

# On the Normative Motivation of States: State Universalism in Western Post-Enlightenment Societies\*

Laure Athias<sup>†</sup>

February 6, 2025

## Abstract

The theory of social choice highlights that determining a rational (transitive) social preference based on individual preferences, as in democratic societies, requires interpersonal utility comparisons. Thus, the functionality of states in democratic societies is, by definition, normative, guided by a sense of common purpose. WEIRD societies are characterized by universal morality as a foundational principle of societal organization. I hypothesize that, in these societies, the state's normative motivation is universalism as a collective meaning. I leverage switches of low-level Swiss workers from the private to the public sector—outside public service industries—as a source of within-individual variation in exposure to the state's normative motivation and study the dynamics of their preference for state universalism. I find that, for any given type of state, working for the state does not affect preferences regarding welfare, redistribution, defense, political ideology or public trust but increases the likelihood of advocating for state universalism by 15%. Examining causal mechanisms, I provide evidence consistent with a culture-varying “state morality” effect, whereby public bureaucrats, as street-level bureaucrats, transmit state universalism beyond the workplace into broader society, and individuals who become state universalists adopt behaviors aligned with a broader sense of citizenship. These results shed a first light on a normative motivation of states that drives the prevalence of universalism within society.

**Keywords:** State formation; Normative motivation; Common good; Universalism; Bureaucracy; Public versus private sector; Workplace socialization; Cultural transmission.

---

\*I am deeply grateful to James A. Robinson for both providing and being an intellectual home in the final stages of this work. I also thank Marius Brühlhart, Rachel Kranton, Mathias Thoenig, Bruno Ventelou, Giorgio Zanarone, and Yanos Zylberberg for very helpful comments on a previous version circulated as “Common Good Institutions, Identity in the Workplace, and Value Dynamics”.

<sup>†</sup>Laure Athias, University of Lausanne, Quartier Unil-Mouline, CH-1015 Lausanne, Switzerland. Email: laure.athias@unil.ch. Phone: +41 21 692 68 21.

“This is publick spirit ; which contains in it every laudable passion, and takes in parents, kindred, friends, neighbours, and every thing dear to mankind ; it is the highest virtue, and contains in it almost all others ; steadfastness to good purposes, fidelity to one’s trust, resolution in difficulties, defiance of dangers, contempt of death, and impartial benevolence to all mankind. It is a passion to promote universal good, with personal pain, loss, and peril : it is one Man’s care for many, and the concern of every man for all.”

Thomas Gordon (1721), *Cato’s Letter No. 35 “Of Publick Spirit”*

“All modern foundings justify the state’s right to rule in accordance with a social purpose arising from the very existence of the people. The social purpose transforms the merely instrumental survival of the state as the guarantor of a stable social order into an agency in which the people are obliged to obey because the state fulfills their normative destiny.”

Bensel (2022), *The Founding of Modern States*, p. xiv

## 1 Introduction

The literature in political economy suggests that, beyond defense motivations, states are created because public goods are essential for generating growth, and individuals cannot provide them without collective organizations such as states (e.g. Besley and Persson (2011), Acemoglu et al. (2016)). Positive theories highlight that this motivation for state formation can arise from either the supply side (e.g. Sánchez de la Sierra (2020)) or the demand side (e.g. Dittmar and Meisenzahl (2020), Allen et al. (2023)). In any case, it is driven by material incentives leading to Pareto improvements (Mayshar et al. (2022)). However, there is an infinite number of potential Pareto improvements for states, some of which may be highly unfavorable to certain members of society. What, then, could drive the choice between them? A rational answer to this question would be that it should be the option that maximizes the general interest. However, the theory of social choice (see Sen (1970)) stresses that determining a rational (transitive) social preference based on individual preferences (as in democratic societies) requires interpersonal utility comparisons—that is, common good considerations beyond individual preferences<sup>1</sup>. Thus, by definition, the functionality of states in democratic societies implies a sense of common purpose. This theoretical point resonates with Bensel (2022), who argues that the founding of modern states inescapably involved a metaphysical conception of a “will of the people” in order to craft senses of common purpose to guide governing institutions. It also aligns more broadly with works in anthropology (e.g. Graeber and Sahlins (2018), Sahlins (2022)) and philosophy (Castoriadis (1987)), which emphasize that institutions cannot be reduced to their functionality—the functions they fulfil in the society—but are

---

<sup>1</sup>In economics, the general interest is defined on the basis of the individual interests of society. Even when there is a divergence between individual interests and the general interest, particularly in the allocation of resources for public goods, education, health, and national defence, any resource allocation is evaluated considering all individual interests. The pareto-optimal allocation, which maximizes the general interest, is then obtained through the aggregation of diverging individual preferences regarding resource allocation. However, such aggregation faces significant challenges, as highlighted by Arrow (1951)’s theorem. The discipline of social choice theory, founded on Arrow’s theorem, has sought to address these difficulties, ultimately concluding that it is impossible to construct the general interest without accepting interpersonal utility comparisons.

intrinsically tied to collective meanings in the social imaginary. However, there is no evidence to support the existence of a normative motivation underpinning states.

Henrich (2020) argues that WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) societies are characterized by universal morality, in which moral principles apply equally to all individuals, regardless of their social status or group membership. This contrasts with the relational or context-dependent morality prevalent in many non-WEIRD cultures, where moral obligations are more strongly tied to kinship, tribe, or specific in-group affiliations. Notably, universal morality is not merely an individual value but also a foundational principle of societal organization at the core of the social contracts of Western Enlightenment philosophies, as illustrated by the opening quote from Thomas Gordon. It is a collective meaning, a social purpose, which led to the emergence of universal political and social rights in post-Enlightenment Western societies. Thus, I hypothesize that in these societies, the state’s normative motivation is universalism.

To test this hypothesis, I leverage switches of workers from the private to the public sector—outside public service industries—as a source of within-individual variation in exposure to the state’s normative motivation and study the dynamics of their preferences for state universalism. I use data from the Swiss Household Panel Survey (SHPS), a panel survey that interviews all members of approximately 5,000 randomly selected households, covering over 12,000 individuals in Switzerland since 1999. These data are unique in five key ways. First, they include a precise measure of the preference for state universalism through the following question: “Are you in favour of Switzerland offering foreigners the same opportunities as those offered to Swiss citizens, or in favour of Switzerland offering Swiss citizens better opportunities?”. For Swiss respondents, this question presents a clear choice between a state that treats in-group members (Swiss citizens) and socially distant people (foreigners) equally, versus one that favors in-group members. Thus, the question explicitly elicits their preference for universalism as defined by Enke et al. (2022b) but at the state level (as in Athias and Ventelou (2024))<sup>2</sup>. Second, the SHPS provides information on respondents’ occupational choices between institutional (public vs. private) sectors and their sectors of activity, in particular whether they work in or outside public services industries (defined as health, education, and social services). Importantly, the 1999-2003 surveys include details about the individual’s type of public organization, allowing for the introduction of public sector-type fixed effects. Third, these individual-level panel data allow to exploit longitudinal variation within individuals to isolate the impact of the institutional sector. The within estimator strongly alleviates the selection into occupation concern. However, workers might choose the time spent in an institutional sector as a function of their own dynamics in preferences. Investigating pre-trends in state universalism of switchers – comparing their initial preference (before switching) with that of stayers in the same sector – I show that this dynamic self-selection concern applies to workers employed in public services sectors but not to those outside these services. Fourth, there is a key advantage of exploiting Swiss data due to the high permeability between the public and private sectors in Switzerland. This permeability stems from

---

<sup>2</sup>Enke et al. (2022b) develop a measure of universalism through money-allocation games. Universalists are individuals who allocate a given budget more uniformly across individuals, regardless of whether they are in-group or out-group members. Athias and Ventelou (2024) replicate Enke et al. (2022b)’s survey-based measure of universalism but in addition to their direct measure of universalism, respondents were asked the same questions in the context of collective (state) vehicles of allocation. Individuals who are state universalists advocate for the state to allocate a given budget between in-group members (national citizens) and strangers (foreigners) uniformly. Athias and Ventelou (2024) find a very strong correlation between direct universalism and state universalism ( $\rho = 0.76$ ).

similarities in hiring procedures, requirements, and workers’ status<sup>3</sup>. Importantly, there is a notable public sector wage premium for similar jobs with equivalent qualifications and hierarchical status. On average, the public sector wage premium is 12%, but it can reach up to 29% at the lower end of the pay scale (Portmann et al. (2024)). Consistent with this, I find that bureaucrats who switch from the private to the public sector outside public services industries tend to be low-level bureaucrats. Since Ashraf et al. (2020) find a trade-off in sorting between mission and financial motivation for low-level talents, it is highly likely that the switching bureaucrats in my sample are driven by financial motives. Another specificity of the Swiss setting comes from its federal structure with most policies and markets regulation set at the state (cantonal) level. As the SHPS also provides information on respondents’ commune of residence, it is possible to control for state-specific time dummies to account for time-varying confounders that operate at the local (state) level (e.g. economic distress, which drives both the likelihood of working in the public sector and individual preferences). Finally, Switzerland, as a multi-cultural country, allows to investigate the cultural heterogeneity of the effect.

I find that the likelihood of advocating for state universalism significantly increases when the same bureaucrats work for the state as opposed to the private sector (both for-profit and nonprofit). The effect size is substantial with the estimated causal effect of working for the state being around 15%. By contrast, I find no evidence that working for the state affects bureaucrats’ preferences regarding welfare, redistribution, defense, political ideology or trust in federal government. Instead, it leads bureaucrats to develop a more critical view of the state of democracy. The results also indicate that the effect is not driven by the federal level or any cantonal-level bureaucracy and that workers keep their preference for state universalism when they quit the state for the private sector. Thus, the effect on state universalism is not attributable to job characteristics.

I further investigate the heterogeneity of the effect. Enke et al. (2022a) conceptualize the link between moral universalism and political ideology, showing that it ultimately defines what it means to be “left” by contrast to “right” in the Western world in an almost identical way across countries. In addition, Athias and Ventelou (2024) find that right-wingers’ universalism does not vary with the vehicle, they are also significantly less universalists with the state vehicle. Thus, I expect a stronger treatment effect for right-wing-oriented bureaucrats through a catch-up effect. This is exactly what I find. Interestingly, while Eugster and Parchet (2019), using federal referendum outcomes at the municipality level from 1981 to 2011, find that voters in French-speaking municipalities consistently show significantly stronger support for policies recommended by left-of-center parties—with a discrete jump of approximately 8 percentage points at the language border—I find a stronger treatment effect when Swiss bureaucrats are French-speaking rather than German-speaking, with the effect doubling in magnitude. This suggests that the intensity of the treatment is stronger on the French-speaking side. Notably, French-speaking Swiss individuals are more exposed to French culture and the associated normative motivation of the state. Rousseau’s political philosophy was the dominant intellectual force when the French Revolution began. In his conception of the General Will, the state metaphorically

---

<sup>3</sup>The term ‘open’ civil service is used when there is no specific competitive exam to enter the civil service (Audier and Bacache-Beauvallet (2007)). Heterogeneity of workers’ profiles within the public sector is consequently more important. In the particular case of Switzerland, Emery et al. (2014) underline that, due to its open civil service, public sector workers from the private sector are quite frequent at any hierarchical level. Guido Schilling AG (2023) finds that in a sample of 1045 top executives in the public sector (at the federal and cantonal levels), one third has at least one experience in the private sector. In addition, in the 1990’s, the civil servant status has been abolished in Switzerland in all states except two.

embodies the nation’s interests “without the mediation of intervening institutions” (Bensel (2022), p. 208), thereby being bound up with a stronger normative motivation than under any other Enlightenment principle.

Overall, my findings are consistent with the intrinsic mechanism, which is the article’s focus: the internalization of the state’s normative motivation through workplace socialization<sup>4</sup>. To illustrate this, I draw on William H. Sewell (2005)’s example of a worker who, convinced by the marginal productivity theory of distribution, believes he is earning the value of his marginal product—and this is a just outcome or at least it is consistent with the First Welfare Theorem. During lunch, he reads *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels, leading to a paradigm shift—now believing he is being exploited—and returns to his job as a completely different person, even though the job itself remains unchanged. Similarly, consider a worker—a cook—who switches from the private to the public sector for better pay while performing the same job. In the morning, he prepares meals in the cafeteria of the Department of Finance, holding the belief that Switzerland should prioritize Swiss citizens over foreigners, a view he considers moral. However, as he socializes with his new co-workers during lunchtime, discussions arise about the state’s normative motivation. Through these interactions, he learns about Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*, Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*, and Kant’s *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Despite their differences in the specifics of the social contract, he understands how all converge on the idea of universal morality as a core principle of society’s organization. When he returns to his job, the physical situation is exactly the same, the technology and production process is the same. Yet his paradigm has shifted: he now believes that the state should be universalist.

However, an alternative extrinsic explanation is also possible. Public employees may adopt—but not internalize—the preference for state universalism due to social incentives. Specifically, if the worker’s utility function is augmented by a culture-dependent parameter that accounts for colleagues’ utility, public employees may adopt the preference for state universalism as it maximizes their expected utility. To distinguish between these channels of causality, I move beyond the workplace setting and undertake two exercises.

First, I build upon Lipsky (1980) who examines the role of frontline public employees (teachers, police officers, social workers, judges, health workers, and many other public employees who grant access to government programs and provide services within them) as mediators between citizens and the state. He argues that their daily decisions and actions significantly shape how citizens experience public policies, thereby imparting a citizenship dimension to their work. Thus, I ask whether public employees are an important channel of transmission of the state’s normative dimension within society, especially to non-workers (young, unemployed and retired people), through their role as street-level bureaucrats. Therefore, I leverage time-varying variation at the state (cantonal) level in the share of public employees advocating for state universalism in the fixed effects estimation. I explore whether an increased share of state universalists among public bureaucrats increases the likelihood that non-workers become in favor of state universalism, controlling for time-varying state (cantonal) political ideology as well as for time-varying local environment measured through the share of state universalists among private sector employees. My

---

<sup>4</sup>Organizational psychologists have long emphasized the importance of workplace socialization in shaping cultural change (see Schein (1965)). According to Van Maanen and Schein (1979), workplace socialization or “organizational socialization refers...to the fashion in which an individual is taught and learns what behaviors and perspectives are customary and desirable within the work setting as well as what ones are not” (Van Maanen and Schein (1979), p. 4). Aneja et al. (2024) provide evidence for the importance of workplace socialization in shaping gender norms.

findings show that public sector employees play a significant role in transmitting the state’s normative motivation in society, nearly as influential as that of the local environment. Thus, the effect cannot be attributed to the workplace setting.

In the second exercise, I consider behavioral outcomes insofar as internalized—but not acquired—preferences may become generalized reason for behavior, taking on the status of a general motive or constraint on behavior, and hence explain behaviors in novel situations<sup>5</sup>. I expect that individuals who internalize the state’s normative motivation—universal morality as a social meaning—are more likely to act as “a citizen of the world, a member of the vast commonwealth of nature” (Smith (1790))<sup>6</sup>. I find in the fixed effects regression that a shift in individual’s state universalism is associated with an increased likelihood of advocating for Switzerland to join the European Union, becoming a member of an environmental organization, donating less locally but more globally, and participating in federal elections.

All in all, my findings point to the internalization of the state’s normative motivation as the explanation for the within-individual shift in state universalism induced by exposure to public bureaucrats.

This work speaks to the literature on the interplay between culture and institutions. It unveils a normative motivation of states, which arises from the impossibility of determining a social preference through the aggregation of diverging individual preferences. The founding of democratic states is therefore normatively bound up with a notion of the “people” as a collective, as highlighted by Sen (1970) and Bensel (2022). Thus, this paper emphasizes that culture, as a collective identity, is tied to a collective meaning, as in Geertz (1973), Castoriadis (1987), William H. Sewell (2005), and Acemoglu and Robinson (2025). This paper demonstrates that in WEIRD societies, this collective meaning is centered on universal morality, a core principle of societal organization embodied in the social contracts of Western Enlightenment philosophies that laid the foundation for modern states. Thus, universalism is not merely a static value at the individual level (Cappelen et al. (2025), Enke (2024), Enke et al. (2022b), Enke et al. (2022a), Tabellini (2008a)), it may also be a value of the people as a people—a collective meaning. As a consequence, individuals may *become* universalists through the internalization of the collective meaning. This paper suggests then a theoretical foundation and first evidence that universal morality is a mechanism through which distant political history—tracing back to the founding of modern states—shapes the functioning of current institutions. However, as pointed out, the mechanism is universal morality as a social purpose or collective meaning rather than as an individual value (Tabellini (2008b)). This distinction has important implications for the evolution of individual values. Specifically, values may not be slow-moving since they are shaped by the collective meaning. As argued by Bensel (2022) and Castoriadis (1987), while the state or elite rulers cannot impose a collective meaning, they can craft a new one that may be collectively accepted, potentially leading to rapid and disruptive shifts in collective meanings, and hence in individual values, as was illustrated by Nazi Germany. This paper also suggests how Acemoglu and Robinson (2022)’s ‘Shackled Leviathan’ may have emerged in Western societies. The state’s normative motivation necessarily implies

---

<sup>5</sup>Evidence for preferences becoming generalized reason for behavior could be found in Athias and Macina (2022), who show that ancestors’ exposure to the slave trade impacts descendants’ contemporary demand for vaccination.

<sup>6</sup>In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith writes: “Man [...] ought to regard himself, not as something separated and detached, but as a citizen of the world, a member of the vast commonwealth of nature. To the interest of this great community, he ought at all times to be willing that his own little interest should be sacrificed.” (Smith (1790), p. 123).

providing it with tutelary powers to fulfill the collective meaning. Alternatively stated, state legitimacy and capacity stems from its normative motivation. However, this paper shows that the collective meaning–universal morality–generates universalist individuals who engage more in the public realm, thereby constraining the state. Overall, this paper participates in rebooting welfare economics (Atkinson (2001), Coyle et al. (2023)) as it unveils the normative motivation underpinning state’s formation in WEIRD societies.

My contribution can also be situated relative to the literature on public organizations and bureaucracy. This paper departs from the literature on nonprofit organizations, which equates private nonprofit and public organizations as mission-oriented organizations due to their common non-profit characteristic (Rose-Ackerman (1996), Francois (2003), Besley and Ghatak (2005)). Instead, this paper highlights that public organizations have a normative motivation that distinguish them from nonprofit organizations. Specifically, the foundational meaning of the public sector derives from the state’s normative motivation, the collective meaning. As a consequence, the legitimacy of public employees rests on embodying the state’s normative motivation, that is, they have to align their morality with the collective meaning. This paper shows that public employees indeed not only hold but also actively transmit the collective meaning. Consequently, public bureaucrats are neither alienated nor blindly obedient individuals (Arendt (1963), Heldring (2020)); rather, they embody societal values. This has important implications for bureaucratic effectiveness (see Besley et al. (2022) for a review): efficiency gains may be generated if public employees are motivated by the collective meaning (see Athias and Wicht (2024) for first empirical evidence). This implies that incentives in the public sector should be combined with moral messages centred on the collective meaning–universalism–exploiting complementarities between the two (Kranton (2019)). Furthermore, this paper strengthens the importance of Weberian bureaucracy, protected from political interference, to ensure the alignment or fit between the state’s normative motivation and state’s functionality. Overall, my work unveils potential effects of market versus public institutions on cultural evolution (Bisin and Verdier (2001)), which may explain different equilibria across WEIRD countries with different incidence of the public sector.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 contains details on the data and the context. Section 3 discusses the empirical strategy and reports my baseline estimation results as well as heterogeneity analysis. In Section 4, I examine specific mechanisms and test whether working for the state induces a change in workers’ state universalism through the internalization of the state’s normative motivation. Section 5 discusses the factors that contributed to the adoption of universalism as a collective meaning. Section 6 concludes.

## 2 Data and Context

The data used in this paper come from the Swiss Household Panel Surveys (SHPS), a unique longitudinal survey interviewing all household members of a random sample of around 5000 households, covering more than 12,000 individuals, in Switzerland since 1999. The SHPS collects information on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of respondents and interviews individuals on a wide range of topics. In this paper, I use the individual-level panel data from SHP I (1999) to SHP V (2003), the only waves with all the necessary information. I select Swiss individuals with Swiss as a first nationality (as the question used to elicit individuals’ state universalism involves a tradeoff regarding Swiss state’s resource allocation between Swiss citizens and foreigners) aged 20-54 (to

focus on voluntary job-to-job mobility (Groot and Verberne (1997)) who are employed in the public or private sector (excluding the self-employed). My final sample contains 3777 individuals (9849 person observations).

## 2.1 State universalism and other state preferences

The surveys include a precise measure of individual’s preference for state universalism through the following question: “Are you in favour of Switzerland offering foreigners the same opportunities as those offered to Swiss citizens, or in favour of Switzerland offering Swiss citizens better opportunities?”. For Swiss respondents, this question presents a clear choice between a state that treats in-group members (Swiss citizens) and socially distant people (foreigners) equally, and a state that favors in-group members. This question hence explicitly elicits their preference for state universalism, as defined in Athias and Ventelou (2024).

In my sample, 32% of the individuals are not state universalists. This share is rather stable over time even though it has declined after the 2007-2008 financial crisis up to 2014 (see Figure 2 in Appendix A). Figure 5 in Appendix A displays ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates from regressions of the preference for state universalism on a set of covariates. I find that the college educated, the left-wingers, the urban and higher income earners are more likely to hold the preference for state universalism whereas it is the opposite for the religious and individuals with a higher number of kids. These results are consistent with Enke et al. (2022a) and Enke et al. (2022b). Table 1 shows a clear distinction in the prevalence of state universalism between the public and private sector. In the whole sample, 76% of people working for the state exhibit the preference for state universalism, compared to 66% in the private sector. The difference reflects a general public sector effect since the share of individuals holding this preference within HES industries and within non-HES industries varies significantly and similarly between the public and private sectors. Figure 3 in Appendix A shows that the differences remain relatively constant over time.

Table 1: State universalism value, by sector

State universalism value	N	Public sector		Private sector		(3) Difference
		(1) Mean	Within s.d.	(2) Mean	Within s.d.	
all industries	8,672	0.759 (0.427)	0.19	0.664 (0.473)	0.23	0.096*** (0.010)
within HES	1,917	0.825 (0.380)	0.17	0.772 (0.420)	0.20	0.053*** (0.019)
within non-HES	5,436	0.696 (0.460)	0.21	0.649 (0.477)	0.23	0.046*** (0.016)

Note: HES refers to health, education and social care. Non-HES refers to all other industries. Column (3) presents the difference in the mean value of state universalism between the public and private sectors. Columns (1) and (2) standard deviation in parentheses. Columns (3) robust standard errors in parentheses. \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

The SHPS data also include information on respondents’ other state preferences, such as their opinion on social expenditures and taxation of high incomes (whether they favor a decrease, maintaining the status quo, or an increase). Additionally, the data capture views on defense (whether respondents support Switzerland having a strong army), political



ideology (on a scale from 0, meaning “left”, to 10, meaning “right”), as well as respondents’ reported levels of trust in the federal government and satisfaction with democracy (both measured on a scale from 0 to 10). The correlation matrix for all state preferences is presented in Table 6 in Appendix B).

## 2.2 Occupational choice

I define individuals’ institutional sector on the basis of the following question: “Are you employed by a private company or a state organization?”. I construct then the binary variable *State* which equals to 1 when the individual works in a state organization and 0 if she works in the private sector. Furthermore, respondents are also prompted with a list of options within state organizations: International organization, Confederation/Swiss Railways/Post office, Canton, Commune. As international organizations are not state organizations but non-governmental organizations, I removed these observations (there are only 112 of the respondents who answered international organization). For meaningful state-type controls, I exclude from my sample workers at the municipal level. State-type controls at the cantonal level are inferred using SPHS information on respondents’ commune of residence, knowing that commuting is mostly local in Switzerland<sup>7</sup>.

The data also include information about the occupational choice at the service level. Specifically, I use respondents’ choice in the nomenclature of economic activities to distinguish workers in public services, defined as health, education and social care in the literature, from the others. In my data, of the 2’369 workers outside public service industries, 18% of them work for the state.

As I adopt a within-individual estimation strategy to identify the effect of working for the state on state universalism, the source of identification is the switchers in the sample, that is, individuals who either switch out of the public sector to the private sector or the other way. Of the 2’369 workers outside public service industries, 8,6% worked some of the time in the private sector and some of the time in the public sector (in my data, I do not observe any individual to switch more than once), and transitions occur equally in both directions. In the next section, I provide evidence on who the switchers are.

## 2.3 Who are the switchers?

### 2.3.1 Addressing the dynamic self-selection concern

The causal identification challenge lies in the potential dynamic self-selection into occupation. If workers choose the time spent in an institutional sector as a function of their own dynamics in preferences, then workers who have a positive shock to their preference for state universalism may switch to the public sector. However, the existing theoretical (see Francois (2003)) and empirical (see Gregg et al. (2011)) literature formalizes and finds that agents who have a civic-minded interest in service self-select into caring services (defined as health, education and social care; HES hereafter), which are delivered

---

<sup>7</sup>Using data from the Federal Statistical Office, the average commuting distance in 2000 was 12,9 km. Among commuters, 36,3% worked within the commune of residence, 49% in different communes but within the canton of residence, and 14,7% outside the canton of residence. This is consistent with Eugster and Parchet (2019)’s estimation of the cumulative frequency of commuting distances for all employed Swiss individuals in the three bilingual cantons, using individual data from the 2000 Federal Population Census. They find that more than 80% of all individuals reside within 20 kilometres of their workplace. Furthermore, some public-service missions impose an obligation of residence in the canton or even in the municipality (this was the case for teachers for example).

by both the public and private sectors but more likely by the public sector. This implies that self-selection based on the preference for state universalism is at the service-type level rather than at the public sector level.

To test this selection story, I investigate pre-trends in state universalism of switchers, comparing switchers' initial state universalism (before they switch) with the one of stayers in the same sector. I consider four binary indicators representing the public and private non-HES sectors and the public and private HES sectors and estimate the following models:

$$StateUNIV_{it}^{Private} = \phi \times Switch_i^{Public} + X'_{st}\delta + Z'_{it}\gamma + u_{it} \quad (1)$$

$$StateUNIV_{it}^{PrivateNonHES} = \phi \times Switch_i^{PublicHES} + X'_{st}\delta + Z'_{it}\gamma + u_{it} \quad (2)$$

$$StateUNIV_{it}^{PrivateHES} = \phi \times Switch_i^{PublicNonHES} + X'_{st}\delta + Z'_{it}\gamma + u_{it} \quad (3)$$

$$StateUNIV_{it}^{PrivateHES} = \phi \times Switch_i^{PublicHES} + X'_{st}\delta + Z'_{it}\gamma + u_{it} \quad (4)$$

$$StateUNIV_{it}^{PrivateNonHES} = \phi \times Switch_i^{PublicNonHES} + X'_{st}\delta + Z'_{it}\gamma + u_{it} \quad (5)$$

where the variable  $StateUNIV_{it}^{Private}$  is equal to 1 if the individual is state universalist and 0 otherwise when he works in the private sector (or in other types of private sector).  $Switch_i^{Public}$  is an indicator variable equal to one if the individual switches into the public sector (or into other types of public sector) at any point in the future.  $PublicHES$  stands for occupations in health, education and social care services in the public sector and  $PublicNonHES$  all other occupations in the public sector (and similarly for the  $PrivateHES$  and  $PrivateNonHES$  variables in the private sector).  $X_{st}$  is a vector of state-type (federal- and cantonal bureaucracies) specific time dummies to account for time-varying confounders that operate at the state-type level (e.g. political ideology or economic distress driving the odds of working in the public sector and individual preferences). I also include a set of control variables for individual characteristics (gender, number of children, age, religion, culture, college education, marital status, health status, urban) in  $Z_{it}$ . Standard errors are clustered at the individual level. The coefficient on the switching indicator therefore captures systematic differences in state universalism between those who stay in the private sector and those who switch out into the public sector at some future point. In addition, to address the potential dynamic selection of workers into the private sector based on their preference for state universalism, I also consider switches in the other way.

Figure 6 in Appendix A summarizes regression coefficients of the switching indicators in all equations. They confirm that self-selection based on state universalism is at the service-type level rather than at the institutional sector level. Specifically, I find no evidence of workers' selection into the public (or private) sector based on their preference for state universalism within non-HES occupations.

### 2.3.2 Changing selection with switchers

I also examine changing selection in the public sector with switchers. Results are presented in Table 7 in Appendix B. Compared to workers who initially chose the public non-HES sector, those switching from the private non-HES sector to the public non-HES sector are

significantly younger, though by less than two years on average, with a mean age of 39. While experiences during the so-called “formative years”, including early adulthood, can shape later-life preferences and views (Roth and Wohlfart (2018), Aneja et al. (2024)), switchers are evidently beyond this stage.

Switchers are also significantly less likely to be college educated. Interestingly, Ashraf et al. (2020) find a trade-off in sorting between mission and financial motivation for low-level talent. In Switzerland, there is a notable public sector wage premium for similar jobs with equivalent qualifications and hierarchical status. However, while on average, the public sector wage premium is 12%, it can reach up to 29% at the lower end of the pay scale (Portmann et al. (2024)). Therefore, it is highly likely that the switching bureaucrats in my sample are driven by financial motives.

### 3 Working for the state and state universalism

#### 3.1 Empirical strategy

To study the impact of working for the state on the dynamics of individuals’ preference for state universalism, I estimate the following fixed effects regression where the state effect is identified only from individuals who change institutional sector:

$$StateUNIV_{it} = \beta \times State_{it} + X'_{st}\delta + \alpha_i + \epsilon_{it}. \quad (6)$$

The unit of observation is an individual ( $i$ )  $\times$  year ( $t$ ) cell, where  $\alpha_i$  is a constant individual specific effect, the variable  $State$  is equal to 1 if the individual works for the state (at the cantonal or federal levels) and 0 if the individual works in the private (both for-profit and nonprofit) sector,  $X_{st}$  is a vector of state-type (federal- and cantonal bureaucracies) specific time dummies to account for time-varying confounders that operate at the state-type level. The variable  $StateUNIV$  is equal to 1 if the individual is state universalist and 0 otherwise. Standard errors are clustered at the individual level.

#### 3.2 Working for the state induces a within-individual shift in state universalism only

The results of my fixed effects regression are reported in Table 2. I estimate a fixed effects linear probability model for ease of interpretation, but I have confirmed the main results using a fixed effects logit model.

In Column (1), the state effect is identified from workers—outside public service industries—who switch institutional sectors, from the private to the public sector. The estimated coefficient for the state,  $\beta$ , is positive and statistically significant. A same person is 10 percentage points (more than 15%) more likely to hold the preference for state universalism when working for the state than in the private sector. Column (2) reports estimates considering switches from the public to the private sector. The results show that workers do not lose their preference for state universalism when they switch to the private sector.

Columns (3-8) run the fixed effects regression on other state preferences. I find no evidence that working for the state affects bureaucrats’ preferences regarding welfare, redistribution, defense, political ideology or trust in federal government. Instead, it leads bureaucrats to develop a more critical view of the state of democracy.

Table 2: Working for the state turns individuals into state universalists

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	State UNIV	State UNIV	Welfare	Redistri.	Defense	Political ideology	Trust in fed. gov.	Sat. with democracy
State	0.0966** (0.0482)		-0.0983 (0.104)	0.0292 (0.122)	-0.0533 (0.113)	-0.0868 (0.207)	-0.321 (0.265)	-0.407* (0.229)
Private sector		-0.0732 (0.0610)						
Observations	4,531	1,084	4,980	5,036	5,031	4,451	5,091	5,046
Number of individuals	1,960	441	2,030	2,040	2,036	1,898	2,052	2,039

Notes: Columns (1) and (3-8) restrict the sample to switches from the private to the public sector outside public service industries, while Column 2 restricts the sample to switches from the public to the private sector outside public service industries. All regressions control for individual fixed effects and include federal- and state-specific time dummies. Robust standard errors are clustered at the individual level. \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Figure 7 in Appendix A demonstrates that my results are not driven by any particular state-type (federal bureaucracy or any cantonal bureaucracy).

Overall, the findings are not consistent with a state effect attributable to job characteristics.

### 3.3 Heterogeneity

In Table 3, I examine heterogeneity in effect size. In Column (1), I ask whether the observed state effect varies with individual political ideology. Enke et al. (2022a) conceptualize the link between moral universalism and political ideology, showing that it ultimately defines what it means to be “left” by contrast to “right” in the Western world in an almost identical way across countries. In addition, Athias and Ventelou (2024) find that right-wingers’ universalism does not vary with the vehicle, they are also significantly less universalists with the state vehicle. Thus, I expect a stronger treatment effect for right-wing-oriented bureaucrats through a catch-up effect. I transform the ideological variable ranging from 0 to 10 into a categorical variable with three categories: left (values 0 to 3), center (values 4 to 6), and right (values 7 to 10). I find that the state effect is indeed primarily concentrated among right-wing individuals.

In Column (2), I investigate the cultural heterogeneity of the effect. Eugster and Parchet (2019), using federal referendum outcomes at the municipality level from 1981 to 2011, find that voters in French-speaking municipalities consistently show significantly stronger support for policies recommended by left-of-center parties, with a discrete jump of approximately 8 percentage points at the language border. Thus, I expect a reduced effect for French-speaking Swiss bureaucrats (Figure 8 indicates no different patterns of selection between French-speaking and German-speaking Swiss individuals). However, the point estimate actually doubles for them (around 20 p.p.). This suggests that the intensity of the treatment is stronger on the French-speaking side. Notably, French-speaking Swiss individuals are more exposed to French culture and the associated normative motivation of the state. Rousseau’s political philosophy was the dominant intellectual force when the French Revolution began (Bensel (2022)). In his conception of the General Will<sup>8</sup>, the

<sup>8</sup>Bensel (2022), p. 208, writes: “Depicting modern society as both corrupt and depraved, Rousseau thought that the only way to recover innocence was to empower the General Will of the people, because, when properly elicited, the General Will unfailingly reflected the universal good of society. Under the

state metaphorically embodies the nation’s interests “without the mediation of intervening institutions” (Bensel (2022), p. 208), thereby being bound up with a stronger normative motivation than under any other Enlightenment principle. In particular, the tutelary powers given to the French state to provide universal goods is explicitly written in the 9th paragraph of the preamble to the Constitution of October 27, 1946, which still has constitutional validity today: “All property and all enterprises that have or that may acquire the character of a public service or de facto monopoly shall become the property of society”. This association between the state and universal goods explains why they are referred to as public services in France, as they are required to be owned by the public sector. By contrast, in order to distinguish between universal goods and the public sector, the European Union, under the influence of Germany, does not mention the term ‘public services’ but ‘services of general interest’.

Overall, these results suggest that the state effect is a “state morality” effect, whereby public employees internalize the state’s normative motivation through workplace socialization and become advocates for state universalism. However, an alternative explanation is also possible. Public employees may adopt—but not internalize—the preference for state universalism due to social incentives such as peer pressure (Ashraf and Bandiera (2018)). Specifically, if the worker’s utility function is augmented by a culture-dependent parameter that accounts for colleagues’ utility, public employees may adopt the preference for state universalism as it maximizes their expected utility.

Table 3: Heterogeneity of the state effect, by worker ideology and culture

	(1) State UNIV	(2) State UNIV
State	-0.0390 (0.0573)	0.0653 (0.0547)
State x Center	0.0841 (0.0752)	
State x Right	0.323*** (0.0901)	
State x French-Swiss		0.127** (0.0635)
Observations	3,947	4,531
Number of individuals	1,801	1,960

Notes: The sample includes switches only from private non-HES to public non-HES sector. All regressions control for individual fixed effects, and include federal- and state-specific time dummies. Column (1) adds the categorical variable ideology as control. Robust standard errors are clustered at the individual level. \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

## 4 Testing for Channels of Causality

In this section, to distinguish between the extrinsic and intrinsic channels of causality, I move beyond the workplace setting and conduct two exercises.

social contract thus formed: “Each of us puts his goods, his person, his life, and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and we as a body accept each member as a part indivisible from the whole.” (*Emile*)”.

## 4.1 Transmission of state universalism by public bureaucrats in society

In the first exercise, I build upon Lipsky (1980) who examines the role of street-level bureaucrats—frontline public employees such as teachers, police officers, social workers, judges, health workers, and many other public employees who grant access to government programs and provide services within them—as mediators between citizens and the state. He argues that their daily decisions and actions significantly shape how citizens experience public policies, thereby imparting a citizenship dimension to their work<sup>9</sup>. Thus, if public bureaucrats’ preference for state universalism is internalized, I should observe that they diffuse the state’s normative dimension within society through their role as street-level bureaucrats. This effect should be most pronounced among non-workers (young people, the unemployed, and retirees), who interact with them most frequently.

As first evidence, I compare how the share of individuals exhibiting the preference for state universalism evolves over time for three distinct groups: public sector workers, private sector workers, and non workers. The goal is to investigate whether non workers share a parallel trend with the one of public sector workers. I use the same sample as before and compute the yearly average of the variable *StateUNIV* for the various groups. The time trends are displayed in Figure 4 in Appendix A. I observe that the share of state universalists is overall lower in the non-workers group. This is explained by the fact that most individuals in this group highly rely on state payments, for instance for their pension and unemployment insurance. Second, in terms of trend, Figure 4 unveils clear parallel trends between non-worker and public employee groups.

To provide micro-level evidence for the horizontal transmission of the preference for state universalism by public employees to non-workers, I leverage time-varying variation at the state (cantonal) level in the share of public employees advocating for state universalism and explore whether an increased share of state universalists public bureaucrats increases the likelihood that non-workers become in favor of state universalism, controlling for time-varying state (cantonal) political ideology as well as for other time-varying horizontal vector of value transmission through the share of state universalists among private sector employees. Therefore, I estimate the following fixed effects regression:

$$StateUNIV_{ict} = \beta \times StateUNIV_{ct}^{PubS} + \gamma \times StateUNIV_{ct}^{PrivS} + \psi \times Left_{ct} + \delta_t + \lambda_c + \alpha_i + \epsilon_{ict} \quad (7)$$

where  $StateUNIV_{ct}^{PubS}$  is the variable of interest and corresponds to the yearly average at the state level of the variable *StateUNIV* for all individuals working in the public sector in my data. To control for other horizontal channels (e.g. neighbours, friends), I include  $StateUNIV_{ct}^{PrivS}$ , computed in the same way as the previous variable but considering all workers in the private sector. I also control for time-varying state ideology with the variable  $Left_{ct}$ . This variable is an indicator variable equal to 1 if the state is left-wing

---

<sup>9</sup>“Unlike lower-level workers in most organizations, street-level bureaucrats have considerable discretion in determining the nature, amount, and quality of benefits and sanctions provided by their agencies. Policemen decide who to arrest and whose behavior to overlook. Judges decide who shall receive a suspended sentence and who shall receive maximum punishment. Teachers decide who will be suspended and who will remain in school, and they make subtle determinations of who is teachable. Perhaps the most highly refined example of street-level bureaucratic discretion comes from the field of corrections. Prison guards conventionally file injurious reports on inmates whom they judge to be guilty of “silent insolence.” Clearly what does or does not constitute a dirty look is a matter of some subjectivity.” Lipsky (1980), p.13.

and 0 otherwise. This variable is a computation using data from Walter and Emmenegger (2019) indicating the partisan composition of cantonal governments (the number of seats by ideological party) by year. Ideological parties are given a value according to where they are situated on the political spectrum from left (taking the value 1) to far-right (taking the value 4). A state is then considered left-wing if its weighted average is below the average of all states.  $\alpha_i$  is constant individual specific effect,  $\delta_t$  time fixed effects, and  $\lambda_c$  canton fixed effects.

I provide in Table 4 the related results. I find a positive and significant impact of the cantonal share of public employees who hold the preference for state universalism on the likelihood that non-workers living in the corresponding state adopt this preference, even when controlling for other horizontal channels of value transmission. The effect is substantial: a 1% increase in the share of public employees advocating for state universalism increases the likelihood that non-workers hold this preference by almost 25% (on average, 62% of non-workers hold the CGV). Among non-workers, I find that the transmission effect is stronger for retired individuals. Overall, these results corroborate the hypothesis that public employees who exhibit the preference for state universalism have internalized it and, as a result, play an important role in transmitting the state’s normative motivation in society through their role as street-level bureaucrats.

Table 4: Public bureaucrats transmit the state’s normative motivation in society

	Non Workers StateUNIV		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
PubStateUNIV	0.169** (0.0721)	0.164** (0.0724)	0.149** (0.0723)
Left-wing		0.0157 (0.0247)	0.0116 (0.0248)
PrivStateUNIV			0.206*** (0.0754)
Observations	12,110	12,110	12,109
Number of individuals	5,155	5,155	5,154

Notes: All regressions control for individual fixed effects and include state and time dummies. Non workers correspond to young people aged over 19, the unemployed and retirees. *PubStateUNIV* corresponds to the yearly share of workers in the public sector holding *StateUNIV* at the state-level. *PrivStateUNIV<sub>ct</sub>* corresponds to the yearly share of workers in the private sector holding *StateUNIV* at the state-level. Left-wing is an indicator variable equal to 1 if the state is left-wing and 0 otherwise. This variable is a computation using data from Walter and Emmenegger (2019) indicating the partisan composition of cantonal governments (the number of seats by ideological party) by year. Ideological parties are given a value according to where they are situated on the political spectrum from left (taking the value 1) to far-right (taking the value 4). A state is then considered left-wing if its weighted average is below the average of all states. Robust standard errors are clustered at the individual level. \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

## 4.2 Consequences of a shift in state universalism on behavior

My second strategy examines behavioral outcomes, as internalized—rather than merely acquired—preferences may become generalized reason for behavior and hence explain behaviors in novel situations. Specifically, I expect that individuals who internalize the state’s normative motivation—universal morality as a collective meaning—are more likely to broaden their sense of citizenship, identifying with a broader, more inclusive community.

Notably, the SHPS provides information on respondents’ views regarding Switzerland’s potential accession to the European Union, membership in environmental organizations, global versus local donations, and participation in federal elections. These variables capture individuals’ propensity to recognize geographically or temporally distant people as part of their societal sphere.

Therefore, I estimate the following model:

$$outcome_{it} = \beta \times StateUNIV_{it} + X'_{ct}\delta + \alpha_i + \epsilon_{it}. \quad (8)$$

The unit of observation is an individual ( $i$ )  $\times$  year ( $t$ ) cell, where  $\alpha_i$  is a constant individual specific effect,  $X_{ct}$  is a vector of canton-specific time dummies. The variable  $StateUNIV$  is equal to 1 if the individual exhibits the preference for state universalism and 0 otherwise. The variable  $outcome$  varies across specifications depending on the individual-level outcome I am investigating.

Results are reported in Table 5. I find evidence that a shift in individual’s state universalism is associated with a broader and more active sense of citizenship. Thus, the results point to the internalization of the state’s normative motivation–universal morality as a collective meaning–taking on the status of general motive or constraint on behavior.

Table 5: State Universalism is associated with a broader sense of citizenship

	(1) Switzerland join EU	(2) Member env. org.	(3) Part. federal polls	(4) Donate globally	(5) Donate locally
State UNIV	0.0274*** (0.0100)	0.0187** (0.00809)	0.133** (0.0519)	0.0372*** (0.0117)	-0.0286 (0.0176)
Observations	13,830	15,382	15,306	15,389	10,121
Number of individuals	4,830	5,030	5,001	5,031	4,531

Notes: All regressions control for individual fixed effects and include state-specific time dummies. *Join EU* is a dummy that is 1 if the individual is in favor of Switzerland joining the European Union, and 0 otherwise. *Member env. org.* is a dummy that is 1 if the individual is member of an environmental organization, and 0 otherwise. *Part. federal polls* is a variable ranging from 0 to 10 measuring participation over 10 federal polls. *Donate globally* and *Donate locally* are dummy variables that are 1 if the individual is respectively member of a global or a local charitable organization, and 0 otherwise. Robust standard errors are clustered at the individual level. \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Taken together, my results are consistent with a culture-varying “state morality” effect, whereby public bureaucrats, as street-level bureaucrats, transmit state universalism beyond the workplace into broader society, and individuals who become state universalists adopt behaviors aligned with a broader and more active sense of citizenship.

## 5 Discussion: Why universalism as a collective meaning?

Any democracy must contend with Arrow (1951)’s impossibility theorem, which highlights the challenges of aggregating individual preferences into a coherent social choice. Consequently, democracies must “justify the state’s right to rule in accordance with a social purpose” (see the opening quote from Bensel). However, the nature of this social purpose varies significantly across societies. As Bensel (2022, p. xiv) mentions, it may range



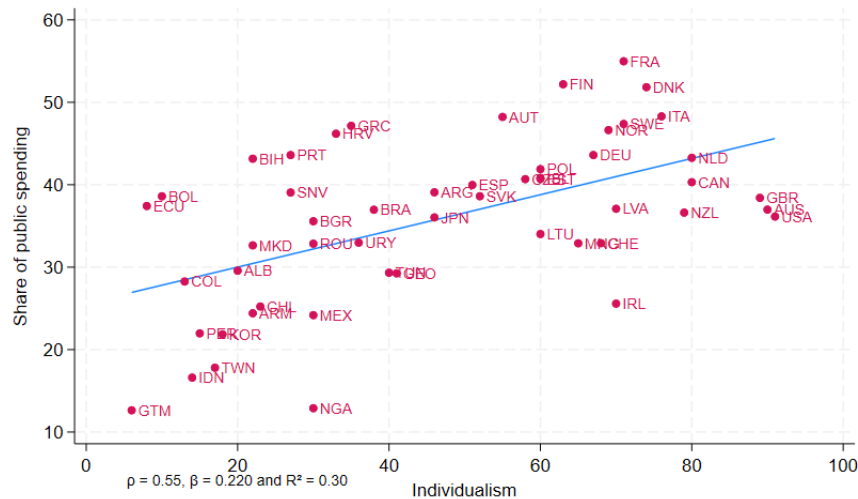
from “their racial superiority within the community of nations, their glorification of a deity through religious discipline, their responsibility for the construction of a proletarian utopia, or the creation and preservation of democratic rights and principles.”

Castoriadis (1987) emphasizes that a key determinant of collective meanings is a society’s degree of autonomy. In an autonomous society, individuals recognize themselves as the source of their collective meanings and assume responsibility for continuously questioning and reshaping them. Autonomy, in this sense, is the explicit self-institution of society. By contrast, in a heteronomous society, collective meanings are accepted as given and perceived as imposed by external forces—whether tradition, divine will, supernatural authority, economic determinism, or immutable natural laws.

The Western Enlightenment era fostered more autonomous societies by developing secular philosophies rooted in rationalism and individualism, ultimately leading to the revocation of the divine right of kings. This increasing autonomy enabled societies to deliberate over fundamental societal questions, such as the desired level of social justice or cohesion—that is, the definition and extent of the common good. Universalism was central to Enlightenment thought, leading these societies to self-institute universal common good as a guiding collective meaning.

From a comparative perspective, even when a self-instituted collective meaning results in a low, exclusionary level of common good, autonomous societies, by definition, justify the state’s right to rule based on considerations of the common good—rather than appeals to divine authority, economic determinism, or other external forces. This distinction offers insight into an apparent paradox: despite their emphasis on individualism, more autonomous (individualistic) democratic societies tend to assign a greater role to the state due to its normative motivation—pursuing the common good (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Individualism and state size in democratic countries



Note: N = 52. The variable Individualism is based on Hofstede’s classification, which characterizes a society’s cultural orientation toward the individual versus the collective. In individualistic societies, personal achievement, autonomy, and individual initiative are highly valued, while relationships (family, friendships, professional) tend to be less interdependent, and individuals are expected to take care of themselves. The concept of privacy is generally very important. The individualism score ranges from 0 (extremely collectivist) to 100 (extremely individualistic) and is based on data from 2015 to 2020, depending on the country. Data on public spending as a percentage of GDP come from the IMF database (2017 or 2018, depending on the country). A country is classified as democratic if the Regimes of the World (RoW) variable from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) database (2018) categorizes it as an Electoral democracy or Liberal democracy.

## 6 Conclusion

Technically, the general interest cannot be uniquely determined through the aggregation of individual preferences. Thus, state formation in democratic societies necessarily involves a normative dimension, a collective meaning. A central question, then, is how this collective meaning is defined. In this paper, I turn to WEIRD societies to explore universalism as a collective meaning.

To this end, I use data from Switzerland, where workers frequently transition from the private to the public sector due to an open civil service, mostly driven by financial motives, particularly for low-level workers. To uncover the state’s normative motivation, I investigate the consequences of working for the state on bureaucrats’ preference for state universalism. I focus on bureaucrats outside public service industries, whose jobs are not directly linked to universalism value. Strikingly, I find that working for the state does not affect bureaucrats’ preferences regarding welfare, redistribution, defense, political ideology or public trust, but substantially increases their likelihood of advocating for state universalism. Investigating the cultural heterogeneity of the effect, I find that its intensity varies with the social contract theory that shaped the origin of the modern state.

I provide evidence to suggest that the internalization of the state’s normative motivation is the driver behind my finding. As street-level bureaucrats, public bureaucrats influence how citizens perceive their state. I find that state universalist public bureaucrats turn individuals who interact with them into advocates for state universalism. This, combined with the previous results, highlights the importance of horizontal socialization in shaping the preference for state universalism, particularly through interactions with public bureaucrats. Furthermore, individuals who adopt the preference for state universalism exhibit behaviors aligned with a broader sense of citizenship. My findings suggest that successful public-sector reforms must align with the state’s normative motivation.

## References

- Acemoglu, Daron, Jacob Moscona, and James A. Robinson (2016) “State Capacity and American Technology: Evidence from the Nineteenth Century,” *American Economic Review*, 106 (5), 61–67, 10.1257/aer.p20161071.
- Acemoglu, Daron and James A. Robinson (2022) “Non-Modernization: Power–Culture Trajectories and the Dynamics of Political Institutions,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 25 (1), 323–339, 10.1146/annurev-polisci-051120-103913.
- (2025) “Culture, Institutions, and Social Equilibria: A Framework,” *Journal of Economic Literature*, Forthcoming.
- Allen, Robert C., Mattia C. Bertazzini, and Leander Heldring (2023) “The Economic Origins of Government,” *American Economic Review*, 113 (10), 2507–45, 10.1257/aer.20201919.
- Aneja, Abhay, Farina Silvia, and Xu Guo (2024) “Beyond the War: Public Service and the Transmission of Gender Norms,” working paper.
- Arendt, Hannah (1963) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York: The Viking Press.

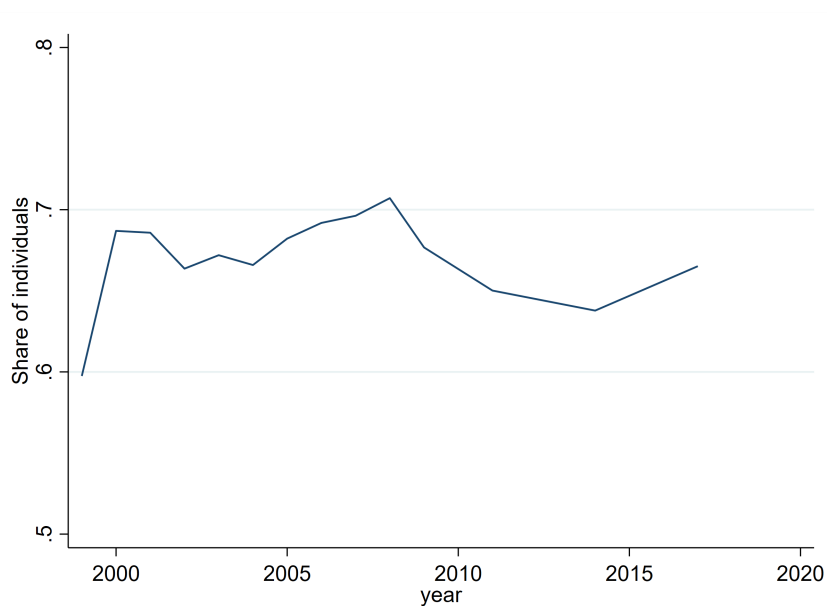
- Arrow, K. (1951) *Social Choice and Individual Values*: Cowles Foundation.
- Ashraf, Nava and Oriana Bandiera (2018) “Social Incentives in Organizations,” *Annual Review of Economics*, 10 (1), 439–463, [10.1146/annurev-economics-063016-104324](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-063016-104324).
- Ashraf, Nava, Oriana Bandiera, and Alexia Delfino (2020) “The Distinctive Values of Bankers,” *AEA Papers and Proceedings*, 110, 167–71, [10.1257/pandp.20201065](https://doi.org/10.1257/pandp.20201065).
- Athias, Laure and Moudo Macina (2022) “Demand for vaccination in Sub-Saharan Africa: The vertical legacy of the slave trade,” *Social Science and Medicine*, 293, 114640, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114640>.
- Athias, Laure and Bruno Ventelou (2024) “From Direct to State Universalism: A Comment on Enke, Rodriguez-Padilla, and Zimmermann (2022),” working paper.
- Athias, Laure and Pascal Wicht (2024) “Make or Buy for Public Services: Culture Matters for Efficiency Considerations,” *Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance*, Forthcoming.
- Atkinson, Anthony B. (2001) “The Strange Disappearance of Welfare Economics,” *Kyklos*, 54 (2-3), 193–206, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6435.00148>.
- Audier, F. and M. Bacache-Beauvallet (2007) “Emploi dans la fonction publique et fonctions “d’intérêt public”: Que nous apprennent les comparaisons internationales ?” *Revue de l’OFCE*, 103, 323–350, [10.3917/reof.103.0323](https://doi.org/10.3917/reof.103.0323).
- Bensel, Richard Franklin (2022) *The Founding of Modern States*: Cambridge University Press, [doi.org/10.1017/9781009247245](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009247245).
- Besley, Timothy, Robin Burgess, Adnan Khan, and Guo Xu (2022) “Bureaucracy and Development,” *Annual Review of Economics*, 14 (Volume 14, 2022), 397–424, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080521-011950>.
- Besley, Timothy and Maitreesh Ghatak (2005) “Competition and Incentives with Motivated Agents,” *American Economic Review*, 95 (3), 616–636, [10.1257/0002828054201413](https://doi.org/10.1257/0002828054201413).
- Besley, Timothy and Torsten Persson (2011) *Pillars of Prosperity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, [doi:10.1515/9781400840526](https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400840526).
- Bisin, Alberto and Thierry Verdier (2001) “The economics of cultural transmission and the dynamics of preferences,” *Journal of Economic theory*, 97 (2), 298–319.
- Cappelen, Alexander W., Benjamin Enke, and Bertil Tungodden (2025) “Universalism: Global Evidence,” *American Economic Review*, 115 (1), 43–76, [10.1257/aer.20230038](https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20230038).
- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1987) *The Imaginary Institution of Society*: MIT Press.
- Coyle, Diane, Mark Fabian, Eric Beinhocker, Tim Besley, and Margaret Stevens (2023) “Is it time to reboot welfare economics? Overview,” *Fiscal Studies*, 44 (2), 109–121, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-5890.12334>.

- Dittmar, Jeremiah E and Ralf R Meisenzahl (2020) “Public Goods Institutions, Human Capital, and Growth: Evidence from German History,” *The Review of Economic Studies*, 87 (2), 959–996, [10.1093/restud/rdz002](https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdz002).
- Emery, Y., D. Giauque, and F. Rebmann (2014) “La lente mutation des élites administratives fédérales suisses,” *Revue Internationale des Sciences Administratives*, 80, 725–747, [10.3917/risa.804.0725](https://doi.org/10.3917/risa.804.0725).
- Enke, Benjamin (2024) “Moral Boundaries,” *Annual Review of Economics*, 16 (1), 133–157.
- Enke, Benjamin, Ricardo Rodriguez-Padilla, and Florian Zimmermann (2022a) “Moral Universalism and the Structure of Ideology,” *The Review of Economic Studies*, [10.1093/restud/rdac066](https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdac066).
- (2022b) “Moral Universalism: Measurement and Economic Relevance,” *Management Science*, 68 (5), 3175–3973, <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2021.4086>.
- Eugster, Beatrix and Raphaël Parchet (2019) “Culture and Taxes,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 127 (1), 296–337, [10.1086/700760](https://doi.org/10.1086/700760).
- Francois, Patrick (2003) “Not-for-Profit Provision of Public Services,” *The Economic Journal*, 113 (486), C53–C61.
- Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*, NY: Basic Books.
- Graeber, David and Marshall Sahlins (2018) *On Kings*, Chicago: Hau Books.
- Gregg, Paul, Paul Grout, Anita Ratcliffe, Sarah Smith, and Frank Windmeijer (2011) “How important is pro-social behaviour in the delivery of public services?” *Journal of Public Economics*, 95 (7), 758–766, <https://EconPapers.repec.org/RePEc:eee:pubeco:v:95:y:2011:i:7:p:758-766>.
- Groot, Wim and Maartje Verberne (1997) “Aging, Job Mobility, and Compensation,” *Oxford Economic Papers*, 49 (3), 380–403.
- Guido Schilling AG (2023) “Schilling report 2023: Transparency at the Top - The Management Boards of Switzerland’s Private and Public Sector,” Technical report.
- Heldring, Leander (2020) “The Origins of Violence in Rwanda,” *The Review of Economic Studies*, 88 (2), 730–763, [10.1093/restud/rdaa028](https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdaa028).
- Henrich, Joseph (2020) *The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*, New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux.
- Kranton, Rachel E. (2019) “The Devil Is in the Details: Implications of Samuel Bowles’s *The Moral Economy* for Economics and Policy Research,” *Journal of Economic Literature*, 57 (1), 147–160, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.20171463>.
- Lipsky, Michael (1980) *Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Mayshar, Joram, Omer Moav, and Luigi Pascali (2022) “The Origin of the State: Land Productivity or Appropriability?” *Journal of Political Economy*, 130 (4), 1091–1144, 10.1086/718372.
- Portmann, Marco, Frederik Blümel, and Christoph A. Schaltegger (2024) “Lohnprämie in den öffentlichen Verwaltungen: Neue Analyse 2024,” Policy Papers 18, IWP.
- Rose-Ackerman, Susan (1996) “Altruism, Nonprofits, and Economic Theory,” *Journal of Economic Literature*, 34 (2), 701–728.
- Roth, Christopher and Johannes Wohlfart (2018) “Experienced inequality and preferences for redistribution,” *Journal of Public Economics*, 167, 251–262, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2018.09.012>.
- Sahlins, Marshall (2022) *The New Science of the Enchanted Universe: An Anthropology of Most of Humanity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Schein, Edgar H. (1965) *Organizational Psychology*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Sen, A. (1970) *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*: Holden Day, San Francisco.
- Sánchez de la Sierra, Raúl (2020) “On the Origins of the State: Stationary Bandits and Taxation in Eastern Congo,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 128 (1), 32–74, 10.1086/703989.
- Smith, Adam (1790) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, sixth edition.
- Tabellini, Guido (2008a) “The Scope of Cooperation: Values and Incentives,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 123 (3), 905–950.
- (2008b) “Institutions and Culture,” *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 6 (2-3), 255–294, 10.1162/JEEA.2008.6.2-3.255.
- Van Maanen, John E. and Edgar H. Schein (1979) “Toward a theory of organizational socialization,” *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 1, 209–269.
- Walter, André and Patrick Emmenegger (2019) “The Partisan Composition of Cantonal Governments in Switzerland, 1848-2017. A New Data Set,” *Swiss Political Science Review*, 25 (1), 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12329>.
- William H. Sewell, Jr (2005) *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

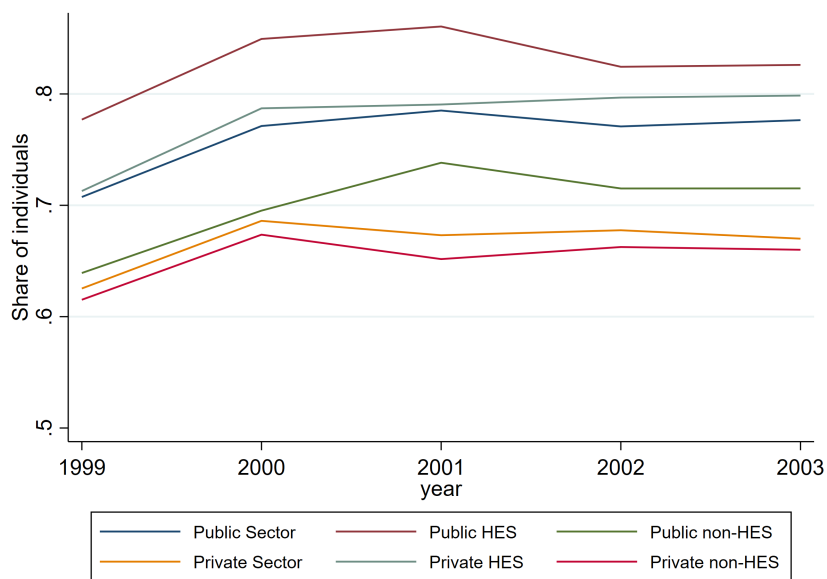
## A Appendix: Figures

Figure 2: Preference for state universalism over time



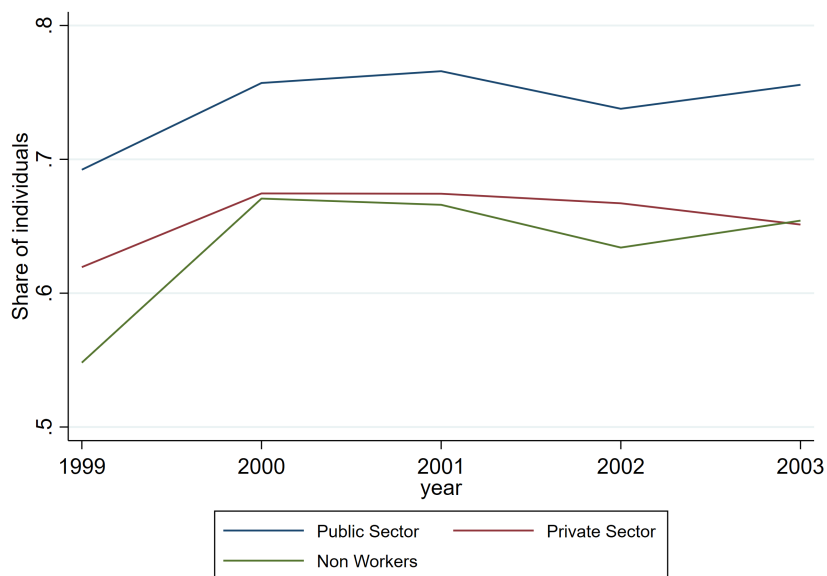
Note: The figure depicts the share of Swiss individuals (no age constraint) holding the preference for state universalism over the maximal period of time with data availability, corresponding to the yearly average of the variable *StateUNIV*.

Figure 3: Preference for state universalism over time and across sectors



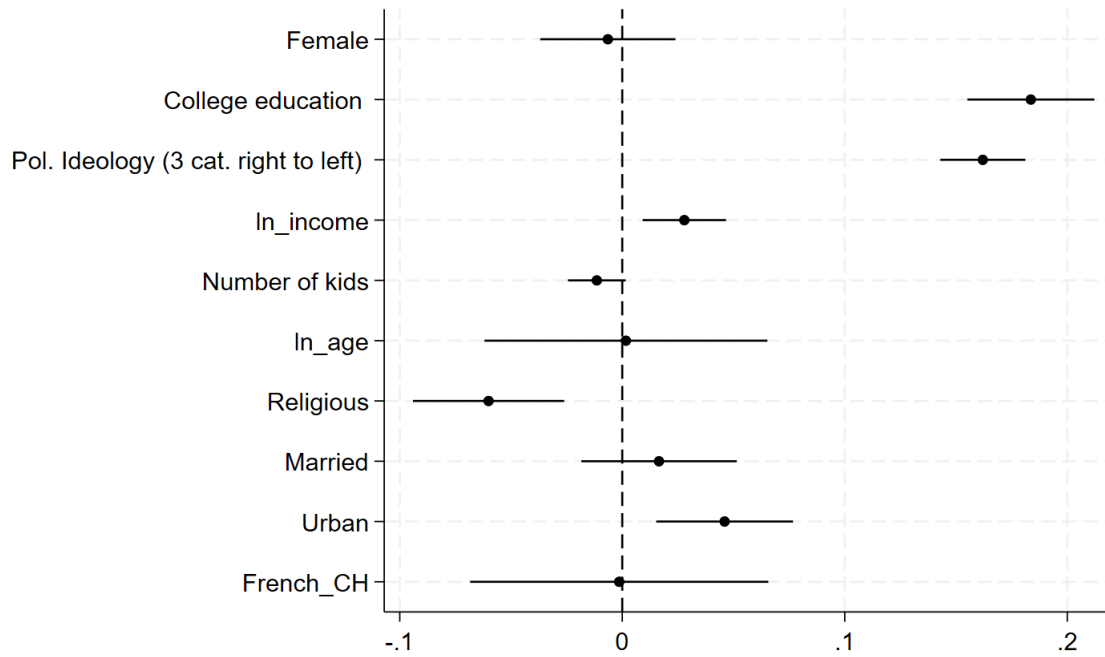
Note: The figure depicts the share of Swiss individuals in my sample holding the preference for state universalism over time and across sectors, corresponding to the yearly average of the variable *StateUNIV* at the sector level.

Figure 4: Yearly share of individuals with the preference for state universalism - by group



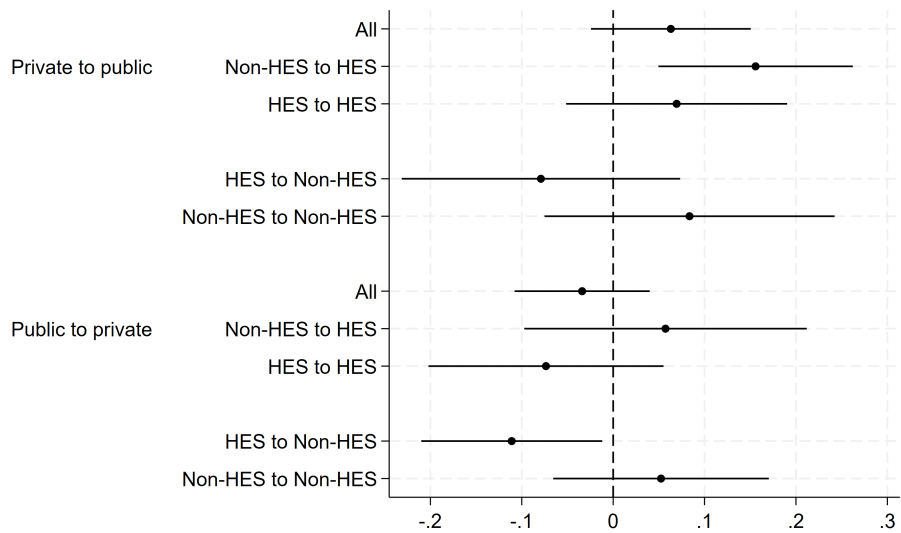
Note: The figure depicts the share of Swiss individuals holding the preference for state universalism over time across groups, corresponding to the yearly average of the variable *StateUNIV* for non workers group, public workers group, and private sector workers group.

Figure 5: Preference for state universalism correlates



Note: This figure presents OLS Estimates from regressions of the *StateUNIV* variable on all sociodemographic correlates, along with 95% confidence intervals.

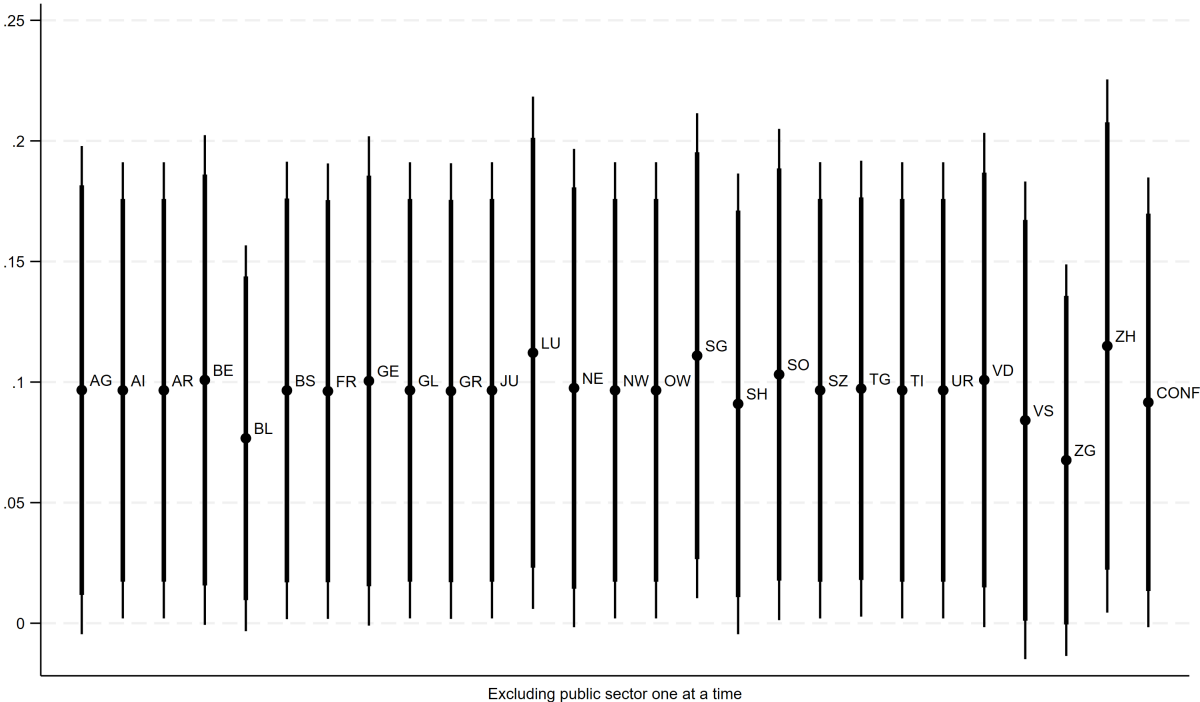
Figure 6: Self-selection based on state universalism across industries



Notes: The figure summarizes regression coefficients of the switching indicators with all the control variables, capturing systematic differences in the preference for state universalism between those who stay and those who switch at some future point. See the text for further details. The 90% confidence intervals are based on standard errors clustered at the individual level.

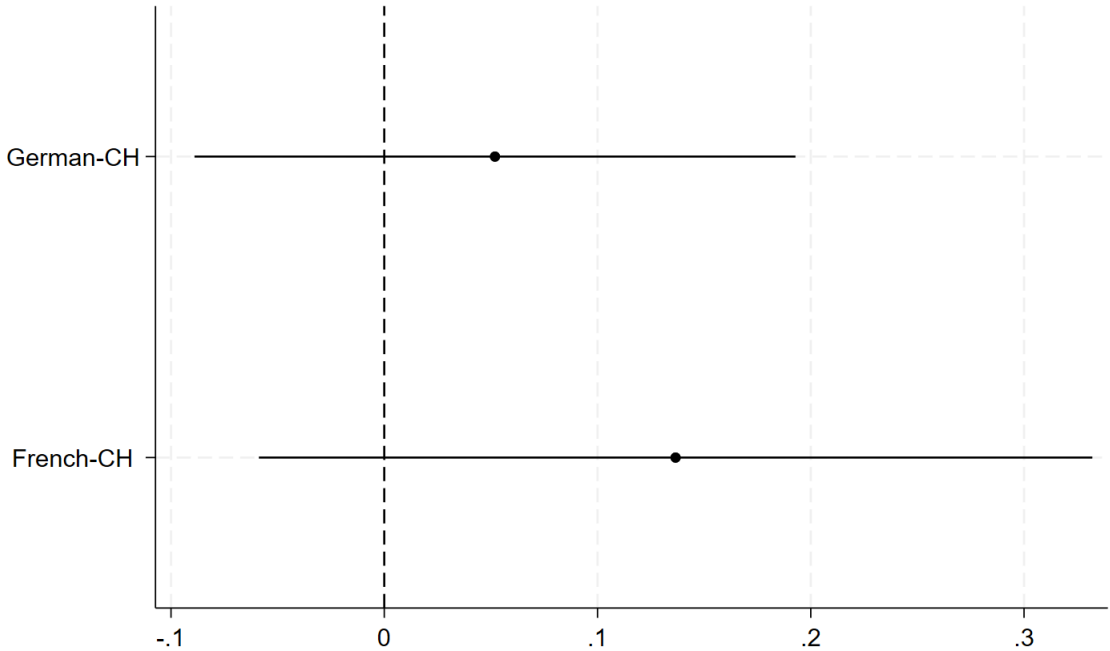


Figure 7: State universalism – robustness of the state effect, dropping one state-type (cantonal and federal bureaucracies) at a time



Notes: Figure reports point estimates of the state effect (specification from Table 1, column 1 of the paper) dropping one state-type at a time. Reporting 95% confidence intervals with light gray vertical lines, and 90% confidence intervals with dark gray lines. Standard errors clustered at the individual level.

Figure 8: Self-selection into the public sector outside public service industries based on state universalism across culture



Notes: The figure replicates the specification in Equation (5) with all the control variables, allowing the coefficients on the switching indicators to vary according to culture (French- vs. German-Swiss (CH) individuals). They capture systematic differences in state universalism between those who stay in the private non-HES sector and those who switch in the public non-HES sector at some future point according to whether they are French- or German-speaking Swiss individuals. See the text for further details. Reporting 90% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered at the individual level.

## B Appendix: Tables

Table 6: State preferences: correlation matrix

	state universalism	welfare	redistribution	defense	ideology	trust in fed. gov.	sat. in democracy
state universalism	1.0000						
welfare	0.1732	1.0000					
redistribution	0.0263	0.2131	1.0000				
defense	-0.2631	-0.2569	-0.1287	1.0000			
ideology	-0.2933	-0.3416	-0.2212	0.4483	1.0000		
trust in fed. gov.	0.1537	0.0023	0.0048	0.0622	-0.0415	1.0000	
sat. in democracy	0.1597	-0.0142	-0.0281	0.0511	-0.0148	0.5968	1.0000

Table 7: Switchers to *vs.* stayers in the public non-HES sector

Variable	(1) Switchers	(2) Stayers	(3) Difference
Share of female	0.429 (0.497)	0.351 (0.478)	0.077 (0.054)
Share of married	0.623 (0.487)	0.676 (0.469)	-0.053 (0.053)
Number of children	1.388 (1.289)	1.584 (1.310)	-0.197 (0.141)
Age	38.714 (9.467)	40.512 (8.666)	-1.798* (1.021)
Share of Educ.: college level	0.143 (0.352)	0.242 (0.428)	-0.099** (0.040)
Share of living in urban area	0.612 (0.490)	0.574 (0.495)	0.038 (0.053)
Ln yearly income	10.924 (0.612)	11.051 (0.602)	-0.127* (0.070)

Notes: The table displays socio-demographic characteristics of switchers from the private into the public sector and stayers in the public sector within non-HES industries. The last column presents the difference in the mean value of each variable between the two sectors. Columns (1) and (2) standard deviation in parentheses. Columns (3) robust standard errors in parentheses. \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .