

## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

**Pieter Vanhuyse and Achim Goerres, eds.,** *Ageing Populations in Post-Industrial Democracies: Comparative studies of policies and politics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012, 272 pp. \$135.50 hardcover (978-0415603829)

**W**e are living in the midst of change. Population ageing and economic challenges are putting great pressure on governments today. The current state of our global world creates somewhat unique circumstances to address these challenges that are experienced by many developed countries. This review of *Ageing Populations in Post-Industrial Democracies*, an edited book by Pieter Vanhuyse and Achim Goerres, praises the attempts made to understand these changes in the political arena. Below I describe the central findings and arguments, as well as note strengths and weaknesses.

*Ageing Populations in Post-Industrial Democracies* aims to understand and explain how the political and policy responses will be or are structured in relation to population ageing. It includes 11 comparative essays of two to 31 OECD countries, written by 12 European and American scholars. Pieter Vanhuyse and Achim Goerres open this collection by mapping the field of generational politics and policies among 30 OECD countries. Vanhuyse and Goerres argue that while demographic trends among these countries are universal, their respective welfare states are heterogeneous. The subsequent essays in this book tease out similarities and differences using a variety of research methods, both quantitative and qualitative.

The increasingly large proportion of older people in democratic societies potentially makes them a powerful group in the political domain. In Chapter 2, Seán Hanley studies this phenomenon by examining the success of pensioners' parties over the past two decades in 31 Western and Central Eastern European countries. Pensioners' parties lack political presence in Canada and the United States, and hence, these countries are not included. Canadian and American readers may be confused as to what these parties are until they read Hanley's overview of the development of pensioners' parties in Europe over the past few decades. Using qualitative comparative analysis methods, relative success is present in Western and Central Eastern countries that spent a high proportion of welfare on pensions and have adequate levels of self-organization

among the old. Additional contributing factors varied between Western and Central Eastern countries that reflect their institutional political contexts.

Another gauge of grey political power is whether mainstream parties court older voters. Jennifer Dabbs Sciubba examines this influence in Chapter 3 through a textual analysis of party manifestos and media messages, as well as labour policies in Japan, Germany, and Italy — countries with some of the highest proportions of older persons in the world. Findings contrast the elderly power hypothesis because political parties across the left-right wing spectrum demonstrate a willingness to be unfavourable towards older individuals in these countries, albeit in different ways. Sciubba argues that in the context of globalization, political parties and policy makers experience greater pressure from economic challenges than from their large older electorate. This argument is also supported in Chapter 4 with respect to the implementation of an unpopular reform among voters.

In Chapter 4, Martin Hering examines how Germany and the United Kingdom, two countries with different political contexts, successfully implemented recent reforms to increase retirement ages. Hering argues this similar outcome had three conditions: An expert commission first raised intergenerational equity issues to the government and pushed for an increase in retirement ages, policy makers were concerned with curbing the rising spending on pensions as well as protecting low-income earners, and a coalition was formed among political parties as a blame-avoiding strategy. Hering praises these countries and considers them to be exemplary models for other countries to follow suit. Problematic presumptions underlying a higher retirement age are not considered in this chapter. For example, older workers are typically not considered desirable workers in the labour market, which is an issue that needs to be addressed if governments want them to remain in the labour force; otherwise, discriminatory behaviours toward older workers will likely persist. Although addressing these presumptions would strengthen the argument for raising retirement ages, Hering presents convincing evidence.

Germany and the United Kingdom may converge with regards to retirement age but differ with respect to other institutional pension characteristics, such as public expenditures on the old. Using cluster analysis in Chapter 5, Mehmet Aysan illustrates how 19 OECD countries vary with regards to their pension institutions and related outcomes of inequality through a typology of Liberal, Social Democratic, Continental European, and Southern European welfare regimes. According to Aysan, the greatest difference is between Liberal and Southern European regimes whereas Social Democratic and Continental European regimes

are relatively similar. This typology is a useful tool to understand the different political contexts and implementations of gender and generational inequality between OECD countries. It acknowledges that even if countries make similar reforms due to fiscal sustainability concerns, the resulting implications for their citizens will differ.

In Chapter 6, Markus Tepe and Pieter Vanhuyse show how the timing and motivations behind pension retrenchments are similar among 18 OECD countries between the years 1981–1999. An event history analysis of when medium (8 percent) or large (12 percent) cutbacks were made reveals that rising unemployment and population ageing led politicians across these countries to accelerate medium cutbacks. These cuts were not shaped by partisanship, the timing of elections, or institutional rigidity. Based on these findings, Tepe and Vanhuyse argue that unemployment and population ageing are silent alarm bells to politicians that signal the need to make cutbacks sooner rather than later. Medium cuts are opted for over larger ones because of the political sensibility over pension benefits among voters. One could also argue, then, that domestic pressures from the electorate do shape the actions taken by politicians. Based on findings from Chapter 5, we can presume those countries that made cuts to their public spending differed in their initial and resulting levels of generosity.

In Chapter 7, Juan Fernández studies the generosity of pension benefits in relation to the size of an elderly population. Fernández uses a time-series analysis of standard and minimum pension replacement rates during the years 1980–2002, among 21 OECD countries. Findings indicate that population ageing is associated with more generous pensions to the average worker but less so for poverty prevention pensions. Fernández argues that the opposing results occur because as a political bloc, seniors mobilize when they all benefit and that this happens with increases in earnings-related pensions. Fernández notes, however, that future research should examine seniors' attitudes on earnings-related and poverty-prevention pension programs. Nevertheless, the political effect of population ageing is evident.

Thus far, older voters are presumed to be different voters compared to their younger counterparts. Achim Goerres and Markus Tepe show in Chapter 8 that voters' preferences for generational policy revisions are not simply age-based. Goerres and Tepe use a two-stage model to examine the effect of family policy regimes (whether the state has an active involvement in care) and family solidarity aspects (individual family values) on attitudes about public childcare. The attitudes of individuals under the age of 45 years in 21 OECD countries are studied. Findings indicate that support is mitigated by normative solidarity (family values

regarding the obligation to care) and contextualized by welfare states. Goerres and Tepe argue that individuals who value normative solidarity in regimes with an active involvement on care, support public childcare presumably to ease the caregiving burden expected of their family members. Notably, the family solidarity concepts are debated in the family literature because of their presumptions of consensus in family relationships. Its use here, however, is not to describe families but rather capture individuals' values about their family members.

In an attempt to understand the convergence of attitudes regarding the redistribution of income among welfare states, in Chapter 9 Jonas Edlund and Stefan Svallfors examine the roles of cohort replacement and class conflict over time (1996–2006) in the United States and Britain, both of which are Liberal welfare regimes. Findings show that over time, the support of redistribution has increased among lower level managers and professionals in the United States, whereas the support of unemployment policy among workers has declined in Britain. These trends occur across age cohorts. Edlund and Svallfors argue that the risky climate in the United States and the disenchantment experienced in Britain with regards to its public policy account for these findings. Accordingly, this chapter complicates our understanding of the politics of population ageing because differences occur within a welfare regime and domestic political institutions matter in relation to their citizens' support of public benefits.

In the context of population ageing, strategies to raise fertility rates receive a lot of research and political attention. In Chapter 10, Andrej Kokkonen adds to this knowledge by investigating how policies can influence fertility rates through the formation of domestic unions, which include legally married and common-law relationships. Kokkonen argues that if countries adopted dual earner policies, fertility rates would increase. Dual earner policies directly or indirectly reduce the losses of opportunity and earnings of women in the labour market for having children. Using a multi-modelling approach based on 22 European countries, Kokkonen finds that working women have lower odds of living with partners than do women outside of the labour force. The context of dual earner policies, however, weakens this effect. Working women have a higher likelihood of living in with a partner in countries with dual earner policies. Differences among countries regarding this index reflect their institutional differences.

Robert Hudson concludes this book by relating its main themes to the situation in the United States. Hudson argues that in the United States, resilience to demographic and economic pressures from political institutions will likely occur but this depends partly on how politicians

debate and consider alternative measures. This comparison to the United States is somewhat perplexing because this country is included in many of the preceding analyses. Hudson's description of the political context of the United States would have been more fruitful if placed earlier in the book so the reader could assess the differences between it and European countries while reading the other the chapters. Given the book's complex findings, an in-depth conversation that brings the findings together and discusses their implications would have been a valuable concluding chapter for the reader.

Studying an ongoing process like population ageing is difficult because the responses to it and its outcomes are not yet finished, as noted by Sciubba in Chapter 3. Nonetheless, this collection adds to our knowledge on population ageing. It helps us understand population ageing in a global context by illustrating the ways in which politics and institutions matter across countries and welfare regimes. This collection finds striking differences in different the politics and policies of different countries. Accordingly, it fails to support convergent arguments that the demographic and economic pressures related to population ageing will lead to similar political action among OECD countries. This collection implores us to move beyond convergent presumptions about ageing populations in OECD countries and to appreciate the influence of political institutions.

*Ageing Populations in Post-Industrial Democracies* will be of particular interest to sociologists and other social scientists studying ageing, demography, politics, and the world of work. The book is well suited for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses on ageing and society. Students will find the global context of this book interesting and enlightening. They will also learn how population ageing can be studied using a variety of comparative methods.

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