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The Welfare States: Examining U.S. State-Level Benefits For Families With Children, 1987-2015

Anthony Huaqui
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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A Thesis Presented

by

ANTHONY C. HUAQUI

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ANTHONY C. HUAQUI

Approved as to style and content by:

Jasmine Kerrissey, Chair

Joya Misra, Member

Sanjiv Gupta, Member

Jonathan Wynn, Chair
Department of Sociology

ABSTRACT

THE WELFARE STATES: EXAMINING U.S. STATE-LEVEL BENEFITS FOR

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN, 1987-2015

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ANTHONY HUAQUI, B.A., CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Jasmine Kerrissey

Welfare state scholars have amassed competing theoretical explanations for the development of welfare policies. When considering the U.S. case, a discussion of federalism is central to these theoretical examinations. How power in policymaking is distributed amongst the varying levels of government is influential in the construction of the U.S. welfare state. Standard quantitative approaches to U.S. welfare research have offered a limited analysis of how theoretical explanations change after historical moments of welfare reform. In this study, I examine the institutional changes introduced to U.S. welfare in 1996 by way of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This study examines the changes in welfare maximum benefit levels for a 3-person family from 1987-2015. However, I apply an alternative quantitative approach to studying the effects PRWORA has had on benefit maximums by splitting models into two separate time periods and running analyses separately: pre-PRWORA (1987-1996) and post-PRWORA (1997-2015). By applying this methodological approach, I demonstrate how the influence of different sets of theories change after institutional reforms, such as PRWORA. The results offer new insights to the temporal applicability of different theoretical explanations and the construction of social citizenship.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The welfare state's purpose is to reduce inequality and grant social rights to citizens by the redistribution of resources and income through government-controlled programs and services (Garfinkel, Rainwater and Smeeding 2010; Marshall 1950). How welfare programs become constructed and administered has implications for who within a polity is granted the title of full citizenship and granted economic security (Mettler 1998; Goldberg 2007). Understanding the expansion and retrenchment of the welfare state has thus been a central question for political sociologists. This paper introduces a different methodological approach, which splits time periods based on federalist institutional changes to policymaking. Doing so provides new insights into welfare state change and how its determinants change over time, particularly for programs aimed at families with children.

Three major camps of welfare theories explored in this paper are political, economic, and racial (Brown and Best 2017). Some scholars argue that political explanations, be it institutions or actors, are the primary driving force for determining welfare generosity (Korpi 1983; Orloff 1993; Esping-Andersen 1990; Skocpol 1985). Another group of scholars argue that it is primarily economic resources that best explain welfare generosity (Wilensky 1975; Cutright 1965). A third group have argued that welfare generosity is driven by racial contexts, particularly within the U.S. (Quadagno 1994; Alesina and Glaeser 2004). These theories have been examined by both cross-national and state-level studies.

The U.S. has a the ‘dual federalist’ political structure (Mettler 1998). This system preserves state and local autonomy alongside a centralized national government (Mettler 1998). Federalism has been embedded into the U.S. political system since its inception and its institutional changes have given different levels of government varying degrees of power throughout U.S. history. Welfare policymaking is a key area in which federalism has taken root, and a major area of social science inquiry (Finegold 2005; Freeman and Rogers 2007; Skocpol and Ikenberry 1983; Skocpol and Amenta 1986; Weil and Skocpol 1983; Thompson 2008).

The responsibility and funding of welfare policies on individual state and local governments has increased since 1996, a.k.a. the “devolution” of welfare policymaking. Welfare scholars identify the 1996 welfare reform that implemented the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) as an important moment in the devolution process. Increasing states’ responsibility of welfare spending for families with children has led states to privatize and retrench welfare programs that administered public assistance for families in order to minimize the financial burden brought on by PRWORA. Specifically, the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, replaced by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) under PRWORA, were targets of PRWORA.

PRWORA shifted decisions on welfare generosity from the national level to primarily the state and local levels. This transfer in political arenas to subnational governments has implications for which set of theories apply pre- and post-implementation of PRWORA and how this influences the social citizenship of women and children. Methodologically, this suggests analyzing these two distinct time periods separately, instead of analyzing a single time period that includes years before and after this act's implementation. Yet previous work has not taken this methodological approach, leaving questions on the temporal impacts of institutional change on citizenship under-examined.

The 1996 welfare reform introduced a fundamental institutional shift in welfare policymaking. As a result, the factors that explain benefit levels may differ across these periods. As federalism spreads post-1996, how state political actors and race determine AFDC/TANF maximum benefits changes in response to this institutional restructuring. This study uses yearly state level data from 1987 and 2015 to assess how the three sets of theories explored (political, economic and racial) in quantitative analyses influence benefit levels before and after PRWORA. Quantitative studies focused on AFDC/TANF often use a year dummy for 1996 to account for this act (Kelly 2005; Brady et al. 2013). Yet methodologically, it is possible to gain a more constructive understanding of which of these welfare theories explain spending for families within states by analyzing the pre-1996 time period and 1996-onwards separately.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Federalism and the U.S. Welfare State

The federalist governance structure of the U.S. shapes how institutions and actors navigate political spaces (Lieberman 1998). Changes to institutional arrangements, such as those caused by policy implementation, influence the power that different levels of government possess. For example, the Social Security Act of 1935 enlarged the powers of the federal government by establishing national welfare programs, including Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) (Mettler 1998). More recently, individual U.S. states have gained greater levels of autonomy in social and economic policy determination with the passing of PRWORA (Brady et al. 2013; Moller 2008; Soule and Zylan 1997). These historical shifts in welfare responsibility have resulted in a stratified system of welfare provisions.

The federalist political structure of the U.S. has been influential in constructing a stratified welfare system. Justification for welfare claims are made as one of three types: needs, earnings, and rights (Gordon 1994). Welfare claims along these three fronts hold unequal legitimacy as claims based on rights are seen as the most legitimate and claims based on needs seen as the least legitimate. This logic on claims has implications for how welfare programs are stratified: welfare programs that are rights- and earnings-based receive greater payments and reputations; welfare programs that provide less generous support are needs-based (Gordon 1994). Old-age insurance (Social Security) is an example of a program in the “better” welfare strata due to it being based on earnings in the labor market; AFDC/TANF are examples of programs in the “worse” welfare strata since this assistance is not determined by one’s labor market involvement but on households’ (usually single mother households) material needs. Federal programs tend to be right-based and more generous, while state-level programs are more likely to be need-based and less generous. This separation and stratification of the U.S. welfare state impacts the construction of American citizenship.

Structural arrangements for policy formation influence the character and experience of citizenship of those covered by the policy. Under federalism, American citizenship is divided by the coexistence of two forms of governance (federal and state/local) that has become separated in terms of gender (Mettler 1998). The welfare programs that were designed to be controlled by the federal government were granted to those who have positions within the labor market that were not in the agricultural or domestic market, predominantly white men. Programs such as Aid to Dependent Children (later AFDC and then TANF) were labeled as “welfare” instead of “entitlements” and administered by state and local governments (Mink 1995). These public assistance programs were designed to keep white women out of the labor force, reinforce traditional family structures, and promote a middle-class, white “Maternalist” idea of motherhood (Gordon 1994; Mink 1995; Morgan 2006). Additionally, domestic and agricultural workers were ineligible for public assistance programs under the Social Security Act of 1935. As these jobs were largely occupied by people of color, this demonstrates the embedded racism of welfare politics (Gordan 1994; Mink 1995). Men were granted national (and thus full) citizenship while women and people of color were rejected from accessing full citizenship.

While the efforts of social movements and changes to the U.S. economy have challenged the consequences of this dual citizenship model, efforts to restrict women and people of color from being fully incorporated citizens by access to public policy benefits have continued. Of particular importance is the welfare reform of 1996 through the passing of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This act continued what is referred to as the "devolution" of welfare policymaking by granting state and local governments increased autonomy in overseeing the administration and formation of welfare programs for families with children.

The "Devolution" of Welfare Policymaking through PRWORA

The Era of Rediscovered Federalism (aka "New Federalism") is characterized by the "devolution" of welfare policymaking, where the responsibility of welfare policymaking by state and local governments has increased (Winston 2002; Zylan and Soule 2000). The Reagan administration's 1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) was the first of these efforts and emphasized work requirements, decentralization and greater restrictions for welfare assistance programs. However, decentralization took priority in 1996 with PRWORA. Signed into law under the Clinton administration, PRWORA radically changed welfare politics in the U.S.

The Clinton administration's welfare reform gained support from New Democrats and Republicans alike who sought to fundamentally restructure the U.S. welfare state to gain support from working-class, white male voters (Reese 2005). This act ended AFDC and implemented TANF, which had stricter work requirements and limitations for cash assistance (Thompson and Gais 2000). PRWORA also gave states the ability to apply for a welfare waiver which would grant individual states the power to be "innovative" with

TANF in terms of eligibility requirements, funding allocated, and the ability to "contract out" administrative services to private agencies (Winston 2002; Moller 2008). States that submitted welfare waivers to experiment with welfare policymaking and eligibility led other states within its geographic proximity to also submit waivers (Zylan and Soule 2000). This "devolution" of welfare policymaking not only increased the responsibility of policymaking to the state and local-level but also shifted the political arena in which interest groups competed for these policies.

Women and people of color were most impacted by the 1996 reform. Marriage promotion and work enforcement for women and people of color were part of PRWORA (Abramovitz 2006; Reese 2005). There was an insistence on cutting welfare for teen and unwed mothers, who were racialized as being predominantly young women of color. States were given the power to regulate women's productive lives through "family caps" on benefits, which denied additional TANF support for mothers who had children while on welfare. There were also incentives for recipients of TANF to use Norplant (a birth control drug) and for teen mothers to live with their parents (Reese 2005). Federal welfare offices even authorized an annual monetary reward to the ten states with the highest percentage increase of children residing in a married, two-parent household.

Congress introduced a five-year lifetime limit on the receipt of benefits for welfare recipients that forced them to take any job possible after the 5 years were over, regardless of wages or working conditions. Many states adopted policies with lifetime limits fewer than five years. This created a low-wage workforce that was comprised of predominantly women of color (Simmons 2002). Welfare-to-work programs created by states under PRWORA pushed women of color into public-sector positions but for lower pay than formally employed public-sector workers and without the ability to unionize.

Federal assistance for the funding of TANF was no longer an entitlement but was converted into a state-administered block grant. This capped federal assistance for the program, leaving a new responsibility for funding the welfare program to individual state budgets (Abramovitz 2006). After PRWORA passed, states accounted for one-quarter of total public spending on welfare programs (Howard 1999; Hayes and Vidal 2015). States were at risk of losing federal funding if the newly instilled work requirements were not met. This created a sense of interstate competition that reduced welfare generosity, particularly for the TANF program (Bailey and Rom 2004). With the shift in funding responsibility for TANF to individual states, privatization and retrenchment increasingly became mechanisms by which state and local governments could minimize welfare expenditures.

Block-grant federal funding for TANF, declining tax bases and increased demands for state services pushed state and local governments to look for alternatives (Reese 2011). Referred to as third-sector organizations, public-private relationships emerged as a way to administer welfare services between government control and the free market. Managerialist and quasi-market principles embedded in these private social service contracts countered the need for flexible, individualized services or involve clients in decision-making. This impacted public-sector unionized workers who administered benefits for TANF. These workers came under attack as privatization efforts by politicians and business interests claimed that these workers were inefficient and over-paid.

The administration of public assistance for families with children became increasingly decentralized, with subnational governments adopting more responsibility for eligibility determination and funding. While there is general consensus on the importance of PRWORA, there are still debates surrounding what factors predominantly explain benefit levels for families. Three sets of welfare state theories might explain these factors as primarily based on politics, economic resources, and racism. Drawing from these larger theoretical perspectives informs what we expect to see as primary determinants of benefits for AFDC/TANF before and after the institutional changes under PRWORA are in effect.

Welfare State Theories and Expected Findings

There is a lot of variation in welfare spending across U.S. states, including the amount of benefits allocated to families with children through TANF. In 2015, Mississippi had the lowest TANF maximum monthly benefit at $170.00 while Alaska had the highest TANF maximum monthly benefit at $923.00.

Welfare state scholars have produced an expansive literature examining what factors influence the implementation of policies and welfare generosity. Three theories that are a focus in this study as explanations for these differences in welfare state expansion include: political, economic and racial (Brown and Best 2017). The following sections explain these theories, as well as how their influence may change under primarily federal decision making (pre PRWORA) versus state level (post PRWORA).

Political Theories

Institutional Approach

A large literature analyzes how political institutions shape welfare spending. Skocpol (1985) considers how states themselves affect political and social processes through policies and relationships with social groups. Long-term political transformations that are the legacies of state formation shape welfare policies as well (Orloff 1993; Pierson 1994). Institutional arrangements and features at the state-level can affect how legislators and other policy makers craft welfare policies during the policymaking process (Amenta and Halfmann 2000; Amenta et al. 2005; Pierson 1996; Kwon and Pontusson 2010). These scholars argue that there is a certain level of path dependency, based on the way institutional structures have been set up in the past. Successful reform of the welfare state can be influenced by the ability of would-be reformers navigating a hostile policy environment that is temporally affected by states' history of welfare generosity (Pierson 1996; Heclo 1976).

This institutional approach establishes one important way to think about welfare reform. As discussed earlier, the passing of PRWORA caused an institutional change in how responsibility and funding for AFDC/TANF was distributed along differing levels of governance. Understanding this fundamental goal of PRWORA theoretically drives this study's analysis. These shifting institutional arrangements of welfare benefits for families with children has an effect on how influential predictors of benefit levels change pre- and post- reform. Running analyses separately between pre- and post-PRWORA time periods provide insights on how changes to political institutional arrangements impacts the temporal applicability of political, economic, and racial theoretical explanations for programs aimed at families with children.

Class-based Actors Approach

Other welfare state scholars focus on the role of political actors. Power resource theory argues that Leftist political actors influence social policy and the expansion of the welfare state (Korpi 1983, 1985, 1989; Brady 2009). Within this category are two primary actors: Leftist political parties and labor unions. Leftist political parties compete within the political arena for electoral power and have advocated for more generous welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990; Huber and Stephens 2001; Brady 2009; Kwon and Pontusson 2010; Primo and Snyder 2010). Labor unions represent the interests of workers and have also been correlated with higher welfare spending (Marlow and Orzechowski 1996; Simmons 2002). Unions have supported Leftist political parties due to their more egalitarian ideologies and vocal support for labor rights. In the U.S., this has primarily come in the form of labor movement support for the Democratic party, although it is important to note that this party is politically more centrist than traditional Leftist political parties (Dark 2001; Rosenfeld 2014).

The interests of capital as a political actor can be advanced through the welfare state. Efforts to reduce funding to public services, weaken the bargaining power of labor, and strengthen the political power of right-wing organizations have recently become the target of studies at the state-level (Lafer 2012, 2017; Reese 2005; Witko and Newmark 2005). Right-wing organizations, such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), lobby on behalf of capital interests to retrench welfare programs.

These explanations of welfare state development influence what we would expect to see both pre- and post-PRWORA, as this shift in policymaking takes place. Prior to PRWORA, with AFDC, states still had some discretion with how they could administer the program, leading to variation of program benefits across states. However, political actors focused lobbying for policies within the federal political arena and less at the state level.

The importance of political actors, specifically unions and partisan actors, changes with PRWORA. We would expect to see political actors as a significant factor of AFDC/TANF maximum benefits in both periods but to a lesser degree prior to 1996 since political actors are more focused on exercising their resources at the federal level then. It is once responsibility for TANF benefit levels become increasingly focused in state and local-governments that we expect to see class-based actors, particularly state-level Democratic political control and labor unions, become increasingly significant.

Economic Theories

Scholars have also explored economic explanations, where policies and welfare programs are dependent on economic factors. Increased funding to welfare programs is used to halt social unrest caused by high unemployment while low unemployment can compel states to spur welfare cutbacks to keep labor in low-wage positions (Piven and Cloward 1971).

Within these economic explanations, scholars have argued that economic conditions are a result of the neoliberal project, characterized by an emphasis on free market principles and the reduction of government intervention in the market. The neoliberal agenda has led policymakers to alter eligibility requirements for welfare programs (Abramovitz 2014; Soss et al. 2011). Fiscal crises can influence a state to cut back on welfare spending and choose to privatize social services to private contractors in order to minimize expenditures (O’Connor 1973; Offe 1984). Fundamental shifts in local labor markets can render welfare programs less effective, increasing the need for social welfare spending (Bertram 2013). Across U.S. states, state per capita income is correlated with the amount of benefits received from welfare programs (Zimmermann and Tumlin 1999).

I would expect economic factors to be significant prior to 1996. Increases in unemployment and poverty rates within states would garner a response of increased AFDC generosity. As a goal of AFDC was to bring white children and their mothers out of poverty in order to keep them out of the labor market and provide aid to 'future citizens' of the polity, states would likely increase benefits to adhere to these populations (Gordon 1994; Mink 1995; Morgan 2006). We would expect the economic growth of a state to negatively influence AFDC benefits, since improved economic conditions have resulted in reduced AFDC caseloads prior to PRWORA (Reese 2005).

By contrast, economic factors are not expected to play as critical an influence post-1996. States implemented more stringent work requirements and shorter benefit periods on TANF after PRWORA was passed. TANF benefits now required employment, forcing the poor into low-wage or temp jobs established by welfare-to-work programs. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) also subsidized the low-wage labor force which ensured its continued reproduction. As states became increasingly focused on reducing TANF caseloads by forcing the emergence of a low-wage labor force, it is expected that unemployment and poverty rates will not be as significant a factor in determining AFDC/TANF maximum benefits.

Racial Theories

A third group of welfare state theories that I focus on in this paper argues for racial explanations for the construction of welfare policies, particularly within the U.S. context. This work focuses on the role that racial tensions, divisions, and discrimination have had on welfare policy implementation (Alesina and Glaeser 2004; Brown 2013; Fox 2012; Neubeck and Casenave 2001). Racial discrimination of African Americans in workplaces has restricted their accessibility to public and private benefits (Brown 1999; Gordon 1994; Lieberman 1998; Mink 1998). The public opinions of whites towards racial minorities and welfare spending have influenced policymakers' decisions surrounding the extent of funding for welfare programs (Gilens 1999; Johnson 2001, 2003). Taken one step further, whites have historically halted welfare initiatives that threatened the racial hierarchy within U.S. (Quadagno 1994). In the U.S., restructuring the welfare system through race-neutral social policies is a way to control the behaviors of women of color, who were demonized as being abusers of welfare generosity (Abramovitz 1992, 2006; Misra et al. 2003). The percentage of blacks at the state- or local-level has been a determinant of both welfare generosity and how strict eligibility for welfare benefits were (Moller 2002; Reese 2005; Soss et al., 2011).

Racism has strongly influenced welfare politics surrounding benefits for families with children. Reagan-era politics stigmatized people of color, primarily women of color, as abusing the welfare system, referring to them as 'welfare queens' (Hancock 2004; Misra et al. 2003). The rhetoric and eligibility reform behind PRWORA were also racialized, disproportionately and negatively affecting people of color (Abramovitz 2000; Mink 1998; Reese 2005). Therefore, we expect to see the percentage of a state's population that is nonwhite as a significant, negative influencer to AFDC/TANF maximum benefits both prior and post 1996.

Political institutions/actors, economic factors, and racial discrimination are the three theoretical foci of this paper, although there are other theoretical perspectives within the broader welfare literature[1][2].

This study uses a methodological approach to account for the effects of PRWORA that is similar to Kelly and Witko (2012). Examining inequality in the U.S., the authors view the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 as a pivotal moment for devolution and so split their analyses to pre and post-1995 time periods. This methodological approach allowed them to test how federal and state governments influence inequality in these two distinct time periods. Similarly, I identify the passing of PRWORA as a crucial moment of federalism and so split my analyses into pre and post-1996 time periods. Doing so allows me to test how different factors influence benefit levels for families with children before and after changes to institutional arrangements granted state and local-level governments increased responsibility.

[1] (See Quadagno 1987).

[2] Feminist theories of the welfare state are a perspective that highlights the intersectional inequalities of welfare policymaking. However, feminist theories are not directly assessed in this paper for reasons of length.

CHAPTER 3

DATA

Data is drawn from the Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research's (IPPSR) Correlates of State Policy and the University of Kentucky's Center for Poverty Research (UKCPR) National Welfare datasets. These datasets combined contain hundreds of state variables from a multitude of sources for all 50 states, with the unit of analysis being state-year. The IPPSR dataset contains data from 1900-2016 and the UKCPR dataset contains data from 1980-2017. Different variables used contained data for different years. Any variables that did not contain data for all the years used in these analyses were imputed by the author.

The main dependent variable is *AFDC/TANF maximum monthly benefits for a 3-person family* in a given year (Brady and Burroway 2012; Brady et al. 2013). This measure captures the maximum monthly cash benefit given under AFDC or TANF, depending on pre- or post-PRWORA, per year that was allowed for a 3-person family[3]. Analyses were also run for 2-person and 4-person families with similar results. The amounts were converted into 2015 dollars. The AFDC and TANF programs were the programs most directly affected by the welfare reforms under PRWORA, leading to privatization, retrenchment of benefits, and deepening the gendered divide of citizenship. By focusing on the maximum benefits allowed for 3-person families by individual states, this approach captures which factors impacted the determination of state spending on families at different eras.

[3] It should be noted that while this measure offers maximum monthly benefits, families rarely received this maximum. This does pose a limitation for this particular measure. Average per family data for AFDC/TANF spending by states is unavailable. This makes the following analysis a conservative test.

The first set of explanatory variables tests political theories of welfare generosity. Korpi's power resource theory (1983) indicates that class-based political actors influence social policy: Leftist political parties and labor unions expand welfare generosity, while capital aims to retrench welfare generosity within the political arena. *Public-sector union density* and *Private-sector union density* capture how influential organized labor has been on maximum benefits for 3-person families in these two eras. This is measured as the proportion of nonagricultural workers in the public- and private-sector who are represented by a union, respectively (Hirsch and MacPherson 2003). Labor unions have historically advocated for the interests of those of lower socioeconomic status and pushed for greater redistributive programs (Freeman and Medoff 1984; Western and Rosenfeld 2011; Brady et al. 2013). This has been evident in programs that benefit working-class families such as AFDC/TANF, especially as post-PRWORA privatization and retrenchment efforts are "justified" by a discourse of over-paid and inefficient public-sector unionized workers (Simmons 2002; Hebdon 2006; Marlow and Orzechowski 1995, 1996; Hirsch and Osborne 2000).

Following the political theories of welfare state expansion, the role of political parties is also included as explanatory variables. A dummy variable is utilized to test the impact of Democrat versus Republican controlled state-governments on AFDC/TANF generosity. *Democratic party control* (Democrat = 1) as a measure tests the effects of political parties. For this dummy variable, mixed governance and Republican controlled state-governments are the reference category. Political party control of a state government is measured as a political party having control of the legislature and being the affiliated part of the state's governor. A dummy variable is also included for *State*

Democratic Governor (Democrat = 1) to test whether this political position gains increased power and importance once TANF responsibility gets shifted to state and local-level political arenas. With the ability to veto proposed bills at the state level, having a separate measure for the Governor position assesses whether this political actor becomes increasingly influential post PRWORA. Robustness checks and additional analyses showed that the removal of either of these political party variables do not change overall results. Analyses available upon request.

Recent studies examine the role of capital's ability to mobilize at the state-level (Lafer 2012, 2017; Reese 2005). This power often gets mobilized through right-wing organizations that lobby for welfare retrenchment at the state-level, such as ALEC (Lafer 2012). This is a further examination of the applicability of Korpi's power resource theory (1983) and how capital aims to retrench welfare generosity. Increased interest in this has led to the inclusion of *share of total income earned by the top 1% of earners* as an explanatory variable. This variable serves as a proxy for the amount of power that capital has at the state-level.

The second set of explanatory variables tests the effect of economic explanations for welfare determination. Welfare and social policy scholars identify multiple economic factors that affect welfare spending. One argument has been the economic growth of states and fiscal crises/downturns can affect the generosity of the state's welfare programs. For this reason, *gross state product (GSP) per capita* in a given year is included in this study as an explanatory variable. This is the amount of gross domestic product (GDP) of the U.S. that has been produced by individual states in 2015 real dollars. Other state level economic variables include *unemployment rate* and *poverty rate*.

The former is the percent of a state's noninstitutionalized labor force that is not employed. The latter is the percent of the state's population that is living in poverty. Official poverty rates include monetary incomes before taxes, capital gains, and noncash benefits. These measures test economic theories which argue that welfare generosity is determined by the market positions of the populace. The final economic variable included in this study is *median household income*. This is the median of all household incomes in a state in real 2015 dollars and will test how state median incomes impact benefit levels in both periods.

The third set of theories of welfare state expansion in this study are race-based theories. Race-based welfare theories argue that racial attitudes and discrimination determine welfare spending and eligibility. To test this set of welfare theories, the variable *nonwhite* is included as an explanatory variable. This variable is measured as the percent of the state population that is identified as nonwhite[4].

[4] It should be noted that using this measure provides its own set of limitations, as it was predominantly Black/African American and Latinx communities who were the primary focus of racialized welfare discourse. However, data for %Black/African American and %Latinx measures at individual state-levels are not readily available for the entire years included in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This research analyzes AFDC/TANF maximum monthly benefits for families from 1987 to 2015. To account for different mechanisms before and after PRWORA, the analyses examine the time periods separately, 1987-1996 and 1997-2015. Doing so allows for each time period to be treated independently and best capture which set of factors were most significant for AFDC/TANF generosity, pre- and post-PRWORA. Previous studies have attempted to capture this temporal change by including a year dummy for 1996 or have not considered structural changes in policymaking as a variable into their analyses (Brady et al. 2013). All variables were lagged by three years since welfare spending is determined by previous year contexts, consistent with what other state-level studies have indicated [Jensen et al. 2006; Amenta et al. 2005; Grogan and Rigby 2009][5]. The three-year lag produced the strongest results. This also ensures that the dependent variable follows the independent variables. The samples for all 50 state-years for 1987-1996 is (N = 500) and for 1997-2015 is (N = 950).

To capture the variation in AFDC/TANF benefits within states over time, two-way fixed-effects models are utilized. The usage of two-way fixed-effects models has been used in other studies examining within-state variation over time (Primo and Snyder Jr 2010; Hayes and Vidal 2015; Kelly and Witko 2012; Brady et al. 2013). The benefit of using these models is that it allows for an appropriate capture of temporal variation within states. However, running separate two-way fixed-effects models based on the passing of PRWORA demonstrate that different factors have significant effects on state

[5] Tests for other lagged structures were done (up to three years) with other results supporting the results of three-year lag structures.

maximum monthly benefits across the two eras indicated. This is the methodological benefit to taking this approach.

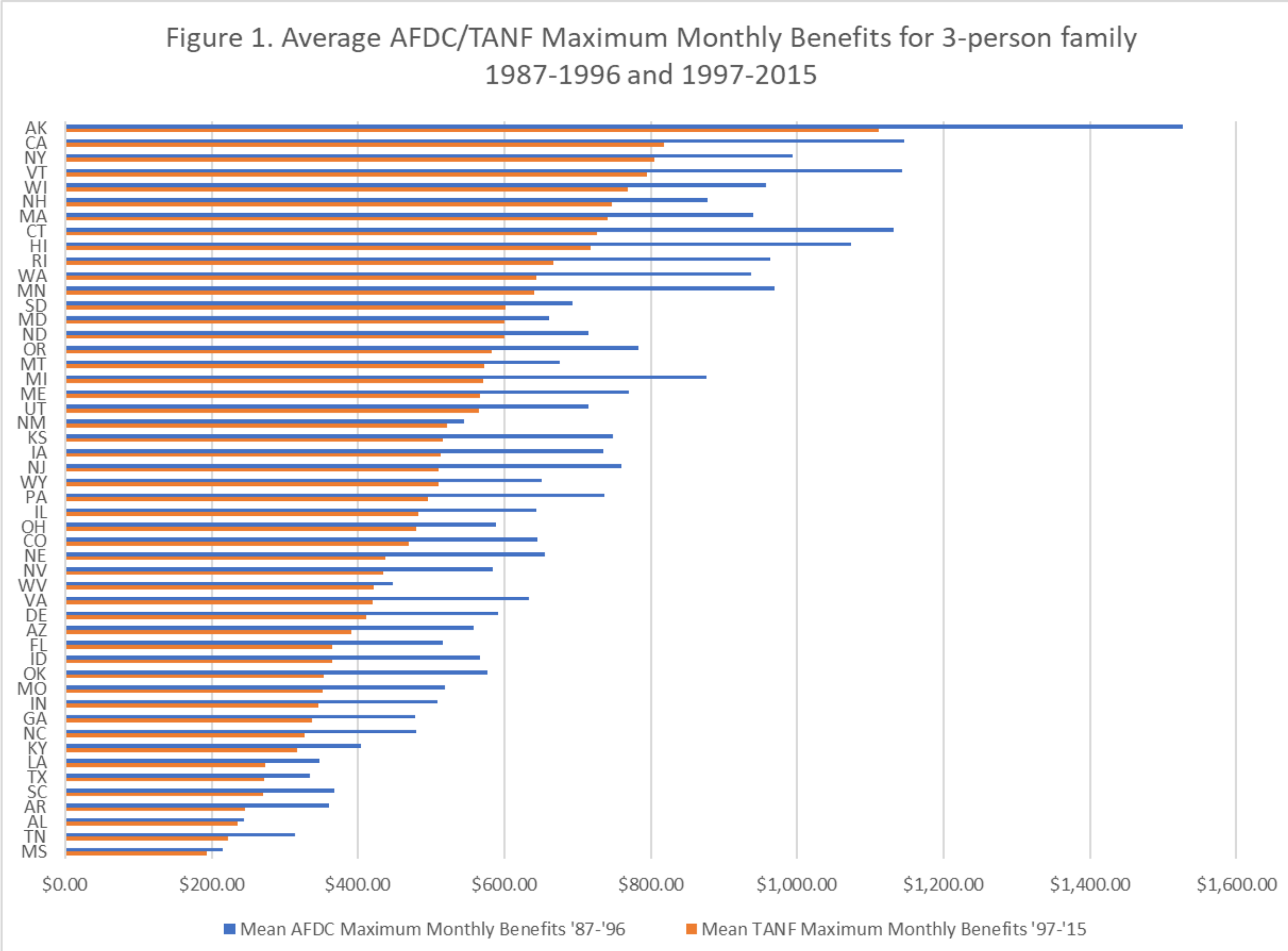
With two-way fixed-effects models, there is the possibility of stable unobserved characteristics causing omitted variable bias. In the case of states, this may include being in the South, right-to-work laws, cost of living differences, etc. The data is thus clustered by state and year, with year dummies, to account for any stable characteristics and accurately estimate the effect of state variables on AFDC and TANF maximum monthly benefits.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

AFDC and TANF maximum monthly benefits have changed over time. All states showed a decrease in AFDC/TANF maximum monthly benefits between its 1987 amount and 2015 amount, in 2015 dollars. Figure 1 captures the average state AFDC/TANF maximum monthly benefits for a 3-person family in both time periods for all 50 states: 1987 to 1996 and 1997 to 2015. The blue line represents the average AFDC maximum monthly benefit of the respective state between 1987 and 1996. The orange line represents the average TANF maximum monthly benefit of the respective state between 1997 and 2015. The states are arranged in descending order for their average spending in the latter period.

TANF (previously AFDC) maximum monthly benefits decreased in the post-1996 period for all states. Increased responsibility for states to fund public assistance programs and limitations by federal block grants led to decreases in the amount state governments allocated to welfare spending for families with children. This combined with the rhetoric to retrench the welfare state, particularly by decreasing dependence of women of color. However, there is variation amongst states in how much they allotted as monthly maximums for families with children.



Towards the top of Figure 1, states such as New York, Alaska, Vermont, and California have some of the highest TANF maximum benefits in the later period. New York, for example, had an average of $804.26 in maximum monthly TANF benefits for a 3-person family between 1997 and 2015. Even in the earlier period, New York still administered one of the most generous amounts of benefits for families, having an average maximum of $994.12. Looking at other states, California had an average of $817.70 and Alaska an average of $1,111.08 on TANF maximum benefits in the later period.

Towards the bottom of Figure 1, states such as Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee have some of the lowest TANF maximum monthly benefits in the later period. For example, Mississippi had an average monthly maximum of $193.16 in TANF benefits for a 3-person family between 1997 and 2015 and an average monthly maximum of $214.75 between 1987 and 1996, making it the lowest-spending state in both time periods. Arkansas had a monthly maximum average of $245.54 in TANF benefits during the later period while Alabama had a monthly maximum average of $236.27 in the same period for 3-person families.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

	1984-1996				1997-2015			
	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
AFDC/TANF Maximum Monthly Benefits*	$686.01	$271.10	$181.27	$1,600.32	$505.16	$199.01	$170.00	$1,362.99
Political Variables								
Public-Sector Union Density	33.61	16.64	7.3	73.1	33.13	17.75	2.7	72.4
Private-Sector Union Density	10.78	4.94	2.3	23.6	7.13	3.74	1.1	19.4
Democratic Governor	0.54	0.5	0	1	0.44	0.5	0	1
Democratic State Gov. Control	0.27	0.45	0	1	0.21	0.41	0	1
Inc. Share earned by Top 1%	12.97	2.57	7.61	23.29	17.52	4.52	10.12	36.07
Economic Variables								
GSP per capita	$25,602.51	$5,723.88	$15,233	$56,026	$45,125.51	$8,724.52	$28,265	$73,505
Unemployment Rate	5.97	1.76	2.2	13.1	5.65	1.98	2.2	14.4
Poverty Rate	13.34	4.17	2.9	27.2	12.54	3.35	4.5	23.1
Median Household Income	$51,885.23	$8,595.45	$33,481	$80,458	$56,348.17	$8,679.77	$36,011	$81,018
Racial Variable								
Percent Nonwhite	19.2	13.49	1.61	70.52	23.82	14.28	1.84	76.81

* For 3-person families

Before turning to the multivariate analysis, descriptive statistics report how AFDC and TANF monthly maximum benefits have changed over time. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for all of the variables included in the following analysis. All of the explanatory variables are lagged by three years. Breaking down the two distinct time periods, we see a difference in how much states have allocated to benefits for families after transforming benefits into 2015 dollars. The mean AFDC maximum monthly benefits for a 3-person family of all states prior to the welfare reform of 1996 is $686.01; after PRWORA, and the change to TANF, it was $505.16. Federal funding was reduced to block-grants instead of entitlements, meaning that funding from the federal government for families were a set amount. With states required to cover the remaining welfare funds, states had economic incentives to see decreases in welfare benefits for families in the latter time period as subnational governments sought to decrease their financial share of responsibility.

I argue in this paper that it is more beneficial methodologically to split this time period into two distinct eras: pre PRWORA (1987 to 1996) and post PRWORA (1997 to 2015). States gained greater power and control over welfare policymaking once the act was put into place. Theoretically, different welfare theories apply to these two distinct eras as the political arenas in which welfare benefits and generosity levels were changed. Prior to PRWORA, determination of welfare benefits for AFDC were still primarily generated at the federal or national-level. Once PRWORA was enacted, and AFDC was replaced by TANF, state and local-governments gained increased autonomy. Examining these two eras separately tests for this theoretical argument.

Model 1 of Table 2 presents the pre PRWORA period. Here we see that it is a mixture of political, economic and racial explanations that account for the change in welfare maximums for families with children within states over time. For political variables, both private-sector union density and unified Democratic control of state government are correlated with AFDC benefits. A 1% increase in private-sector union density within a state is associated with an increase of $7.83 in AFDC monthly maximum benefits over a three-year period ($p < 0.01$). Unified Democratic control of state governance in associated with an increase in $12.09 in AFDC monthly maximum benefits over a three-year period ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Predicting AFDC/TANF Maximum Monthly Benefits.

	Model 1 1987-1996	Model 2 1997-2015
Political Variables		
Public-Sector Union Density	0.13	-1.81***
	(0.7)	(0.54)
Private-Sector Union Density	7.83***	0.83
	(1.88)	(1.66)
Democratic State Governor	6.61	9.99*
	(5.18)	(4.02)
Unified Democratic State Gov. Control	12.09*	-6.73
	(5.71)	(4.97)
Inc. Share earned by Top 1%	-2.54	1.21
	(2.21)	(1.13)
Economic Variables		
GSP per capita	0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Unemployment Rate	-7.46***	1.04
	(1.75)	(2.06)
Poverty Rate	-0.2	-1.41
	(1.28)	(1.25)
Median Household Income	-0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Racial Variable		
Nonwhite	-13.17***	-1.46*
	(3.41)	(0.74)
Constant	863.84***	657.22***
	(83.74)	(57.21)
Observations	500	950
R-squared	0.69	0.57

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Consistent with class-based theories for welfare expansion, results from the pre-PRWORA period support these political explanations for determining maximum monthly benefits for families with children. Both unions and the Democratic party have historically been advocates for working-class interests, including in the expansion of the welfare state. This is consistent with power resource theory and the subsequent literature that has built on this class-based theoretical approach (Brady 2009; Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi 1983). For programs designated for families with children, unions and

Democratic parties are associated here with higher AFDC maximum monthly benefit levels for 3-person families.

For economic variables, unemployment is negatively correlated with AFDC benefits. As the unemployment rate increases by 1% within a state, AFDC maximum benefits decrease by $7.46 over a three-year period ($p < 0.001$). This is an indication of the inherent contradiction of the goals of the AFDC program and how the design of AFDC counters broader theoretical logics which would expect to see benefits increase as unemployment increases. Its stated goal was to promote the traditional family structure by keeping white women out of labor force and having them dependent on men for economic stability. However, this program also had work requirements that were implemented which pushed women with children into the labor force in order to secure their eligibility for these benefits. As unemployment increases, benefits for this program for families would decrease over the three-year period.

Aligned with racial explanations of the welfare state, the percent of a state's population that is nonwhite is correlated with AFDC benefits. A 1% increase in the population of a state that is nonwhite is associated with a decrease in AFDC maximum benefits of $13.17 ($p < 0.001$) over a three-year period. What this indicates is that racial discrimination and oppression influenced the amount states allocated to welfare programs for families with children prior to welfare reform being implemented (Reese 2005; Soule and Zylan 1997). These results reinforce the argument that welfare programs were designed in a manner to reduce benefits to nonwhite populations due to the demonization of nonwhites as abusers of welfare generosity (Soss et al. 2011; Abramovitz 1992). Examples include the Avenues of Self-Sufficiency Through Employment and Training

Services (ASSETS) project in Alabama and Work First in North Carolina, both of which were targeted towards African Americans to get them off of welfare (Reese 2005; Zylan and Soule 2000). This differs from the most influential determinants of state-level welfare spending in the later time period.

The second time period, 1997 to 2015, starts in the year after PRWORA was enacted and further increased states' responsibility for family welfare programs, reported in Model 2. During this time period, political actors still remain significant predictors of benefits for families, although in different ways. Contrary to what was expected, unionization becomes negatively correlated with maximum benefits for TANF, a major change from the previous time period. A 1% increase in public-sector unionization within a state is associated with a decrease of $1.81 in TANF maximum monthly benefits over a three-year period ($p < 0.001$). This result runs counter to class-based approaches of welfare generosity, such as power resource (Brady 2009; Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi 1983). This is additionally interesting considering private-sector unionization is no longer significant in the post-PRWORA period.

This may be a context-driven result for this particular program that is connected to the attack on unionized employees who administered TANF benefits to eligible recipients. After PRWORA was passed, state and local governments argued that unionized state employees who administered welfare programs were too costly and inefficient. With states privatizing welfare administration to private agencies, the argument presented by politicians and capital interests was that this would save the state money that could then be reallocated to recipients. This finding in the post PRWORA period may be the result of this[6].

A Democratic governor in a state is associated with an increase in TANF monthly maximum benefits of $9.99 over a three-year period ($p < 0.05$). This is a shift however from the previous period in which unified Democratic control of a state's government was positively associated with benefit increases. This may be due to the Democratic party being focused on regaining support from white, working- and middle-class voters who were largely pro-welfare reform. Democrats were pushing for welfare reform during this time period, as were Republicans. This shift between both political party variables from pre-PRWORA is also an indication of the increased power and importance of the state Governor position when individual states increasingly become arenas of political contention. State Governors have the electoral power to pass or veto state-proposed welfare bills.

While political variables remain significant predictors of generosity levels of welfare programs for families with children, there are some changes as to how. Changes to institutional arrangements brought upon under PRWORA have changed how political actors influence TANF benefit maximums, thus supporting arguments that institutional structures mediate how political actors influence policy (Amenta and Halfmann 2000; Amenta et al. 2005). State responses to the increased financial responsibility of funding TANF has changed how unions in particular influence TANF benefit levels.

[6] A jackknife analysis was conducted in order to identify if there were specific cases influencing this result with the analysis showing no indication of this occurring in the data. The author also conducted additional robustness checks such as modeling-out and interacting each predictor variable individually with the year 1996 to ensure both periods were comparable.

Economic variables were not significant predictors of TANF benefits during this time period, as expected. This is not to say that economic explanations are to be completely disregarded after the passing of PRWORA. It is that state-level political actors become more significant at the state level once devolution occurs and the responsibility of funding welfare programs increases for states.

Racial explanations for TANF spending remained significant, although marginally, during the post PRWORA period. An increase in the nonwhite population within a state that by 1% is associated with a decrease in TANF maximum monthly benefits of $1.46 ($p < 0.05$) over a three-year period. The rhetoric used by politicians that people of color on welfare, particularly mothers, were abusers of the welfare state persisted in the post PRWORA period. Stricter eligibility and work requirements, alongside promises of retrenchment, were how politicians sought to win the white vote in the latter half of the 1990s. While aiding the poor garnered support from working-class and middle-class white voters alike, programs that were labeled “welfare” gained strong opposition. Both AFDC and TANF were regarded as welfare, since it is needs-based and not on earnings or rights. It was thus expected that racial theories of the welfare state would hold true in this period as well.

The results here are indicative of a shift in the set of explanations that are predictors of welfare benefits for families with children after a change in the institutional governance structure of welfare policymaking brought on by PRWORA. As state and local governments increasingly became the political arenas for determining benefits of public assistance programs, the influence of political actors changed from the previous period. Pre PRWORA, we see unions and left-leaning politicians advocating for the interests of lower-class women by pushing for higher benefit maximums under AFDC. The results in Model 1 thus support class-based political approaches, such as power resource theory.

The results from Model 2 tell a different story for how political explanations of welfare expansion should be understood from the pre PRWORA era. By analyzing public and private-sector unionization separately, we are able to see a change in how unionization impacts monthly benefits for the (now) TANF program. Public-sector unionization is negatively correlated with TANF benefits. This is not to say that public-sector unions were promoting reductions in the amount of assistance families with children received. In fact, public-sector unions were doing the opposite and opposing the threat that privatization and retrenchment efforts would bring forth (Winston 2002; Reese et al. 2006; Reese 2011; Simmons 2002). Instead, this may be the response of state and local governments to reduce the increased financial responsibilities brought upon by changes in the federalist structure under PRWORA. State and local governments used the discourse that public-sector unionized workers who administered AFDC/TANF benefits were costly and inefficient, thus promoting a privatization campaign across the country. Decreases in TANF benefits may be the response of state and local governments to increases in public-sector unionization as they continue to push for privatization and retrenchment of public assistance generosity.

These models suggest that the institutional changes to the policymaking structure of welfare for families had an effect on the significance of welfare determinants. The expansion of a federalist governance structure by PRWORA contributed to this. Running the entire time period as a single analysis may provide support for certain theories of welfare policymaking but overlook the temporal significance of federalist-inspired policies, such as PRWORA. Results from analyses that use a year dummy for 1996 may demonstrate that the year was significant for policymaking but doesn't explain how. Splitting the analyses into two time periods and running them separately has allowed us to compare how determinants have changed for needs-based welfare programs as policymaking structures in the U.S. change. A consequence of federalist changes in policymaking has been how political determinants influence TANF benefits and when this occurred would be missed through other methodological approaches[7].

[7] Corollary analyses were conducted to test interactions but issues of multicollinearity, non-significance, or not contributing theoretically to the argument make these not worth mentioning. Available upon request.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research finds that federalist policies influence the social factors – politics, economics, and race – impacts the generosity of AFDC/TANF benefits. Therefore, it is theoretically and methodologically useful to examine time periods prior to and after large-scale political restructurings. In this case, the 1996 welfare reform that implemented PRWORA was an important point between two distinct eras of welfare policymaking. Meant to weaken the role of the federal government and create a smaller welfare state, individual states were given greater control and responsibility for creating welfare policies for families and funding them. This created variation over time in how states handled welfare policymaking, leading to privatization and retrenchment efforts.

The methodological approach taken here captures how the influence of determinants change with the enactment of PRWORA. There is strong support for the argument that it is political actors who have the most influence over welfare policymaking. However, there is a difference in how political actors influence the determination of benefits for families between both periods. Power resource theory is supported pre PRWORA, as Leftist political actors, such as left-leaning political parties (in the case of the U.S., the Democratic party) and labor unions, are positively correlated with AFDC benefits within states over time. Advocates for the interests of the working and lower-class may be utilizing their political power resources within political arenas to push for more egalitarian policies. Alternatively, while Democratic partisanship remained positively correlated in the post PRWORA period, public-sector unionization changed to being negatively correlated. I argue that this is due to state and local government's effort to privatize TANF administration in order to offset the increased financial burden. Governments shift the burden of “high cost” to recipients by reducing the maximum benefits their able to receive on a monthly basis.

As the federalist political structure of the U.S. has created a dual citizenship system, examining how the restructuring of welfare policymaking influences welfare determinants becomes increasingly important. The allocation of responsibility of welfare programs for families with children has placed women and children within a lower-tier of citizenship then men. PRWORA has only advanced this further by allowing states to experiment with eligibility, requirements, benefit levels, administration, and more. Splitting up analyses by pre and post PRWORA allows us to examine how different welfare determinants influence benefit levels and, thus, how they influence the social citizenship of women and children. Which party is in control of state government, unionization, racial demographics, and unemployment levels influenced the legitimacy of citizenship for women and children through benefit levels pre PRWORA. Post PRWORA, it was the political party of the state Governor, unionization (although in a different manner), and racial demographics that predominantly influenced the determination of maximum benefit levels. Understanding this gives us further indication of how continued restructuring of the federalist welfare state in the U.S. influences citizenship.

This study does contain some limitations. A limitation of this study is that this paper only examined the impact of PRWORA on maximum monthly benefits allocated to families with children through AFDC and TANF. However, families rarely, if ever, actually received the maximum monthly benefit allowed. Families often received benefits far below the maximum allowed. Therefore, one should not interpret these results as being indicative of how much each family on AFDC or TANF actually received. Another limitation of this study is the years included in this study, particularly for the pre PRWORA period. The claims made in this paper can only be attributed beginning in 1984 and miss a large portion of U.S. welfare history on AFDC and even its previous version, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). By extending the years of data, we may see a cyclical nature to welfare policymaking, as argued by Piven and Cloward (1971).

Future studies on AFDC/TANF should focus on how much state and local governments spend on these programs. By focusing on how much, aggregately, subnational governments spent on these programs, we can get a better understanding of how PRWORA's restructuring of financial responsibility affected how much these governments allocated to AFDC/TANF spending. Future studies of state welfare should also examine different historical moments of federalist advancement to examine how this process has played out over welfare history. A similar study could examine pre- and post-ACA (Affordable Care Act) to see how spending or benefit levels for medical insurance changed within states. Splitting analysis into distinct time periods may offer scholars a more comprehensive look into how federalist restructuring of the welfare state changes welfare determinants for other programs.

This study implemented an alternative methodological approach to investigating how institutional restructuring of welfare policymaking impacts determinants of policy benefits. Analyzing time periods separately, based on the passing of a welfare reform act, provides a way to compare how determinants of welfare benefits change pre- and post-reform. In the case of AFDC and TANF, we are able to see that while political actors remained significant before and after PRWORA, how they influenced benefit levels changed after the reform. Economic contexts no longer remain significant benefits after reform and racial discrimination is a significant determinant in both periods. For welfare state studies, this approach can provide new insights on the temporal applicability of theoretical explanations and, thus, how social citizenship is constructed.

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