

Banting KEITH and Will KYMLICKA, *The Strains of Commitment. The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017)

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Is multicultural diversity a threat to social solidarity, understood as an “attitude of mutual concern and mutual obligation”? And, if so, would multicultural diversity through this mechanism weaken the redistributive policies of the welfare state? These are the questions that this excellent edited volume addresses head-on. As such, it is highly relevant and much-needed both politically, as well as academically, because assumptions of a trade-off between multicultural diversity—open borders—and the sustainability of generous welfare provision continue to abound. More and more studies investigate this alleged trade-off in empirical terms. While the evidence is and remains inconclusive at the aggregate level, careful micro-level studies confirm negative links between exposure to immigration and welfare support only in very limited and specific circumstances (e.g. the direct competition for identical, non-elastic and scarce goods). Hence, assessing the theoretical and empirical foundations of a potential trade-off is highly important, not only to gauge the effects of immigration on welfare states, in terms of effect sizes and scope, but also to understand strategic dilemmas and choices for political parties and voters, and—most importantly—the effects on social solidarity.

What makes this book so powerful is not only the questions it asks and the answers it provides, but also the careful, systematic and non-alarmist discussion of the relationships under investigation. Rather than proving a point, the editors and authors let the findings speak for themselves, embrace nuance and ambiguity, and manage to synthesize a complex set of findings into a set of clear conclusions. The key message this book conveys is that there is no robust evidence of a direct link between immigration or multiculturalist diversity and solidarity. While the absence of this link has been established before with regard to civic and political solidarity (values and rights), this book confirms it for redistributive solidarity. There is no clear trend of eroding redistributive solidarity—overall—and there is no direct (negative) link between multiculturalism and redistributive solidarity.

Rather, the demise of solidarity in Western societies tends to be strongly overstated. Solidarity has been and is “built”, both by actors and by institutions, and hence the relationship between multicultural diversity and solidarity is conditional on actors, institutions and policies.

The book begins with a detailed and profound text by the editors, which synthesizes introduction and conclusion into a single chapter outlining the questions at stake, the theoretical and empirical state of research, and the findings the book provides. The volume then carefully theorizes and empirically investigates the different components of the argument in three coherently structured parts, featuring an impressive line-up of junior and senior scholars from both normative and positive approaches.

A first part is dedicated to political theory, with contributing chapters by Miller, Bauböck and Levy. Miller delves into theorizing and defining the concept of solidarity in terms of mutual concern and groupness, and explains why mechanisms that help *sustain* solidarity may not identically *generate* it. Bauböck, to some extent, breaks up the challenge of maintaining group solidarity in diverse communities by associating different forms of solidarity to different levels of governance. Levy, finally, takes the role of *advocatus diaboli* in this volume by asking not only whether solidarity and mutualism are at all necessary for redistributive policies, but also whether they are at all desirable given their imminent exclusionary potential. Rather than focusing on solidarity as the foundation for material redistribution within societies, he pleads in favor of emphasizing the virtues of cooperation as both an empirically more feasible and normatively more desirable basis for redistributive policies.

Part II empirically probes the alleged trade-off between multiculturalism/nationalism and solidarity on the basis of public opinion data. The strong chapter by Teney and Helbling provides evidence against such a trade-off. While they do find a strong multiculturalism-nationalism divide in Germany, this divide is not related to support for social redistributive solidarity. Johnston, Wright, Soroka and Citrin add findings from the Canadian context disconfirming any link between national pride and redistributive solidarity. And the chapter by Reeskens and van Oorschot makes the link to the sources of solidarity by showing that generous social policies themselves prevent such a trade-off from emerging.

The seven chapters in Part III then investigate different possible sources of solidarity more deeply. Their shared message could be

summarized as follows: the causal arrow is diametrically opposed to what is usually alleged. Solidarity is not a precondition for inclusive institutions. Rather, inclusive policies and institutions are generative of solidarity. Hall starts out by showing that solidarity of diverse communities (not only national ones) relies on actors, institutions, and the joint narratives they entail. The chapters by Koning, and by Lefkofridi and Michel (who build on their important work on exclusive solidarity), show that actors—right-wing populist parties in particular—shape the terms and saliency of how diversity and redistribution are (in)compatible. Rothstein’s contribution resonates with the key message that Levy’s chapter provides: redistributive solidarity may depend less on mutualist and/or altruist attitudes, but rather on effective government that sustains citizens’ cooperation. Bloemraad goes from institutions to policies and asks if multiculturalist policies undermine solidarity by highlighting diversity. For the North American context, she finds rather the inverse, and argues that the generative solidaristic effects of multiculturalist policies do not require pre-existing solidarity, but can be fought for politically. Finally, the chapters by Borevi and Loobuyck and Sinardet focus on actors and how elites differ in the discourses they adopt. Again, their findings disconfirm any automatic or necessary link between structural trends and declining solidarity.

In lieu of a conclusion, Philippe van Parijs reflects on a third way between “unbounded humanitarianism” (which the editors of the volume distance themselves from) and “bounded national solidarity”, namely a “deliberative justificatory community”, in which solidarity arises from the need to justify one’s actions and, in particular, the exercise of power.

Beyond the strengths in terms of conceptual differentiation and empirical openness already mentioned, I would like to point out just three further strengths of the volume. First, it provides a serious and—rare—joint reading of both normative and positive-empirical research on different models of community boundaries and solidarity. Second, the volume effectively debunks the assertions that “shared values” are either necessary or sufficient for redistributive social solidarity, i.e. generous welfare states. Rather, the editors contend that “thinned and multicultural” criteria can make people feel they are “members of an inter-generational national community”. On this aspect, though, it remains unclear why the editors of the volume adhere to the importance of the *national* community as key for redistributive social solidarity, given that the nation is by no means

a “natural” welfare risk pool (neither theoretically nor empirically in Western welfare states). Third, the book makes a real effort in thinking through sources of solidarity beyond the limitation of diversity, i.e. alternative sources of solidarity that could be viable in the diverse and heterogeneous societies of today. And while their finding of the important role of actors and institutions in generating communities and solidarity is key, the volume thereby also points to further challenges for research (and politics) in an era where integrative associations (such as mass parties and trade unions) are in decline for reasons unrelated to multicultural diversity.

If there was anything to criticize about the volume, I would mention its implicit assumption that national societies are the “natural” communities for bounded redistributive solidarity, and its assumption that this kind of solidarity requires an attitude of mutual concern. For welfare state scholars in particular, both assumptions are not self-evident, as the pooling of social risks through welfare states has historically occurred along very different lines from the national community, and through very different mechanisms than “mutual concern” (e.g. insurance, appeasement of protest and deviance, log-rolling etc). The implication is that even if redistributive solidarity was in decline (because of diversity)—which it is not—this would not automatically be a threat to inclusive welfare states.

But this is a research agenda for a different project and a different set of scholars, which is why the volume should resonate widely and strongly beyond scholars working on multiculturalism, into political economy, and electoral and partisan politics in particular.

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