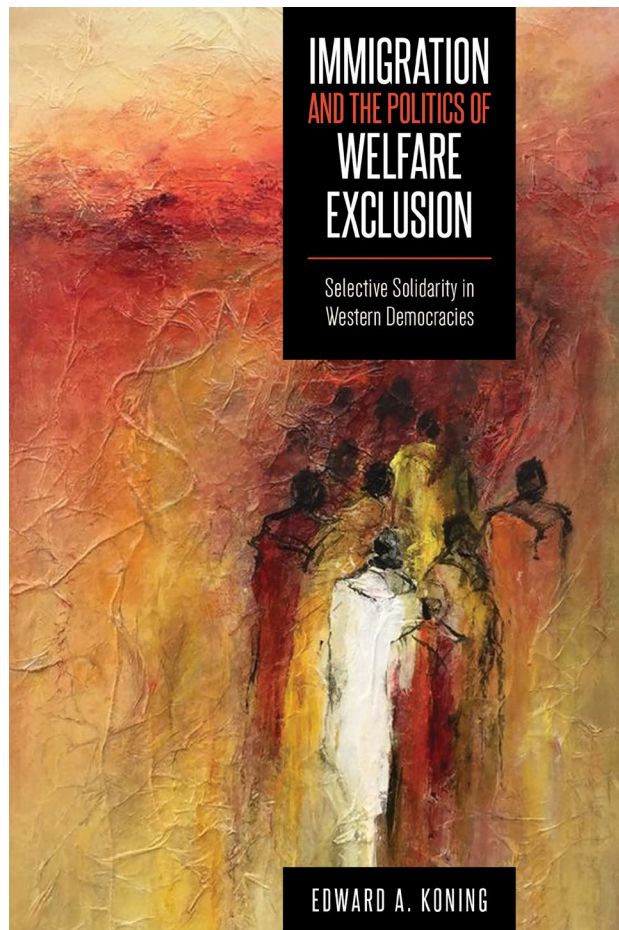


Review
Edward A. Koning:
***Immigration and the politics of welfare exclusion:
Selective solidarity in Western democracies***
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. 307 p.
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Reviewed by Willem Maas



Different countries respond in strikingly different ways to the tension between immigration and welfare. Some countries exclude immigrants from social rights while others maintain benefit levels or even increase access. Economic rationales do not support excluding immigrants from social benefits and services, argues Edward A. Koning in this compelling comparative study. Instead, politics and political logics explain why some countries go much further than others in reducing or eliminating immigrants' access to social rights. Combining a general theoretical framework (chapter 1) and comparative empirical analysis demonstrating the limited utility of economic explanations (chapter 2) with detailed examinations of the politics of three case studies – Sweden, Canada, and the Netherlands (chapters 3, 4, and 5) – demonstrates clearly that politics determines the timing and level of restrictions, as summarized in the conclusion (chapter 6). Two pithy sentences in the conclusion are that, all in all, “the politics of immigrant social rights seem mostly detached from economic reality” (202) and that “country-level differences in the dominant discourse on immigrants' social rights turn out to be much more important than party-level differences in ideological orientation” (203). Ideologically different parties in one country are more likely to agree with each other than with ideologically similar parties elsewhere; while parties of the left are more likely to advocate inclusion than parties of the right, “the more striking observation is that in each of these three countries, political parties are by and large in agreement about the desirability of IEWRs” (203-204), Koning's acronym for immigrant-excluding welfare reforms. Thus, the variation *between* countries is much more significant than the variation *within* them.

Koning is a political scientist (the book originates in his political science Ph.D. dissertation) and admirably uses the methodology prized in contemporary political science: a mix of quantitative data and careful qualitative study, including interviews and extensive policy and documentary analysis of both primary and secondary sources, which are documented in the book's 33-page bibliography. One might wonder whether a Dutch-born political scientist working in Canada selected the Netherlands and Canada as cases for pragmatic reasons while ignoring other more appropriate cases, but Koning convincingly demonstrates the relevance of these two cases, along with Sweden. All three countries have had significant immigration and similar economic fortunes over the past two decades, but they differ dramatically in ways that affect the politics of immigration and welfare: the structure of the welfare state (generous and universal in Sweden; more contributory and means-tested in the Netherlands, and even more basic in Canada), popular conceptions of national identity (inclusive egalitarianism in Sweden, Dutch nationalism that has become more exclusionary over the last few decades, and a history of immigration that is crucial to the self-imagery of Canada), and variation in the popular discourse on immigration (a growing mino-

rity of immigration sceptics in Sweden, anti-immigrant commentary becoming a central feature of public debate in the Netherlands, while the vast majority of political and public commentary in Canada discusses immigration in positive terms). This tripartite comparison leads to the book's main finding, that "the politics of immigrant welfare exclusion are more about general opposition to immigration and multiculturalism than about concerns over the economic effects of immigration and the sustainability of the welfare state" (5).

Though rooted in the three case studies (which are very well done), the book aims to explain the more general phenomenon of political contestation over the social rights of immigrants. The possible universe of contemporary cases ranges from California's 1994 "Proposition 187" referendum, in which 59 percent of voters supported denying undocumented immigrants access to health care and education – later overturned by a federal court, but then transformed into U.S.-wide policy through the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, part of a Republican-led effort to facilitate deportation and lower levels of and access to welfare benefits more generally, including for American citizens – to similar policy changes enacted over the past two decades in countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom (one might add some countries in central and eastern Europe which have not been particularly welcoming towards immigrants but also have relatively low levels of social benefits; or indeed the analysis could be extended to other regions of the world, which similarly see tension between immigration and access to social rights). The book's overarching goal is to understand why there are "such large differences across time and place both in how often attempts at welfare exclusion occur and in the extent those attempts are successful" (4).

The book finds the answer in deep-rooted historical features of a country's political system, particularly the structure of the welfare system and the prevailing sense of national identity. Contestation between the belief that the welfare state should primarily protect native-born citizens (what Koning terms "selective solidarity") and more universalistic beliefs results, Koning argues, from differences in principled attitudes about the proper place of immigrants in a welfare system. Focusing on reductions in immigrants' social rights (which remain relatively underexplored in the academic literature) suggests that excluding immigrants from benefits can be a popular strategy politically, even as such proposals often face legal prohibitions on differential treatment. Furthermore, "immigration can become such a politically volatile issue that it can affect policy-making in areas that are at most indirectly related" (8); attempts to appear tough on immigration can result in policy solutions that are related only tangentially to the problems they are meant to solve. In sum, this book demonstrates convincingly that politics

rather than economics explains policies towards immigrant social rights, and perhaps towards immigration more generally.

About the reviewer

Willem Maas, Jean Monnet Chair and Professor of Political Science, Public & International Affairs, and Socio-Legal Studies at York University, chaired Glendon Political Science for three and a half years, Glendon Faculty Council for four, and is also active in professional service. Professor Maas has held appointments at Yale, New York University, Radboud, Leiden, European University Institute, and elsewhere, and writes on EU and multilevel citizenship, migration, borders, free movement, and politics focusing on Europe and North America. He co-edits the new Oxford Studies in Migration and Citizenship book series and also heads the Canadian part of the Whole-COMM project, investigating the integration of migrants in small communities. Among other courses, Maas teaches an intensive summer seminar on the Netherlands and Europeanization.