

Attitudes, Aspirations and Welfare

*Social Policy Directions
in Uncertain Times*



Edited by
Peter Taylor-Gooby
and Benjamin Leruth



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Editors

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Acronyms

AfD	Alternative for Germany
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
ALMP	Active Labour Market Policy
AROPE	At Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion
BSA	British Social Attitudes Survey
CEE	Central and Eastern European countries
EC	European Commission
ECB	European Central Bank
EOPYY	Greek National Health Service Organisation
ESS	European Social Survey
EU	European Union
EU-15	First 15 members of the European Union
FN	Front National
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GMI	Minimum Income Guarantee
ILO	International Labour Office
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISSP	International Social Survey Programme
ND	New Democracy
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Co-ordination

SAP	Social Action Programme
SYRIZA	Coalition of the Radical Left (Greece)
UBI	Universal Basic Income
UK	United Kingdom
UMP	Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (France)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAT	Value Added Tax

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1

New Challenges for the Welfare State and New Ways to Study Them

Peter Taylor-Gooby and Benjamin Leruth

We urgently need to understand what people want for the future of the welfare state for two reasons. Firstly, European welfare states face severe challenges and are changing rapidly. Change is driven by long-run factors that include population ageing, globalization, labour market change, rising inequality, unprecedented levels of immigration in most European countries, constrained resources and a decline in the forces that traditionally supported public provision. We need to know what people expect from the welfare state and what reforms they will support.

Secondly, these challenges are exacerbated by immediate economic factors—the Great Recession, stagnation and more intense budgetary pressure—and by a new, global wave of radical populist politics, which mistrusts elites and experts and demands greater control over government.

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We need to know what the implications of these changes are for public attitudes and for welfare state futures.

This book analyses welfare state attitudes and priorities and the way people justify them. It uses a new method, Democratic Forums. This method does not pre-categorise public opinion in the way that conventional quantitative surveys do, but seeks to give ‘ordinary’ people as much control as possible over the way attitudes are studied—as it were, a populism in social science research.

This chapter falls into five sections that consider, respectively, the following dimensions: current challenges to European welfare states; responses to these challenges and the importance of attitude studies; review of the existing literature on welfare state attitudes (almost entirely from pre-coded surveys); explanation of our new method, Democratic Forums; discussion of the contribution that our research makes to understanding current challenges; and lastly, we draw conclusions about the key themes in popular understanding of welfare state futures in different European countries.

Challenges to the Welfare State in Europe: Population Ageing, Austerity and the New Populism

The challenges confronting European welfare states have been discussed in an extensive literature (Ervasti et al. 2012; Pierson 2001; Van Kersbergen and Vis 2014) and in our companion book *After Austerity* (Taylor-Gooby et al. 2017). They may be divided into two groups: *structural threats* caused by continuing changes in the context of state welfare, and *political challenges* that result from the policies pursued by national governments in response. Into the first group fall population ageing with its attendant pressures on pension, health - and social - care spending, and the labour force; economic globalization which challenges the capacity of governments to maintain national employment policies; the inequality resulting from changes in the world of work and labour market dualisation; the competitiveness imperative that more open markets impose on national

industries; and the high levels of immigration resulting largely from war and disorder, mostly in the Middle East and North Africa. The second group includes public spending cutbacks and the exacerbation of inequality as governments prioritise balanced budgets over state interventions at the national and European Central Bank (ECB) level; and a new wave of populist politics, especially on the right, that often promotes isolationism and foregrounds a welfare chauvinism that ring-fences public provision for nationals.

A series of reforms have contained pressures to escalate health and pensions spending across Europe (see Taylor-Gooby et al. 2017, Chaps. 1 and 10). Most governments have addressed labour-force issues by cutting back benefits and introducing stricter entitlement rules to promote flexibility and enhance work incentives, by investing in education and training to improve skills and productivity and by seeking to mobilise older people and those with young children into paid work, for example raising the pension age and subsidising childcare (Hemerijk 2013, Chap. 1). These policies are intended to enhance national competitiveness in a more globalized world and help address inequality and poverty.

Flexibility, Work First,¹ financial stringency and social investment have had varying success in different parts of Europe. The EU's *Europe 2020* programme seeks to draw national initiatives together to address a range of issues including climate change and energy production as well as productivity and inequality. It reports positive developments in education since 2008, particularly among women who also have higher levels of employment and a slow growth in their proportion of the working population, but no progress in the proportion of men in paid work, or progress in reducing poverty or inequality (Eurostat 2017a). More detailed analysis shows that success tends to be concentrated in Northern and Western Europe, while the most serious problems are found in Southern Europe and the post-socialist countries (Eurostat 2017b). Liberal Europe (notably the UK) does relatively well in employment but has failed to address poverty.

The majority of European governments and the EU as a whole have pursued 'balanced budget' programmes, requiring very substantial cuts in public spending, especially in those countries receiving bailout loans from the European Central Bank (ECB), the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) and the EU—Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland (De la Porte and Heins 2015). Greece and France's attempts to pursue neo-Keynesian state-led investment and social spending programmes in 2012–2016 achieved very little (see for example Petmesidou 2017; Leruth 2017).

The sense of economic and social malaise and the failure of governments to address the very real problems many people experience have contributed to the populist shift notably on the right in national politics across Europe, typically combining suspicion of established elites and of institutions such as the EU with programmes to end or reduce immigration, welfare chauvinism and higher spending on services for nationals.

Eurosceptic parties across Europe have considerably increased their influence since the advent of the Great Recession. Such parties have joined the government in Finland, Hungary and Poland and gained substantial numbers of votes elsewhere, but the UK is the only country to trigger the EU exit process, following a referendum on 23 June 2016. This has stimulated a process of 'differentiated disintegration' in the European Union (Leruth 2017; Leruth et al. 2018). The debate surrounding Greece's possible exit from the Economic and Monetary Union, which started in 2013, still continues as the country encounters severe difficulties in repaying EU-led bailouts. Following the results of national elections held across Europe in the course of 2017 (including Austria, Czech Republic, France and Germany), it appears that Euroscepticism remains a major political force and exerts strong influence on mainstream politics especially among those who feel 'left behind' (Kuhn et al. 2016).

Europe has experienced substantial immigration with over ten per cent of the population in all large countries foreign born and particularly high levels in Germany, Scandinavian countries and the UK (OECD 2016). In countries such as Denmark, Hungary or the UK, anti-immigration and/or anti-refugee programmes are typically bound up with a welfare chauvinism that assumes rigid controls will free up a fixed pool of jobs, housing and other resources for established residents. Resentment at austerity and concerns about immigration into Europe and between EU countries have fuelled a general trend to more emphatic nationalism in European politics.

The shift to a more populist and nationalist politics has led international commentators such as the OECD (2017) and International Monetary Fund (IMF 2017) to argue that countries should pursue social reforms as well as balanced budget and labour market flexibility programmes. These agencies have for some time claimed that more support for active labour markets and a strengthening of the rights of women and other disadvantaged groups in access to work and opportunities will enhance productivity. The new reports argue for broader redistributive programmes to enhance social equality and improve health (for example OECD 2017) and claim that these will also help by reducing the dissatisfaction that is seen to lie behind the growth of populism. They also present evidence (for example Ostry and Berg 2014) to show that redistribution does not damage medium-term growth.

This brief review points out why good quality, up-to-date attitude data is valuable in European welfare policy debates. Most European countries had addressed (or were on the way to addressing) most of the structural external challenges by the middle of the 2000–2010 decade. The reforms implemented in both pensions and healthcare were expected to meet commitments, and considerable progress had been made in improving the quality and quantity of labour to meet the competitive challenge of globalization. The Great Recession then set in train an ideological shift towards neo-liberalism and a general move to prioritise eliminating deficits over sustaining services. The impact of such policies on living standards and opportunities heightens dissatisfaction with existing policy elites. High rates of immigration provide a focus for blame. Any assessment of the development of the welfare state in Europe must take into account people's confidence in their governments and their response to immigration when analysing hopes and expectations for the future.

Findings from Recent Attitude Research

Public opinion, from what the quantitative attitude survey literature tells us, is generally not supportive of most aspects of the neo-liberal austerity programme, although austerity has dominated responses to the 2007–2008

financial crisis and its aftermath in European countries. There is backing for welfare chauvinism and the new populism, but also strong evidence of support for traditional provision, for inclusive, redistributive welfare states and also for social investment.

All the evidence shows that welfare states are popular with their citizens (Roosma et al. 2016), and that popularity has not diminished over time, at least since the 1980s (Papadakis and Bean 1993; Svallfors 2012a). The survey data is much less supportive of private provision (Taylor-Gooby 2002). Similarly, support for redistribution and for greater equality appears strong, although as Svallfors (2012b) and Taylor-Gooby and Martin (2010) point out, the details of question phrasing make a substantial difference to the findings. Approval of state welfare is evident in all regime types, despite differences of level in relation to redistribution and income differences (Arts and Gelissen 2001; Brooks 2012; Svallfors 1997).

So far so good for the traditional, non-liberal, non-populist welfare state—and an emerging puzzle as to how democratic governments succeed in pursuing welfare state contraction, austerity and individual responsibility programmes so obviously at variance with majority opinion. However, as an influential study by Roosma et al. (2013) points out, attitudes to the welfare state and the part it should play in redistribution and meeting need are complex and multidimensional. These authors distinguish seven dimensions in attitudes to the welfare state, including the goals, the range of service areas covered, the degree of redistribution, who should benefit and who should pay, and the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation. Our Democratic Forum method is designed to explore this complexity as ordinary people themselves understand it.

In summarising the structured survey literature we may group these dimensions under three headings. Firstly, *goals, range and redistribution*: many studies point to a division in support between benefits for older people, disabled people and healthcare programmes which are generally popular, and the much lower level of enthusiasm for benefits for able-bodied people of working age, evident in survey findings from the 1996 International Social Survey Project onwards, and which if anything have strengthened over time (Bonoli 2000; Ferrera 1993; Likki and Staerklé 2015; Taylor-Gooby 1982). Public opinion is notably less likely to support

spending on unemployed people and inclined to distinguish more and less deserving groups even among the unemployed (Larsen 2008). The extent of actual or potential reciprocity makes a difference, especially in more corporatist countries (Mau 2003). These points are reinforced by findings from the few qualitative studies available (Taylor-Gooby et al. 2018; Taylor-Gooby and Martin 2010; Ullrich 2002). Welfare state support is nuanced and centres on mass services. While people favour the general idea of redistribution, they do not endorse practical policies directed at low-income people, so they do not back programmes leading to redistributive and inclusive outcomes.

Secondly, *who should benefit and who should pay?* Both interests (typically proxied by socio-demographic variables) and political ideology (proxied by political party support and orientation) play a role in support for social spending. Interests tend to be the most influential factor (Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Taylor-Gooby 2002). Both self-interest and ideology also influence attitudes to pensions and unemployment benefits and explain a major part of the difference in levels of support (Pederson 2014). National patterns of provision impact on support. Social class differences play a stronger role in the more liberal countries, whereas insider/outsider differences matter more in the more corporatist countries (Fong 2001; Linos and West 2003; Meier Jæger 2006). Carriero (2016) shows that, surprisingly, lower class people are more accepting of inequality in the more unequal countries.

Normative assumptions also fit within a national regime framework. Linos and West (2003) show that, in Anglo-Saxon liberal countries, the greater the extent to which people value social mobility, the less they are likely to support redistribution. The one qualitative study in the field shows that attitudes to inequality and redistribution vary markedly between Germany and the UK, and that this extends to the language used to discuss the concepts of opportunity and outcome (Burkhardt et al. 2011). Again, support in practice is likely to be much stronger for particular aspects of the welfare state than for state welfare as a whole.

Thirdly, *efficiency, effectiveness and tax*: many people are critical of what they see as government bureaucracy and lack of transparency. They are strongly concerned about benefit abuse, particularly by people of working age, and they believe that the incidence of taxation is unfair, particu-

larly for lower- and middle-income groups (Edlund 1999; Andersen 1999; Svallfors 1999). This reinforces the shift to populism.

The strength of support for welfare state provision as a whole and for the most expensive aspects of state welfare (pensions and healthcare) in particular tells against the general programme of balanced budgets, cuts in state provision and the expansion of the market. On the other hand, concerns about the operation and effectiveness of welfare state institutions fit well with a general neo-liberal suspicion of big government. The parallel concerns that centre on provision for people of working age imply approval of the principle of individual responsibility, in this area at least. This suggests a nuanced individualism in public attitudes, growing rather stronger over time and immediately focused on an ethic of responsibility in the world of paid work.

Two other areas are currently important: the central focus of the current wave of European populism—the conviction that immigration damages the interests of national populations—and the endorsement of social investment to promote productivity and enhance individual opportunities by the EU and many national governments. In the first area, the claim promoted by Alesina and Glaeser (2005), that European welfare states rest on an essentially nationalist solidarity which will be undermined by mass immigration, has attracted considerable attention. While this claim is not supported by the empirical evidence on policy responses to immigration (Taylor-Gooby 2005; Chap. 3 this volume), attitude studies do at least show that immigrants come low in rankings of deservingness for benefits and services (Jaime-Castillo et al. 2016; Kootstra 2014; Mau and Burkhardt 2009; Reeskens and Van der Meer 2014; van Oorschot 2008). The welfare chauvinist thesis that couples support for generous welfare states to the exclusion of immigrants from provision is widely endorsed (Mewes and Mau 2012; Van der Waal et al. 2010). Conversely immigrants themselves are rather more in favour of mass state welfare than are the host populations (Luttmer and Singhal 2011).

When we come to examine individual rights and social investment, there is evidence that many people are in favour of state services that help mobilise groups like women with childcare responsibilities into paid work. Support for the provision of childcare by the state is high across Europe, rather higher in southern European countries than elsewhere

(Meuleman and Chung 2012). Women are more likely to support these policies than men (Bolzendahl and Olafsdottir 2008; Knijn and van Oorschot 2008). Support for childcare has increased somewhat since 1996 (Crompton and Lyonette 2005). Other aspects of social investment policies are not well covered by the surveys, but a recent eight-country study in Western Europe shows that social investment programmes are generally more popular than passive welfare or workfare programmes and are particularly supported by a broad coalition of the better-educated and left-libertarian leaning middle class (Busemeyer et al. 2017). In addition, a one-country study using a quasi-experimental design shows that the inclusion of training and employability enhanced support for active labour market programmes (Gallego and Marx 2016).

The data from the pre-coded surveys and other work shows a clear hierarchy of areas of provision and of the deservingness of different groups of recipients, with older and disabled people at the top and those closest to the labour market and recent immigrants at the bottom. This fits with the established theory which links deservingness to 'control over need, or to taking responsibility for it, level of need, reciprocity, closeness to us and gratefulness and compliance' (van Oorschot 2006, 29; Cook 1979; Coughlin 1979). Groups seen as needy, not responsible for their need, having contributed or being likely to contribute to society, similar to us and grateful for help are thought deserving. Support for state welfare in general and for redistribution seems reasonably high, highest in Nordic and corporatist countries, but also high in relatively weakly redistributive liberal and southern countries. The private sector is endorsed most strongly in liberal and also in post-socialist Europe.

Support for the welfare state is heavily nuanced and at odds with the traditional model of the inclusive and redistributive welfare state. There are clear differences in the level of support for different needs and the pattern of support is likely to undermine serious redistribution since the needs of able-bodied poor people of working age are generally viewed with suspicion. This approach does not support a simple austerity neo-liberalism but might go some way towards approving more liberal labour market policies. The widespread anti-immigrant sentiments and concerns about big government fit well with populism and with welfare chauvinism. At the same time, the social investment stance receives considerable

support in the few surveys that cover this area. Social investment is typically seen as a new approach to state welfare and one that could contribute to the traditional goals of greater equality and a better quality of life for most people (European Commission 2013; Morel et al. 2012).

These points suggest that the basis for a real shift in the politics of welfare may exist, but that we need to explore attitudes and their various dimensions in much more detail to understand how people fit the various ideas together and what the forward programme that most people expect or would support would be like.

In the next section we discuss a radically new approach to understanding people's attitudes in context based on the idea of 'democratic forums'. We then outline some of the findings from our research to demonstrate its merits and limitations.

Democratic Forums

Democratic Forums are relatively large (typically 30–40 participant) group discussions that take place over an extended period of time with limited moderation. The objective is to allow participants as much control over proceedings as possible and to limit opportunities for the conceptual frameworks of researchers and policymakers to influence the ideas they express. The opportunities for discussion in the forums and the time involved, typically extending over more than one day, allow people to develop ideas and to respond to arguments. Researchers can examine the way different positions are justified and the conceptual frameworks that are used by ordinary members of the public to link ideas together. In practice, plenary sessions are combined with breakout groups in most forums to facilitate participation from those who are less confident in large gatherings. One aspect of the authority of the group over the situation is that the participants are typically given the opportunity to request information to assist their discussion and this is then sought from independent experts by the researchers.

The background theory for the forums comes from two social science traditions. First, one of the major developments in recent democratic theory has been a shift away from an approach to democracy as a system

for ensuring that governments respond to the wishes of a largely passive electorate (Almond and Verba 1963) and for managing disagreements about the overall direction of policy within that electorate (Dahl 1961; Lijphart 1999), to one of democracy as an active institutional framework for promoting more widespread deliberation and citizen engagement (Chambers 2003; Dryzek 2010; Goodin 2009; Mouffe 2000; see Floridia 2017 for a historical review). Secondly, and at the same time, attitude theorists have moved away from a positivist concept of attitudes as original within the individual—the ‘file-drawer model’ in which, as it were, one looks up one’s attitudes inside one’s head (Wilson and Hodges 1992)—to a more social account of attitudes as developing through interaction and expression in debate (Tajfel 1981).

These changes are bound up with a number of developments: economic approaches that shift away from a simple rational actor model to one which sees preferences as constructed within economic formations (for example, the New Institutionalism); the emergence of a whole range of groups and interests demanding engagement within the political process (Snow and Soule 2010); shifts in international aid and development towards programmes that require donor countries to consult with and actively engage with the populations as well as the governments of countries which receive aid (for example, the World Bank Civil Society programme: see World Bank 2014); developments such as the Porto Alegre participatory budget-holding initiative (de Sousa Santos 2005), now copied elsewhere; concern about citizen alienation in Western democracies; and a whole range of approaches associated with an increased emphasis on individual dignity and human rights. These have led to shifts in the way power-holders treat others in areas ranging from legal systems to medicine, from science to mental health and from risk policy to local government. A foundational argument underlying both democratic theory and theories about attitudes and values is Habermas’ concept of legitimacy as based on the exemplar of an ‘ideal speech situation’ in which all those concerned can communicate with good will and outside the influence of interests and in which differences in political values can be negotiated justly (Habermas 1996). This basis makes the forum method particularly valuable in studying the ideas of ordinary members of the public, very often in rejection of the approach of an established policy elite.

The main use of Democratic Forums has been in extending participative democracy and consulting the mass public, for example by policy-makers who will themselves make the final decision. This is particularly valuable in the case of areas of controversy and conflict. Renn (2008) describes an exercise in using forums to arrive at a community decision on the siting of an unpopular waste incinerator. No one wanted it but it had to go somewhere. The forums concluded that the possibly poisonous plant should be located upwind of the main regional administrative building. Their advice was considered and the plant not built. Another use is to legitimate a decision that is already preferred by policymakers, by allowing others to discuss it, or in testing out public reaction to a decision that has already been made: for example the UK consultation on Universal Credit and other reforms that was interpreted as endorsing the proposals despite widespread dissent (DWP 2010). Here we use the forums in a relatively unusual way and for the first time in studying welfare attitudes, as a research tool to examine how people justify their ideas and link them together.

We explore these linkages, which play an important role in determining priorities, through the idea of 'framing'. The framing approach emphasizes the point that social attitudes do not exist independently from ideas and values about other aspects of society. The entire pattern of ideas provides a supportive context which reinforces or legitimates attitudes (Druckman 2001). For example, a conceptual framework that includes the belief that the proportion of older people in the population is increasing and sees older people as net consumers of services will support the idea that pension spending will be a major problem in the future; the belief that unemployed people are lazy and that the cost of benefits for them is an important factor in public spending may justify benefit cuts and workfare programmes. This may be reinforced by a value-commitment to the work ethic. The view that immigrants are a net economic burden as consumers rather than an asset as workers fits with the view that immigration should be limited. Ideas about the relative costs of services for different needs and the social impact of the behaviours that particular welfare programmes are thought to encourage will influence spending choices. Framings link together understandings of the world of welfare with ideas about priorities and serve to justify the positions that

people take up. They may be provided through mass media, the statements of politicians, celebrities, public intellectuals, media figures, neighbours or other communications (van der Pas 2014), or be understood as part of people's mental mapping of the issues (Chong and Druckman 2007).

The extended group discussions with which we are concerned are variously referred to as Democratic Forums, Deliberative Forums or Citizen's Assemblies (see e.g. Warren and Pearce 2008; Flinders et al. 2016) and more generally participatory government, depending on whether the central concern is the locus of authority in a research investigation, the deliberative process, or the interest in arriving at a consensus outcome on a public policy issue. The title 'Deliberative Poll' is particularly associated with the work of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. In this case we refer to our method by the general title of Democratic Forum. Our research method differs from other deliberative approaches in three ways. Firstly, we are concerned to give participants as much control as possible. Secondly, our interest is broader than that of a typical Citizens' Assembly, as we asked participants to reflect on the future of the welfare state, which encompasses a broad and loosely defined family of issues. Thirdly, one of the key objectives of our Democratic Forums is to compare attitudes between citizens of countries with different welfare traditions.

The forum approach has strengths and limitations compared with the main alternative, pre-coded surveys. The group participating in a forum is too small to provide statistical representation of the population. It is perhaps best thought of as a 'mini-public' that includes the main socio-demographic groups in which most researchers are interested. The material generated by a forum is not typically amenable to statistical examination but instead requires careful and detailed post-coding and protracted iterative content analysis.

The point of the forum is that, unlike a pre-coded questionnaire survey, it does not impose its own framing on the questions to be asked about an issue or the response categories into which answers will be fitted. The raw priorities of ordinary people, the justifications they think important and the conceptual framing they use to link ideas together can be captured. Goerres and Prinzen (2011) point to the failure of pre-coded

surveys to capture ambivalence (a respondent may really wish to tick two of the exclusive boxes), non-attitudes (the respondent may have no strong views but offer one to be polite), inconsistency (people may hold logically contradictory attitudes, for which there is no place on the questionnaire) and uncertainty (the individual simply does not know what to think). The material from a Democratic Forum, since it includes the arguments used by participants expressed in an informal and unstructured way, is much more likely to allow the researcher access to such aspects of the way people understand an issue.

The justifications that people give in discussion may also bring out their background understanding; in the case of beliefs in the effectiveness of the current welfare state, for example, it may reveal their assumptions about the relative cost and numbers of claimers for different benefits. They may also indicate the significance of current framings of issues, for example, by mass media, and indicate which sources of information people trust and which they do not (see Larsen 2013; Slothuus 2007).

As part of the NORFACE-funded 'Welfare States Futures: Our Children's Europe' (WelfSOC) project, we used Democratic Forums to give new insight into how people think about the future of European welfare states. We were particularly interested in people's priorities and in how they justified them, the evidence they used to support their views and the way their ideas and beliefs fitted together into conceptual frameworks which legitimated particular policy directions.

We conducted two-day forums with between 34 and 36 participants in five countries (Denmark, Germany, Norway, Slovenia and the UK) in September and October 2015. The forums included a broadly representative sample of the population, consisting of older and younger, middle and working class, women and men and those with and without dependent children, and also some unemployed, self-employed, retired, ethnic minority and immigrant members. Participants were selected by research agencies commissioned by the WelfSOC team. The countries were chosen to represent Scandinavian, corporatist, liberal and post-socialist welfare state regimes, and co-ordinated market and liberal market varieties of capitalism. We offered the forums a deliberately broad and forward-looking question, encompassing several themes: *'What should the priorities of*