



OPINION

Big-tent politics is now all but dead

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper called Peter MacKay a "historic figure" when the Conservative Justice Minister recently announced his departure from politics. But despite his starring role in uniting the right, the jury is still out on whether Mr. MacKay will be viewed as an agent of history, or a casualty of it.

What's left of the Red Tory faction that kept the Progressive Conservative Party alive after its 1993 electoral thumping still resents Mr. MacKay for betraying his promise to reject a merger with the Canadian Alliance after he won the PC leadership in 2003. But the truth is that, by then, Canadian voters had already condemned the PCs to the dustbin of history.

Mr. MacKay had only to heed their verdict. The unprecedented "sorting" of the Canadian electorate along right-left lines that began with the Reform Party's 1993 breakthrough triggered a process that no PC leader could have resisted.

Until then, Canada's party system was one of the least polarized in the Western world. Two big-tent parties took turns governing based on how well each brokered vast regional and religious cleavages. Voters couldn't choose the Liberals or PCs based on their stands on state intervention or law and order because they were largely indistinguishable.

Canadian voters didn't suddenly discover their inner ideologue with the arrival of the Reform Party on the ballot. But, until then, the party system provided little outlet for ideological expression, despite occasionally successful attempts by the New Democratic Party to encourage class-based voting on the margins.



then Conservative Party produced a marked shift in the way in which parties captured and/or affected preferences for redistribution. As of 2011, Conservative voters [were] very clearly to the right of the other parties."

University of British Columbia political science professor Richard Johnston notes that PC victories up to and including 1988 depended on "radically incoherent" coalitions of voters. Canadians themselves came to realize this once voting for Reform became an option. With 2011's NDP wave in Quebec, the sorting trend under way in the rest of Canada since 1993 seemed finally to extend to that province.

The result is that "the big battalions of voters are now on the flanks, rather than in the middle," Prof. Johnston concludes. "Canadians' ideological locations are probably better sorted by party than they were 30 years ago, especially on the right."

Prof. Johnston argues that this sorting was "not ineluctable." But the way modern elections are fought suggests otherwise. Data-driven politics leads parties to aim for victory not by assembling "radically incoherent" coalitions of as many fundamentally incompatible voters as possible, but by mobilizing a much narrower base of like-minded voters. When barely 60 per cent of voters turn out, firing up your core supporters yields big returns on election day.

In this respect, Canadian and American politics are converging. Fifty years ago, Republicans and Democrats aimed to win the White House with broad-based coalitions. Today, Blue Dog Democrats and Rockefeller Republicans are extinct as both parties target core liberal or conservative voters, squeezing out moderates.

In 1992, Democrat Bill Clinton fought for and won Kentucky, Louisiana, West Virginia and Tennessee. Today, Hillary Clinton has veered left to mobilize the Democratic base and won't even contest those states in 2016. The reason, as former Barack Obama campaign manager David Plouffe recently explained: "If you run a campaign trying to appeal to 60 or 70 per cent of the electorate, you're not going to run a very compelling campaign for the voters you need."

ELDERCARE IN THE US VS. DENMARK

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE AMERICAN SYSTEM

OVERVIEW

- › Goal:
 - › Provide a brief overview of the US health and welfare system
 - › Focus on the elderly
- › Presentation plan:
 - › Introduce you to American
 - › Income benefits
 - › Healthcare
 - › Long-term care
- › Key points:
 - › The American system is
 - 1) Residual
 - 2) Fragmented

INCOME BENEFITS

	Denmark	US	OECD
Income from public pensions	53%	38%	59%
Income of 65+ (% mean income)	74%	92%	86%
Poverty rates of 65+	8%	20%	13%
% of population 65+	17%	13%	15%

INCOME BENEFITS

US

- › Social Security – Public pension
 - › Benefit level based on (e.g.)
 - › Earnings history
 - › Age of claiming benefit
- › Targeted benefits
 - › SNAP – Food stamps

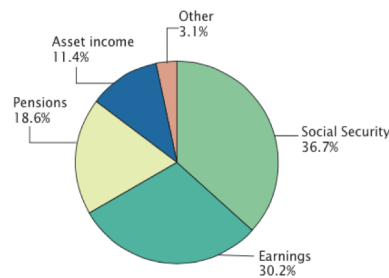
Denmark

- › Basic public pension
- › Targeted pension

INCOME BENEFITS

Share of Aggregate Income for the Population Aged 65 and Over by Source: 2010

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/cps/methodology/)



Note: The reference population of the survey is the civilian noninstitutionalized population. Source: Social Security Administration, 2012b; Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), 2011.



HEALTHCARE

US

- › TRICARE
 - › Public military healthcare coverage
- › Medicaid
 - › Public healthcare coverage for the poorest
 - › Varies by state
- › Medicare
 - › Public healthcare for the elderly
- › Obamacare
 - › Regulations on private health insurance
 - › Some reform of Medicaid/Medicare

Denmark

- › Universal healthcare
- › Separate long-term care provisions



HEALTHCARE

	Denmark	US	OECD
Healthcare			
Public health spending (% total)	85%	48%	76%
Health expenditure (% GDP)	11%	18%	10%
Life expectancy	79	78	80

US HEALTHCARE

- › Medicare
 - › Part A
 - › Hospitals and other institutions
 - › Part B
 - › Doctors and other specialists
 - › Part C (Private Healthcare)
 - › Usually provide Part A, B, and D coverage
 - › Sometimes provide vision, hearing, and dental coverage
 - › Part D
 - › Some prescription drug coverage
- › Medigap
 - › Private health insurance for uncovered services

US HEALTHCARE

- › Obamacare
 - › Gradually reduce
 - › Gaps in prescription drug coverage
 - › Part B premiums
 - › Part A and B coinsurance



US HEALTHCARE

Coverage by Type of Health Insurance for the Population Aged 65 and Over: 2000 and 2010

(In percent)

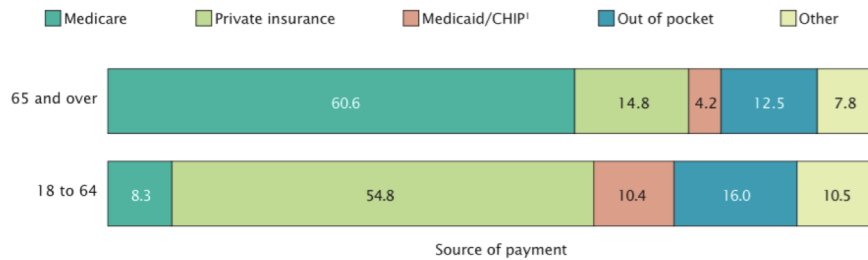
Coverage type	2000	2010
Any private provider	62.8	57.9
Employment based	34.9	32.5
Direct purchase	31.7	28.8
Any public provider	96.4	93.5
Medicaid	9.0	9.2
Medicare	96.1	93.1
Military health care	4.3	8.1
Uninsured	1.0	2.0

Note: Individuals may have multiple sources of health insurance.
Source: Denavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith, 2011.



US HEALTHCARE

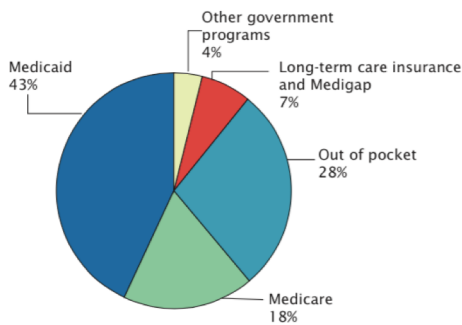
Percentage Distribution of Health Care Spending by Source of Payment and Age Group: 2009



¹Children's Health Insurance Program.
Source: Kashihara and Carper, 2012.

US LONG-TERM CARE

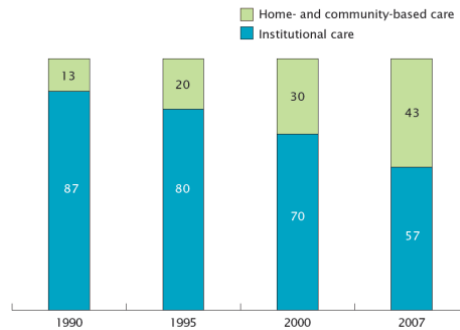
Long-Term Care Funding by Source: 2006



Source: Avalere Health, 2008.

US LONG-TERM CARE

Percentage Distribution of Medicaid Funding for
Long-Term Care by Type of Care: 1990 to 2007



SUMMARY

- › The American system is:
 - › **Residual**, not universal
 - › **Fragmented**, not unified
- › Results:
 - › A large role for the private sector
 - › Considerable variation by state
 - › Difficulties addressing poverty
 - › Lots of informal care




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Inflated figures, inflated opposition: how claims about welfare benefit levels affect public opinion

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/how-claims-about-welfare-benefit-levels-affect-public-opinion/

June 24, 2018

*Politicians, journalists, and think tanks frequently try to put a number on just how much welfare recipients receive in benefits – often massaging the figures in the process. But do exaggerated claims about benefit amounts really change anybody's mind about welfare overall? New research by **Carsten Jensen** and **Anthony Kevins** confirms that they indeed do.*



If you follow politics, or even just glance at newspaper headlines from time to time, you've probably come across quite a few claims about how much welfare recipients can "rake in" from benefits. To take just one well-known example, former Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne recounted the shock he felt when, after taking office, he realised that some people were receiving "£100,000 a year in benefit". Given how widely the exact amount of these figures varies, it seems clear that such numbers can easily be massaged or cherry-picked to align with prior ideological convictions. Presumably, the goal of propagating these sorts of welfare myths is to convince others that benefits are more generous than they should be, often by drawing comparisons to the income levels of those working in low-wage employment. But do claims like these actually have any effect on people, or have we all just made up our minds in advance?



In our new study, funded by Aarhus University's Department of Political Science and recently published in *Political Studies*, we find that inflated claims about benefit levels may indeed have a negative impact on attitudes toward benefit generosity.

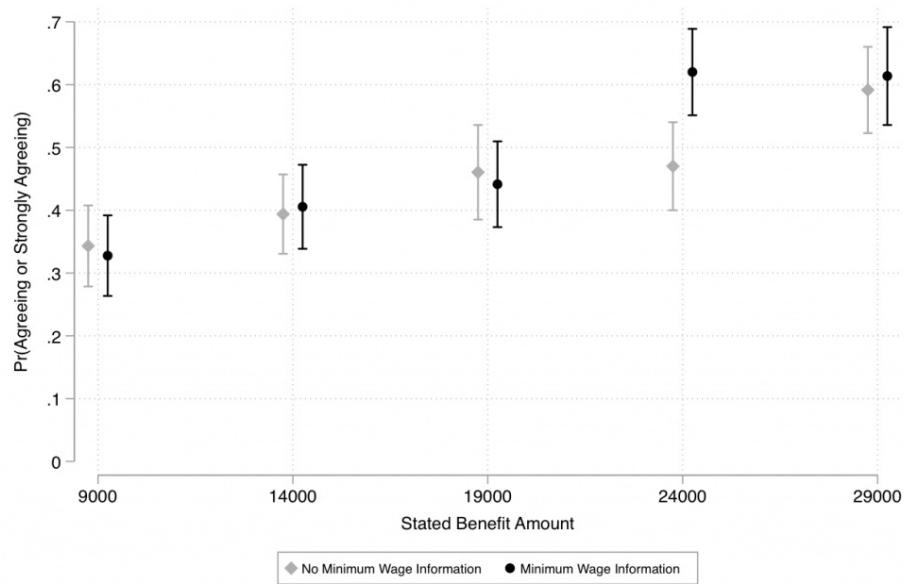
Using data from an original survey experiment that we conducted on approximately 2,000 Britons, we set out to answer two questions. First, we wanted to know if the size of the asserted benefit income matters. We therefore presented respondents with a benefit income level for the "typical family on welfare", supposedly based on data from the Office for National Statistics – but we varied the stated figure, which ranged from £9,000 to £29,000 (in intervals of £5,000).

Second, because past research suggests that citizens may not be particularly familiar with the income distribution, we also examined whether adding in information about minimum wage income would shape responses to asserted figures. To that end, half of our survey respondents also received information about the take-home income of a typical family working at minimum wage (set at £19,000 in the text), presented alongside an asserted benefit income of a family on welfare.

Inflated figures, inflated opposition

Results of our survey experiment suggest that when the asserted level of benefit income is high, there is a greater chance that an individual will think benefit levels are too generous. At the same time, however, we find that information about the minimum wage income level only shapes reactions to these figures in one instance: when the asserted benefit level is modestly higher than the stated minimum wage income.

Figure 1: Probability of Agreeing that Benefits Are Too Generous



Note: the stated benefit amount is given in pounds sterling.

Figure 1 summarises our overall findings, illustrating the likelihood that an individual will agree that benefits are too generous, broken down by the size of the asserted benefit income presented to a respondent, as well as whether or not information about the minimum wage income was included in the same text. As we can see in the figure, there are only limited differences between the responses of those individuals who saw either the £9,000, £14,000, or £19,000 claims.

Although there is a meaningful difference between respondents who saw the £9,000 figure and those who saw the £19,000 one, neither group is distinguishable from the one that was presented the £14,000 figure. The effects are starker once we enter the £20,000 range, however: on the whole, respondents presented with the £29,000 figure were more likely to feel that benefits were too generous, regardless of whether or not they also received information about the minimum wage income; yet those who saw the £24,000 figure felt the same way only when minimum wage income information was also included.

Similar effects for egalitarians and anti-egalitarians

The size of the asserted benefit level does seem to matter, then. It could be, however, that these effects are driven by specific types of citizens. There's probably good reason to assume, for example, that people with pro- or anti-welfare state tendencies might react differently to these claims, as may those with high or low levels of knowledge about politics. Our study explores these possibilities as well, ultimately finding that: (1) although egalitarians and anti-egalitarians start from different baseline attitudes, respondents generally react to increasingly large asserted benefit levels in surprisingly similar ways; and (2) the difference between responses to the £24,000 figure with and without minimum wage income information appears to be driven by those respondents with low levels of political knowledge. As a result, it seems that while increasing the asserted benefit level has a relatively widespread (gradual) impact, the importance of minimum wage information is limited to those with less pre-existing knowledge of politics.

Potential policy implications

Massaging the numbers to come up with headline-worthy levels of benefit income thus seems to be a potentially fruitful strategy for opponents of the welfare state. These findings are all the more important given their possible policy implications: to the extent that these sorts of claims can shape public opinion, they may serve to shore up support for welfare cuts. Policies like the benefits cap – for better or for worse – seem to be a particularly likely end result. So, proponents of an expansive welfare state will want to pay particular attention to these sorts of number-based narratives, breaking down asserted figures and proposing their own in return.

Note: the above draws on the authors' published work in *Political Studies*.

About the Authors

Carsten Jensen is Professor in the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University. His research is focused on the causes and consequences of redistributive politics in advanced western democracies, as well as democratic representation more broadly. His work has been published in journals such as the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *British Journal of Political Science*, and *Comparative Political Studies*.



Anthony Kevins is a Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at Utrecht University's School of Governance. His research centres around the reciprocal relationship between public opinion and social policy reform, and his work has been published in journals such as *Socio-Economic Review*, the *Journal of European Social Policy*, and the *European Political Science Review*. You can read more about his research on his website, which also includes non-paywalled, open-access copies of all of his published articles.

