

Introduction to Comparative Welfare State Analysis: Foundations, Theories and Development¹

Summer semester 2025

Time: Wednesday, 12-2pm (c.t.)

Room: 26.32.U1.21

Semester dates: 09.04.-**23.07.2025**; no sessions on 21.05.2025 and 25.06.2025

Addressees: Bachelor students without extensive knowledge of political economy and welfare state research

Johanna I. Plenter, M.A.

Johanna.Plenter@hhu.de

Building 37.03, Room 00.16

Content: Providing social security for the population against risks such as illness, unemployment and old age is one of the core tasks of the state. For this reason, social spending accounts for a large share of the budget in most developed countries. However, there are significant differences in the type and level of spending and in the content of welfare state policy in international comparison. Why have welfare states developed so differently and what are the current challenges? In recent decades, the traditional welfare state has come under increasing pressure. From a liberal (economic) perspective, it is seen as bloated, cumbersome and creating false incentives. At the same time, social inequality is increasing in most democracies, and existing systems do not have adequate answers to new social risks.

This seminar introduces the extensive literature on the emergence, establishment and current development of the welfare state as a political-economic system of risk protection and redistribution. To this end, we will read and discuss both theoretical texts from the comparative analysis of welfare states and empirical works. The aim of the seminar is to introduce participants to a central field of research in political economy and to enable them to critically question political reforms in the area of social policy.

¹ Credits: I would like to thank professor Achim Goerres (University of Duisburg-Essen) for sharing his syllabus for the seminar "Political Decision-making, Political Leadership and Governance: Political Psychology from a Comparative Perspective" (WS 2022/23), and for allowing me to use some of his ideas.

Proof of participation (BN)

To receive credit points for the seminar, the following is expected:

1. Active participation in all seminar sessions,
2. Submission of answers to questions on the seminar readings for five sessions,
3. Creation and presentation of a scientific poster

Examination (AP)

According to the requirements of your regulations (Prüfungsordnung) either

1. Term paper of approx. 3,000-4,500 words (hard deadline: **30 September 2025, 23:59** (registration deadline corresponding to 30 July 2025; you are responsible for meeting these deadlines), submission by e-mail only, or
2. Oral exam based on the entire seminar content (~20 minutes)

Note on participation in the seminar

Successful completion of this seminar requires that you actively participate in each seminar session. The seminar is largely based on discussion of the texts to be read – it is a highly discursive and active seminar in which we can learn a lot from each other. For this reason, it is essential that you participate and contribute on site. **If you are unable to attend a session for any reason, you will usually be required to submit a replacement within 10 days, covering the content (and time commitment) of the missed session.** However, you have two “free shots”, i.e. you do not have to submit a replacement for two missed sessions. Whether and when you take these free shots is up to you. The exact work assignment and the respective deadline will be posted on ILIAS after the session. It is your responsibility to submit the substitute work on time and in full – I will not send you a reminder!

Workload

- Participation in all 14 face-to-face sessions = 21 hours = 0.7 CP
- Meeting preparation/Readings (~1.5 hours/week) = 18 hours = 0.6 CP
- Answering the questions for five sessions (~30 minutes/session) = 2.5 hours = 0.08 CP
- Designing one scientific poster = 18.5 hours = 0.62 CP

2 CP

Learning objectives

At the end of this semester, students will be able to...

1. ...read English-language scientific texts, recognise their main message and critically evaluate the argumentation/results.
2. ...summarise, trace and compare the historical development and current challenges of welfare states in different countries.
3. ...name different forms and consequences of welfare policies, critically assess the measurement of welfare state generosity and based on this evaluate their performance.
4. ...design and present a scientific poster on a scientific text.
5. ...write a term paper in the field of comparative welfare state research/political economy.

Scientific posters

In the second or third session, you will be allocated to a week to prepare a poster presentation with a maximum of 5 minutes. The posters are presented jointly in one session at the end of the semester.

- **Each poster team must create a colour-printed scientific poster in the format A1 and present it.** A scientific poster is the graphical presentation of scientific findings. The posters will be ordered for print by myself. The poster is to include some selective findings from an empirical study that you will have found through research and answer some questions that are listed below.
- The piece of research that is the essence of your poster must be **an empirical study**, e.g. a journal article, **that makes substantive use of one of the pieces that is among the required readings** (this is called prospective bibliographic search) e.g. an often-cited study that refers to one of the readings and is within the week that you will be allocated to or a paper that can otherwise be closely linked to the reading.
- The piece of research that forms part of **your presentation must be in English**, in the field of comparative welfare state research and an accepted article in a peer-reviewed journal, a chapter from a monograph or a section in an edited volume. Neither are we looking for some obscure paper that is published on the internet, nor unpublished manuscripts and conference papers.
- Example: for week 2, you have to read Kuhnle/Sander (2010). So, you can look for an empirical study that cites Kuhnle/Sander (2010).
- Bibliographic search is easiest performed with the help of library databases like [Web of Science](#), International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Scopus or others. They are accessible from within the university or via your VPN to our university.
- **Each study identified has to be shown to me for approval as quickly as possible** and 14 days before the poster session the latest. Note that if students come down on the same study, the first group to flag this study to the instructor can “keep” that study, the other will have to find another one. Thus, no study can become the subject of a poster twice.
- You have to analyse the new study with regard to the following questions (questions should not be repeated on the poster):
 - What is or are the implicit or explicit research question(s)?
 - How do they relate to the content of the mandatory reading of that week?
 - Which data are analysed?
 - What is the main logic of the research design?
 - What are the main findings? Be selective.
 - Why are the findings relevant for comparative welfare state analysis or science at large?
- **One person will present the poster in a maximum of 5 minutes.** Groups can decide for themselves who presents.

- The poster should be crisp, clear and originally layouted. Students are required to independently make themselves familiar with poster techniques. Suitable software can be Microsoft PowerPoint or Publisher.
- Spend a lot of time selecting what should go on the posters. Come up with a catchy title and do not forget all student names. Be selective.
- Layout will not be marked, but an award for the best poster will be given after the poster session.
- Posters have to be submitted via ILIAS upload both as a PDF file and in its original file format (like PPTX).

Diversity statement

I am committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse community in which each individual, regardless of their background, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age or disability, can develop their full potential in methodologically oriented empirical political science.

The aim is therefore to promote a respectful and supportive learning environment in which different perspectives and skills are valued in order to foster your full potential. I am aware that there are structural disadvantages for certain groups at universities/ in science, which manifest themselves, for example, in different proportions of speaking time in class. I try to minimise such inequalities and would like to encourage all students to actively participate in the seminar.

At the same time, I am aware that the reading list of this course does not reflect the diversity of research and that male authors, for example, are clearly overrepresented. I have tried to minimise this as much as possible.

Syllabus

09.04. Introduction

Course Block I: Origins	16.04. Origins of the Western Welfare State <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Kuhnle, Stein; Sander, Anne (2010): <i>The Emergence of the Western Welfare State</i>. In: Castles, Francis G. et al. (eds.): <i>The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 61-80.
	23.04. Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism: The Foundation of Comparative Welfare State Research <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Esping-Andersen, Gøsta (1990): <i>The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism</i>. Cambridge: Polity Press. Introduction & Chapter 1: pp. 1-34.
	Optional Additional Readings <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Bonoli, Giuliano (1997): Classifying Welfare States: A Two-dimension Approach. <i>Journal of Social Policy</i> 26(3): pp. 351-372.

Course Block II: Challenges	30.04. Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism: Theory meets Evidence ➤ Danforth, Benjamin (2014): Worlds of welfare in time: A historical reassessment of the three-world typology. <i>Journal of European Social Policy</i> 24(2): pp. 164-182. ***Optional Additional Readings*** ➤ Arts, Wil; Gelissen, John (2002): Three worlds of welfare capitalism or more? A state-of-the-art report. <i>Journal of European Social Policy</i> 12: pp. 137-158.
	07.05. Development of the Welfare State I: Power Resource Theory (PRT) ➤ Refslund, Bjarke; Arnholtz, Jens (2021): Power resource theory revisited: The perils and promises for understanding contemporary labour politics. <i>Economic and Industrial Democracy</i> (Epub ahead of print): pp. 1-22. ***Optional Additional Readings*** ➤ Bradley, David et al. (2003): Distribution and Redistribution in Postindustrial Democracies. <i>World Politics</i> 55: pp. 193-228.
	14.05. Development of the Welfare State II: Varieties of Capitalism & Institutionalism ➤ Estévez-Abe, Margarita et al. (2001): Social Protection and the Formation of Skills: A Reinterpretation of the Welfare State. In: Hall, Peter; Soskice, David (eds.): <i>Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 145-183. ➤ Huber, Evelyne et al. (1993): Social Democracy, Christian Democracy, Constitutional Structure, and the Welfare State. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 99(3): pp. 711-749.
	21.05. — no session —
	28.05. New Politics of the Welfare State: Welfare State Retrenchment ➤ Pierson, Paul (1996): The New Politics of the Welfare State. <i>World Politics</i> 48(2): pp. 143-179. 04.06. Institutions Blocking Welfare State Change ➤ Bonoli, Giuliano; Palier, Bruno (2000): How do welfare states change? Institutions and their impact on the politics of welfare state reform in Western Europe. <i>European Review</i> 8(3): pp. 333-352. 11.06. Public Opinion Blocking Welfare State Change ➤ Brooks, Clem; Manza, Jeff (2006): Why Do Welfare States Persist? <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 68(4): pp. 816-827. ***Optional Additional Readings*** ➤ Häusermann, Silja et al. (2019): The Politics of Trade-Offs: Studying the Dynamics of Welfare State Reform With Conjoint Experiments. <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 52(7): pp.1059–1095.

Course Block III: Solutions and Side Effects	18.06. New Voter Coalitions ➤ Gingrich, Jane; Häusermann, Silja (2015): The decline of the working-class vote, the reconfiguration of the welfare support coalition and consequences for the welfare state. <i>Journal of European Social Policy</i> 25(1): pp. 50-75.
	25.06. <i>– no session –</i>
	02.07. Measurement of Social Policy ➤ Otto, Adeline (2018): A Benefit Recipiency Approach to Analysing Differences and Similarities in European Welfare Provision. <i>Social Indicators Research</i> 137: pp. 765-788. ***Optional Additional Readings*** ➤ Scruggs, Lyle (2006): The Generosity of Social Insurance, 1971-2002. <i>Oxford Review of Economic Policy</i> 22(3): pp. 349-364.
	09.07. Social Investment ➤ Gingrich, Jane; Ansell, Ben W. (2015): The Dynamics of Social Investment: Human Capital, Activation, and Care. In: Beramendi, Pablo et al. (eds.): <i>The Politics of Advanced Capitalism</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 282-304.
	16.07. Dualisation ➤ Yonn, Yeosun; Chung, Heejung (2016): New Forms of Dualization? Labour Market Segmentation Patterns in the UK from the Late 90s Until the Post-crisis in the Late 2000s. <i>Social Indicators Research</i> 128: pp. 609-631. ***Optional Additional Readings*** ➤ Palier, Bruno (2001): Turning Vice Into Vice: How Bismarckian Welfare States have Gone from Unsustainability to Dualization. In: Bonoli, Giuliano; Hatali, David (eds.): <i>The Politics of the New Welfare State</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 233-255.
	23.07. Poster presentations

Missing anything?

→ If possible, I'm happy to adjust the syllabus according to your wishes, preferences, or expectations!