Strange Bedfellows:

Conservative Governments and Family Policy in Canada and Germany, 2005-2015

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I. Introduction

The late twentieth century was a time of great pessimism for the future prospects of the welfare state. The turbulent 1970s – which saw price shocks, economic stagnation and runaway inflation – gave right-wing governments in the United States and Britain pretense to pursue vast liberalizing agendas, creating a template for like-minded reformers elsewhere. Such reforms hollowed out existing social safety nets and, through a "starve the beast" logic, reduced the number of revenue generating tools available to policymakers. A parallel shift occurred in the ideational realm, where the interventionist economic philosophy of Keynesianism gave way to monetarism and other neo-classical perspectives. These developments led to a broad academic consensus that the conventional welfare state had reached its apex and that the new challenge for progressives would be to defend existing social programs (Stephens 2015, p. 274). One leading scholar characterized the prevailing social policy environment as one of "permanent austerity" (Pierson 1998).

But the rumors of the welfare state's demise were, indeed, greatly exaggerated as broad, systemic changes in the socio-economic environment have generated a demand for new forms of social insurance. Paradoxically, post-industrial governments are now beginning to spend substantially on policies designed to mitigate problems created by the process of welfare state maturation itself. Many of these "new social risks" stem from the steady decline of the male-breadwinner manufacturing economy and concomitant rise of a dual-earner services model of employment (Taylor Gooby 2004; Bonoli 2005). The post-industrial shift to services and the coeval unfolding of the women's rights movement have led more women to pursue work outside of the home, often on a full-time basis. This has subsequently placed pressure on the state to provide extended support for aspects of child rearing that have historically been carried out by stay-at-home mothers.

Accordingly, the 2000s have seen a cross-national swell in spending in the domain of family policy, defined broadly here as state intervention intended to make raising children more affordable, convenient, or desirable – especially for women. Examples include publicly-subsidized daycare, paid parental leave, and family cash transfers. In fact, Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2015) identify an empirical trend of family policy expansion in all rich OECD countries except for the United States (p. 15).[1] Pivotally, they uncover a declining influence of the effects of partisanship over the 2000s (p. 20), meaning that this appetite for new family spending now extends beyond its traditional base of support on the left. This finding is consistent with a number of recent qualitative studies, which argue that the decline of traditional party cleavages has led center and right parties to court 'floating' women voters, often using family policy concessions as an inducement (Green-Pederson 2007; Wiliarty 2010; Morgan 2013). It also squares with recent work that contends that flat-lining birthrates have forced traditionally conservative regimes to begrudgingly implement policies designed to enable women to reconcile child rearing with work (Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen 2011; Oliver and Mätzke 2014).

Nevertheless, this research agenda still is a very new one and much remains to be explained about what may motivate right governments to expand family policy. Why would conservative parties, which would at face value be most receptive to neoliberal exhortations to

[1] Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser measure growth in family allowances, parental leave durations, day care, and other cash benefits between 1980 and 2008 (p. 11).

curtail social spending, actively champion an expansion of the welfare state in perhaps its most invasive form? — That is, its penetration into the "private sphere" of family life. It is especially vexing that the lingering fallout from the Global Financial Crisis of 2007/08 has not greatly slowed the cross-partisan expansion into this realm (Hemerijck**,** p. 251-253).

Project outline and contribution

I attempt to shed new light on this new phenomenon here through a comparative historical analysis (see Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003) of family policy expansion in two unlikely cases, Canada and Germany. What makes this an interesting comparison is that, in both countries, substantial and path-shifting family policy reforms have been pursued at the direction of right governments. These are the Christian Democrat/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU)-led government of Angela Merkel in Germany (2005 –) and Canada's recently unseated Conservative government, led by Stephen Harper (2006 – 2015). Moreover, this is a fresh comparison as the bulk of case-based comparative social policy research compares countries that are within the same welfare state family (Esping-Andersen 1990). As such, Canada (a liberal welfare state) and Germany (a conservative one) are rarely studied side-by-side[2] despite a number of marked institutional and other political parallels between the two countries. For instance, Canada and Germany are both highly decentralized federations and they both accommodate strong subnational cultural identities (with an added linguistic tension in Canada). Finally, the German and Canadian reforms have unfolded over a similar timeframe – the last decade – which facilitates a structured comparative historical assessment of the cases.

To be precise, these relevant similarities between my cases enable me to pursue a qualitative and comparative analytical strategy that, ideally, will foster a greater understanding of why and under what circumstances right governments may choose to pursue path shifting family policy expansion (see Morgan 2013). This comparative approach will also allow me to address a corollary puzzle of why relevant family policy reforms have taken shape differently in each country. Specifically, Canadian family subsidies have come in the form of demand-side cash benefits and tax exemptions, in accordance with a neo-familial Christian Democrat policy paradigm (Esping-Andersen 1990; Hall 1993) while; by contrast, Germany's Christian Democrat-led government has taken a more active role in increasing the supply of public daycare spaces. German policymakers have also embraced the Nordic model of generous, income-based maternity and parental leave payments. Broadly speaking, the German reforms exemplify a Nordic-style universalistic policy paradigm (Esping-Andersen 1990).

To be clear, the CDU and Conservative Party of Canada are not ideologically identical, nor would they be expected ex ante to approach family policy the same way. The CDU, long the dominant player on the [West] German right, was until recently the purest surviving embodiment of a Bismarckian, corporatist conservative party (see Palier 2010). As such, it has characteristically intervened in the German economy to preserve a conservative vision of social order. Such interventions have historically included wage, taxation, and cash transfer policies designed to sustain the male-breadwinner model of the nuclear family. This stated, the CDU and other Christian Democrat parties have also been constrained by the 'subsidiarity principle', which holds that social issues are best dealt with at the lowest possible level of society and, therein,

[2] One exception is Triadafilopoulos' (2013) study of the evolution of multiculturalism in both Canada and Germany.

discourages the state from unnecessary meddling in "private" family and community affairs (Morgan 2006, p. 12).

By contrast, the Conservative Party of Canada would be best described as a neo-liberal conservative party of the Anglo-Saxon tradition,[3] as evidenced by the fact that Canadian Conservatives share the nickname "Tories" with their British counterparts. As such, the party could reasonably be expected to support private, market-based solutions to work-family reconciliation problems, while perhaps also providing modest, means-tested subsidies to low income families in accordance with the long-running Anglo-Saxon tradition of poor relief.

This is nevertheless a worthwhile comparison as, over the past decade, both parties have implemented pattern shifting family policy reforms in a way that would not fit ex ante theoretical expectations. In fact, it could be argued that the implementation of a universalistic family policy package would have been likelier in Canada, where universalistic social programs like single-payer health care have more of a historical precedent (Maioni 1997; Mahon 2008).

In sum, this study's focus on two long-serving right governments and their political motivations for pursuing generous family policies represents a palpable contribution to an extant literature that, by and large, still tends to present social policy expansion as a project of left parties. What follows is a review of said literature (and of associated feminist perspectives on family policy), a more precise identification of the lacunae that this project will address, an elaboration of my working hypotheses, and an abbreviated discussion of potential avenues for further research.

II. Literature Review

This study relates most directly to the burgeoning literature on new social risks and the struggle of post-industrial countries to grapple with them (Taylor-Gooby 2004; Bonoli 2005). Such risks stem from various structural and demographic changes associated with welfare state maturation. These include population aging, the decline of the male-breadwinner manufacturing economy, and, perhaps most dramatically, the breakdown of the traditional gendered division of labour. With women taking a more active role in all aspects of the formal economy, and subsequently devoting less time to household chores, post-industrial governments have come under increasing pressure to devise policies that make it easier for parents – especially mothers – to balance paid work with their child rearing duties.

Such policies, which include parental leave, publicly-funded daycare, and other family subsidies, are a bedrock of the nascent social investment policy paradigm (Perkins et al. 2004). Proponents of the social investment approach accordingly advocate strategic state investment in human capital aimed at generating better long-term economic outcomes. Many of them argue that investments in various family policies do just this as they allow women to become fuller participants in the economy and simultaneously provide young children with a higher level of

[3] The Conservative Party of Canada was formed in 2003 through the merger of the center-right Progressive Conservatives and the more socially-conservative Canadian Alliance. Although Harper led the latter prior to becoming the leader of the unified Conservative Party, he has since sought to focus on economic issues and keep more polarizing social matters off the agenda.

intellectual stimulation, leading to better career opportunities later in life (Jenson and Saint-Martin 2003; Esping-Andersen 2009).

This stated, the project's focus on family policy – a domain that, to many scholars, is intrinsically linked to the liberation of mothers and other female caregivers from the "private sphere" of domestic exploitation – also necessitates proper engagement with the long-running feminist[4] literature on gender and the welfare state. While I do not anticipate my findings to bear significant implications for feminist scholars, it is nevertheless necessary for me to acknowledge the origins of this agenda within the gender studies tradition. As such, I begin with a review of gendered perspectives on the welfare state and their influence on how family policy has subsequently been studied.

Gender and the welfare state literature

Feminist scholars have long approached the archetypal welfare state with a marked ambivalence. This unease is rooted in the observation that the bulk of mainstream welfare state theory has been built on an unstated assumption of the industrial male worker as its core microsocial unit of analysis. This has led analysts of the welfare state – especially those working within Esping-Andersen's (1990) "welfare regimes" paradigm – to focus too narrowly on the effects of social policies on the well-being of working class males, turning a blind-eye to their reverberating impacts on women both within and outside of the labour force (Morgan 2001, p. 107). Relatedly, feminists have criticized the modern welfare state for reinforcing the traditional separation of the public and private/domestic spheres, generally accepting the latter as off-limits to state intervention.[5] This is especially problematic for feminists, who view the two realms as inherently connected by a patriarchal social structure that ascribes monetary value to male industrial labour but not female domestic labour (Pateman 1987).

A second generation of feminist work perceived the welfare state more charitably as an imperfect yet potentially valuable resource for feminist reformers. This view was heavily shaped by Norwegian political scientist Helga Hernes' (1987) conceptualization of the "women-friendly state", defined as one that "would not force harder choices on women than on men, or permit unjust treatment on the basis of sex." (p. 15). Central to this definition was the imperative of social policies that enable women to balance motherhood with labour market participation and other life aspirations: "In a woman-friendly state women will continue to have children, yet there will also be other roads to self-realization open to them." (ibid.). Hernes saw her native Norway and its Scandinavian neighbours as the states that came closest to embodying this ideal, generally echoing the sentiment of "Nordic exceptionalism" espoused by many mainstream social policy scholars (Esping-Andersen 1990, 2002; Stephens 1995). Her pioneering work launched a robust agenda on comparative state feminism, which now focuses on identifying strategies for successful feminist engagement with state institutions.

[4] Following O'Connor et al (1999, p. 10) I use the term "feminist" here to "describe scholarship that uses gender as an analytic category and/or focuses on the situation of women."

[5] The obvious exception here is the Scandinavian welfare state, which has long embraced a dual-earner household model characterized by generous parental leave policies and universal daycare. This stated, some feminists have criticized this model for making many parental benefits contingent on labour force participation, thereby disadvantaging mothers who choose to stay at home (Morgan 2001, p. 120). Scholars have also raised concerns about the high level of sex-segregation in the Scandinavian labour force (ibid, p. 120; Estevez-Abe 2007).

Proponents of state feminism (Stetson and Mazur 1995; McBride and Mazur 2010), or "feminism from above", contend that women's movements can develop alliances with various sympathetic state organizations in order to gain access to policy arenas and subsequently attain their policy goals (McBride and Mazur 2010, p. 5). Although the pioneers of this concept initially applied it exclusively to state agencies with a direct mandate to promote women's equality, the framework has since been used more broadly to identify circumstances where the political opportunity structure is most favorable for would-be reformers (McBride and Mazur 2010, pp. 5-6). Scholars of state feminism have accordingly identified periods of left government as crucial windows for would-be reformers. Leading feminist scholar Julia O'Connor (2015) in fact uses the example of Canada under the Harper Government to substantiate this point, writing: "the key influence [in developing gender equality structures] is the strength of left-parties, and, more broadly, non-right parties, as illustrated by the Canadian Federal level" and "[t]he role of right-wing parties in the retrenchment of women's policy machinery is most strongly evident in Australia [under John Howard] and Canada." (p. 494).

O'Connor's assessment, while not entirely off-target, misses the complexity of the Canadian case and what it tells us about the increasingly sophisticated politics of gender and the welfare state. Though certainly no friend to state feminists, Harper nevertheless showed a desire to be perceived as attentive to the needs of at least a certain subset of Canadian women by making family policy a focal point of his governing agenda. Rather than sweep women's issues under the rug entirely – as feminist theory would have expected him to – Harper chose instead to stake his political fortunes on his own vision of family-friendly policy. He showed similar instincts by spearheading a major G8 initiative on maternal and child health.[6] The feminist view also clashes with the governing record of Germany' Christian Democrats who, as I will discuss in further detail below, have assertively claimed credit for a sweeping set of universalistic family policy reforms implemented under their watch.

The puzzling approach these conservative governments have taken to family policy is perhaps better understood in light of the rapidly consolidating social investment paradigm in social policy. Social investment, which posits a Pareto-improving 'win-win' association between targeted social spending (especially early investments in human capital) and long run economic development, presents a logic that unifies aspects of predominant social democratic and neoliberal agendas. It also gives politicians a powerful rhetoric of 'common sense' with which to frame new social policy initiatives (Morel et al. 2012, pp. 8-9; Hemerijck 2015, p. 253). Accordingly, I now turn to the rise of social investment and its relevance to my research topic.

Social Investment literature

Although the concept of social investment can be traced back to the Nordic political thought of the interwar years (Myrdal and Myrdal 1934), the idea has enjoyed a renaissance over the past two decades amidst widespread disillusionment with both neoliberal and Keynesian approaches to social policy. Social investment can be generally understood as a hybrid of the two

[6] The Muskoka Initiative, announced at a 2010 G8 summit in Huntsville, Ontario, entailed a $7.3-billion [Canadian] investment in various maternal, newborn, and early childhood health programs concentrated in Africa and other parts of the developing world. Canada led the way with a $2.85-billion contribution to the initiative between 2010 and 2015 (Government of Canada 2014). The Harper Government also hosted a 2014 global conference on maternal and child health issues held in Toronto.

schools, presenting a positive relationship between activation-oriented social policies and the long-run neoliberal objectives of economic growth and market efficiency.

As its name suggests, social investment's defining feature is its future-orientation. Its proponents argue accordingly that strategic investments in human capital – especially when directed to children and young adults – will result in better socio-economic outcomes down the road (Morel et al. 2012, p. 11); for instance, that investments in public education will ultimately produce a more highly-skilled and adaptable workforce. This view gives a primacy to daycare and other services for pre-primary aged children, particularly in light of contemporary scientific research that finds that a child's earliest years are its most critical for cognitive and emotional development (National Scientific Council 2007). Such interventions have the additional benefit of 'activating' female workers, whose child-rearing obligations would otherwise sideline them from the labour market. In all, social investment provides a powerful economic rationale for the implementation of child and family-supporting policies

Social investment is not without its critics. In fact, some of the most trenchant criticisms of the paradigm come from feminist scholars, who object to its instrumentalization of gender equalization policies – centrally those aimed at working women – as a rather crude means to attain various economic ends, such as increasing the taxpayer base and mitigating labour shortages. This gives second-billing to the more foundational social justice aspects of the feminist agenda (Morel et al. 2012, p.16). Some feminists have also argued that the child-centric character of social investment reduces women to their reproductive capacities (Jenson 2009). In other words, social investment prioritizes the function of women as mothers and caregivers over their personal needs as citizens. More purely economic objections to social investment point to its regressive character, as the activation-oriented policies that are its hallmark tend to benefit the middle classes, while doing less for the very poor. This is apparent from Europe's middling performance on poverty alleviation under the social investment-oriented Lisbon Strategy, initiated in 2000 (Cantillon 2011).

Such reservations have not slowed social investment's momentum. In fact, the cross-national diffusion of the social investment paradigm – promoted heavily by the EU and OECD (see White 2011) – has made family policy the site of much recent political activity. Reconciliation-oriented family policies like paid maternity leave and pre-kindergarten programs have garnered widespread political support. Some governments have also embraced the more contentious social investment-based position that widely-available public daycare, accessible from infancy, fosters 'early childhood education' that will ultimately help young children become more cognitively and emotionally equipped for formal schooling (Heckman 2006; Morgan 2012). Others, acting on more conservative political motives, have reluctantly pursued generous family policies in an attempt to shore-up lagging domestic birthrates (Seeleib-Kaiser and Toivonen 2011; Oliver and Mätzke 2014).

Accordingly, a strong pattern of family policy expansion was traced out empirically in a recent study by Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser (2015). Using a statistical matching technique called multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), the authors found that all rich OECD countries, with the exception of the United States, have made significant investments in family policy between 1980 and 2008 – precisely the time period when the welfare state was purportedly in retreat (See Figure 1). Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser call this ongoing phenomenon a "silent revolution".

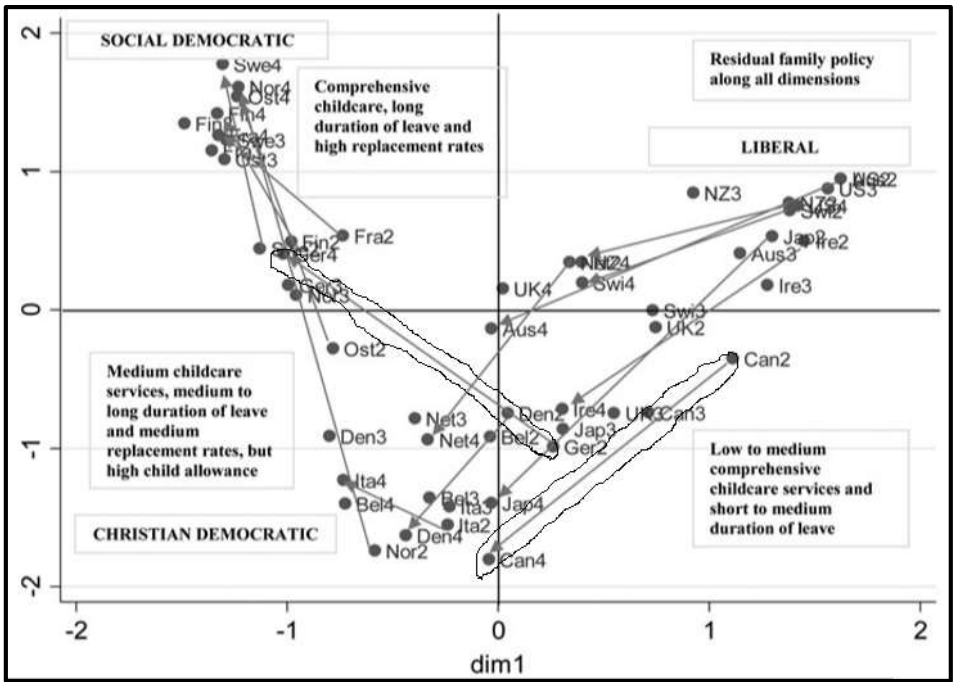

Figure 1 – Evolution of Family Policy in rich OECD Countries: 1980-2008 (Canada and Germany circled). From Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser.

The 2000s have correspondingly seen a wave of research on the partisan politics of family policy. Much of this work focuses on the electoral incentives of politicians to prime family policy, especially as part of a strategy to engage women. (Annesley et al. 2010; von Wahl 2011; Williarty 2010; Morgan 2013). The general argument here is that a cross-national rise in female labour force participation, coupled with the deterioration of traditional class and religion-based partisan identities, has motivated parties to target politically unattached female voters. They have done this through a two-pronged approach: first by recruiting more women as candidates and operatives and, secondly, by priming political issues calculated to appeal to working women. These mechanisms are, of course, interconnected as it is often the women within party organizations who identify and champion women-friendly policies (Morgan 2013). Left parties, which are broadly supportive of social spending and unencumbered by traditionalist wings, have generally been the most enthusiastic proponents of new family policies (Ibid.). Right parties, especially those with strong socially conservative wings, have been slower to embrace these reforms (Hemerijck 2015, p. 253).

In sum, despite the hype surrounding social investment as an ideologically unifying paradigm, the extant literature continues to present partisanship (specifically left-government) as the key determinant of this form of social policy expansion (see: Huber and Stephens 2001). Other proposed explanations, positing concerns over fertility as the motivation for family policy interventions from the right, do not neatly fit my cases either.[7] This makes the German and Canadian instances of conservative-driven family policy reform, respectively, noteworthy and

[7] Despite a low domestic birthrate, Canada's high intake of immigrants has allowed it to sustain an annual population growth rate of just over 1% [2010-2014]. This places it well above the OECD average of roughly 0.6% per year (OECD 2016).

theoretically important anomalies that each warrant further in-depth exploration. I explain each case more fully in the next section.

III. Lacunae and research puzzle:

As alluded to in the previous section, one particular shortcoming of both the feminist and social investment literatures on family policy is that they each have little to say about what specific circumstances may motivate mainstream conservative parties to take the lead on family policy expansion. While reforms have taken place across different regime types, the protagonists in these narratives are most often left and center parties. Merkel's Christian Democratic government is generally presented as an outlier case, with a significant emphasis placed on the presence of women in key elective and civil service positions (Williarty 2010; von Wahl 2011; Fleckenstein 2011; Morgan 2013). For instance, one prominent scholar calls Germany's family policy paradigm shift "a women's revolution from above" (von Wahl 2011).

Although I do not contest the well-supported assertion that women's representation – in both elective office and the civil service – fosters the development and implementation of women-friendly policies (Stetson and Mazur 1995; Childs and Krook 2009; Atchison and Down 2009), I believe that the effect of officeholder gender has been overstated in multiple scholarly accounts of the CDU's reorientation towards family policy. Even without Chancellor Merkel and other women in leadership positions, the CDU would have had electoral incentives to change its tone. The Christian Democrats' perceived backwardness on social issues has in fact been cited as a culprit for its long slide at the polls in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Morgan 2013, pp. 89-90). Moreover, it was around this period of time that Germany's low fertility rate and its underachieving track-record on children's issues both became widely-acknowledged and well-publicized social problems (Seeleib Kaiser and Toivenen 2011, p. 4; Müller and Wrohlich 2014, p. 2) that all electorally-viable parties would ultimately have to address. Accordingly, Clemens (2009) traces the first stirrings of the CDU's social policy modernization back to 1998, four years before Angela Merkel became the chair of the party.

The women's representation narrative is also inconsistent with the governing record of Merkel's second administration, active from 2009 to 2013. The firmly right-wing coalition, which consisted of the CDU/CSU alliance and the libertarian Free Democratic Party (FDP), was generally ambivalent about work-family reconciliation policies and ultimately acceded to a widely-panned CSU proposal to subsidize stay-at-home mothers through a monthly cash transfer called the Betreuungsgeld[8] (Henninger and von Wahl 2014). This despite once again having both a female chancellor and a female family minister.[9] In sum, even if female leadership was a necessary condition for Germany's observed family policy expansion, it evidently wasn't a sufficient one.

The Harper government's decisive action on family policy is an even more confounding puzzle, which fits none of the extant theoretical explanations. The usual suspects of women's political mobilization and demographic challenges do not apply here. Women were noticeably

[8] The German Constitutional Court struck down the Betreuugsgeld in July 2015, ruling unanimously that the federal government did not have the spending authority to distribute the subsidy (Eddy 2015).

[9] The polarizing Kristina Schröder inherited the family portfolio from von der Leyen, who in turn went to the Labour ministry. Schröder's tenure at Family Affairs drew poor reviews from both pundits and the general public (Henninger and von Wahl 2014, p. 387).

absent from Harper's inner circle, in terms of both his cabinet ministers and his leading advisors (Ditchburn 2013). This came as Canada's national women's movement, starved of public funding (O'Connor 2015, p. 290), sank to its lowest point in three decades (Collier 2015).[10] Moreover, despite its low domestic birthrate, Canada's population is growing at a faster pace than that of many other industrial countries due to its high intake of immigrants.[11] Harper appeared to be at peace with this trend as legal immigration increased by roughly 15% per year during his time as prime minister (Gunter 2015).

One other anomaly is that, despite being outwardly neoliberal in orientation, the Harper Conservatives pushed family policy into a neo-familial, Christian Democrat-esque policy space characterized by direct family cash transfers, high child allowances, and tax subsidies for stay-at-home parents (Ferragina and Seelieb-Kaiser 2014, p. 10). Indeed, the final round of increases to Canada's Universal Child Care Benefit [UCCB][12] (announced just days before the 2015 election campaign began) totalled $3-billion, an amount that comprised just over 3% of total discretionary program spending.[13] The child benefit expansion was accordingly hyped by Harper himself as "the single biggest one-time direct payment in Canadian history" (Harper 2015).

Another of the Harper government's major legislative initiatives was a controversial family income-splitting plan that would allow family breadwinners to transfer up to $50,000 to their lower-earning spouses for tax purposes. Income splitting came with a price-tag of $2.2-billion for its first year and exposed divisions between traditionalists and fiscal conservatives in Harper's caucus (Smith 2015). Moreover, with just over a week to go in his government's unsuccessful 2015 re-election campaign election campaign, the prime minister announced an extension of maternity and parental leave to eighteen months (up from twelve).[14] All told, benefits for families and seniors comprised roughly 72% of total new program spending in the Conservative Party's 2015 electoral platform (ibid. pp. 156-59).[15]

This pre-election family policy blitz came at the expense of spending in other politically sensitive areas. For instance, despite Harper's hawkish posturing on Islamic radicalism and Russia's incursion into Ukraine (see: Brewster 2014), he actually presided over a long stagnation in defense spending, which endured flat or negative growth over each of his last five years as prime minister. By the time Harper left office, the defense budget comprised just 1% of total GDP,

[10] Plagued by infighting and financial difficulties, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) fell off the political map in the late 2000s, leaving Canadian feminists without a consolidated national organization (Collier 2015, p. 28). O'Connor (2015, p. 490) found that the Harper Government either partially or totally defunded twenty separate women's equality organizations.

[11] Canada's current population growth rate of 1.07% per year (2010-2015) is about on par with the global average (1.18%). This puts it ahead of close relatives the United States (0.75%) and United Kingdom (0.63%). Germany falls near the bottom of global rankings at 0.06% (World Bank 2015).

[12] The child benefit now sits at $160 per month for each child aged six or under, plus an additional $60 a month for each child between the age of seven and seventeen.

[13] The Harper government's 2015/16 budget authorized $76.1-billion in program spending. This figure, calculated by the author, excludes transfers payments, public debt interest charges, capital amortization, and fixed federal seniors and employment insurance benefits (see: Whittington 2015).

[14] Canadian parental leave claimants receive job protection and may also claim employment insurance (E.I.) benefits during their time off. E.I. payments typically amount to 55% of regular earnings and cap out at $524 per week (corresponding to the maximum insurable earnings of $49,500 per year). See: Service Canada (2015).

[15] Supports to families and seniors comprised $1.9-billion of $3-billion in total platform spending.

placing it in a tie for fifth-from-last among NATO countries and a full percentage point below the NATO recommendation (Pavgi 2015). A similar torpor in the Veterans' Affairs budget made Harper the target of politically damaging attacks about the inadequate treatment of wounded and mentally ill veterans (Caplan 2015). Some of this criticism came from within his own party.[16] Widespread accusations of underfunding led to the reassignment of Veteran Affairs Minister Julian Fantino in January 2015 (Chase 2015). Health care is another area of the federal budget that suffered under Harper. The prime minister allowed a ten-year, $41-billion Federal-Provincial Health Accord to expire in 2014 and has subsequently moved forward with plans to reduce health transfers to the provinces (Rennie 2014). This was an especially risky move given the centrality of universal health care to Canada's national identity.

The family policy spending spree also placed the Harper Government's razor-thin projected budget surplus of $1.8-billion in jeopardy.[17] In fact, shortly after the budget was unveiled Parliamentary Budget Officer Jean-Denis Fréchette predicted that the federal government would actually run a $1-billion deficit in 2015/16 due to lower-than-expected economic growth (Whittington 2015). Although Fréchette's prediction proved false, and the outgoing Conservative government did in fact leave Canadians with a modest surplus (Argitis and Wingrove 2015), the uncertainty surrounding the budget weakened Harper's ability to credibly campaign on his economic record. This was especially problematic for Harper, who holds an advanced degree in economics, as he had long branded himself as a prudent manager of economic affairs.

In sum, Harper's championing of such substantial family policy initiatives was inconsistent with the established theoretical notion that social policy expansion will not take place under neoliberal right governments (Huber and Stephens 2001, p. 4). It was especially puzzling given the fact that the Harper government seemingly prioritized family policy over several other vital and politically-sensitive budgetary items – in the immediate run-up to a federal election, no less. This indicates that Harper and his advisors identified some strategic upside to priming family issues electorally.

As a partial caveat I must note that, as in Germany,[18] Canada's family policy reforms were first initiated in the early 2000s by a more progressive government. This happened when Liberal prime minister Paul Martin [2003-06] sought to build a consolidated national child care program. Martin pledged $5-billion over five years for the initiative (on top of $900-million earmarked for child care by the previous government) with a goal of creating 250,000 subsidized daycare spaces in that timeframe (White 2011, p. 12). He then undertook intense bilateral negotiations with each of Canada's ten provinces in order to build an effective national framework for cost-sharing and

[16] High profile ex-Defense Minister Peter MacKay, who's widely viewed as a possible successor to Harper as Conservative Party leader, admitted that more could have been done for mentally ill veterans shortly after leaving his post. "I wish we could have, perhaps, been able to reach out into our country's mental health providers to enlist the support that's needed now," MacKay told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in a candid March 2014 radio interview (Do 2014). MacKay, 50, chose not to run in the 2015 federal election, fuelling speculation of a rift between himself and the prime minister.

[17] Total budget expenditures are an estimated $288.9-billion (Payton 2015)

[18] Child care reform was first initiated by SPD family minister Renate Schmidt, who commissioned two separate reports on the matter (in 2002 and 2005, respectively). Her progress on the child care file was interrupted when Chancellor Gerhard Schröder called early legislative elections in the fall of 2005 (Saxonberg 2014, p. 244).

service delivery. Martin's fledging child care program, however, never got off the ground as it was one of the first items to be scrapped by Harper when he became prime minister in 2006.

However, far from abandoning the child care file, Harper subsequently made the area an even larger federal budget priority. Child care spending in fact rose five-fold under Harper, from $600-million (2004-05) to $3.7-billion per year (2013-14). With the final round of enhancements to the UCCB and Child Care Expense Deduction,[19] it was slated to top out at $8-billion per year by 2016-17 (Malanik 2015, p. 11); a sum that would have vastly overshadowed the maximum $1.2-billion per year for child care promised under Martin's national child care program (Liberal Party of Canada 2005). This figure alone represents over 10% of discretionary federal spending,[20] covering over 65% of aggregate child care expenses for families with children under the age of six (Malanik 2015, p. 11).

Unsurprisingly, new prime minister Justin Trudeau has already encountered difficulty in trying to roll back the family policy initiatives set in motion by Harper just prior to his exit from office (Press 2015; Rabson 2016).[21] The sheer magnitude of these expenditures, which increased steadily over Harper's near-decade as prime minister (See Figure 2), indicates that Harper deserves the lions-share of the credit (or condemnation) for Canada's drastic paradigm shift in family policy, regardless of where the new government chooses to go from here. As such, Canada, like Germany, is a curious case of conservative-driven family policy expansion.

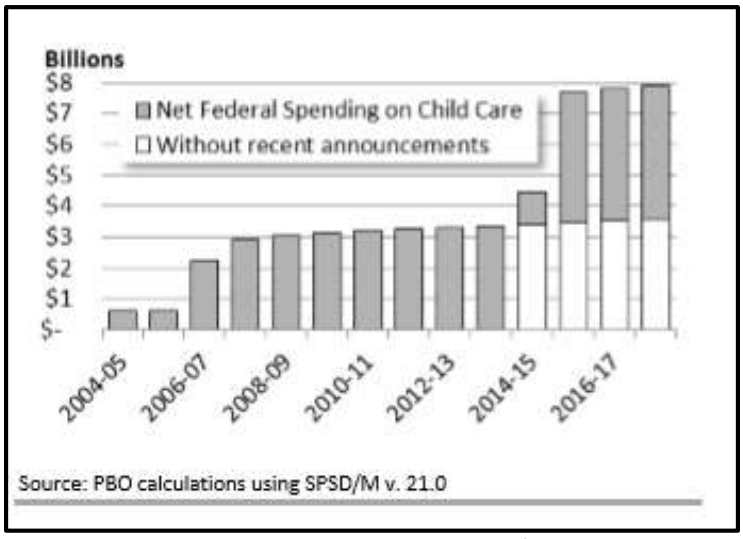

Figure 2 - Total Federal Spending on Child Care (2004-05/2016-17) From Malanik, 3.

The incompatibility of my cases with the extant theoretical perspectives points to the need for a more viable account of the puzzle of conservative governments and family policy – my

[19] First introduced in 1971, the Child Care Expense Deduction [CCED] allows parents to deduct various child care expenses from their income taxes. The CCED is available to the employed or in-training parents of children aged 16 and under. It is claimed by the lower earning spouse, with an overall cap of two-thirds of his or her income. As of 2013-14, the estimated annual value of the CCED was $0.8-billion, accounting for 14.5% of total household child care expenses (Malanik, pp.6-7).

[20] 2015/2016 figure ($76.1-billion) used. See footnote #10

[21] The UCCB will remain in effect until at least July of 2016. Prime Minister Trudeau has thus far encountered difficulty in trying to negotiate a new, income-tested benefit with the provinces (Fitz-Morris 2016).

titular 'strange bedfellows'. Another conundrum is that of why Germany has pursued Nordic-style universalistic policies while Canada has pursued Christian Democratic-style family transfers and tax benefits. In the following section, I propose a multifaceted explanation based on political structure, issue framing, and underlying public sentiment.

IV. Hypotheses:

The above comparison provokes two theoretically important questions: [1] why have both conservative governments chosen to pursue substantial and highly-publicized family policy reforms? And [2] why did the relevant reforms take shape differently in each country (continental Europe-style transfers and tax benefits in Canada, versus Nordic-style daycare and family leave entitlements in Germany)?

The answer to the first question is relatively straightforward as it is readily apparent that both the Harper Conservatives and Merkel's CDU identified family policy expansion as an avenue through which to appeal to electorally important blocs of voters, a dynamic observed elsewhere (Morgan 2013). In the case of the Merkel Government, the family policy push was part of a larger project to modernize the Christian Democrats in response to the waning influence of organized religion and other traditional sources of its power (ibid; Clemens 2009). Harper, similarly, has used the child benefit and other family transfers to reach out to traditionalist but often politically disengaged suburban voters. One archetype that has been targeted by Conservative strategists is "Mike and Theresa", a hypothetical middle-income couple. Mike and Theresa have two children and pay a mortgage on a modest home in the suburbs of Toronto. Mike must travel frequently for work, leaving Theresa with the bulk of the domestic responsibilities. This archetype fits the mould of what prominent feminist scholar Jane Lewis (2001) calls the "modified-industrial model", where both men and women work but traditional gender roles still guide the division of household labour (see also: Taylor-Gooby 2004, p.16). Harper's success in courting "Mike and Theresa" types has been identified as a key determinant of his rise to power. This type of microtargeting has also been central to Harper's longer-term strategy of transforming Canada's historically regional (east versus west) political cleavage into a more values-driven urban versus suburban schism, as seen in parts of the United States (Wells 2006, pp. 213-214). While not identical to the dynamic identified by Morgan, this strategy nevertheless reflects the de-alignment of traditional political cleavages (which in Canada are geography-based) and new techniques modern parties must use to build electorally viable coalitions. This phenomenon has been called 'boutique politics' elsewhere (See: Clarkson 2002).

The more interesting question is that of why political circumstances motivated these conservative governments to pursue dramatically different visions of family policy. Why has the generally neoliberal Harper government pursued a familial policy package while the historically traditionalist Christian Democrats have championed a Nordic-style universalistic one? I argue here that this asymmetry can be traced back to multiple cultural and structural variables that have motivated each party to pursue a different political strategy. Specifically, I attribute the observed variation to some combination of political structure and the framing of the family policy debate in each country.

First, I offer the following insights about Germany: (1) being in a Grand Coalition government with the SDP forced the governing CDU to moderate its position on family policy

(which the CDU was subsequently able to capitalize on politically). (2) German family policy reforms have been framed in a natalist tone, which established raising the country's slumping birthrate as a serious national imperative. This framing also appears to have played on fears of a creeping 'Islamization' of Germany, as the country's Turkish and Arab populations increase relative to the population of white Germans. Moreover, having women like Chancellor Merkel and Ursula von der Leyen in visible positions may have helped the CDU establish this natalist narrative without offending targeted female voters. (3) Finally, the natalist and assimilationist overtones of the German family policy debate – and the absence of such themes from the Canadian one – suggest that German policymakers may have had more xenophobic popular sentiment to latch onto.

By contrast, the Harper government was unencumbered by the strictures of a formal coalition. This allowed it to implement a familial, subsidy-based set of family policy reforms that placated its socially conservative wing (see: Prince and Teghtsoonian 2008). Moreover, the Harper reforms have generally been framed in a populist, anti-intellectual manner, as characterized by the standard Conservative talking point "We all know childcare care decisions are best left to the real experts, mom and dad" – a clear rebuke of the 'expert' advocates of universal childcare in the academic and policy communities (Harper 2015 [August 7]). Finally, the near-absence of anti-immigrant and natalist sentiment from the Canadian discourse curtailed prospects for a socially conservative case to be made in favour of daycare as a mechanism to increase the domestic birthrate.[22]

Independent Variable #1: Partisanship and Coalitional Dynamics

While the Christian Democrats – and specifically their media savvy family minister Ursula von der Leyen – were able to claim most of the credit for Germany's transformative family policy reforms, the reforms pivotally took place within the context of a Grand Coalition government that included the Social Democratic Party (SPD). In fact, the coalition was characterized by a marked continuity in the family ministry as von der Leyen chose to retain a number of SPD-affiliated staff. This group of holdovers included Malte Ristau-Winkler,[23] who had been chief adviser to Renate Schmidt, von der Leyen's immediate predecessor at Family Affairs (von Wahl 2011, p. 397). Schmidt herself has been widely acknowledged for her role in getting child care on the political agenda, as well as for her efforts in reframing family policy as a "hard issue" vital to shoring up Germany's perilously low birthrate (Rüling 2008, p. 42).

Von der Leyen retained Schmidt's natalist talking points, but was perhaps in a better position to deliver them. Her conservative credentials were unassailable as she came from a prominent Christian Democrat political family and, prior to becoming a politician, she had raised seven children while also working as a medical doctor. As such, there was a "Nixon-goes-to-China" feel to her rhetoric, suggesting that even the most strident conservative had to acknowledge the seriousness of Germany's impending demographic time-bomb (von Wahl 2011, p. 396). Von der Leyen matched these words with a sweeping package of universalistic family policy reforms, which included generous, income-based parental leave (covering 67% of the

[22] Daycare and other universalistic family policies have been linked to higher fertility rates in the OECD countries (see Rovny 2011).

[23] Ristau-Winkler is male.

claimant's normal salary) and, critically, a universal guarantee of publicly-subsidized daycare for one and two year olds (ibid., pp. 397-8).

Coalition dynamics may also explain the falling off of family policy reforms during Merkel's second government, a solidly right-wing bloc consisting of the CDU/CSU and FDP. Daycare was a tough sell to both junior coalition partners. The FDP favored a voucher system that enabled greater choice in child care while the traditionalist CSU advocated a monthly transfer to stay-at home parents. The latter actually threatened to leave the governing coalition if its favoured child care subsidy did not become law (Henninger and von Wahl 2014, pp. 390-2). Further, the global economic downturn left the family ministry saddled with a 4-billion euro budget cut, forcing it to in fact pare away existing parental benefits for high earners and welfare recipients (Ibid., p. 391). Kristina Schröder (CDU), von der Leyen's successor at Family Affairs, showed neither the aptitude nor the inclination to fight for women-friendly policies, leaving a shrinking group of CDU modernizers (which included von der Leyen)[24] in the lurch. Sensing that this was a battle the modernizers could not win, Chancellor Merkel intervened repeatedly on the side of the CSU and traditionalists in the CDU (Ibid., p. 392). As observed by Henninger and von Wahl (2014), the underwhelming performance of the CDU/CSU/FDP alliance on family policy is indicative the complex partisan dynamics engendered by Germany's legislative norm of coalition governance. Although it was the CDU that took political credit for the sweeping family policy reforms passed during Merkel's first government, it is unlikely that these reforms would have been implemented without the presence of the SPD in the governing coalition. As such, grand coalition governance with a left party appears to be a key determinant of the observed policy shift.

No such tradition exists in Canada as, outside of the World Wars, the country has never seen a coalition government at the federal level. This despite the fact that it is fairly common in Canada for a single party to govern unilaterally without holding a majority of the seats in parliament – a scenario known as a minority government. This has happened thirteen times in Canada's history (Parliament of Canada 2011). Prime Minister Harper actually presided over the country's lengthiest ever stretch of minority governments, which lasted from 2006 to 2011. Throughout this period, Harper was known to play parliamentary brinkmanship with the opposition parties, at times daring them to trigger an election call over contentious legislative items.

One such item was the controversial UCCB which, as mentioned earlier in the paper, Harper had initially devised as a replacement for a nascent federal-provincial accord to create more publicly subsidized daycare spaces. The child benefit was opposed by all three opposition parties and just lukewarmly received by the general public. In fact a June 2006 study conducted by Environics Research, a leading Canadian polling house, found that the child care benefit had just a 35% approval rating among voters.[25] Moreover, 40% of the survey's respondents agreed with the statement that the opposition parties should trigger another election if the conservatives failed to back down on the issue of child care (pp. 7, 19). However, initiating a new

[24] The Merkel government's change of course on family policy drew tacit criticism from von der Leyen, who has since moved on to the labour (2009-13) and defense (2013-present). She publicly expressed concerns about the proposed stay-at-home parent subsidy in 2013, telling leading German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* that "children need other children" to develop properly and, as such, should attend daycare (Caldwell 2013)

[25] The UCCB increased in popularity over time. A poll conducted by the department of finance in the lead-up to the 2016 election found that 76% of Canadians supported the enhancements to the child benefit (Kennedy 2016).

election campaign over child care would have been a reckless gamble for the opposition parties and it was ultimately a risk that they were unwilling to take.[26]

It's easy to see how things may have gone differently if there were in fact a strong precedent of coalition government in Canada. The Harper Conservatives, who were at the time thirty-one seats short of the number necessary to form a parliamentary majority, would have been hard-pressed to find willing coalition partners. They may well have needed to sacrifice their child care agenda in order to obtain the requisite support from the other parties.

Independent Variable #2: Issue Framing

Although the CDU's embrace of universal family policy was clearly motivated by electoral considerations and facilitated by the presence of the SPD in Merkel's first governing coalition, the presence of female leadership nevertheless helped the party from a framing standpoint. Von der Leyen's rhetoric on family policy was pointedly natalist, as she characteristically made statements like, "The question is not whether women will work… the question is whether they will have children" (Landler 2006). Further, the popular German family minister did not hesitate to use her own image as a working mother of seven children to frame the reforms she planned to implement. This type of messaging helped von der Leyen and other advocates establish family policy as a 'hard issue' that was central to Germany's very demographic survival (Rüling 2008). However, coming from a male politician, such rhetoric – essentially imploring women to bear more children – would likely be perceived as paternalistic and overbearing, potentially offending the very female voters being courted.

This in fact echoes one popular interpretation of the failure of a similar child care strategy proposed in Canada under the Liberal government of Paul Martin [2003-06]. The Martin government's promotion of its national child care plan was viewed widely by analysts as politically tone-deaf and ultimately ineffective. Despite being spearheaded by Social Development Minister Ken Dryden, a well-respected lawyer and former ice hockey great, the child care initiative was attacked by the Conservative opposition for being condescending to women. This sentiment was memorably encapsulated by Conservative MP Rona Ambrose[27] when she told Minister Dryden "working women want to make their own choices. We do not need old white guys telling us to do," during a parliamentary debate on child care (Parliament of Canada 2005). Noted political commentator Chantel Hébert later remarked that Ambrose's barb "reinforced the image of the federal government as a meddling, paternalistic uncle" (2007, p. 81).

Accordingly, the framing of Harper's child care agenda took on something of a populist, anti-intellectual tone; characterised by the refrain "we believe that the real child care experts are mom and dad" and a more general emphasis on parental choice. This statement was clearly directed at the many advocates of universal childcare in the academic and policy communities. It also served to remind voters of what many commentators perceived to be a patronizing attitude

[26] The UCCB was introduced as part of the Harper Government's first budget [2006/07], which passed with the support of the separatist Bloc Québecois. The Budget technically passed with unanimous consent due to a procedural mix-up, but this was largely irrelevant as the Liberals and NDP did not have sufficient votes to reject it (CBC News, 6 June 2006).

[27] Ambrose became the interim leader of the Conservative Party shortly after the party's unsuccessful 2015 re-election campaign. She will remain in this role until a permanent replacement is chosen in the spring of 2017.

from the Liberal advocates of Paul Martin's national child care strategy.[28] Moreover, party statements on child care were often delivered by prominent female Conservative caucus members, such as former Human Resources Minister Diane Finlay and the aforementioned Rona Ambrose.

One related curiosity observed by feminist scholars is that the Harper Government's emphasis on "parental choice" in their child care rhetoric created a libertarian veneer that masked some of their more familial objectives. For instance, Richardson (2011) observes that the Conservatives' dominant "choice discourse" was premised on the faulty assumption that the UCCB empowered all parents to choose between sending their children to daycare and caring for them at home (p. 43). This despite the fact that, even at the beefed-up rate of $160 per month, the government's UCCB checks do not provide nearly enough money to cover the costs of centre-based child care, much less to enable middle and low-income parents to forgo work in order to stay at home with their children (See Table 1). Thus, while creating the illusion of choice, the Harper Conservatives have in fact constructed a socially conservative family policy regime that most benefits traditional nuclear families (see Findlay 2015). This suggests that issue framing, and specifically its relation to gender, was also a key aspect of the Canadian family policy narrative – although the Harper Government's framing strategy was not as straightforward as the one used by the CDU in Germany.

Table 1 – Monthly Child Care Costs by Province (2013 figures)

Province	Median monthly fees charged by child care centres (average of infant, toddler and preschool fees)
British Columbia	$905.00
Alberta	$838.33
Saskatchewan	$582.00
Manitoba	$497.67
Ontario	$970.67
Quebec	$152.00
Nova Scotia	$734.67
New Brunswick	$671.00
Prince Edward Island	$602.00
Newfoundland and Labrador	$778.00

Source: (Passoli 2015, p. 73)

Independent Variable #3: Societal Attitudes towards Multiculturalism

The natalist tone of Germany's family policy push also brings to mind a conceivable link between this issue and immigration. The most straightforward way for policymakers to address the economic challenges created by demographic imbalances is to open the door to migrant workers. This was the exact strategy pursued by a rapidly re-industrializing West Germany, which

[28] A major turning point of the 2006 federal election campaign came when Liberal Party communications director Scott Reid stated on television that parents would "blow" the Conservative child care benefit on "beer and popcorn". The statement reinforced the perception that the Liberals believed that parents could not be trusted to take care of their own children (Wells 2006, pp. 189-90)

recruited upwards of 2.5 million Turkish guest workers over the 1960s and early 1970s (Triadafilopoulos 2012). However, it would be fair to say that the Turks and other non-European migrant communities have since integrated poorly with the general population – an unfortunate state of affairs that's led to a burgeoning political culture of xenophobia on the German right and; further, is a possible impetus for policies designed to boost the birthrate among native German women. Merkel herself has periodically voiced this nativist sentiment. For instance, in a widely-covered 2010 speech to the CDU youth wing, she made the following remarks:

> In the early 1960s we brought the guest workers to Germany, now they're living with us. We lied to ourselves for a while, we said, "they won't stay long. One day they'll be gone." But this is not the case. Of ours the multicultural approach, living side by side and being happy with each other, has ***utterly failed***.[29] (Rowe 2011).

Anxieties over cultural integration may have also contributed to the failure of the Christian Democrat's polarizing Betreuungsgeld (care allowance). Similar in structure to Harper's UCCB, the Betreuungsgeld was a monthly subsidy of 150 euros available to parents of one to three year-olds who chose not to enroll their children in any form of public or publicly-subsidized daycare (Müller and Wrohlich 2014, p. 5). Devised as a measure to placate the socially-conservative CSU, the Betreuungsgeld began circulating in the summer of 2013 – the exact same time that the CDU's universal guarantee of daycare came into effect (Ibid. p.1). As of the spring of 2015, the Betreuungsgeld went out to 450,000 German families at a cost of 900-million euros per year (McCathie 2015).

The subsidy was controversial from the start, raising questions about the sincerity of the CDU's professed support for working women. Accordingly, the progressive opponents of the Betreuungsgeld's derisively dubbed it the "kitchen bonus". The child subsidy's divisiveness soon made it the target of multiple political and legal attacks. Even Ursula von der Leyen, now Germany's Minister of Defense, has publicly expressed concerns about the Betreuungsgeld, telling leading newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* that "children need other children" to develop properly (Caldwell 2013).[30]

In July of 2015, the Betreuungsgeld was struck down by the German constitutional court in a unanimous ruling. The court ruled that federal government did not have the spending authority to circulate the subsidy (TheLocal.de, 21 June 2015). The case's plaintiff was the SPD-controlled government of Hamburg, which held that the subsidies reinforced inequalities towards low-income families and that the public funds allocated to it would be better directed at improving daycare infrastructure (ibid. 14 April 2015). While many on the Canadian left would agree with this viewpoint, it is entirely inconceivable that any mainstream Canadian opposition party would have gone to court to have the Harper Government's UCCB checks cancelled. Doing so would have been political suicide.[31]

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[29] Emphasis the author's.

[30] Von der Leyen held the Labour portfolio at the time of this interview.

[31] During the 2015 federal election campaign, NDP leader Thomas Mulcair pledged to preserve the UCCB if elected prime minister, despite also promising to implement a $15 per day national daycare program. Now Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said that he will replace the UCCB with a new, income-based monthly child benefit (Bryden

The Betreuungsgeld's political fragility likely stems in part from its perceived association with immigrants. A large proportion of the child care checks have gone to migrant families, especially those based in major urban centers. Notably, 22.4% of applicants based in Berlin have been identified as foreigners, despite just 13.4% of the city's population not holding a German passport (Knapp 2015). Accordingly, much of the anti-Betreuungsgeld rhetoric has been assimilationist in tone. Specifically, critics have argued that the subsidy enables the children of migrants to self-segregate, when they should be learning the German language and cultural customs at public daycares (dpa, 7 July 2015; TheLocal.de, 14 April 2015). These critics drew ammunition from a highly-publicized 2012 OECD report ("Jobs for Immigrants") which concluded that direct-to-parent child subsidies could be "highly detrimental" to the well-being of both migrant women and their children. Although Germany was not one of the countries included in the study, [32] the German media nevertheless used these findings to cast doubt on the Betreuungsgeld's effectiveness (Die Welt 2012).

Canada, by contrast, has proven to be a more hospitable environment for non-white immigrants. In 1971, Canada became the first ever country to adopt an official policy of multiculturalism, which included a color-blind immigration policy. The concept of 'multiculturalism' has since become central to the inchoate Canadian national identity and, critically, a part of how Canadians distinguish themselves from their more assimilationist American neighbors. Accordingly, the 2014 Social Progress Index, a joint project of leading consulting firm DeLoitte and the non-profit Social Progress Imperative, ranked Canada first in the category of tolerance towards immigrants. Germany placed just twenty-second in the same category (Iaconangelo 2014).

Over time, Canada's warm embrace of multiculturalism has catalyzed a major demographic shift. Immigrants now comprise just over 20% of Canada's population – which is the highest proportion among the G7 countries (Statistics Canada 2014) – and immigration presently accounts for two-thirds of Canada's annual population growth (Statistics Canada 2013). Canada has highest naturalization rate of any OECD country, as roughly 75% of landed immigrants ultimately attain Canadian citizenship (OECD 2012, p. 134).

The propensity of Canadian immigrants to become citizens and, subsequently, engaged and organized voting blocs, has made them a priority demographic for all major parties. This includes the Conservative Party, whose 2011 majority-government breakthrough was powered by a strong showing in immigrant-heavy suburban communities surrounding Toronto and Vancouver (Friesen and Sher 2011). Harper had a chance to articulate the party's conciliatory approach to multiculturalism at that year's party leaders' debate:

> [W]hat Canadians need to understand and what we understand of multiculturalism is that people who make the hard decision to leave countries where they have established for centuries or millenni[a] come here first and foremost want to belong to this country. That's why they come, that's why they're here. They also at the same time will change our country and we show through

2015). At present, the Trudeau Government is in negotiations with the provinces as to how the new benefit will be structured. As such, the UCCB will remain in effect until at least July 1, 2016 (Press 2015).

[32] The study examined the labour market integration of immigrants in Austria, Norway, and Switzerland.

> multiculturalism our willingness to accommodate the differences so they're more comfortable. That's why we're so successful integrating people as a country, I think we're probably one of the most successful countries in the world in that regard (*Canuck Politics* 2011).

The contrast between the Harper and Merkel rhetoric on multiculturalism is jarring, and perhaps explains why overtly natalist overtones have been absent from Canada's family policy discourse. Given the continued willingness of Canadians to accept immigration as a stopgap measure to stave off demographic imbalances, it's unsurprising that increasing Canada's low domestic birthrate is not a priority item on the political agenda. This, as mentioned earlier, sealed-off the prospect for Canada's low birthrate to be used to make a socially conservative case for daycare and other universalistic family policies.

One potential qualifier to this argument is that German and Canadian immigrant populations are very different in composition. Turks are by far the largest ethnic minority group in Germany, comprising nearly 25% of all foreigners (Statistisches Bundesamt 2014). Turks notably make up roughly 6% of Berlin's population (Statistik Berlin Brandenburg, n.d.) as Berlin's over 200,000 Turks comprise the largest Turkish diaspora community in the world. Accordingly, as the face of German immigration, the Turkish community has borne the brunt of reactionary violence and harassment perpetrated periodically by radical right-wing groups.

Canada's immigrant population, by contrast, embodies a true cultural mosaic. No one national community constitutes more than 10% of the total immigrant population and fifteen diaspora groups number 100,000 or more (Statistics Canada 2009). The religious diversity of Canadian immigrants is also worth noting. Nearly half of recent immigrants[33] claim Christian religious affiliation. Muslims, by comparison, make up only 17.4% of recent immigrants and just over 3% of the country's total population. Hindus and Sikhs are also prominent migrant communities, which each comprise over 5% of all recent immigrants (Press 2013). The religious heterogeneity of Canadian immigrants and, specifically, the relative paucity of the country's Muslim population is relevant here given the strong undercurrent of Islamophobia that underpins much of the anti-immigrant sentiment in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Moreover, it has been argued elsewhere that the principles of Islam are inconsistent with those of democratic liberalism, making it especially difficult for Muslims migrants to integrate into western societies (Huntington 1997). This is an argument that, to be clear, I do not agree with, but is nevertheless necessary for me to highlight some of the unique obstacles faced by Muslim immigrants and the potential relevance of such obstacles to this project.

The cultural integration of Muslim immigrants actually played a central role in Canada's most recent federal election campaign. Bizarrely, much of the campaign spotlight was monopolized by the debate over whether newly-Canadian women of Muslim faith should be able to wear facial coverings (niqabs) at citizenship ceremonies – so much so that the campaign was derisively dubbed "the niqab election" by two of Canada's leading newsmagazines (Kay 2015; Wherry 2015). Harper, who vehemently opposed the accommodation of niqabs on such

[33] Those who arrived between 2006 and 2011 (see Press 2013).

occasions, emphasized throughout the campaign that he would fight the courts on the issue.[34] He also stated that, if re-elected as prime minister, he would look into passing a new law to prohibit public service employees from wearing niqabs (CBC News, 7 October 2015). Moreover, as the campaign entered its final stretch in early October, Harper enlisted two of his frontbench ministers to announce the creation of a special police tip line to allow callers to report instances of 'barbaric cultural practices' to the authorities (Conservative Party of Canada 2015).

The unveiling of the so called Barbaric Cultural Practices Hotline immediately provoked accusations of racially-charged dog whistle politics meant to stigmatize Muslims. The Conservative Party's alleged targeting of Muslim-Canadians gave Justin Trudeau, the leader of the ultimately triumphant Liberal Party, an opportunity to amplify his own message of inclusion. There was a symbolic quality to Trudeau's rhetoric as his father, the late Pierre Elliot Trudeau, had been Canada's prime minister when it first adopted an official policy of multiculturalism.

The Conservative Party, which had held a constant lead at in the public opinion polls through the final week of September, saw its support plateau shortly after the Barbaric Cultural Practices Hotline announcement on October 2nd and decline steadily through the rest of the month (See Figure 3). Although the data from Canada's 2015 National Election Study has not yet been made available to the general public, the initial post hoc analysis indicates that Canadians grew increasingly fatigued with the mean-spirited and decidedly 'un-Canadian' politics that had characterized the Harper era – as exemplified by the Conservatives' sharp anti-Muslim turn near the tail-end of the campaign. All told, the 2015 federal election campaign is a striking testament to the electoral unviability of nativist and xenophobic politics in Canada.

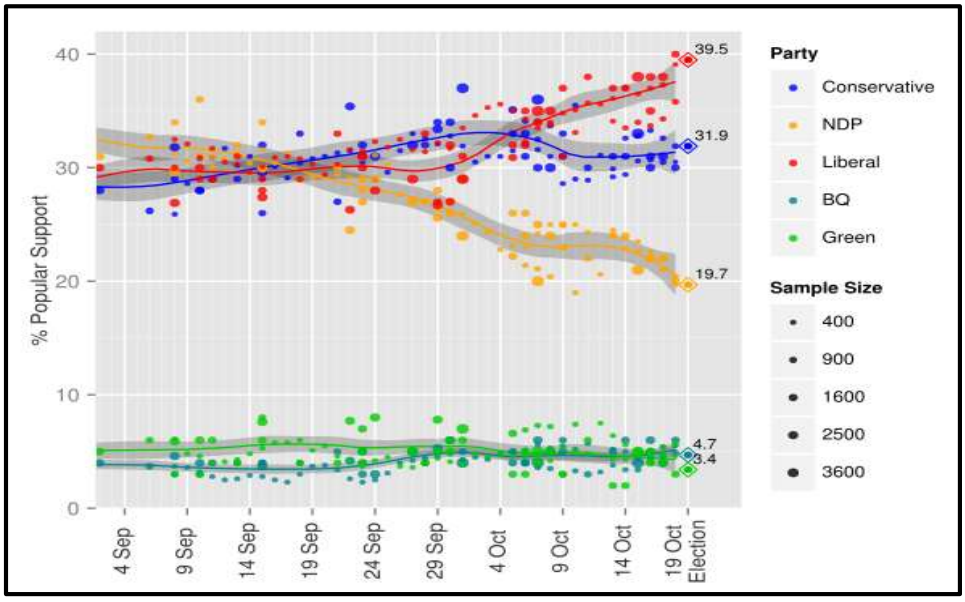

Figure 3 - Daily public opinion tracking, 2016 Canadian Election Campaign
Source: Wikimedia Commons

[34] The Harper government's petition to prohibit a Muslim women from wearing a facial covering while taking the oath of citizenship was recently denied by the Federal Court of Appeal. (see Fine, 5 October 2015).

Conclusion

The substantial and path-shifting reforms pursued by the conservative governments of Stephen Harper and Angela Merkel, respectively, are indicative of a broader cross-national trend of increased state investment in family policy. While this phenomenon has been well-documented empirically, it has yet to be adequately theorized. Accordingly, the present piece provides insight into not only the political circumstances that may motivate non-left parties to pursue family policy expansion, but also why such reforms may follow different trajectories. My most fundamental observations are that right parties now have electoral incentives to pursue family policy modernization agendas and that their specific paths to reform will be shaped by the domestic political environment.

One strand of this research agenda that I find particularly compelling is the hint of the possible relevance of cultural openness to the trajectory of family policy reforms. It is indeed curious that concerns over declining fertility and the integration of immigrants have been so prominent in the German discourse yet virtually absent in the Canadian one. Assimilationist and natalist considerations may have in fact helped to make daycare and other universalistic family policy items more palatable to a subset of German conservatives. While I cannot provide a definitive answer here, my preliminary findings nevertheless point to the need for further research into this understudied area.

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