

Christian Albrekt Larsen, *The Institutional Logic of Welfare Attitudes: How Welfare Regimes Influence Public Support*, Ashgate Aldershot, 2006, 184 pp., ISBN 0-7546-4857-5, £45.00

This book provides an assessment of how different welfare regimes produce their own degree of individual welfare state support. The aim of Albrekt Larsen's book is "to search for the mechanisms that link the macro-structures of welfare regimes to the micro-structure of public opinion towards welfare policy" (Albrekt Larsen 2006: 2). Where other studies show a regime-dependent pattern in attitudes at the aggregate level, they appear unable to explain these patterns. In *The Institutional Logic of Welfare Attitudes*, Albrekt Larsen searches for this missing link and attempts to prove its existence empirically.

To theoretically link welfare institutions to welfare attitudes, Albrekt Larsen combines welfare regime theory with literature on deservingness. In doing so, he builds upon Esping-Andersen's welfare regime theory. The main logic put forth here is that liberal, conservative and social democratic welfare regimes vary in their approaches towards 'bad risks' and in turn, these approaches produce different welfare attitudes. Three dimensions of welfare regimes are distinguished: the degree of selectivism in welfare policy, the level of generosity in welfare policy, and job opportunities in the labour market. The author contends that these dimensions determine the direction of discussions on deservingness, covering perceptions of five deservingness criteria: who is in need (*need*), who is to blame (*control*), who belongs to 'us' (*identity*), reciprocal fairness (*reciprocity*) and gratitude of recipients (*attitude*). Essentially, the three dimensions of welfare regimes are likely to influence the degree to which the poor and unemployed are able to fulfil these five

criteria. Deservingness literature shows that the more the poor and unemployed answer to these criteria, the more individuals are likely to believe that the poor and unemployed deserve support from the government. As a result, regimes will vary in public support for the poor and unemployed.

Albrekt Larsen tests this theory using data from several surveys, including the World Values Surveys, Eurobarometer surveys, and ISSP surveys. The empirical results show that a regime-dependent pattern is present in perceptions of deservingness (criterion *control*). In liberal regimes, a high proportion of individuals believes that the poor are in control of their own poverty. This proportion decreases in conservative regimes, and is even lower in social democratic regimes. Next, the author demonstrates a connection between cross-national differences in perceptions on whether the poor and unemployed are in control of their own poverty and public support for welfare policy. Supplementary analyses (used to overcome the small *n*-problem) in a most similar cases design (in the Nordic countries) show that two welfare regime dimensions - the degree of selectivism and generosity – affect perceptions on the deservingness criterion *identity*. Finally, after proving that perceptions of the poor and unemployed are regime-dependent, Albrekt Larsen investigates support in greater detail in a national context (Denmark). These analyses show that variation in perceptions of the poor and unemployed can explain much of the variation in public support for social assistance.

Given the limitations of the available cross-national data, the empirical contribution of the book is original and quite impressive. Nevertheless, the study is not always consistent in addressing whether deservingness criteria are tested directly (by investigating deservingness criteria) or indirectly (by investigating perceptions on

three regime dimensions, which - according to the book's theory – represent deservingness).

Furthermore, although the empirical contribution of the book is quite convincing, Albrekt Larsen makes one disputable choice that seems crucial to his conclusions, namely he defines the Netherlands as a social democratic regime. Yet, the Netherlands is arguably a hybrid welfare regime, containing elements of all three ideal types, and is most often defined as a conservative, corporatist regime (this is the definition used by Esping-Andersen from 1999, revising his previous argument in 1990 that the Netherlands should be defined as a social democratic regime). This shift in categories could affect Albrekt Larsen's regime-dependent findings.

Looking at the figures presented in chapter five, it seems imperative to Albrekt Larsen's argument that the Netherlands be defined as a social democratic regime in order to distinguish the regime-dependent attitude pattern. If the Netherlands were defined as a conservative regime, these empirical results might be less in line with Albrekt Larsen's theoretical expectations.

In sum, *The Institutional Logic of Welfare Attitudes* addresses an important deficiency in welfare state research. Although the empirical findings may be problematic given the country-classification of the different regimes, the book provides an interesting and promising theory on the micro-level foundation of welfare attitudes. This book will definitely be of considerable interest in future cross-national welfare attitude research.

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