Why is the connection between social policies and public opinion important? The classical research question is: Are social policies effective in reducing poverty? But there’s more to it. We want to know about the politics of social policies, asking: Who are the beneficiaries? Who are the stakeholders in this field? Can a set of policies be maintained? So your question is about legitimacy? Actually we look at effects of policies and ask whether a policy is popular. This has consequences for subsequent policies. Politicians must be interested in this question. They should be. We used to think that effective policies automatically are popular. We tested this assumption. How did you go about? We analyzed social and political data and surveys in 39 countries, both rich/developed and developing and middle-income countries, including China, Eastern Europe, many Latin American countries. And what was your result? Universal policies from which everybody benefits are not as popular as we had assumed so far, even though they are rather effective. In contrast, non-universal social policies that are targeted at the poor are effective. But these policies tend to be unpopular. This is not attractive for politicians. Yes, we see the danger of effective targeted policies are being undermined by lack of popular support. The lesson is: it’s difficult to have harmony between effectiveness and popularity. Are there differences between the countries you looked at? The issue of this delicate balance is basically the same across this broad set of countries. It’s a universal struggle: effectiveness vs. popularity. What are the consequences? Effective social policies run the risk of not being kept up, let alone being expanded. Every government has to find a way to deal with this danger of effective policies being undermined.