politically aware are much more likely to provide consistently positive or negative responses to the battery of questions than those with more limited knowledge and interest.

Welfare Spending: I am not convinced that the question on social spending is a good indicator of support for the Welfare State in a comparative study. It may be strongly conditioned by the actual level of social spending /taxation in each country, and by recent political developments (e.g. a recent tax increase). We also know that it is strongly affected by the economic cycle.

As discussed in the manuscript, this question concerning preferred levels of social spending is far from perfect, but it is also one of the most commonly used in the literature. Its principal strength is that it specifically addresses the trade-off between taxes and social spending trade-offs that lies at the heart of many political economy models focused on public opinion. The finding that it is strongly correlated with preferences for redistribution only for those at high levels of political awareness, and conversely that it is not at all correlated with preferences for redistribution for the large section of the population who are less politically aware is a significant and important finding. It is this finding which most clearly demonstrates how this project challenges conventional research in this field.

The author is assuredly correct that support for changes in social spending are affected by a variety of factors including current levels of social spending and the broader economic climate; however, this does not warrant exclusion of the variable for two reasons. First, each of the national-level factors should affect the mean level of support for changes in welfare spending across countries, but not necessarily the variation around that mean. If high-levels of current spending reduce support for more spending, this would be reflected by a shift in overall support for increased spending, but it is not clear that it would affect whether, for example, union members are more likely to support higher or lower levels of spending than non-union members. The use of fixed-effects should reduce problems associated with national-level variations in economic context or current social spending/taxation rates by factoring out any cross-national differences in mean support. Second, no indicators of social policy preferences are immune to these concerns. Standard questions about whether the government should reduce income differences or reduce poverty are similarly influenced by existing welfare efforts or the state of the national economy. Though these factors are important, they do not of themselves suggest that the spending variable is inadequate. In the end, the models in Table 1 include a robustness check using the question concerning whether inequalities are deemed unfair, which finds largely similar results.

In addition, previous literature have demonstrated that people with low income/education tend to support more public spending but reject to pay higher taxes. Qualitative studies indicate that this apparent contradiction is based on the perception that they can not afford to pay more taxes (remember that they have low incomes); that the tax system is not really progressive (something accurate in certain countries); and that improvements in the Welfare State should be paid for by “the rich”. This idea may be found naïve or not, but it is not inconsistent. I am aware that the authors’ analysis includes controls by income/social class and education, and that even controlling for these variables political awareness shows a significant effect. Notwithstanding, I will rather not use this question in a study of attitudinal consistency.

I agree with the reviewer’s argument that believing that the government should spend more, but being wary of rising taxes is not inconsistent. If, as suggested by the reviewer, these two views are theoretically disconnected from one another then, we would expect the two variables to be largely uncorrelated. Importantly, the evidence here demonstrates empirically that the redistribution and social spending variables are in fact strongly correlated for those with above average levels of political awareness. It is only at lower-levels of awareness where these variables become largely disconnected. It is always possible to find ways to link a variety of different responses to these questions together into a “consistent” set of preferences, but the data is revealing that for those with limited political awareness the questions are disconnected (as suggested by the reviewer), but for the more politically aware they are significantly more correlated both with each other and a broader “ideological” position on the welfare state.

The expectation that if people support the Welfare State should see no difficulties or side effects in the actual implementation of public programs seems a bit naïve (I am referring here to the moral hazard index).

As with the previous discussion of social spending, though it is possible to find fault with any particular indicator, the manuscript uses a variety of indicators as both a robustness check and to examine whether people at lower and higher levels of political awareness appear to fit the variables together differently. It is not at all difficult to believe that individuals could support the welfare state and simultaneously believe that current programs suffer from serious implementation problems. I share this belief. The moral hazard index, however, is not principally a measure of the effectiveness of particular welfare programs, but rather asks about the overall impact of welfare programs on the behavior of the poor. The three questions ask individuals whether they believe social benefits: (1) “make people lazy?” (2) “make people less willing to care for one another?” and (3) “make people less willing to look after themselves and their family.” These are broad statements about the overall effects of welfare benefits on the behavior of recipients, rather than specific concerns about how well-run particular programs may be (e.g. “I support national health care, but think the NHS is a mess”). We should expect that people who believe that social benefits reduce the willingness of individuals to care for themselves should be less supportive of social spending than those who do not hold this view. So, while it is possible to imagine individuals seeing flaws in the welfare state, but still supporting it in principle, it is a bit more difficult to believe that individuals who believe the welfare state creates a moral hazard are not less supportive of social policy than those who don’t hold those views.

In addition, as discussed above, the principle concern of the manuscript is not the strength of the correlations per se, but rather whether the strength of the correlation varies along with political awareness. The evidence presented here demonstrates that, as with social spending and the other variables, the moral hazard index is strongly correlated with other measures of welfare support for the politically aware, but much less so for those with low levels of political awareness. The suggestion then, that a disconnect between the moral hazard index and other variables reflects more nuanced thinking, requires us to believe that those with lower levels of political awareness are expressing more nuanced views than those with higher levels of interest and knowledge.

# Differing National Contexts

The reviewer raises questions concerning whether variations across different national contexts may raise methodological and theoretical issues for the analysis. On a methodological level, the reviewer asks whether the pooling of national surveys into a single cross-national data set may hide the fact that particular countries drive the findings. On a related theoretical-level, the reviewer asks whether differences in the dominant welfare ideologies across countries may produce very different correlations between particular variables.

The pooling of cross-national datasets is an integral part of the existing literature on public support for redistribution and the welfare state. As the analysis is centrally interested in raising concerns with the existing literature, it adheres closely to what has become the standard methodological approach in this field. The pooling of data is meant to examine whether there exist broad patterns of public opinion that cross-national boundaries. In addition, the pooling of data allows for a much larger number of observations, yielding much greater statistical power for the analysis of interaction terms and in the face of known issues of measurement error in opinion surveys. There therefore exist strong statistical, theoretical, and practical reasons for the pooling of the surveys.

To explore the reviewer’s questions, I replicated the analysis for each country separately. The results of these analysis are presented in Appendix B, which might be included as an online appendix or used simply to address these concerns. As expected, there are some differences across countries; however, on the whole, the regression and inter-item correlation analysis depict very similar pictures across most countries. It is possible that the differences across countries reflect real cross-national differences of theoretical importance, but there are also reasons to believe that these differences merely reflect variations in measurement error across countries, as described below. I will first address my interpretation of the findings before moving on to how they may specifically implicate the specific concerns of the reviewer.

Table B1 replicates the reliability analysis of Table 1 within each country. The results reveal that in all countries with the exception of Portugal, the inter-item correlation between the seven variables increases with political awareness. The presence of this pattern across thirteen of the fourteen countries gives significant confidence in the validity of the cross-national analysis and suggests the results from Table 1 are not the result of leverage from any single country. The one exception, Portugal, is a country with very low levels of recorded political awareness and, more problematically, extensive missing data. Rates of non-response in Portugal were very high across a range of variables including income (58%), left-right self-placement (32%), social spending levels (26%), and preferences for redistribution (10%). With missing values this high, it is arguable that Portugal should be excluded from the analysis altogether. Importantly, it is likely that these high non-response rates are correlated with low-levels of political awareness and thus likely underrepresent the least informed in this society.

Tables B2.1 and B2.2 reproduce the interaction analyses from Table 2 by country. The results from Table B2.1 shows the expected interaction effects between political awareness and preferences for spending cuts across 11 of the 14 countries with Switzerland narrowly missing the 90% confidence level. Table B2.2 demonstrates results consistent with the cross-national patterns in 8 of the 14 countries. These suggest that the individual country-level results broadly conform to those from the cross-national models.

Tables B3.1 and B3.2 reproduce the interaction analyses from Table 3 by country. The results broadly conform to those from the cross-national analysis. Table A3.1 demonstrates the expected negative interaction between income and political awareness for 8 of the 14 countries. Importantly, 3 of the 6 countries for which no interaction term was found had very high rates of missing income data (Switzerland 24%, Spain 37%, and Portugal 58%). Given the unavoidable increase in measurement error produced by the imputation process, these null results are consistent with measurement error in the income variable. Table B3.2 demonstrates the expected null results across almost all countries, consistent with the null findings in Table 3.

Taken together, the country-level analyses conform to the expected patterns from the pooled analysis with some discrepancies across individual countries consistent with variations in measurement error. There is little evidence that the results are driven by a small number of countries, or that there are particular cross-national patterns that drive the results. The evidence from Appendix B thus confirms the validity of the methodological approach adopted here and shared with much of the existing literature.

The authors make a good case demonstrating that answers to different questions on social policy are more correlated for respondents with a high level of political awareness. I.e. politically aware people that support the welfare state tend to support all aspects of it: they support redistribution; they want more social spending; they believe that the state should intervene in the main welfare areas; they believe state intervention does not generate moral hazard; and they consider income differences as unfair. This is a very interesting finding, but I disagree with its interpretation in terms of “consistent” and “inconsistent” attitudes. I have two arguments for this criticism:

First, although authors state that “It is possible to “thread the needle” and imagine ways in which individuals could respond negatively to some of these questions and positively to others in an intellectually consistent way”, I can see several reasons to give “inconsistent” answers. For example: -The redistributive character of welfare institutions depends on the particular welfare model. Some welfare models have a clear redistributive aim, whilst others are primarily oriented as a safety net, and yet others are legitimized in terms of risk-insurance. Redistribution lies not at the core of all Welfare States. The connection between support for redistribution and support for welfare programs is expected to be stronger in Nordic countries, and lower in countries with Liberal or Corporatist welfare states.

The reviewer is correct to point out that not all welfare programs are explicitly redistributive and that different welfare models are built upon different principles, which are more or less explicitly focused on social insurance or poverty reduction. There is evidence from the policy feedback literature that these policy differences may influence overall levels of support for welfare across countries; however, to my knowledge, this literature has not shown that different welfare models actually produce a disconnect between redistributive preferences and broader social policy preferences. In other words, it has not been demonstrated that support for welfare policies is less correlated with redistributive preferences in Nordic welfare states compared to Liberal welfare states.

Secondly, this argument would be true of some of the variables, but not others. Though it is possible that redistributive preferences might be disconnected from support for healthcare. It is more difficult to understand how redistributive preferences could become disconnected from beliefs about the fairness of inequality (Table 1, Models 3 & 4). An argument can be made that threads the needle between any two or three of the questions, but as a battery of six questions, plus left-right self-placement, it becomes more difficult to argue that these preferences could be ideologically consistent.

Additionally, even if some countries may deemphasize redistribution, we should still expect to see preferences for redistribution and the broader welfare state to be correlated. First, as described in the manuscript, all of the variables discussed in the paper have effectively identical relationships to key explanatory variables. Though support for social insurance and redistribution may be theoretically distinctive, both are expected to decrease with income, for example. As a result, even if the variables can be linked together in a variety of different ways, because they are all expected to have effectively identical relationships to the underlying causal variables, they should all be correlated with one another if individuals are giving responses consistent with their self-interests and ideological predispositions. Moreover, though it is possible to argue that one could support social insurance without supporting redistribution, it is more difficult to understand the opposite position (e.g. supporting redistribution, but rejecting the social insurance policies designed to produce it). Thus, we would expect that even in a society where the welfare state deemphasized redistribution those who strongly support redistribution should more strongly support the welfare state, producing an overall positive correlation between the two variables.

In the end, the empirical evidence makes it clear that in all of the countries except Portugal the variables are more strongly correlated for those with higher levels of political awareness than for those at low levels of awareness. Though there is some indication of overall variations in inter-item correlations across countries, the overall pattern of higher levels of consistency across the variables as political awareness increases is remarkably consistent. This means that despite some theoretical reasons to believe that informed citizens might reasonably disconnect their preferences for redistribution from their preferences about social spending, the evidence shows the opposite.

Second, some political parties (but not all) have black or white discourses on the Welfare State. E.g. ‘we want more redistribution and more taxes; the state should be totally responsible for the main welfare areas; and state intervention carries no moral hazards’. It is just logical that individuals more interested politics and that expose themselves to political discourses (by reading newspapers watching the news, etc.) have attitudes that better accord with the discourses of political parties and/or with a clear ideological left-right divide. However, I can not see this ‘black or white’ position of some political parties (and of those exposes to their discourses) as consistency but as a need to simplify positions for the sake of political argumentation.

The reviewer here raises an important and deep question concerning whether the left-right spectrum and general understanding of welfare preferences held by political scientists are based on meaningful and logical ideological differences or whether instead they merely reflect the convenient packaging of policy choices by partisan elites. As already discussed above, I believe this is somewhat mitigated by the broad scope of the questions as it is not difficult to argue for any one or two variables being disconnected, but an argument that one’s preferences for redistribution should not be correlated with their attitudes toward the fairness of inequality or that preferences for high social spending are disconnected from support for social insurance programs is more difficult to understand.

More importantly, the questions asked by the reviewer are really the questions raised by the results. Existing theory assumes that preferences for the welfare state are generated by individual-level factors or individual’s responses to structural differences across countries. It is also possible that a central variable explaining cross-national variations in support for social policy is differences between parties and how they package welfare preferences together. I know of no study that has specifically addressed this question in a cross-national context. In the end, even if what is defined here as consistency is the byproduct of partisan politics, it remains true that the politically aware across the vast majority of the countries studied demonstrated more highly correlated beliefs than those at low awareness, and strong evidence exists that variables such as income become more strongly correlated with welfare preferences as awareness increases. In other words, those at high awareness are significantly more likely to behave as our dominant theoretical models predict than are those at low awareness. This is an important finding. It is also a finding which raises important questions concerning the role political parties play in “informing voters.” These are questions raised by the analysis, but exist beyond the current scope of this research.

Finally, the type of data analysis used is efficient but may be misleading. On the one hand, coefficients from regressions models on pooled data can be strongly conditioned by one or two countries. It can be the case that, although 11 countries show no relation between A and B, the regression coefficient is statistically significant because in 2 countries A and B are related. One needs to repeat the analysis country by country to really know what is going on.

This is a legitimate concern in any pooled research, but, as discussed above, the evidence from the country-level analyses presented in the Appendix makes clear that the results are not the byproduct of a small number of countries leveraging the results. There are some cross-national differences, as is to be expected, but these are consistent with variations in measurement error across countries, rather than any systematic leverage issues.

On the other hand, a recent study by Roosma et al (2013) ‘The Multidimensionality of Welfare State Attitudes: A European Cross-National Study’ concludes that: ‘According to our empirical analysis, attitudes towards the welfare state are multidimensional; in general, people are very positive about the welfare state’s goals and range, while simultaneously being critical of its efficiency, effectiveness and policy outcomes. We found that these dimensions relate to each other differently in different countries. Eastern/Southern Europeans combine a positive attitude towards the goals and role of government with a more critical attitude towards the welfare state’s efficiency and policy outcomes. In contrast, Western/Northern Europeans’ attitudes towards the various welfare state dimensions are based partly on a fundamentally positive or negative stance towards the welfare state.’

The cited paper raises an interesting set of questions about differences in cross-national patterns of attitudes toward the welfare state. The argument is that individuals in Southern Europe have positive attitudes about the goals, but negative attitudes toward the effectiveness of the welfare state. The study here uses a large number of variables, but few of them deal with the issue of program efficiency and effectiveness per se. Of the battery of questions used, only the moral hazard index addresses the issue of the effectiveness of the welfare state, and as discussed above, it does so in a more general way focused on social benefits as a whole, rather than asking about whether particular programs are effective. The other variables probe a wide range of different attitudes, including preferences for redistribution, the acceptability of high inequality, support for social insurance, preferred levels of social spending, and left-right self-placement. As suggested above, it is not difficult to believe that people support the welfare state in principle, but are frustrated by how the existing welfare state works, but it is more difficult to understand how individuals who believe that high inequality is unjust can simultaneously believe high inequality is justified to reward effort or that individuals can believe that the welfare state should be expanded while believing that social policies make people lazy.

The cited paper, along with other responses, do raise important and interesting questions concerning how attitudes are “put together” differently in different national contexts. If we look carefully, there is some evidence that the overall inter-item correlations are on average lower in Southern Europe compared to the other countries (no evidence exists for differences between Nordic, Liberal, and Continental welfare states). This lower correlation between the battery of items in Spain and Portugal is consistent with the claim of a difference in Southern Europe; however, it may result from a variety of factors: religion, welfare state structure, low levels of political awareness in Southern countries, economic cycles, or simply measurement error (due to high levels of missing data in Portugal and Spain). With the given evidence it is difficult to disentangle which of these possible factors might be driving these differences and whether these differences are of any real theoretical interest. In the end, these questions about differences across regions are interesting and worth pursuing; however, they are beyond the scope of this study. This analysis here is principally concerned with whether political awareness increases the extent to which a wide range of attitudes cohere into a particular set of welfare preferences. Though the correlations between two or three of these variables may vary in particular national contexts, this analysis is principally interested in whether there exists a general pattern in which low levels of political awareness reduce the internal consistency of stated preferences and the connection between those preferences and other causal variables. The evidence presented in the original paper as well as the Appendix tables show strong evidence for these patterns. As discussed, in 13 of the 14 countries we see that political awareness does appear to increase attitudinal consistency as defined by the paper. Thus, though there is some reason to believe that there might be cross-national differences in how countries link these different variables, these are avenues for future and further research that lie outside the scope of this project.