

Book Review: The Right and the Welfare State by Carsten Jensen

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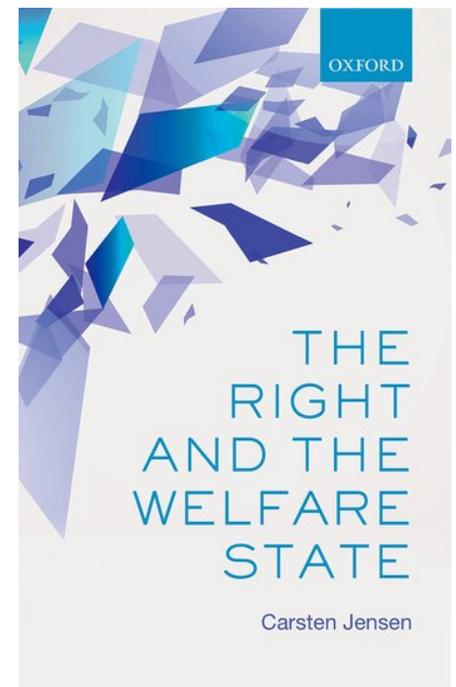
The Right and the Welfare State studies the welfare state policies of conservative and liberal governments. These parties have been assumed to be nothing but the welfare-sceptical flip-side of the Left, but **Carsten Jensen** uses case studies of Australia, Denmark, and the UK to present a new theory. **Patricia Hogwood** finds that Jensen's approach proves most effective in highlighting a deeper and more diverse interest in welfare politics than centre-right governments are generally given credit for.

The Right and the Welfare State. Carsten Jensen. Oxford University Press. 2014.

The values surrounding the construction of the post-war consensus on welfare have entrenched the values of the left as the standard from which other approaches are held to 'deviate'. Given the realities of post-war conservative governance and the rise of neoliberal ideology, though, the right's conception and development of welfare politics is clearly deserving of academic attention. In setting out to construct a 'positive' theory of the right and the welfare state, [Carsten Jensen](#) attempts to fill a long-standing gap in the literature.

Having established a life-course/labour market distinction in the approach of the right to welfare, Jensen turns his attention to partisan strategies within these areas. At this level, the distinctiveness of right over left approaches emerges more strongly, even over life-course issues. Although there is cross-party agreement over life-course protection, right governments want to offer their own constituents the best possible deal. This translates as maintaining a large public sector but supplementing this with subsidized private alternative services. This strategy limits the redistribution of resources from rich to poor, upholds a high level of risk protection overall and adds value to the middle-to-high-income individuals who are the bedrock of conservative support. Jensen terms this strategy *marketization via layering* (p6ff). When it comes to social programmes relating to the labour market, Jensen posits a two-stage *erode and attack* approach by the right. Anticipating resistance to a programme of cuts, the right will first attack the unions as the institutional power-base behind protective labour measures and only then address the measures themselves (p6ff).

Jensen adds depth to his study by triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods. An investigation of the European Social Survey (2008) reveals that the life-course/labour-market distinction in welfare approaches is reflected in voters' expectations. Whereas support for government intervention in labour-market issues is conditional on personal income, support for programmes on life-course issues is not. Next, a series of large-N time-series cross-sectional regression analyses is used to investigate relationships between government partisanship, spending and social rights. Here, Jensen's results demonstrate that right governments are consistently under-represented in their support of labour-market welfare programmes, but not of life-course programmes. These findings are supplemented by three in-depth case studies: Australia, Denmark and UK. Jensen uses these case studies to good effect to develop his concepts of marketization via layering and erode and attack in the context of concrete policy legacies and institutional veto points.





Bedroom Tax protest Trafalgar Square. Credit: [Alan Denney](#) CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

In contrast to institutionalist writings in the field, Jensen argues that universal conceptual frameworks (here: risk types and reform strategies, p7ff) are universal. At least within his context of parliamentary democracies with established party structures, this claim is plausible. It also helps to establish an overarching analytical framework for his book. Jensen elects to highlight this argument in his concluding chapter. He brings in a short discussion of the US to demonstrate the potential for universality in the policy mechanisms he describes. For me, however, this discussion is misplaced and reduces the impact of the study.

This raises the question of Jensen's contribution to the field. There are indications that Jensen himself sees his work as a challenge to e.g. Pierson's (1996) claim that ideology no longer matters (p7ff). However, Jensen's main focus is policy *strategy* rather than ideology. His study in fact makes a better case for the argument 'constituency matters' than 'ideology matters'. At times he suggests that policy strategy is embedded in ideology; at others he conflates ideology with constituency. I would have like to see his conclusion focus more squarely on teasing out the relationship between ideology, values and constituency in the distinctive policy strategies adopted by governments of the right. One other question deserves more attention. That is, given the distinctive focus of the right on labour-market welfare policies, can conservative welfare politics be seen as a policy field in its own right, rather than as subordinate to market policies? If the latter is the case, then Jensen's analytical assumptions do not hold.

Overall, Jensen's work is meticulously planned, scholarly and intellectually honest. His consideration of 'hybrid' programmes (in which it is difficult to separate life-course from labour-market issues) is an overt recognition of the limits of his analytical framework; even though he is at pains to distinguish his work from the institutionalist turn in policy studies, he acknowledges that right governments' healthcare programmes illustrate the importance of healthcare legacies or 'path-dependence' (p.100). As a refreshing, insightful and accessible study on the right and the welfare state, Jensen's book can be recommended to academics, policy practitioners, postgraduates and advanced undergraduate students.

Patricia Hogwood is Reader in European Politics at the [University of Westminster](#). She has published on UK devolution and EU policy-making in a comparative context. Her other research interests include EU immigration policy and the externalisation of internal security and the impacts of German unification on German identity,

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