Welfare States

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Overview

“The spirit of a people, its cultural level, its social structure, the deeds its policy may prepare – all this and more”, Schumpeter thought, “is written in its fiscal history, stripped of its phrases”.

The sociology of welfare states retains a classical sociological interest in the intersection of the political, economic, and social. Like political economy, sociology emphasizes institutions. But sociologists see institutions in less formal terms than do political scientists and economists. Institutions relevant to the welfare state include political systems, taxation, education, healthcare, as well as social security. Yet sociology also considers (labor) markets, civic associations, and families as institutions shaped by states. The boundary of the welfare state is a question not a given. Furthermore, sociology emphasizes ways welfare states are embedded in – and embed – cultures and ideas.

This perspective involves considering welfare states over time and place. The study of welfare states showcases sociology’s historical-comparative methods. Increasingly also, statistical analyses test and refine theories of welfare states. This syllabus reflects these different approaches within sociology, and its porous boundary with sister disciplines, especially politics.

After reviewing classic texts on the welfare state, the first section explores the historical origins and variation in welfare states. The second section looks at the social politics of the public and private provision of welfare: considering both the private spheres of business/industry, and of families. The third section considers contemporary challenges to welfare states, whether predominately from globalization, de-industrialization, interests or ideas. How to respond to these, both practical and theoretical, challenges is the question we end with.

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1. Classical Interpretations


2. Historical Origins and Development

2a. General and European:


2b. United States:


2c. Comparative Variations


2d. The Historical Relationship of Capitalism and Liberalism to the Welfare State


3a. Private welfare provision and the politics of social insurance & taxation


3b. Family provision and the feminist critique


Daly, Mary, 2011, What Adult Worker Model? A critical look at recent social policy reform in Europe from a gender and family perspective. *Social Politics*. 18(1)43-
4. Challenges to welfare states

4a. Reassessing the post-World War II expansion of social policy


4b. Welfare state retrenchment and reform


4c. Interests and Preferences


4d. Culture and Conflict


4e. Rejoinders: Futures for welfare states?
