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ARTICLE

The formation of family policy attitudes: the role of justice perceptions in the division of household labour

Anna Helgøy[1] and Arno Van Hootegem[2]

[1]Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway and [2]Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway
Corresponding author: Anna Helgøy; Email: anna.helgoy@stv.uio.no

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Abstract

Welfare state attitudes make up an interactive feedback loop of defining popular legitimacy and future policy trajectories. Understanding attitudinal drivers is thus essential political knowledge. However, as existing research is mainly based on the work-nexus of welfare, this article expands the literature to the welfare state's care-nexus, examining drivers of family policy attitudes. We argue that conventional attitude predictors of self-interest and ideology are insufficient to explain the attitudinal cleavage in family policy. Instead, justice perceptions in the division of physical and cognitive household labour represent an important normative battleground. We test this with Norwegian survey data ($N = 3500$), using a unique vignette experiment to operationalise justice perceptions. Findings show that individuals who do not perceive a disproportional household labour division as unfair prefer optional familialism within family policy. Individuals who do perceive unfairness in a disproportional household labour division prefer de-familialism, which facilitates gender equality in public and private spheres. This is consistently found for the physical division of labour, while the cognitive dimension seems less politicised. We conclude that the battleground for different family policy approaches is fundamentally normative and linked to justice considerations on gender roles.

Keywords: family policy; household justice; welfare attitudes; self-interest; ideology

Introduction

People's attitudes towards the welfare state matter for its legitimacy and further development (Rothstein, 1998; Mau, 2004; Van Oorschot, 2007; Staerklé et al. 2012). Determining what affects support for welfare policies is crucial political knowledge, contributing to welfare state survival and defining the space for future policymaking (Pfau-Effinger, 2005). However, the current state of research is largely based on the work-nexus of the welfare state; That is, it largely concerns 'old' social risks such as unemployment and attitudes such as support for redistribution. This paper instead

focusses on the care-nexus of the welfare state, which encompasses family policies countering 'new' social risks such as reconciling work and family life (Bonoli, 2005). Family policy is used to pursue several social goals, such as increasing gender equality, maternal employment, work–life balance and regulating fertility levels. Despite the potential of attitudes towards these policies to both (de)legitimise their usage and affect future policies, we know surprisingly little about what drives attitudes towards different family policy approaches.

Existing research on family policy attitudes centres on the single dependent variable of support for public childcare (Henderson et al., 1995; Goerres & Tepe, 2010; Mischke, 2014; Chung & Meuleman, 2017). While important, we are instead interested in explaining contemporary attitudinal *cleavages* in the welfare state's care-nexus. We do so by relying on theoretical classifications of family policies, representing mutually exclusive normative grounds, and empirically testing predictors of attitudes on both sides of the theorised cleavage. Mapping attitudinal cleavages is important knowledge because they are telling of conflicting stakes in policy areas. Within family policy in particular, attitudinal cleavages represent conflicting ways of approaching gender equality. Taken together, the cleavage makes up the legitimate space for regulating the gendered division of labour in society (Pfau-Effinger, 2005).

The rich literature on welfare attitudes often explains attitudes as grounded in ideology or in rational self-interest. The latter camp argues that people are rational actors who maximise their material or protective gain (Rehm, 2016), while ideological explanations argue that welfare attitudes are guided by values such as solidarity or altruism (Mau, 2004; Van Oorschot, 2007; Staerklé et al., 2012). Yet, for family policy, interests are often diffuse and non-differentiable across approaches. For instance, women arguably have an interest in *more* family policy, but whether they have an economic interest in compensation for care or for policies that facilitate labour market participation is not clear. Similarly, general ideological beliefs may not fully capture political divides in family policy attitudes either. While support coalitions for traditional welfare policies aimed at providing passive transfers and income protection followed conventional left versus right divides, policies addressing new social risks often divide the left (i.e. between the old and new left) and the right (i.e. between liberals and conservatives) from within (Häusermann, 2006, 2012). Different family policies will thus likely prompt new value coalitions that transcend pure left–right conflicts.

We therefore suggest that family policy divides can also be grounded in normative perceptions of justice in the distribution of household labour. As a result, we study a potential driver of family policy attitudes through conceptualising the household as a core distributive site where benefits and burdens within the family sphere are organised. Although justice considerations in other distributive contexts (such as the workplace or the welfare state's work-nexus) have documented consequences for policy attitudes (Eatwell, 2000; Arzheimer, 2018; Van Hootegem et al., 2022), this has yet to be analysed for the household. It is nevertheless crucial to assess whether perceptions pertaining to the private sphere spill over to beliefs on how to publicly regulate gender equality.

This is done by linking preferences for private divisions of household labour to opinions on approaches to family policy that either uphold or erode traditional gender roles. Another contribution of the paper is that it accounts for justice

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preferences on both the cognitive and the physical division of household, an important distinction rarely considered in research. In particular, the following research question is examined: *How do perceptions of justice in the division of physical and cognitive household labour translate into family policy attitudes?* We answer this question using data from a Norwegian survey from 2022 ($N = 3500$).

Theory

Family policy: approaches and attitudes

Family policy aims to facilitate individuals' balancing of work and care (Morgan, 2012), through defamilising or familising measures, which respectively break or maintain intra-familial dependencies that demote or uphold traditional gender norms (Esping-Andersen, 2003; Leitner, 2003; Lohmann & Zagel, 2016). Family policy approaches thus contain measures that affect gender equality generally and the division of household labour specifically. Demoting traditional gender norms involves relieving women of their household labour burdens, for instance through externalising household labour to the state by offering public childcare, or through pushing father involvement via father quotas in parental leave schemes. Policies upholding traditional gender norms, on the other hand, typically involve passive transfers supporting mothers to stay more at home at the cost of paid work.

Although these measures seemingly have opposing aims, they are in reality often mixed in family policy packages (Jozwiak, 2022). Leitner's (2003) typology of family policy approaches systematically accounts for this by separating between de-familialism, optional familialism, explicit familialism and implicit familialism. Explicit and implicit familialism represent family policy approaches that offer family support only through passive transfers to caregivers, or offer no public support, respectively. This results in the upholding of traditional gender roles by either explicitly facilitating women staying home or implicitly forcing them to unless they can afford private childcare.

In the present case, Norway, implicit and explicit familialism are not viable policy alternatives. Instead, we focus on preferring de-familialism or optional familialism. This cleavage represents those who support gender equality as role symmetry in the labour market and the household (de-familialism) and those who accept role asymmetry in the household if it stems from an autonomous choice (optional familialism). Thus, optional familialism contains elements of both de-familialism and explicit familialism, giving individuals a choice between prioritising paid work or household labour. Here, the emphasis of family policy is put on offering a plain choice, irrespective of distributional consequences (Lewis, 2008).

Studying this cleavage within family policy is relevant also for other welfare states in Europe. With the exception of the few liberal welfare regimes (i.e. the UK) where family policy is so limited that it classifies as implicit familialism (Ciccia & Verloo, 2012), most European welfare regimes currently implement policies representing both optional familialism and de-familialism. However, differences can be observed between welfare states in the degree to which choice is emphasised more (i.e. continental welfare states with joint taxation and cash-for-care schemes alongside childcare support; see Häusermann, 2018) or less (i.e. social democratic welfare states that prioritise de-familialist measures; see Ellingsæter, 2024).

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In the present study, two family policy proposals are evaluated that represent the institutionalisation of optional familialism and de-familialism: the cash-for-care scheme that offers payment for care of a small child by a parent (optional familialism), and public investments in childcare (de-familialism). Evaluating both policies simultaneously is novel, as attitudinal studies on established cleavages within family policy have yet to be conducted empirically for a general population (but see Helgøy, 2024 for an examination among part-time workers in Norway). In terms of societal relevance, studying family policy cleavages clarifies the political space for reforms and reveals drivers behind conflicting stakes in a policy area crucial for gender equality.

The current literature finds that people tend to support family policy already in place (Chung & Meuleman, 2017; Valarino et al., 2018). These findings have prompted arguments that family policy is a flexible policy field with potential for meaningful political impact (Chung & Meuleman, 2017). However, current research mainly examines one type of family policy, namely public childcare (Henderson et al., 1995; Goerres & Tepe, 2010; Mischke, 2014; Chung & Meuleman, 2017; Busemeyer & Neimanns, 2017, but see Goubin & Kumlin, 2022). While this is of course important, only investigating this single item is not sufficient to make arguments about family policy attitudes generally, as the item cuts across family policy cleavages. Public childcare provision can be supported not only by individuals preferring de-familialism but also by proponents of optional familialism (who prefer a choice between public childcare and compensated care at home). A cash-for-care scheme, however, strictly represents optional familialism and is relevant to posit against support for childcare.

Justice perceptions as drivers of family policy attitudes

Justice perceptions are fundamentally normative and can be defined as 'shared conceptions of the desirable' (Van Deth & Scarbrough, 1995, p.28; Liebig & Sauer, 2016), which connects closely to understanding welfare attitudes as embedded in moral beliefs. However, justice preferences are intrinsically context dependent or domain specific (Van Hootegem et al., 2020), meaning that they are better understood at a lower level of abstraction than generic ideological preferences. Specifically, they are types of societal values that contain 'references to concrete social circumstances', rather than universal values that are applicable across contexts (Haller, 2002; Jo, 2011). In particular, we focus on justice perceptions in the domain of the household, which specifically connect to family policy ideals.

The literature on justice perceptions in the household division of labour[1] grew out of research trying to explain persistent inequality in that division, based on the puzzling finding that a substantial number of women in unequal households do not find the inequality unfair (Koster et al., 2022). The literature on justice perceptions is thus linked to research on the division of labour itself. However, justice perceptions among individuals may contribute to persistent inequality beyond its effect *within* the household. These perceptions reflect norms and ideals in the population of what division of labour people perceive as "right" in general terms. Thus, we investigate these underlying norms of justice perceptions at the household level, motivated by the argument that these affect gender inequality also from a structural standpoint by translating into differing family policy attitudes.

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We argue that a relationship between justice perceptions and attitudes exist on at least two theoretical grounds. First, justice perceptions of household labour seem to closely connect to gender attitudes (DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; Lavee & Katz, 2002). Individuals with egalitarian views on gender are more likely to judge an unequal division of labour as unfair than those who have conservative gender views. Diverging gender attitudes have in turn been linked to different family policy approaches (Jozwiak, 2022). Second, the division of labour is a distributive matter, of which resulting allocations can be evaluated by affected individuals on the basis of what they believe to be just. The distributional outcomes impact individual lives substantially, as the burdens allocated involve daily and tedious tasks. If the allocation is skewed, feelings of injustice may follow. A large body of research finds that feelings of injustice are linked to political attitudes and behaviour connecting to restoring the injustice (Eatwell, 2000; Liebig & Sauer, 2016; Arzheimer, 2018; Van Hootegem et al., 2022).

We build our hypotheses from the theoretical links between justice perceptions and attitudes, and how the dimensions of de-familialism and optional familialism relate to them. First, as the dimensions of de-familialism and optional familialism correspond to the attitudinal cleavage identified in the gender attitudes literature, we expect that individuals whose justice perceptions deviate from egalitarian divisions of labour will prefer optional familialism. Vice versa, we expect that individuals whose justice perceptions align with egalitarian divisions of labour will prefer de-familialism. The theoretical links from the justice literature support these hypotheses further. Those who perceive injustice in inegalitarian divisions of labour should support policies rectifying that injustice from a structural standpoint – they should thus prefer de-familialism, as that promotes symmetry in gender roles. Contrarily, those who do not perceive injustice in inegalitarian divisions of labour should prefer optional familialism, enabling them to choose unequal divisions.

H1.a: *Individuals whose justice considerations deviate from egalitarian divisions of household labour will prefer optional familialism in family policy.*

H1.b: *Individuals whose justice considerations align with egalitarian divisions of household labour will prefer de-familialism in family policy.*

Moreover, research has found it meaningful to analytically separate physical and cognitive housework. The physical dimension consists of concrete chores typically measured in household labour – cleaning, cooking, etc. Cognitive labour, on the other hand, is the organisational dimension of the household, often referred to as the mental load (Mederer, 1993; Zimmerman et al., 2002; Daminger, 2019). Cognitive labour is found to be highly gender unequal even in couples with a relatively equal physical task division (Wiesmann et al., 2008). It thus warrants the attention of researchers but has proved difficult to study with traditional quantitative measurement tools such as time-use surveys, owing to the concept's lack of constraints in time and space (Daminger, 2019). However, our method of establishing justice perceptions through a vignette experiment accommodates the inclusion of a cognitive dimension.

We expect that justice perceptions on the cognitive labour dimension will have less predictive power in explaining family policy attitudes than the physical dimension. Not only is the mental load uncrystallised for many, given that household labour has

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consistently been conceptualised as physical work – it is also invisible, including often to the person carrying it (Dean et al., 2021). Additionally, when made aware of cognitive labour, people tend to strongly attach to their share by linking it to their own (ungendered) personalities whereby the woman happens to be more organised and the man more relaxed (Zimmerman et al., 2002). It can therefore be more robust to perceiving injustice even in an imbalanced division. Indeed, research has shown that inequality in household management is less prone to prompt within-couple conflicts than inequality in physical household tasks (Mederer, 1993).

H2: *Justice perceptions in the cognitive dimension of household labour will matter less for family policy attitudes than the physical dimension of household labour*.

Conventional predictors of welfare attitudes: self-interest and general ideology

We also consider the traditional frameworks used to explain welfare attitudes: self-interest and ideology. While self-interest frameworks assume that people prefer policies yielding personal economic advantages, the ideology framework assumes that attitudes gain meaning in a broader system of political and normative beliefs on the desired functioning and organisation of society (Jæger, 2006; Staerklé et al., 2012). We control for self-interest factors such as age, living with a partner, having children, education and income, given previously described self-interest findings with regards to family policy attitudes (i.e. Lewin-Epstein, 2000; Pettersen, 2001; Lewis, 2008). Indeed, previous research finds that individuals more likely to make use of family policies support spending on public childcare, such as married younger women and families with young children (Lewin-Epstein, 2000; Pettersen, 2001). Regarding ideology, the welfare attitudes literature often focusses on general ideological predispositions to explain distributive preferences. Although related to justice considerations in that they also capture normative battlegrounds, these ideological dispositions are more generic, abstract and span across societal contexts. To capture this, we include left–right placement, government responsibility to reduce income differences and anti-immigration attitudes as predictors.

It is not clear how these ideological predispositions might explain cleavages in family policy approaches beyond general support. First, a drawback of the self-interest perspective is that it prioritises short-term over long-term interest (Kumlin, 2004). As family policy mainly concerns long-term and rather abstract goals (such as increased gender equality), traditional self-interest may be less appropriate. De-familialism typically maximises individuals' long-term material gains as it involves higher labour market engagement among parents. However, certain family contexts can plausibly contain self-interest drivers leading to a preference for optional familialism instead. For instance, someone working many hours may benefit from having a partner devoted to the household. Regarding ideology, the normative subject under scrutiny in family policy is not just more or less redistribution, but rather gender roles and how household labour ought to be divided within families. Indeed, one study finds that family policy attitudes connect to views on feminism (Henderson et al., 1995). In this sense, family policy cleavages seemingly go beyond traditional ideological conflicts between the conventional left and right, as these policies often

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divide the left and especially right from within (Häusermann, 2006). Research on the politics of family policy supports this claim by showing that centre–liberal and Christian parties, as opposed to the political right, have been the main protagonists of the most gender-conservative family policy in the Nordic countries (Ellingsæter, 2024). Whilst we still include self-interest factors and ideological beliefs to test the social and ideological dividing lines in family policies, we expect that they offer insufficient explanations.

Data and methods

Data

We use data from the WELTRUST survey, collected online in 2022 in Norway on welfare and political attitudes (Kumlin et al., 2023). The target population is the Norwegian general population aged 18 years and older, and data collection was executed by the survey company Kantar. Based on computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI), a final sample of 3,486 respondents was realised. Initially, the invitation was sent to roughly 9,600 individuals, resulting in a response rate of 36%. The median time to complete the survey was 20 minutes, which indicates that it was a sufficiently short questionnaire to not overburden respondents.

We argue that testing our hypotheses in the Norwegian context is relevant in two ways. First, it makes for a stringent test, as Norway is one of the most gender-equal settings in a global perspective. Gender egalitarianism is a strong cultural norm, which has been shown to promote the recognition of injustice in unequal divisions of labour (Braun et al., 2008; Greenstein, 2009). This level of general gender equality also means that Norway may be getting closer to the final step of gender equality in the home, which involves equality on the cognitive labour dimension (Holter, 1995). Thus, Norway may represent one of the only contexts where the mental load has been crystallised enough to connect to attitudes. Second, family policy has been particularly politicised in Norway along the de-familialism versus optional familialism cleavage (Ellingsæter & Leira, 2006). In sum, the Norwegian context represents a gender equality frontier in which justice perceptions about household divisions of labour and family policy attitudes should be crystallised and politicised enough to answer our research question.

Indicators

Dependent variables

Two dependent variables are used: support for the cash-for-care scheme and the provision of childcare. Whilst the first policy represents optional familialism, the second probes support for de-familialism. The Norwegian cash-for-care scheme consists of passive transfers to one parent who stays at home with a child under 2 years of age, as an alternative to public childcare. Support for the cash-for-care scheme is operationalised by an item probing whether 'The cash-for-care scheme should be removed'. Answers are registered on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree), where higher scores hence indicate a more favourable attitude. A preference for investments in childcare is measured by a statement that asks respondents how much responsibility the state should have to 'Provide enough

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daycare places for working parents', which is administered on an eleven-point scale (1 = not the responsibility of the government at all; 11 = the responsibility of the government entirely).

Independent variables

The main independent variable is justice perceptions of household labour divisions, which is operationalised by both a cognitive and a physical component. To measure this, respondents were presented with a vignette that describes a fictional situation where a division of physical and cognitive household labour were given. Appendix C presents an overview of the vignette text and the included fully randomised dimensions. Originally, the vignette was designed to also capture working time preferences, and hence most dimensions of the vignette relate to this outcome. Importantly, however, the text also specified whether both the cognitive and physical division of labour were mostly performed by the person themselves or their partner, or was equally divided. After the vignette text, respondents were asked how just they think the distribution of cognitive and physical responsibility for the household is in the scenario, which is captured on a ten-point scale (1 = completely unfair; 10 = completely fair). Note that respondents judged this for a fictional scenario and not for their own division of household labour, making it possible to not only analyse people with children or in relationships. Additionally, the vignette operationalisation of justice perceptions solves a notable issue with previous research on the topic, namely that the objective division of labour can be controlled for. By asking people about their justice consideration regarding a fictional division of labour that is specified in the vignette rather than asking individuals to rate their own divisions, we avoid conflating justice considerations about what is desirable in general with satisfaction about one's own household responsibility.

For each of the levels (i.e. you, your partner or equal), the difference between the conditional marginal mean[2] (i.e. the mean for a level of a dimension averaged over all the other vignette dimensions) and the indicated justice perception by the respondent was calculated, so that each individual gets a deviation from the average score of others who are presented with the same level or condition. This is done for the cognitive and physical division separately, so that the impact of both can be studied. For the unequal levels (i.e. you or your partner), the justice perception was subtracted from the mean (mean – justice perception), while for the equality level (i.e. equal), the mean was subtracted from the justice perception (justice perception – mean). This indicates that people who find unequal divisions just or equal divisions unjust in relative terms get negative scores, while respondents who rate unequal divisions unjust or equal divisions just get positive scores. On the basis of these scores, three groups were created for both the physical and cognitive division of household labour: people who find inegalitarian divisions just (score below −1), people who are neutral (score between −1 and 1) and people who find egalitarian divisions just (score above 1). The reason for constructing three groups instead of using a metric indicator is that there could exist a non-linear relation between these justice perceptions and policy preferences, as those who are neutral could have quite different opinions than people who have strong justice considerations.

Moreover, we control for the influence of self-interest factors and more general ideological dispositions. From the self-interest framework, gender and age,

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education, income, having dependent children at home, living with a partner and part-time work are included. Education is treated as a metric variable that goes from 1 (primary school education) to 6 (tertiary education of at least 4 years). Income is measured as self-reported annual household income, which initially ranged from 1 (under 200,000 NOK) to 8 (1,400,000 or more), but is recoded into four quartiles. A missing category is also included, so that the relative high number of respondents with non-response on this sensitive item are not omitted from the analyses. Having children is measured metrically by four values: no children, one child, two children and three or more children. Living together with a partner is measured by a dummy variable (1 = living with a partner, 0 = not living with a partner). Part-time work is operationalised as working less than 35 h, whereby the reference is those who work more or who do not work. We also include a measurement of respondents' own perceived cognitive burden in household work, to control for individuals' own situation in contrast to their justice perceptions. This is operationalised by a single item that lists a number of examples of the mental load and asks whether individuals take care of this mostly themselves (1 = totally agree; 10 = totally disagree). The item is reversed so that higher values refer to a higher cognitive burden in the home.

To control for broader ideological beliefs, left–right placement is added. Left–right placement is a more general ideological variable that encompasses both economic and cultural elements. This catch-all ideology variable is operationalised by a standard question probing where individuals put themselves on a scale from left to right (1 = left; 11 = right). In addition, to capture a form of economic egalitarianism, we include support for government responsibility to reduce income differences. This is measured on an eleven-point scale ranging from 1 (not the responsibility of the government at all) to 11 (entirely the responsibility of the government). Finally, immigration attitudes are also included as a control, as the Norwegian cash-for-care scheme is strongly politicised in terms of its take-up by immigrant populations (Ellingsæter, 2024, pp.156–157). These attitudes are captured by asking whether individuals believe that there are already enough immigrants and asylum seekers in Norway (1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree). Although anti-immigrant attitudes themselves can also arise from self-interest or group competition mechanisms, we assume that their connection to family policy is mainly ideological.

Statistical analysis

As a first step, a descriptive overview of family policy dimensions as well as the constructed measure of physical and cognitive justice perceptions is given. Descriptive statistics for each of the justice groups and hence their demographic and ideological composition is provided in Appendix A. As a second step, family policy attitudes are linked to justice considerations through a series of regression models. This analysis is a first exploration of the determinants of the family policy cleavage between optional and de-familialism. The dependent variables are analysed by means of linear regression. Both justice components (physical and cognitive) are introduced simultaneously into the models, so that the unique impact of each can be dissected.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics for family policy attitudes

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	% in favour
Cash-for-care	2.78	1.39	1	5	32.96
Childcare responsibility	8.90	2.07	1	11	78.54

Table 2. Proportions in each of the justice groups for both dimensions of household labour

		Physical			
		Inegalitarian	Neutral	Egalitarian	Total
Cognitive	Inegalitarian	0.160	0.071	0.123	0.354
	Neutral	0.069	0.230	0.000	0.299
	Egalitarian	0.129	0.000	0.218	0.347
	Total	0.358	0.301	0.341	

Results

Family policy attitudes: a cleavage between optional and de-familialism?

Descriptive statistics for each of the dependent variables are displayed in Table 1. First, it becomes clear that there is more resistance than support for the cash-for-care scheme, representing the optional familialism approach. The mean is slightly below the mid-point of the scale, and only about a third of respondents are in favour of preserving the cash-for-care scheme (i.e. respondents indicating that they agree or strongly agree with keeping it in place). In contrast, support for childcare responsibility by the government is high, with a mean well over the mid-point of the scale. When combining the four highest categories of support for the eleven-point scale of childcare responsibility (the equivalent of taking the two highest categories for a five-point scale, as done for cash-for-care), we find that almost 80% is in favour of the government providing childcare. When studying the correlations between the policy proposals, we see that they are quite independent of each other. Support for optional familialism (i.e. cash-for-care) and de-familialism (i.e. childcare responsibility) only correlates at 0.03, which illustrates that this is a cleavage that does not just measure support for family policy in general.

Justice perceptions on the cognitive and physical division of household labour

As a second step, a descriptive overview is provided for both the cognitive and physical dimensions of justice considerations. Table 2 displays the proportions of individuals in each of the three categories for both dimensions, in total and in relation to each other.

Studying the cognitive justice component first, we see that about 35% classifies as inegalitarian (justice perceptions deviate from egalitarian divisions of labour), 30% neutral and 35% egalitarian (justice perceptions align with egalitarian divisions of

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labour), which indicates that each of the groups is substantially represented even in a gender-egalitarian context such as Norway. For the physical dimension, the numbers are almost entirely the same, which could be related to the construction of both variables on the basis of the same outcome variable. Looking at their interrelation, it is nevertheless evident that 39% of individuals are in a different group for the two variables, indicating substantial differences between them. Surprisingly, none of the individuals who are neutral on either dimension are in the egalitarian group for the other dimension. This might indicate that neutral individuals lean more to the inegalitarian side instead of the egalitarian group.

Explaining family policy attitudes

Table 3 displays the coefficients for two models predicting support for the cash-for-care scheme and government responsibility for childcare on the basis of social characteristics, general ideological dispositions and justice perceptions regarding both the cognitive and physical division of household labour.

First, we focus on the characteristics indicating the explanatory power of self-interest. Women are more supportive of both policies compared with men (yet this is only significant for childcare), which could relate to stronger self-interest in both policies that compensate care responsibilities and facilitate labour market participation (Goossen, 2020; Garritzmann & Schwander, 2021). In contrast, older respondents are less in favour of cash-for-care, which could be because older respondents benefit less from this scheme. In addition, highly educated respondents and those in the two highest income groups are less supportive of cash-for-care, which could be because they are less likely to need or benefit from these financial incentives. The highest income group is, however, also significantly more in favour of the provision of childcare. On top of this, people with children are more favourable towards both policies, which makes sense as the initiatives are meant to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family. Individuals who live with a partner are more in favour of both family policies, although this is not significant for the childcare responsibility variable. Individuals who work part-time are not significantly more in favour of any of the policies compared with the rest of the sample, although this finding should be interpreted with caution owing to low numbers of part-time workers in the sample. The own cognitive burden impacts neither of the policies, indicating that respondents' own division of household work does not explain the attitudinal divide. However, since we do not have a measure of respondents' physical burden, this should be explored by future research. Generally, these social characteristics largely work in line with the self-interest framework. However, they do not explain the *cleavage* between optional and de-familialism, but rather the support of any family policy.

Second, the general ideological indicators showcase that those with higher immigration support are more in favour of cash-for-care, which is connected to the strong politicisation in terms of the migrant population's use of this scheme. For left–right placement, a more fine-grained picture emerges whereby cash-for-care is more popular among the right, and childcare responsibility is more supported by leftist individuals. While we expected that these generic ideological dispositions would not explain the cleavage between optional and de-familialism, left–right

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Table 3. Regression coefficients of justice perceptions on family policy preferences

	Cash-for-care (optional familialism)	Childcare responsibility (de-familialism)
Household justice perceptions		
Justice in cognitive labour		
Inegalitarian (ref.)		
Neutral	−0.001	0.077
Egalitarian	0.047	−0.064
Justice in physical labour		
Inegalitarian (ref.)		
Neutral	−0.030	−0.152
Egalitarian	−0.143*	0.249**
Self-interest		
Gender		
Male (ref.)		
Female	0.100	0.273***
Age	−0.019***	0.002
Education	−0.100***	0.010
Household income		
Quartile 1 (ref.)		
Quartile 2	−0.148	0.134
Quartile 3	−0.308**	0.195
Quartile 4	−0.533***	0.320*
Missing	−0.152	0.171
Number of children	0.097*	0.280***
Partner	0.195**	0.071
Part-time	0.050	0.109
Mental load	−0.006	−0.001
Ideology		
Left–right	0.076***	−0.074***
Immigration attitude	0.146***	0.060
Government responsibility	0.017	0.320***
Constant	3.199***	6.006***
Observations	2422	2568
R2	0.090	0.228
Adjusted R^2	0.083	0.223

Note:
*$p < 0.05$;
**$p < 0.01$;
***$s < 0.001$.

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placement does help understand why people prefer one approach over the other. The support for government responsibility to reduce income differences has a positive relationship to opinions on childcare provision, but it is unrelated to favouring cash-for-care. This could in part signal a general wish for more government involvement and egalitarianism that also translates into government responsibility to provide childcare and promote gender equality.

Lastly, we turn to the justice considerations to establish whether they are equipped to explain the attitudinal cleavage in family policy. Similarly to left–right ideology, it becomes clear that the justice perceptions on the physical division of household labour are significantly related to both family policy approaches. While neutral individuals are not distinct from respondents who find inegalitarian divisions fair, the inegalitarian group does diverge from the egalitarians. In line with hypothesis H1.a and H1.b, respondents whose justice perceptions align with egalitarian divisions of labour score 0.14 points lower on support for cash-for-care (on a five-point scale) than the inegalitarian group, while simultaneously being more in favour of government responsibility for childcare ($b = 0.25$). This indicates that individuals who deem imbalances in physical labour between partners unjust are less in favour of policies that uphold traditional gender norms and prefer de-familialism in family policy. In contrast to the physical dimension of labour, justice considerations linked to the cognitive division of labour explain neither of the family policies. This lends support for hypothesis H2, which postulated that consequences for the physical dimension were larger than for justice in cognitive labour.

Discussion

Family policy is an ever-growing part of contemporary welfare states, structuring a range of social outcomes such as parental labour market participation, fertility rates, work–life balance and gender equality. Although knowledge about family policy attitudes is therefore essential, their driving forces are not well understood. This article aimed to increase that understanding by looking into cleavages in support of different family policy approaches. In particular, we zoom in on support for optional familialism (accepting gender role asymmetry in public and private spheres based on choice) and de-familialism (promoting gender role symmetry in public and private spheres) as a core divide within family policy. Going beyond self-interest indicators and general ideological beliefs, we argue that individuals' perceptions of household justice represent an important battleground of competing family policy approaches. Importantly, we are the first to consider justice considerations for the division of both cognitive and physical household work as predictors of family policy attitudes.

Our results demonstrate that justice in the household is clearly politicised, and link to diverging family policy approaches. Supporting our hypotheses, individuals whose justice perceptions deviate from egalitarian physical divisions of labour and who are hence more inegalitarian prefer optional familialism. In contrast, individuals whose justice perceptions align with egalitarian physical divisions of household labour are more supportive of investments in childcare that are in line with de-familialism and promote work for both partners. In line with our expectations, the cognitive dimension is less politicised and it is the physical dimension that has substantial political consequences.

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Self-interest has important explanatory power for support for the degree of family policy but is rather uninformative of the substantive cleavage between optional familialism and de-familialism. For ideology, we find that both anti-immigrant attitudes and government responsibility to reduce income differences only affect one of the two considered family policies. However, left–right beliefs do have predictive power to understand preferences for policy approaches, where left-wing individuals support childcare responsibility while being more opposed to the cash-for-care scheme. Despite new social policies not always fully aligning with traditional left–right conflicts anymore (Häusermann, 2006, 2012), this illustrates that these broader ideological dispositions are still informative for family policy divides. The similarity in the impact of left–right ideology and justice considerations could be related to their connection to a more general egalitarianism or progressive gender ideology, which is impactful in shaping family policy. All in all, the influence of these normative dimensions seems to indicate that family policy cleavages are mainly ideological and normative battlegrounds.

These results have important implications for European welfare states in terms of promoting more equal divisions of household labour. Not only will individuals with different justice perceptions be likely to actually organise their care responsibilities differently within their own household and hence contribute to (in)equality on a personal level (Braun et al., 2008; Greenstein, 2009; Koster et al., 2022), but they will also support different types of policies that will manifest this position more broadly and for others in society. Moreover, the weaker politicisation of the cognitive dimension showcases that this is not on people's minds when judging broader policy packages and that many might be unaware or unwilling to act on this nevertheless crucial part of labour divisions.

This paper is not without limitations and hence avenues for future research. Our measurement of justice on the cognitive and physical dimensions was based on a single survey question. Even though our measurement was novel, future research should more clearly separate them and analyse differences in more detail. Second, the context of this study could have impacted the results, as Norway is a country where family policy and gender equality is high on the political agenda. The politicisation of justice in the household could hence be especially strong in this case, and future research should replicate this in other national contexts. Third and last, it would be fruitful to include preferences for the other two options in the model of Leitner (2003), especially of implicit familialism, which exists in liberal welfare regimes and represents a preference for non-interference in the family sphere.

Despite these limitations, the present research is highly relevant. Given that European welfare states are increasingly moving towards a social investment logic (Garritzmann et al., 2022), which aligns more clearly with de-familialism in family policy (Häusermann, 2018), it is likely that the cleavage between optional familialism and de-familialism will grow evermore prominent with time; That is, the battleground of family policy will be between those wishing to retain some explicit familialist measures in an otherwise de-familialist regime – thus standing for optional familialism – and those preferring a purer version of de-familialism. Information on what drives this attitudinal cleavage is crucial knowledge for shaping family policy trajectories and its effects on gender equality across Europe.

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Notes

1 This literature mostly refers to the perception of fairness in household labour. However, we choose to rely on the term 'justice considerations' rather than fairness, as we conceptualise the household as a core arena of distributive justice.

2 The conditional marginal mean is used instead of the midpoint of the scale (which equals 5.5) to consider that equal and unequal divisions of labour might get varying levels of support, especially in a relatively gender-egalitarian country such as Norway. As a result, the deviation from the relative baseline is considered more meaningful than an absolute threshold that is the same for all dimensions. However, as the midpoint of the scale is relatively close to the marginal means (see Table 5 in Appendix B), using the midpoint of the scale only leads to a different categorisation of 10% of respondents for both fairness dimensions.

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