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## CHAPTER 1

# The International Context

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PETE ALCOCK AND GARY CRAIG

## Welfare and the State

The focus of this book is on the provision of welfare in a selected number of countries across the developed world. As the Introduction notes, our aim has been to provide a resource for the comparative study of social policy or welfare. However, this undertaking raises a number of important theoretical and definitional problems. What do we mean by ‘developed’ countries? What do we mean by social policy or welfare provision? More specifically, to what extent are these concepts uniformly understood in each country represented in the book? And, finally, what is the most useful framework within which to pursue comparisons between countries with differing social, political and economic histories?

These are major theoretical and empirical questions and they now form the basis of a wide-ranging literature and research agenda in comparative social policy analysis. We cannot hope to summarize all this debate in this short introductory chapter; and it has not been the aim of this book to engage in such an analysis of the comparative development of welfare provision. We will try to guide readers to some of the key areas of current debate, however, and suggest what may be useful areas for further exploration. However, what many comparative theorists do increasingly agree on is the need for some contextual understanding of the political and economic development of welfare policies in individual countries, so that generic comparative data and analysis can be set alongside the specific histories and trajectories of individual nations; and it is this national context that this book aims to provide – for those countries that we have included within it (including two, China and South Korea, not included in the first edition of this book).

The countries included in this book are all taken from what has come to be called the developed world. That is, countries who have experienced, and continue to experience, industrialized economic growth and who have developed extensive state structures to manage and support that growth and to provide (to some extent) for the consequential welfare needs of their citizens. For these reasons most such countries are members of the OECD, which provides them with mutual support and information – and also now

is the source of considerable important comparative data about them, as we mention below.

However, recent comparative work by Gough *et al.* (2004) has pointed out that the formal security provided by these ‘welfare states’ contrasts starkly with the very different economic and social development to be found in most other nations across the world. From their research on some of these other nations they argue that such welfare states are only one form of meta-welfare regime to be found in the world, and they contrast this with two other meta-welfare regimes (and see Gough, 2001, and Wood and Gough, 2006):

- *Informal security regimes* where community and family relationships are the major source of welfare support, often on hierarchical or patronage basis with resistance to any formalization of public responsibility through the state.
- *Insecurity regimes* where powerful external players can prevent any effective structures of internal support, often in cases of conflict and destabilization with no effective established political authority.

Clearly the provision of welfare within such regimes is a rather different enterprise than it is in the state-based meta-welfare regimes of the developed world; and comparative analysis of welfare provision has only recently begun to come to terms with this broader global context of policy analysis and development. In this book therefore we have concentrated only on ‘the state welfare’ of Gough *et al.*’s formal security regimes. Despite the many economic, social and political differences that are revealed in the chapters that follow, it is nevertheless the case that each country discussed here accepts some measure of public responsibility for meeting many of the common welfare needs, and the development of appropriate welfare provision has accompanied the growth of its industrial economy. It is perhaps one of the most striking aspects of state welfare that, however inadequately, every industrialized nation state has come to accept that it has a role in providing welfare alongside taking some role in the management of the provision of private welfare provision.

This is not to suggest, however, that the development of this welfare provision is an inevitable product of the growth of industrial economies – that social policy always accompanies economic policy. This has sometimes been referred to as the *industrialization, or convergence, thesis* (see Wilensky, 1975), and is distinct from the Marxist tradition which links the development of welfare directly to the class struggle within industrialized nations (see Gough, 1979). Its implication is that all industrialized countries can be located on a similar development track, converging towards common social and economic futures, though Gough, and others, would argue in response that local political struggle has been critical in shaping at least some of the differences between welfare states.

This shared social and economic development thesis was discussed more

recently in a wide-ranging review of public policy development in 21 OECD nations by Castles (1999). Castles concluded then that, in the second half of the twentieth century, all underwent major changes in economic growth and policy planning although he pointed out that there was much variation between countries due (again) to different political circumstances and differing degrees of economic and social development. Despite similarities therefore, there was no sustainable evidence of the growth of welfare as a linear process, which is the natural consequence of industrialization. Even if similar trends could be identified, sharp differences of scale and direction were also observable.

Since then Castles, and others, have continued with this broad-based analysis of welfare development, drawing primarily on the data provided on trends in public expenditure and other similar data provided by the OECD. This data has itself become more extensive and sophisticated in the new century, although it is always inevitably several years out of date by the time it is available for public analysis; and it permits more detailed comparison to be made, for instance between the gross and net expenditure levels, in the latter case controlling for the effects of tax and social security contributions and tax credits and exemptions.

As Castles and Obinger (2007) point out, gross expenditure and net expenditure figures can provide different patterns of convergence and diversity among OECD nations. In particular, however, as Castles (2004) argued, more systematic analysis of this evidence does not provide any support for the dismal view that, after half a century of growth in the latter part of the twentieth century, spending patterns in all OECD nations were now following a 'race to the bottom' to reduce state welfare commitments in the light of the global economic pressures which we discuss below.

As with welfare expansion, retrenchment and contraction are not universal characteristics, and indeed rather different responses can be found in different countries to what are perceived to be the international pressures that they are facing (Castles, 2007). Hall and Soskice (2001) have discussed the different responses of nations to economic pressures as reflecting the 'varieties of capitalism' that can be found in the developed world, in particular contrasting the liberal market economy approach of the USA to the coordinated market approach of Germany and other countries in western continental Europe. Castles (2004) adopts a broader range of models of 'families of nations', contrasting four different models within Europe: English-speaking nations, Scandinavian, western continental Europe and Southern Europe. These are similar to some extent to the welfare regimes identified by the Scandinavian academic Esping-Andersen (1990), whom we shall return to discuss below. A number of these countries are included in this book, however, and, as the more detailed analysis provided by our authors reveals, in practice the patterns of development and change within these countries is even more complex than these broad regimes models might suggest.

Underlying some of the contrasting conclusions apparently reached in such broad-based comparative analysis of welfare trends is what is sometimes referred to as the ‘dependent variable problem’ (Clasen, 2007). Much comparative analysis utilizes public expenditure figures for different countries as the dependent variable to compare different trends in welfare policy, assuming therefore that the social and economic needs that underpin these changes are a more or less constant independent variable. Of course, this is unlikely to be the case; for instance, demographic changes such as ageing populations and declining fertility rates will be likely to lead to changed demands for welfare, as recognized by Castles (2007); and indeed other changes in labour markets or private pension markets will also influence expenditure differentially. Changes in public expenditure cannot therefore simply be read off as evidence of changes in political support for state welfare provision. Indeed, as Kuhner (2007), points out these different pressures on expenditure need to be subject to disaggregated analysis within nations and across different social policy domains to be able to establish on any firm basis to what extent they reflect political, social, organizational or other forces for change.

Clasen (2005) has sought to undertake such more detailed comparative analysis of changes across just two countries, Germany and the UK, identifying differences between the policy domains of pension and employment on the one hand and family policies on the other. These are both countries covered in this book, and Clasen’s work provides a useful further analysis of the differences identified by our authors here. He has also collected together a wider range of contributions covering a number of policy domains and countries to explore in more detail the limitations that flow from the dependent variable problem (Clasen, 2007). P. Pierson’s (2001) edited collection also provides extensive evidence of the divergent responses of different nations to pressures for retrenchment, and the importance of national politics in determining welfare outcomes.

What many commentators conclude, therefore, is that the broad-based comparisons between countries, drawing on the large international datasets provided by the OECD and other similar bodies such as the EU, have inevitable limitations to what they can tell us about the development and change of welfare regimes, even within the developed world. Although some similar trends and pressures can be identified, there has been no consistent convergence towards a single model of state welfare support, and no subsequent ‘race to the bottom’ to reduce commitments in the face of recent pressures of global economic change. Different countries have developed different ‘mixes’ of welfare provision, and these have been adapted or preserved differently in the light of internal political partisanship and pre-existing commitments as well as external economic pressures.

Welfare policies are to a significant extent the result of the ‘path dependencies’ established within different nations; and it is for this reason that we have sought to explore these paths in some detail in the national vignettes

provided in the different chapters of this book – at least for those countries included within it. It remains is for the readers of the book to make the comparisons between countries or to draw out contrasts. However, the analyses of our authors have been informed by the broader developments of comparative analysis over the last two decades or more, and by the broad trends that have been identified within this.

## Comparative Social Policy

Much social policy investigation – both in the UK and elsewhere – has understandably been based upon theoretical or empirical analysis of the operation or development of welfare provision within specific national contexts. For the large part welfare provision and social policy debate have been developed within national contexts, dominated by the policies and practices of national governments. However, this has been changing rapidly in the last decade or so. Comparative study of the welfare provisions and policy debates of different countries is now increasingly central to social policy research and teaching; and *international* forces are increasingly shaping the policy agendas of *national* governments, so that welfare provision is less and less the product solely of national policy debates or political considerations. In this respect as in many others, the world is becoming metaphorically a smaller place; and social policy scholars are increasingly seeking to analyze this international context of welfare development, in particular Pierson (2006), and see also Ellison (2006).

International pressures on national policy-making are in part a direct and indirect consequence of the growing competitiveness of the international capitalist economy and the power of major corporations within this – a process sometimes referred to as globalization, which we shall return to shortly. However, it is not just international markets which influence national policies; international agencies are now also seeking to control or influence the social policies of individual countries.

This is most obviously true in Western Europe of the role played by the European Union (EU) which, with the support of its now 27 member nations, is pursuing measures to harmonize social policies within the EU and developing cross-cutting supra-national policy initiatives (Geyer, 2000; Hantrais, 2007). Other supra-national agencies seeking to influence the social policy agendas of individual nations, extending beyond Western Europe include, in particular, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These are the financial agencies of international capital that, through their economic relations with nations needing their support, can use powerful financial levers to press for social policy changes (Deacon, 2007; Yeates, 2008). This is a strategy that has been employed quite widely by these agencies in recent years, influencing the policy agendas of both well-developed welfare states, such as the UK since the mid-1970s

(CDPIIU, 1976), and newly developing ones, such as the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe (Deacon, Hulse and Stubbs, 1997) and even the economies of developing countries in Gough's other meta-welfare regimes (Craig and Mayo, 1995).

International influences on national policy development are not only enforced, however. They may also be welcomed and even sought out by nations. Since the late twentieth century the role of policy transfer has become an important influence on the political agenda of many nations (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996; Dolowitz *et al.*, 2000). Policy initiatives developed in one country may well be of relevance to others who wish to address comparable welfare needs within similar social and economic circumstances. Even if ideas from one country are not directly replicable in another, they may form the basis of similar initiatives shaped by success (or failure) elsewhere. This has long been the case of the social insurance ideas promoted initially by Bismarck in Germany in the late nineteenth century; a more recent case is that of the tax credit measures used to supplement low wages in the USA (Jordan, 1998; Deacon, 2000; 2002).

These international pressures on social policy agendas have resulted in a growing body of research and writing on comparative social policy analysis, and an expanding literature with a range of different approaches and methods within comparative analysis.

- *Guides to comparative study* – intended to give an overview and introduction to comparative methods and the strengths and weaknesses of comparative analysis. Clasen (1999) is an early example of this. Kennett (2004) is now the leading collection here, but there is also a range of contributions in Part VIII of the *Student's Companion to Social Policy* (Alcock, May and Rowlingson, 2008).
- *Theoretical studies* – these attempt to explore, and to explain, variations between the welfare systems of different countries and to assess the extent to which they are the result of internal policy-making or external dynamics. Relatively early examples of this are Wilensky's (1975) US study of the development of welfare states and Titmuss's (1974) discussion of three models of welfare provision. More recently there have been broad-based international studies such as Gough (1979), Castles (1982; 1999; 2004), Pierson (2001), Pierson (2006), Offe (1984), Mishra (1990; 1999), Pfaller, Gough and Therborn (1991), Goodin *et al.* (1999), Bonoli, George and Taylor-Gooby (2000), Kennett (2001), George and Wilding (2002), Taylor-Gooby (2004), Jordan (2008) and Ellison (2006). There are also more specific attempts to develop a classification of welfare systems through comparative analysis, most notably in the seminal work of Esping-Andersen (1990), and studies of international agencies by Deacon (2007) and Yeates (2008).
- *Sectors and issues* – further texts have developed international comparison across different sectors of welfare provision, for instance, Hill (2006)

and Clasen (1999), or by focusing on one particular policy domain such as pensions (Bonoli, 2000; Bonoli and Palier, 2007), labour markets (Sarfati and Bonoli, 2002; Clasen *et al.*, 2006), social activation (Lodemel and Trickey, 2001), or social exclusion (Barnes *et al.*, 2002).

- *Policy evaluation* – research projects based on international studies have aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of specific policy interventions across a range of countries. Examples of this can be found in the work of Bradshaw *et al.* on child support (1993; Bradshaw, 2006) and Ditch *et al.* (1997) on social assistance.

Despite this burgeoning literature, however, there remain significant problems involved in the comparative study of social policy. For a start there are inevitable limitations to the scope and explanatory power of overarching theoretical accounts of international social policy development or classification. As we discussed above, such accounts attempt to explain what are in practice complex and varied social processes across differing social and political contexts. In this process the danger of over-generalization is ever-present. Even Esping-Andersen's empirically based classification of welfare regimes has been criticized for focusing upon a limited range of types of welfare provision, primarily employment and pensions, and ignoring important comparative factors, such as family policies, which might have led to very different classifications from those arrived at in his early analysis.

In addition to the risk of theoretical over-generalization there is also the problem of empirical comparability. Much comparative analysis relies upon data about the nature of social issues or the impact of social policies across a number of countries under review. There is no guarantee that such data has been gathered and published on a similar basis in each country – and indeed a significant risk that it has not. Thus, whether one is comparing levels of poverty and inequality or levels of expenditure on health services, we may not always be comparing like with like.

However, the collection and analysis of data across countries by major international agencies has become more sophisticated and extensive in the new century. Of particular importance is the data on economic development and public spending collected by the OECD, and utilized by international researchers such as Castles (2004; 2007). Eurostat, the EU's statistical service, also collects extensive data on a more or less consistent basis across its member nations and has been used by researchers to compare trends within the EU (Adelantado and Calderon Cuevas, 2006). And there are policy-specific resources such as the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), which contains data about the income distribution of many different countries, which can be explored and analyzed by researchers worldwide using on-line computer access (Smeeding, O'Higgins and Rainwater, 1990). These international databases make comparative analysis simpler, and more robust; but they cannot overcome the diversity and path dependency of individual countries discussed above. The more detailed analysis of individual countries,

which this book provides, remains an important supplement to the generic trends identified by comparative scholars.

## **A Common International Context**

### *Economics*

We mentioned above that one of the defining characteristics of developed countries is the process of industrialization which changed their economic and social structures. It also created the social conditions and political conflicts that could give rise to the development of modern welfare provision. In simple terms, labour market needs and the conflicts reflecting struggles between labour and capital gave rise to pressure for the introduction of welfare measures. This impact of industrialization as an example of an international influence on social policy was explored to some extent by Wilensky (1975) in an early comparative study of welfare states; and Gough's (1979) path-breaking work emphasized the significance of organized labour in the creation of welfare provision.

The impact of industrialization on societies creates economic conditions in which the need for public welfare provision takes on a particular form. At the same time industrialization also creates a climate in which political forces pressing for welfare support, the organizations of the working class, are likely to become more influential. The development of public welfare provision is therefore to some extent a response to the needs and demands of the working classes. At the same time, such welfare provision also helps to support the continued growth of the industrial economy, for instance through improving the health and education of the population. Within an industrial economy, therefore, the development of public welfare provision can be seen as something of a compromise between the needs of both labour and capital.

The expectation that such a compromise could also result in positive economic growth, and in political consensus over the desirability of public welfare provision seemed to many to become reality towards the middle of the twentieth century. At this time in most Western nations, in particular, welfare reform was introduced at the same time as state intervention to support economic growth had become a common feature of national economic planning (Castles, 1999). In the UK this was known as the period of Keynesianism, after the economist Keynes (1936) who developed the theory of state intervention. It was also the time when most of the major state welfare institutions were introduced, giving rise to the notion of the creation of a welfare state.

As we can see from the later chapters of this book, this notion of a Keynesian 'golden age' in the development of welfare was a pattern shared by some, particularly 'Western', nations; but it was certainly not one followed by all. In Asia-Pacific nations, such as Japan and South Korea, for

instance, the links between economic growth and welfare support have taken on a rather different form from that in the West; and this relationship is even more distinctive in China. Even in the West, however, the Keynesian golden age was a short-lived affair. In the last quarter of the twentieth century most of the capitalist economies of the developed world experienced periods of severe economic recession, fuelled in part by the oil price rises of the 1970s (Bonoli, George and Taylor-Gooby, 2000).

In the last quarter of the century it became clear that national economies must operate within an ever-more competitive international economy, in which some large multi-national corporations, such as General Motors or Coca-Cola, have greater economic power than do many individual nations. This process has been referred to by many as *globalization* (Waters, 1995; Mishra, 1999; Ellison, 2006) – the requirement of all governments to take account of global economic forces in their national economic and social policy planning (Gray, 1998). The impact of globalization on national policy planning is a complex, and much debated, phenomenon (Held *et al.*, 1999; Sykes, Palier and Prior, 2001). Not all countries have responded to the pressures of global forces in the same way; but, as Mishra (1999) argues, all have had to respond to them.

What is more the process of globalization has meant that economic changes within some countries have inevitably taken on a broader common international character. In particular this is true of what the economists have called *post-Fordism* (Gilbert, Burrows and Pollert, 1992). This is the move away from economic production being dominated by large-scale manufacturing industry to a situation in which a wider range of more flexible producers operate to meet more demanding and more rapidly changing consumer markets. In such a manufacturing climate the production process becomes more automated and employment shifts instead to specialized production and to work in service industries, serving both producers (insurance and banking) and consumers (catering and leisure); and labour markets become more ‘flexible’, with workers having to be more prepared to accept less formal terms and conditions of employment, often accompanied by downward pressures on wages. In the Western world in particular this process has been exacerbated by the relocation of the remaining labour-intensive production processes to less-developed countries with lower individual wage levels and reduced social and welfare costs. The result of these processes is that, in some of the countries examined in this book, levels of unemployment (especially long-term unemployment) have grown and much waged work has become more flexible (temporary, part time and often low paid).

The flexible, post-Fordist, international economy has thrown into greater relief the trade-off at the heart of all social and economic policy planning in advanced economies, as Esping-Andersen (1996) discusses. This trade-off is that between the provision of extensive and redistributive welfare services (equity) and investment in competitive economic growth (efficiency). It poses choices for governments in responding to the pressures of economic

change, although as Hall and Soskice (2001) and others have argued, different ‘varieties of capitalism’ are likely to respond differently to these pressures. The choice can perhaps be characterized as that between two contrasting models for social and economic planning:

- The first – the low wage/low welfare model – involves the pursuit of growth through the reduction of welfare commitments. This implies acceptance of low wages and insecure work as the price for higher levels of employment with greater inequalities as a result, and the reduction of collective welfare costs through low taxation and social insurance payments. As a result welfare support is targeted only at the poor and welfare services are reduced to a residual role. In such a society protection and participation are provided largely through the labour market, and public welfare is only available to the casualties who cannot fend for themselves. The USA has increasingly become the paradigm example for this model, but the UK has been moving steadily in that direction.
- The second – the high wage/high welfare model – is the pursuit of growth through the maintenance of public support and the promotion of social integration and solidarity. This requires political commitment to developing a high skill/high reward labour market through generous social insurance payments and extensive collective provision for education, training and health. In such a society inequalities are reduced, in part through high levels of taxation and insurance contributions, and access to welfare services is generally provided on a universal basis. Here Sweden remains the best example.

The former approach is that championed by neo-liberal economists, who have argued that greater free market competition is the only effective response to globalization – a point discussed in more detail by Mishra (1999) and Ellison (2006). Capital investors can now move resources rapidly from country to country depending upon their judgements about economic prospects, and the major international corporations are likely to seek to operate where both the direct (wage) and indirect (tax and insurance) costs of welfare are lowest. This movement of capital could lead to what some commentators have called the ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of public welfare provision – what the EU describes as ‘social dumping’, the concentration of investment in countries where levels of wages and welfare are lowest. Not surprisingly the EU, and especially the high wage/high welfare countries which exert most power within it, are concerned about social dumping and are using the supra-national powers of the Union to counteract such pressures, for instance by seeking to impose EU-wide rights and standards (Kleinman, 2002).

In practice it is far from clear that a uniform march to the bottom has taken place across the international social policy arena, as Castles’ (2004, 2007) more recent analysis of public expenditure trends reveals. Economic

growth and levels of employment have been high in countries such as the USA, where low wages and low welfare costs predominate. But the high wage/high welfare countries of Europe, such as Germany and Sweden, have also been able both to maintain economic growth and to expand export markets (Goodin *et al.*, 1999; Huber and Stephens, 2001; Palier and Martin, 2007). High growth has also been associated with very different mixes of work, wages and welfare in other countries such as Japan. All countries must respond to global pressures; but, as Esping-Andersen (1996, p. 258) argues, responses to wage competition have not been unidimensional. The more egalitarian and integrative welfare models of some countries have been able to sustain stable economic growth as well as avoiding some of the worst anti-welfare outcomes of the more residual welfare model.

In part, of course, the relative success of the high wage/high welfare model of capitalism is a result of the higher levels of social integration and political support that were instrumental in the establishment of such regimes and thus sustained within them. High wage/high welfare strategies can attract political support within democratic countries, even if they also extract a high price in terms of international competitiveness. Political calculations can influence economic policy-making, and ultimately can influence economic trends. This is an important element in the analysis developed by Esping-Andersen, Mishra, C. Pierson and others; and it reminds us that, while economic pressures may be important, they cannot obliterate other local factors.

### *Politics*

It is quite clear from the different chapters in this book that the varying political contexts of different countries have led to different responses to the need for welfare services and to the pressures of economic competitiveness. The welfare state model discussed above is particularly associated with the social democratic or liberal democratic politics of Western Europe. Such political frameworks are based upon a compromise between the representatives of capital and labour over the development of public welfare provision within a predominantly market economy – the Bismarck and Beveridge models, a compromise which has taken differing forms in different countries, at different times. This has been taken up in particular in the work of Esping-Andersen (1990) and his identification of three broad welfare regimes that characterize and classify these differences, based on empirical analysis of Western welfare states.

However, social and liberal democracies have not been the only political ideologies to influence social policy and the development of welfare provision. Both socialist or Marxist politics and new right or neo-liberal politics challenge the notion of class compromise as a viable basis for the development of welfare policy and both have been influential at times in a number

of countries. Socialist politics were of major importance in determining welfare services provided in Russia and Eastern Europe during the communist era, and much of that legacy still remains in some of these countries. The different socialist policies of China have provided their own distinct legacy, as discussed in Chapter 13. Socialist politics have been influential within democratic countries too, in particular as a form of left-wing pressure upon social democratic governments to abandon the politics of compromise and pursue instead a public monopoly of welfare services and a nationalization of the market economy (Deacon 1983). Such pressure has remained outside of the political mainstream, although occasionally having significant impacts in countries such as Italy and France. Neo-liberal politics have also exerted pressure upon democratic governments, in particular in the latter decades of the twentieth century. In the UK, for instance, the Thatcher governments of the 1980s were strongly influenced by the neo-liberal politics of some of their New Right members. This was also the case during the Reagan era in the US and more recently in the George W. Bush administrations of the new century.

Clearly, therefore, the power of partisan political forces has had a variable impact in different countries. Thus, where working-class organizations have been strong, state welfare services have been extensive, for instance in Sweden; and, where these organizations have been weak, welfare provision has adopted more of a residual model, for instance in the USA (Goodin *et al.*, 1999). However, it is not just the political ideologies associated with class forces that have been influential in shaping welfare. Other social forces have also had political influence, such as those organized around issues of gender, race (or racism), disability or ecology. They are discussed in more detail in Lewis, Gewitz and Clarke (2000) – and sometimes referred to as the ‘new social movements’.

Feminist politics has had a significant influence on welfare policies in a number of countries in recent years, both in terms of shaping the nature of public provision (for instance, improved childcare support in Scandinavian countries and support for carers of adults in the UK) and of leading to the development of alternative forms of service (for instance, women’s health self-help groups). Race and disability politics have also taken on a higher profile in many places. And environmental politics has even entered mainstream government, with Green Party representatives in Germany securing ministerial status for a time after the 1998 election, as well as, currently, two MEPs.

Politics is not just a matter of representation and campaigning, however. Within democracies in particular the political process itself has an important influence upon the determination of policy. For instance, within an electoral democracy public support for welfare is likely to be reflected in the votes cast by citizens. This has led some commentators, such as Therborn and Roebroek (1986) to argue that, once established, welfare states are irreversible by political means, because of the democratic support that the services that they provide will inevitably attract. On a more critical note such

ballot-box politics has led other critics to argue that such pressures will lead to potentially damaging upward pressure on welfare growth as politicians seek to outbid each other with promises of improved services in order to secure popular support. This is the argument of the ‘public choice’ theorists in the USA who are concerned that such pressures will unbalance the equity/efficiency trade-off and prevent economic growth (Tullock, 1976).

Both politicians and public service bureaucrats are likely to seek to defend the public services with which they are associated, which may influence the political climate in a pro-welfare direction, despite the pressures of international economic forces. Overall therefore there is considerable evidence to underline the point that political forces and political processes can influence welfare policies, independently of the economic context within which they are operating. Politics is constructed within a social context too, however, and the social structure of advanced industrial societies has also been undergoing significant change in recent decades.

### *Demography*

Welfare services are constructed to meet the needs of populations. They are therefore determined to some extent by the shape and structure of these populations; and inevitably these shapes and structures are subject to demographic change, as Castles (2004) discusses in his more recent comparative work. Demographic change is a complex phenomenon. It is the product of many different factors, of which birth rates, death rates, longevity and, increasingly, the impact of migration are only the most obvious features. It is also a phenomenon that impacts gradually over time as different cohorts of individuals move through the life cycle. We can identify some of the more significant factors here.

According to most commentators the most pressing contemporary aspect of demographic change, from the point of view of welfare policy, is the growing proportion of older people within most advanced industrial countries – both at the end of the twentieth century, and going into the twenty-first. It is itself a product of a number of factors including greater average longevity (a product of improved health care) and a declining birth rate in the latter decades of the twentieth century, resulting in an increasingly declining relative number of people of working age. This pattern varies significantly between countries, with the proportion of older people growing much more rapidly in Japan, for instance, than in the UK or more notably South Africa. The UN Population Division estimates, for example, that the population of the current EU members will fall by about 15 per cent to 628 million over the next 50 years leaving a labour deficit in many areas of the labour market, a deficit which, ironically, could only be met by an increase in planned migration, at a time when many such countries are imposing harsher immigration regimes (Craig, 2002).

Given these variations, and the long-term nature of demographic change, the panic reaction to the 'growing burden' of the elderly, which seems to have gripped policy-makers in some countries, may in practice be somewhat exaggerated, although the contradictions between national and international migration, social, economic and overseas development policies remain to be resolved. Pension payments and social care services will have to be provided for a larger number of people in the future; but, of course, these demands can be planned for within economic and political calculations made now (Bonoli, 2000). A growing proportion of older people within the population is not, therefore, in itself necessarily a problem.

The same is true of a declining birth rate. Reduced fertility has been experienced in a number of developed countries in the last half of the twentieth century, most notably, within the countries covered here, in Italy. At times, such reductions have been perceived to be an issue for social policy, for instance, generous child support provision in France has usually been associated with concerns to encourage families to produce more children. Conversely, relatively high birth rates may present a problem for policy-makers as large numbers of children give rise to additional demands for care and education. This is the case to some extent with the 'baby booms' that followed the end of the Second World War in countries such as the UK. Continuing concerns over high birth rates in China led to policy measures being introduced to encourage families to have only one child.

In addition to changes in the balance between the generations there have also been changes in family patterns experienced in many countries. In many Western nations, for instance, divorce levels have been rising and the numbers of lone-parent families have been increasing both relatively and absolutely. The assumption on which some social policies have been based therefore, that children will be cared for by both their natural parents in a stable 'nuclear' family structure, cannot be sustained. This has led to the need to support families in different ways, recognizing the diversity of patterns of care for children, including acknowledgement of the growth of gay and lesbian parenting patterns.

Even where significant changes are not taking place in levels of fertility and longevity, however, demographic issues influence the policy planning agenda. The welfare needs of all citizens change over the course of their lives. This is true at an individual level, but it is also true of whole cohorts within the population. And different cohorts born, and growing older, at different points in time will carry with them the expectations, and the welfare support, which they have experienced throughout their lives. Thus, for instance, in many countries the pensioner population of the mid- to late twentieth century did not have the benefit of being able to contribute to generous private or public pensions during their working lives in the earlier part of the century. Their pension needs and pension rights and expectations are thus very different from those of the cohorts reaching pension age at the end of the century, whose work incomes contributed towards their future pension needs.

These are differences to which social policies must, and in different ways do, respond. They are also, of course, to a large extent predictable developments that can be built into political debate and policy planning – although the extent to which different countries have done this effectively varies in practice, as later chapters in this book demonstrate. This is especially the case because the long-term planning, which is dictated by such demographic issues, inevitably comes into conflict with the short-term calculations characterizing economic pressures and political expediencies of national governments with terms of four or five years at most. This is revealed most sharply by the difficulties experienced by many nations in the 1990s in planning changes in pension policies but is illustrated by other short-term and unexpected events such as the relatively huge levels of migration from Eastern European states into the UK, following their accession to the EU, with consequent demands on welfare provision.

### *Ideology*

Whatever the importance of economic, political and social pressures on welfare policy, the development of policies in practice depends also upon how the notions of welfare and need that underpin them are defined and understood. This is because different definitions are generated by different ideologies of welfare, and ideologies of welfare differ across countries and, perhaps more importantly, within them. All of us operate with ideological perceptions of welfare and need, and indeed all other social phenomena. However, most ideological differences can be located within the major broad ideological frameworks, which dominate much theoretical debate about social policy. George and Wilding (1994) provide an accessible guide to these, and their links to political debate and policy activity, and some more recent developments, are discussed in Powell and Hewitt (2002) and Fitzpatrick (2001 and 2005).

In the context of comparative study, however, it is important to bear in mind that ideological differences in what might be understood as welfare issues or social needs do lead to differences in the development and operation of welfare provision across different countries. For instance, provision of employment rights and regulation of family patterns are more commonly included within conceptualization of social policy goals in continental Europe than in the UK and other English-speaking countries. Ideological perspectives not only influence how welfare needs are defined, they also influence how they are met. For instance, in Scandinavia, the common expectation is that the needs of all will be met on a universal basis through the state, whereas in countries such as the USA, the predominant expectation is that public welfare should only be available to the poor and needy. Such differences between universal and selective approaches to the principles underlying welfare policy also influence policy debates within most

developed nations, as do ideological differences about the roles accorded to public and private welfare provision. These differences are also represented in the ideological frameworks which underpin different the political traditions of neo-liberals, social democrats and others.

Ideological expectations do not just differ across countries, however; they also change over time. The understanding and measurement of welfare needs, such as poverty levels, have altered considerably throughout the twentieth century, for instance, with broader and more relative definitions replacing narrower and more subsistence-based measures (Townsend and Gordon, 2002). It is also argued by some that pressures on welfare services increased in the latter decades of the 20th century as result of higher expectations among citizens of needs that should be met by public services. For instance, many more people now continue into higher education than used to be the case in most developed countries, and more people expect health care provisions such as minor operations to be available on demand. Such ideological pressures can create counter-tendencies to the economic pressures to reduce welfare services, which must be resolved within the political processes discussed above.

### *Culture*

The cultural heritages of different countries are in part a product of ideological perspectives and political debates; but they go beyond these, and themselves can shape or change the political climate within which social policy decisions are taken. There are a number of examples of the importance of cultural influences contained within the countries examined in the later chapters of this book:

- The entrepreneurialism and longstanding multi-culturalism of the USA has militated against the development of a strong central state welfare politics.
- The work-based, male-breadwinner family model of German social structure has mitigated against the development of broad universal welfare provision.
- The Confucian culture of East Asian societies such as Japan has supported a strong individual and family role in the provision of welfare.

Cultural differences do not just exist between countries, however. They also exist within them. Most nations now contain within their boundaries a range of different cultural traditions, resulting in large part from patterns of (mainly) postwar immigration and emigration between countries. The USA, the UK and Australia, for example, all contain a wide range of diverse ethnic cultures, with very different expectations about the structure and extent of welfare provision appropriate within these. For instance, Muslim groups have

particular views about the importance of family structure and gender roles; some Catholic groups have strong views about family planning; and African-Caribbean groups in the UK and USA carry with them experiences of their subjection to slavery and the lower status that this has accorded them in the eyes of some members of the white majority population. In all of these cases, a culture of racism has influenced the way welfare policies are developed and experienced within societies. Not all cultural heritages have positive welfare manifestations therefore. Additionally, some ethnic groups are prone to particular ailments, which often are not reflected in higher demand for health services, such as the greater incidence of sickle cell anaemia among African-Caribbean populations.

## Welfare Regimes

Welfare states, or welfare systems, have experienced common external pressures, yet they also have varying internal dynamics and social structures. These contrasting influences lead on the one hand to a convergence among countries towards similar patterns of welfare provision, and on the other hand to diversity reflecting differing local circumstances. These contrasting pressures have been recognized by comparative social policy analysts, such as Esping-Andersen (1996), and most attempts to compare and contrast welfare systems have endeavoured to develop analytical tools to explain and account for both similarities and differences, and predict ways in which future pressures will be responded to within different countries. This has commonly taken the form of attempts to categorize or classify welfare systems according to identifiable similarities and differences.

An early example of this was Titmuss's (1974) three-fold categorization of welfare states:

- Residual welfare systems – provision was available on a ‘casualty’ basis only to those who could not be expected to provide for themselves.
- Individual achievement systems – needs were met through involvement in the labour market and through work-related welfare measures.
- Institutional redistributive systems – with universal services provided for all.

A similar kind of classification was produced much later in one of the seminal empirical studies of comparative social policy by Esping-Andersen (1990) covering most of the major welfare systems of the developed Western world. He used national data on public expenditure on employment sickness and pensions and also examined the social development and political history of welfare provision. From this he extracted evidence about two key features of welfare states: the extent of *decommodification* (that is the extent to which welfare protection was available independently of market forces) and the

levels of *stratification* (the extent to which access to welfare was structured by social class). The countries he analyzed were thus classified according to these two criteria and, he argued, fell into three broad clusters, representing different *welfare regimes*.

Within each cluster the countries all exhibited similar features in terms of welfare provision, and social and political circumstances; yet between the clusters there were significant key differences. He also identified three countries that provided near ideal types of the three different regimes – Sweden, Germany and the USA (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1** Characteristics of welfare regime ideal types

	Sweden	Germany	USA
<b>Regime</b>	Social Democratic	Corporatist	Liberal
<b>Political base</b>	Broad-based compromise	Employer/worker coalition	Free market
<b>Service type</b>	Universal	Occupational	Residual
<b>Public expenditure</b>	High level	High level	Low level
<b>Labour market</b>	High employment/ high wage	Low employment/ high wage	High employment/ low wage

Esping-Andersen's analysis was based upon *post hoc* examination of the history and structure of these different welfare states. But he also argued that the classification could be used to predict how different regimes would respond to new economic and political challenges – an approach which he took further in later work (Esping-Andersen, 1996). According to him, therefore, all welfare systems within developed countries could be subsumed within these three broad regimes, a similar conclusion to that of Titmuss.

More recent analysts, however, have questioned the comprehensiveness and representative basis of Esping-Andersen's three regime types. The limited nature of the database for analysis, just one year's data from the early 1980s focusing on employment and pensions, has been criticized by Scruggs and Allan (2006), who went on to replicate his analysis using more extensive and up-to-date information from the OECD. This revealed some discrepancies in the location of some countries, such as Canada, Japan and Italy, within Esping Andersen's regime clusters; and discovered greater variation across the clusters for data on particular policy domains in some countries. However, overall their extension of his analysis confirmed the broad differences in ranking and the clustering of regime types.

Others have argued that, building on the three regimes identified by Esping-Andersen, further comparative analysis can reveal the existence of other welfare regimes within the developed world – leaving aside Gough *et al.*'s (2004) identification of other meta-regimes outside this. Castles and Mitchell (1991) argued that from within the countries that Esping-Andersen studied a distinct fourth regime type could be found, exemplified by Australia and New Zealand, where there was a different role for means-tested

welfare provision. Leibfried (1993) and Ferrara (1996) also argued for a fourth type, this time based upon the 'Latin Rim' nations of Southern Europe, which Esping-Andersen did not examine. Since then others have gone further in expanding the range of welfare regimes to include other models of welfare provision, such as the former communist countries of Eastern Europe (Deacon *et al.*, 1992), or the new welfare systems of the Pacific Rim 'tiger economies' (Jones, 1993).

These attempts to identify new regime types are as much developments of Esping-Andersen's analysis as criticisms of it; and, as virtually all of the contributors to this book reveal, Esping-Andersen's regime analysis still provides a benchmark against which analysis of the characteristics and developments of different welfare states can be compared and contrasted. What the different chapters here also reveal are the different ways in which these regimes have responded to the international trends summarized above.

## **Responding to Welfare Challenges**

What the detailed analysis of the country chapters in this book reveals is that a range of factors have impacted on welfare provision, although the extent to which each factor has been more significant, and the balance between the various factors, is different in each case. The key factors include:

- The impacts of an ageing population, leading to increased demands for health and social care, forms of rationing and enhanced dependence on familial or informal care.
- Increasing downward economic pressures, prompting increased tendencies towards privatization, outsourcing and reliance on non-state providers – the welfare mix thus reflects greater roles for private and NGO sectors.
- A growing crisis in land availability and consequent housing affordability, with knock-on impacts on both housing markets and on individual disposable incomes.
- The contradictory impacts of migration, both internal (with rural populations moving to urban areas) and cross-national in forms. Most developed countries now depend more heavily on migrant workers to fill the least skilled jobs in welfare provision (cleaners, night-shift workers, porters, etc.). At the same time, racism has increasingly informed political demands to reduce immigration.
- Pressures on NGO/Third Sector organizations to engage more widely as direct providers of welfare services, perhaps therefore limiting their critical political role.
- Increasing use of disciplinary measures against the poor, including workfare policies and an emphasis on who is deserving.

The picture presented in these chapters, as a result of these pressures, is of a clear, if uneven shift towards public welfare becoming more oriented towards a residual form of provision, a tendency in short towards the model most closely associated with the USA and one in which the claims of social justice are increasingly being crowded out (Craig *et al.*, 2008). The combined impacts of demography, migration and global economic pressures have therefore produced pressures for a new form of welfare convergence towards the political right.

In many countries, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish in practice the welfare policies of social democratic parties from those of the liberal right, with spokespeople for both types of party increasingly complaining that 'their' policies are being stolen by the 'other' parties. Both ends of the political spectrum in the more developed countries now emphasize the importance of quality and choice, although, for most, this tends to translate into questions of ability to buy into the growing private welfare market, in some cases a market that extends to provision which can be purchased in other countries.

Again, in most of the countries represented here, the increased dependence on market solutions to the provision of welfare (and income) has led to increasing levels of inequality, especially in the less industrialized nations between rural and urban populations. Although some countries have attempted to address the question of growing inequality of income and wealth (Kenworthy and Pontusson, 2005) by targeting resources on the poorest, these programmes have generally barely slowed the process of enlarging income differentials and have had only a marginal effect set against the impacts of wider market forces. This may lead in due course to renewed political protest. In countries that are still industrializing, and particularly those that have emerged from state socialist regimes, welfare had always been seen as a tool to promote economic development: hence the notion of the developmental welfare state as illustrated in the case of South Korea. The option of a welfare state in these countries has therefore never really been on the table.

Whether the drift continues towards the political right and towards increased market solutions to the provision of welfare, with continuing high levels of poverty and inequality, depends in the final analysis on political struggle both within and across countries, and on the balance between different political tendencies. In the past few years left-wing political parties have been electorally unsuccessful and in some political disarray, and the trades union movement has had a decreasing impact on debates about welfare. Neo-liberalism has thus assumed a more dominant role within international discourse. The high wage/high welfare/high employment model of welfare, still associated with Sweden, is therefore an increasingly more remote response to international pressures, even within Sweden itself.

Nevertheless, as the different chapters in this book demonstrate so clearly, politics does still matter; and converging international pressures do not

produce uniform national outcomes. What is more, the balance of political forces does vary across different countries, with centre-right and centre-left coalitions in control in different places at different times in recent years in most of the countries discussed here, leading to important shifts in the aim and practice of welfare policies. The value of comparative analysis thus remains of critical importance to our understanding of the diversity of the development of welfare provision both nationally and internationally. This will help both to contextualize national change and development, and to provide a more sophisticated basis for understanding how to make appropriate comparisons between differing national welfare provision.

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*Note:* The Index has been constructed to aid cross-referencing and comparison between individual country chapters. As each country chapter deals with most types of basic welfare provision (housing, income maintenance, etc.) and analyses provisions in terms of a common framework (central government, local government, market, state, private, public and voluntary/NGO provision), these themes are not indexed separately here. Individuals named in this index are those whose historical impact has been significant; author references to each chapter are provided at the end of each chapter. General entries such as gender, disability, migration draw together references to that theme whether or not specifically identified as such in the text. Note also that some of the categories present in the first edition are no longer present but that several new categories have been added.

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