
Politics of Pension Policies: Editorial

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Pension reform has been a prominent topic in Germany almost continuously since the Great Reform of 1957 (Döring 2002, Hegelich 2006). In the last years, the German pension system was seen to be confronted with major problems especially the lack of contributions because of unemployment and demographic change (Börsch-Supan 2001). Politicians have reacted with several reforms of the pension system, most notably the pension reform in 2001 with the enhancement of private provisions (*Riester Rente*) and the reform in 2004 that changed the formula for the calculation of pensions (Hegelich 2006: 196). These reforms have attracted the attention of many political scientists, not only as an object of research but also in the field of political advisory.

The first wave of analytical contributions from political science focused mainly on policies. Leading questions were amongst others: What are the effects on pensions of such reforms? What changes of the welfare system go along with such reforms? (e. g. Hinrichs/Kangas 2003, Bonoli 2003).

A second wave of contributions focused on politics. Leading questions were for example: Why can reforms in a

particular environment (not) function? What is the “political cost” of pension reforms? What conditions make pension reforms more likely to happen? (e. g. Armington/Bonoli 2006, Ebbinghaus 2006, Hering 2004).

In addition to this important work, this special issue of German Policy Studies tries to stress the connection between *policies* and *politics*. To analyse the process of pension reforms in these two dimensions, it is necessary to understand that pension reforms are not just institutional changes to solve common – in the sense of shared – problems. Far from that, pension policies are always the field of competing or even contrary political interests. This perspective changes the leading research questions: Instead of *conditions* the actors’ *positions* are questioned. Within the reform process *conflict* becomes more important. And *outcomes* are not measured absolute but in the relation to the *cui bono* question.

In this way Frank Nullmeiers essay on “Personal responsibility and its contradictions in terms” reveals that the call for personal responsibility is in many ways an ideology strengthening the pressure for reforms of the pension system.

Marius Busemeyer analyses the latest pension reforms in Germany with the focus on the embedded political strategies. In contrast to a majority position in the relevant literature, which claims a broad consensus is a precondition for successful pension reform, he argues that in Germany, a large variety of political strategies have been applied. Most involve consensus or at least an attempt to create cooperation with trade unions or the opposition parties, but some also rely on unilateral governmental action.

Wolfram Lamping and Friedbert W. Rüb examine the pension reform of 2001 with the so called *Riester Rente* and find a new policy-style of the red-green Schröder government that they coin “*experimental law-making*”.

Frank Berner shows that the pension reform in 2001 results in new conflicts. The introduction of the new multi-pillar approach strengthened the role of welfare markets. But in contrast to the statutory pension insurance, social goals can not directly be realized by means of law-making in a market-based voluntary system of private pensions.

Simon Hegelich focuses on the actors’ interests in the enhancement of supplementary provision for old age. He argues that the strengthening of the so-called second and third pillar could be reached because it was the intersection of competing interests of employers, employees, and the political administrative system. The results are a change from defined-benefit to an undefined status and a growing potential for conflicts.

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