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## Social Policy

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## Introduction

Social policy exists as an academic discipline but also refers to the practice of policymaking and administration (including service delivery). As an academic discipline, social policy is distinct in its empirical focus on welfare provision but overlaps with other social science fields such as sociology, political science, and public administration. From a narrow standpoint, social policy refers to policies and practices created to address the needs of individuals, i.e., to provide welfare. From a broader standpoint, social policy can be used to motivate individual behavior; is inherently related to the creation of social inequalities across class, gender, race, and sexualities; and is closely tied to capital. Social policy encompasses a wide range of policies, including activation, care, education, families, health care, pensions/aging, poverty/social assistance, and unemployment. Social policy practice refers to the administration of social policies and service delivery. Welfare provision is not limited to government—markets, employers, nongovernmental organizations, churches, and informal networks all play a role in welfare provision, although this varies across countries. The focus, however, particularly in social policy research, is often on government policies and the provision of services. In particular, social policy is often discussed in relation to the welfare state because social policies represent the public or collective management of social risks, an essential function of welfare states. In recent years, social policy research has become increasingly comparative, with a focus on cross-national analyses of systems, policies, and service provision. I would like to thank Hannelore van Hoffen, my research assistant, for all her efforts in helping to compile a list of social policy references to be considered for this article.

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## General Overviews

A number of important texts that provide general overviews of social policy are available. These books offer more than a general indication of the subject matter, however. They give the reader a concise introduction to critical social policy (Williams 1989), an understanding of comparative social policy (Kennett 2013), and an introduction to social policy (Béland 2010) and its theories and methodologies (Alcock, et al. 2016; Fitzpatrick, et al. 2010). Greve 2019 provides the most up-to-date overview of social policies in relation to the welfare state. For the most comprehensive overview of welfare state literature and classic texts, see Leibfried and Mau 2008 and Castles, et al. 2010.

**Alcock, Pete, Tina Haux, Margaret May, and Sharon Wright. 2016. *The student's companion to social policy*. 5th ed. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.**

This introductory text by Alcock and colleagues clearly introduces social policy's core concepts and offers a comprehensive overview of social policy approaches, debates, and issues. Each chapter provides a "Guide to Useful Sources" that includes relevant websites as well as annotated references. This newest edition includes new chapters on the devolution of social policy in the United Kingdom. The text can be used in conjunction with Alcock, et al. 2002 (*The Blackwell dictionary of social policy*, cited under Textbooks).

**Béland, Daniel. 2010. *What is social policy?* Cambridge, UK: Polity.**

Provides a concise introduction to social policy in relation to the welfare state. Placing the US welfare state in comparative perspective, it looks at the historical development of social policy, the retrenchment and restructuring of policies, and future challenges.

**Castles, Francis, Stephan Leibfried, Jane Lewis, Herbert Obinger, and Christopher Pierson. 2010. *The Oxford handbook of the welfare state*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.**

This online handbook offers students a comprehensive overview of social policies in relation to the welfare state. It contains forty-eight chapters summarizing the most important scholarship in this area and clearly introduces important social policy areas. It also provides an overview of the philosophical underpinnings and history of the welfare state and social policy, as well as scholarship on various models of welfare.

**Fitzpatrick, Tony, Huck-ju Kwon, Nick Manning, James Midgley, and Gillian Pascall. 2010. *International encyclopedia of social policy*. 3 vols. Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge.**

This comprehensive encyclopedia covers a whole range of social policy topics and therefore offers students, researchers, and practitioners an easy guide to social policy, both thematically as well as in terms of offering references for future reading. It provides an overview of current debates in social policy and covers topics of interest in various institutional and cultural settings.

**Greve, Bent, ed. 2019. *Routledge handbook of the welfare state*. 2d ed. Abingdon, UK, and New York: Routledge.**

This volume is the most up-to-date welfare state reader, offering a wide range of scholarly debates on the welfare state. The forty-five chapters cover important concepts, typologies, and methods on welfare state scholarship. All previous chapters have been updated and revised. Recent inclusions to the second edition include chapters on well-being, migration, long-term care, and homelessness.

**Kennett, Patricia, ed. 2013. *A handbook of comparative social policy*. 2d ed. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.**

This updated edited volume offers students, practitioners, and researchers one of the most comprehensive books on comparative social policy. While outlining the difficulties in undertaking comparative research, the text includes practical advice for conceptualizing and analyzing social policy in a comparative manner. The book consists of five parts: Part 1, The State and Social Policy in a Globalizing World; Part 2, Concepts and Definitions; Part 3, Comparing and Categorizing Social Policy Provision and Redistribution; Part 4, The Research Process and Part 5, Themes and Debates.

**Leibfried, Stephan, and Steffen Mau, eds. 2008. *Welfare states: Construction, deconstruction, reconstruction*. 3 vols. Cheltenham, UK: Elgar.**

This comprehensive, three-volume text provides students with an introduction to the most important scholarship on the welfare state. It contains sixty-three articles including numerous classics ranging from 1974 to 2005. Volume 1 covers analytical approaches, Volume 2 varieties and transformations, and Volume 3 legitimation, achievement, and integration.

**Williams, Fiona. 1989. *Social policy: A critical introduction; Issues of race, gender and class*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.**

This classic text is an essential read for students wishing to gain a greater understanding of the intersections of race, gender, and class in social policy. Williams discusses the underlying race, gender, and class assumptions in social policies. The book consists of three parts: Part 1, The Discipline of Social Policy; Part 2, New Critical Approaches to Welfare; and Part 3, The Welfare State: An Analysis.

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