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Welfare State, Social Capital, and Liberal Integration Dilemmas in the U.S. and Germany

Over the last decade a cloud settled over the immigration and integration regimes of the European welfare states as well as the United States. Political and social anxieties generated by the apparent loss of sovereignty and decline of social solidarity and trust have destabilized previous advances and opened the doors to anti-liberal populist politics.

Confidence in the ability, inevitability and value of integrating newcomers into a system of legal and social solidarity has waned. The weakening of both liberal civic nationalism and secular constitutional patriotism has unsettled national identities and undermined legal reforms intended to facilitate the inclusion of immi-

grants. The road ahead will be difficult for both the welfare state and immigrants. More forceful integration policies might be better for sustaining the welfare state, but the current preferences for individual liberties and group recognition as well as the weakening of universalist frameworks such as “class,” make this more difficult. Projects like “Americanization” or adaptation to a “Leitkultur” are today politically unacceptable. Ironically perhaps, immigrants may now fare better in the more unjust neo-liberal societies with lower levels of social solidarity such as the US, than in the advanced welfare states.

Social capital debates have, it is true, sometimes been mobilized and instrumentalized in a number of

countries to push back against the previously-regnant (though vaguely defined) multicultural projects of the previous decade. Nonetheless, the question once posed by David Miller, is what sense must socialism necessarily be communitarian (1989), has not been adequately addressed. Arguably, the findings of Alesina et al seem to hold for Europe as well as the United States whereas the more optimistic findings of Banting et al for Canada and Portes for the U.S. may not travel as well. (Indeed, Portes's arguments emphasizing the importance of community social capital while delinking its accumulation from integration and emphasizing instead the virtues of the enclave, have been inspirational to some in the U.S. while drawing harsh criticism from Waldinger and others.) It is, perhaps, time to ask, both empirically and normatively, what social-capital building integration measures are feasible. In particular, one might ask whether there is any utility today (as Weber hypothesized in his day) to the "nation" as an identity integument, in which social capital development and social solidarity might better thrive. Or is this sentiment, like the trade union, Arbeiterkultur, and

mass-production Fordism, a thing of the past whose invocation has little to offer socially while risking much politically?

This essay looks at Germany and the US in particular to assess these questions and the dilemmas that the social capital debates have helped to underscore.