

## Coding Instructions for Welfare Politics Project

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This is a study of agenda-setting in welfare politics in Congress. The question it asks is how the welfare issue was framed in hearings on welfare reform and in floor debates. The notion of the agenda is closer to Schattschneider than Kingdon.<sup>1</sup> Agenda means the issue, the controversy, the focal point of the debate, not so much the problems or solutions on which people are able to agree.

For background, read Beyond Entitlement, ch. 5, The New Politics of Poverty, ch. 9, and “Summary of Cong. Hearings and Debates on Welfare Reform, 1967-88.”

The study covered the major stages of welfare reform controversy in Congress, from 1962 through 1994-6. That includes the following episodes. Each is used by the acronym we’ll use to identify it:

- Social Service amendments, 1962 (SSA).
- Work Incentive Program and other work measures, 1967 (WIN).
- Nixon’s Family Assistance Plan, 1968-72 (FAP).
- Carter’s Program for Better Jobs and Income, 1977-8 (PBJI).
- Family Support Act, 1987-8 (FSA).
- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 1994-6 (PRWORA).

At each stage, some important proposal for welfare reform was on the table, although not all the measures passed. We ignore the important changes passed under Reagan in 1981 because these were not the subject of significant hearings or debates in Congress.

We will compare how the issue was framed across these episodes to establish how the agenda shifted.

### **What to code**

To do this, we will code participants in Congressional deliberations using a set of categories defined below.

We will code witnesses who appear in hearing on welfare reform held by the principle Congressional committees during the main reform episodes. These committees are Ways and Means in the House and Finance in the Senate. See separate hearings list that gives the hearings to be covered. This list also gives the location of microfiche on the hearings.

We will also code members of Congress speaking in the principle floor debates on enactment of each reform measure. I will develop a list of these debates.

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<sup>1</sup> E.E. Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960); John W. Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

## Whom to code

The basic idea is to code everyone who appears as a witness in the hearings, and everyone who speaks in a floor debate. But defining who this is requires some judgment.

In the case of groups of witnesses appearing together, code each spokesperson separately if unaffiliated, but code only the lead witness if they all speak for the same group or organization. Sometimes several politicians or other spokesmen will appear representing a single organization. Several governors, for example, may speak for the National Governors' Association. Classify only whoever appears to be the main spokesman, usually the person presenting the official position, even if they all speak or answer questions. In some cases, it's hard to tell if they are speaking for the group or individually; in the latter case, code all the speakers.

In some cases (particularly in the early stages), welfare reform proposals appeared as part of omnibus bills to amend the Social Security Act, in which welfare law appears. So there may be witnesses or speakers who address issues raised by these bills that are completely unrelated to welfare reform, particularly increases in Social Security benefits. Omit these people, as they are not speaking to our issue. Ignore bill reports by committees.

In the case of floor debates, code only members who actually speak on the floor. Ignore members who merely submit texts for the record.

At the end of the first cut of each stage of coding, coders will compare their lists of witnesses and reach agreement about that, while keeping the actual codings of these witnesses secret (see further below). Witnesses should be listed in coding spread sheets in the order in which they appear, with all House witnesses listed ahead of all Senate witnesses.

## What statements to code

In hearings, code using the witness's initial oral statement before the committee. Ignore the written statement submitted for the record, and ignore colloquy with the committee members. While previously I have considered this material, it seems best to omit it in order to define more closely what we are coding and also to speed up the coding process.

Similarly, for a member of Congress in a floor debate, code using the member's initial speech on the floor. Ignore later statements or colloquy with other members. Again, ignore members who do not actually speak on the floor, and ignore bill reports by committees.

## Coding sheet

One sheet would be filled out for each witness or speaker. Here is an explanation of the categories:

**Stage:** Refers to the stage of the welfare reform issue. Categories are in terms of the dominant proposal on the table at the time. The acronyms (SSA, WIN, etc.) are defined above.

**Hearing/debate:** Specify the hearing or debate you are drawing from. If a hearing, give the committee (Ways and Means or Finance) and a shortened version of the hearing title. Also give the date the witness/speaker spoke. Some hearings and debates stretch over several days, but give the date only for the witness/speaker in question. Finally, give the pages from the hearing or

Congressional Record that pertain to the speaker in question. The pages should cover the witness/speaker's oral statement.

***Witness/speaker:*** Give the name of the witness or member of Congress as it appears in the hearings or debates. In the case of Congress members, include first names, state, and party affiliation. These details may not be apparent in the official documents. However, Congressional Quarterly publishes lists of the members of each Congress. Xerox the lists from CQ's Almanac volumes, available in the government documents center at Bobst, and use these to add the details.

***Group or affiliation:*** Give the name of the witness' group or affiliation.

***Type of group:*** Categorize the witness' group or identity. Classify based on group, not personal, identity if there is doubt. That is, if a governor or expert appears as a spokesman for a social welfare group, classify him under "SocWelfare" rather than "LocalStateGov." I have listed the main possibilities; circle the appropriate one. Put cases that don't fit under "Other"; we may categorize them later.

"Admin." Means spokespersons for the Administration of the day who are presenting its position on the legislation in question. Often, these are senior officials of the Departments of Health, Education, and Welfare (after 1978, Health and Human Services) or Labor.

"Congress" means members of Congress. That is, members who speak on the floor or appear before the committee as witnesses. Does not include members of the committee.

"LocalStateGov." means elected officials (governors, mayors, county officials, or legislators) who speak either for themselves or as representatives of intergovernmental lobbies such as the National Governors' Association, the National League of Cities, or the National Conference of State Legislatures. These are general government executives or representatives, not social welfare administrators (who go under "SocWelfare").

"SocWelfare" means agencies that deliver social services at the state or local level. Includes public welfare agencies or their spokesmen, and private agencies typically working for the public ones. The spokesmen will usually be appointed, professional managers, not elected leaders. Anyone actually *running* social programs, public or private, should generally go under this coding. Includes lobbies for such agencies such as the American Public Welfare Association (now American Public Human Services Association).

"Academic" means professors or researchers who come from a university setting, whose standing comes from their personnel expertise and not because they represent anyone else. Should speak on the basis of research rather than a pre-formed political or ideological agenda.

"ThankTank" means other experts who work for non-university research organizations such as the Brookings Institution, the Urban Institute, or the Manpower Demonstration Research Organization. While these organizations usually have some general political coloring, they should speak primarily on the basis of research and not a preformed agenda.

"Union" means labor unions (e.g., AFSCME) or organizations representing them (e.g., AFL-CIO).

“Business” means corporate leaders or business lobbies such as the Chamber of Commerce, Business Roundtable, or National Association of Manufacturers. These should be private-sector entities, not governmental or nonprofit.

“Activist” means advocates or groups dedicated to expanding benefits or services for the poor and reducing work or other requirements from a militant, right-oriented perspective. Includes the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), local welfare rights groups, the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF), and also poverty lawyers engaged in litigation on behalf of recipients. Some of these groups (e.g., CDF or the Center on Policy and Budget Priorities) generate research, but they have a preformed agenda that the research serves, in contrast to think tanks where the research is primary.

“CivilRights” means groups engaged in general advocacy on behalf of blacks, such as the NAACP or Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Means groups whose advocacy is general to the concerns of these groups, not focused specifically on social welfare (which would be “Soc-Welfare” or “Activist”). Although some social welfare or activist groups have a racial identity (e.g., Urban League, NWRO), classify them under those other headings.

“IdeolGroup” means groups whose main agenda is to favor or oppose bigger government from a general ideological perspective, and who don’t fall into any of the more functional categories above (e.g., Americans for Democratic Action on the left, or libertarian groups on the right). These groups are not focused on poverty as such, although they appear in hearings to comment on poverty or welfare.

“Religious” means religious denominations or advisory bodies or committees closely linked to them. These bodies are policy-oriented and sometimes ad hoc, aimed at the issue of the moment. They are distinct from church-related agencies actually providing social services, which fall under “Social welfare.”

“Advisory” includes committees of experts or politicians convened on an ad hoc basis to review social policy and make recommendations (e.g., the National Commission on Children).

“Other” should be used for groups that don’t fit the above categories. We may create fresh categories later.

***Main issue spoken to:*** State the main issue or agenda that the witness is speaking to, as he/she understands it. That is, what is at stake? State as a choice or issue. Describe in the topical terms such as the witness/speaker might use, not in theoretical terms. The issue may be implicit in the position the witness/speaker takes rather than stated explicitly.

***Position taken on this issue:*** State the witness/speaker’s position on the issue, again using the topical language appropriate to the hearing or debate in question.

***Issue types:***

Now specify any of the four issue types used by this project that you find present in the witness/speaker’s discourse. Which of the four themes do you hear in how this person talks about welfare or welfare reform in this hearing or debate? Circle “Yes” for the issue types that are present, “No” for those that are not. If some unrelated issue is important, circle “Other” (see further below).

For those issues that are present, go on specify whether the position taken on them is Left or Right and the Rank of the issue (see further below).

To be coded, there have to be definite statements by the witness/speaker using discourse of the indicated type. One can't simply infer that they must be articulating a certain theme because of other things they say.

Also, to be coded, an issue type must play some significant role in the speaker's argument. It need not be the most important theme, but it can't just be mentioned in passing. The speaker has to lean or depend on it in some significant way. Judgment will be needed here.

These are the four issue types, along with what "left" or "right," or "liberal" or "conservative" tends to mean for each.

"Progressive": Connotes disputes framed in "New Deal" terms. That is, the issue is seen to be the role of government, especially the federal government. Should it be large or small? Specifically, the issue is how much welfare or other benefits should be received by the poor, along with related issues such as cost and degree of federal (vs. local) control. The focus is on political and economic principles more than on concrete need, or lack of need, for programs. The progressive struggle is between demands made on behalf of the poor and resistance to those demands.

Here, the liberal position is the idea that "more" should be done for people. The poor deserve income, etc., as a matter of right, we can afford it, and that the control of welfare should be federalized. The conservative position is to favor "less" government. Either the poor don't need help, they don't deserve it, we cannot afford it, we can't tolerate the federal control that would be involved, or control should be devolved to localities or nongovernmental bodies.

"Obligation": Connotes disputes over whether recipients should face any serious requirements to work or enter training or education as a condition of aid. Should welfare be given as an entitlement, that is on the basis of need and regardless of behavior, or only in return for taking steps toward self-reliance? Focus should be on the principles, not program details. The issue here is obligations *within* the welfare system. Generalized talk of how society is responsible for the poor, or how the poor should show more personal responsibility, but without specifics, falls rather under progressivism. Includes the issue of general participation or activity standards, such as were legislated as part of the Family Support Act and PRWORA.

Here, the liberal position is to favor entitlement; the conservative one is to demand accountability for behavior.

"Opportunity": Connotes arguments over the extent of opportunity to work or get ahead afforded to the poor by American society. That is, the availability and pay of jobs, the fairness of employment, or of support services such as child care that assist the poor to work. The question is not how welfare ought to be organized or whether it ought to be more generous or demanding, but whether American society is open and fair. The statements here are about the society beyond government, rather than about what government should do or not do for people. The focus is empirical, on social or economic conditions outside welfare, rather than on moral or political reasoning.

Here, the liberal position is that society is not adequately open or fair, that there are various "barriers" facing the poor or dependent that prevent them working; government must remove

them before enforcing work. The conservative position is that society is open and fair, that jobs, child care, etc., are adequately available. Therefore, recipients can work if they choose, and work requirements are reasonable.

“Paternalist”: Connotes disputes over how best to arrange the details of welfare reform programs to as to promote success, especially to help the poor work or avoid unwed pregnancy. The question is how practically to raise participation in welfare work programs or improve family life. Focus on child care and other support services, the administrative details of workfare or child support, and practical problems such as union objections to government jobs. Includes discourse about the management, organization, or evaluation of social programs. The discourse is about nuts and bolts rather than morals, politics, or social conditions.

Here the liberal position is to favor an extensive but indulgent program structure, providing new services while downplaying self-reliance or accountability. The conservative position is to favor fewer services and a more demanding structure.

There may be shadows of progressive or work obligation controversy, but the focus is on the practical, not principles. The issue is not whether programs should exist or be expanded (a progressive theme); their existence is assumed. Nor it is about the fairness or feasibility of work tests in principle. Rather, the issue is the proper internal character of the programs.

The contrast of these categories is as much in tone as substance. The focus in “Progressive” is on aggressive new assertions of rights--and resistance to them—arguments are abstract and generalized, without reference to client behavior. In “Obligation” the discourse is equally heated, but about personal obligations in general terms. In “Opportunity” discourse, the criticism is of the society or the labor market more than government, and the tone is usually cooler. In “Paternalist” discourse the focus is on the details of the welfare regime, and the tone is again cooler.

“Progressive” and “Obligation” discourse can occur together; classify as the former if liberals seem to be on the offensive, pressing new benefits as a matter of right, as the latter if they are on the defensive, fending off work demands. If conservatives are resisting on ground of distrust of government, it’s “Progressive”; if on grounds of permissiveness, it’s “Obligation.”

All issues can involve what I call sociological reasoning by liberals, that is objectification of the problems of the poor, projections of personal difficulties onto the environment. So whether this logic is present won’t tell you what type of issue it is. Sociologism is, however, relevant to the size-of-government and competence scales (see below).

All issues can also involve disputes over federal policy or control, so the presence of such controversy doesn’t generally tell you how to code. Federal control is part of the definition of an issue only for Progressivism. So *if* federal control seems innately controversial, that argues for a Progressive coding.

If you are unsure whether an issue appears, mark “Unsure,” but minimize this.

If a theme appears that is important and doesn’t fall within one of our four issues, circle “Yes” under “Other” and describe the theme. This is to be sure that we have not missed an important dimension of welfare politics.

Not all issues in welfare politics fall easily into this classification scheme. Here's how to handle several that don't:

**Welfare incentives or disincentives.** The argument is often made that welfare recipients fail to marry or work because of incentives inherent in welfare, or that they can be made to marry or work more by changing those incentives. Classify as "Opportunity" if the focus is on the limitations of the labor market or the surrounding society; that is, if conditions are said to force people into nonwork or pregnancy. Classify as "Paternalist" if the focus is on the internal rules and rewards of welfare itself.

Typically, liberals favor improving incentives by subsidizing work or marriage within welfare, while conservatives favor improving them by cutting back welfare itself.

**Child support:** Discussion of why few welfare fathers pay child support and how they can be made to pay more. Usually this is "Paternalist" because it chiefly concerns the internal structure of welfare; child support enforcement is part of a paternalist regime. But in some versions the emphasis on size of government, opportunity structure, or work enforcement might be strong enough to justify classifying under another issue types.

Child support arouses less disagreement than other welfare issues. However, liberals are most likely to favor an elaborate regime to protect the rights of the mother; at the same time, they may hesitate to obligate the father on grounds of his disadvantage. Conservatives will want a less elaborate regime, favor leaving the mother's rights to the courts, and yet be tougher about obligating the father.

**Quality control:** This means disputes about "fraud and abuse," about whether ineligible people are getting onto welfare or claiming too much benefits. Most of the time, this will be progressive, as the issue is heated, all tied up in the question of rights to welfare or denials thereof. But if the tone is practical or administrative, it could be paternalist.

**Questions of bureaucratic organization:** Discussion of management or bureaucratic organization is paternalist if connections are clearly drawn to effects on the recipients. Higher-level structural issues where no such connection is drawn, such as which department should control welfare work programs, should be coded under "Other," as falling outside our four main issue types.

Questions of what "works" in welfare reform will be paternalist if the meaning is what is effective in practical, operational terms for the recipients. But what "works" can also connote what is politically acceptable, in which case the discussion is likely to fall under one of the other issue types.

### ***Position***

For each issue type *that is present* also indicate whether the position taken on this issue is "left" or "right," within the meaning these terms have for that kind of issue (see above). Position is to be given only for the four main issue types, if present. For any that are absent, leave Position blank.

With Progressive discourse, there can be complexities, because this issue involves considerations of both scale of government and federalism. Choose position here in terms of ultimate goal rather than

means. Thus, if speakers appear to favor decentralization *in order* to stave off conservative cuts in social programs, classify as Liberal rather than Conservative.

Note that these judgments are supposed to be independent of the stage of reform debate in question, not made relative to what seems extreme or moderate in that stage. Thus, in the early stages, the discourse is more “liberal” than it seems later, so more of the speakers in these stages should be coded “left” than would be appropriate in later stages, even though some may have been moderates or even conservative relative to the typical opinion in that stage.

Code as “Unsure” if in doubt, but *minimize this*.

### ***Rank***

Finally, indicate the rank of each issue type *that is present* in terms of its importance within this witness/speaker’s discourse. Mark the leading issue type as “1,” the second-most important as “2,” and so on. Determining the leading issue type is the key coding decision. This issue type should correspond to the “Main issue spoken to” and “Position taken on this issue” specified above.

Note that rank applies only to the four issue types. Do not rank an “Other” issue, if present.

Rank issues first in terms of (1) ink time—which gets the most space in the witness/speaker’s statement. If two issue types get equal ink time, rank by (2) which gets the most stress, arouses the most feeling, or seems most important for the argument. Indicate in “Comments” instances where such a judgment is made.

One case of (2) occurs when a logical tie is made between two issue types. Rank by which embodies the goal rather than the means. For example, if a witness wants to devolve welfare to localities *in order to* set up more demanding programs, the Progressive stance is a means to a Paternalistic outcome. *If* the two seem otherwise equally weighted, Paternalist would be ranked ahead of Progressive.

### ***Leading Issue***

Of the four main issue types you find to be present, indicate which is the most important for this witness. This should be the issue type ranked (1) in the section above. If you feel two issues tie for first, then code Leading Issue as Unsure.

As with the rank questions, ignore any “Other” issue that may be present. The leading issue must be one of the four main issue types. If one of the four main issue types is present as well as “Other,” score the main issue type as Leading. If *only* an “Other” issue is present, then Leading Issue as well as the Position and Rank questions should all be left blank.

### ***Scales***

There are hypothesized to be two general tendencies underlying the stances witnesses/speakers take on the issues. The type of issue may be very immediate to the legislation in question. The scales concern background assumptions, and positions here may be less apparent. Like the “position” questions, these scales are supposed to be coded on an absolute scale applying to all stages of the study, rather than a relative scale that applies only to one stage.

*Size of government scale:* Indicate whether the witness/speaker appears to favor larger or smaller government, considered at the most general level. Is there a generalized bias toward government, a tendency to see it as the answer to problems? If so, code “Larger.” Or is there a bias against, a preference for personal responsibility or the private sector? If so, code “Smaller.” Size-of-government is understood to be a master tendency underlying positions, especially on progressive and opportunity disputes.

*Competence scale:* Also indicate whether, overall, the witness/speaker has a lower or higher view of the capacity of the poor. How much pressure/demands can the poor handle? The focus is on the capacity of the poor to function, not whether they have the right values. If the poor are seen as victims, vulnerable, overwhelmed by social conditions, code as “Lower.” If they are seen as autonomous, choosing and optimizing for themselves, code “Higher.” Understood to be a master tendency underlying positions especially on work obligation and paternalist issues.

While use of sociologist rhetoric (see above) doesn’t decide issue type, it does tend to indicate a “lower” view of competence than avoidance or rejection of this rhetoric.

Do not be misled by rhetoric. The question is not whether the witness/speaker speaks warmly of the poor or praises their values but what he/she thinks of their capacities. Some liberals may trumpet the morals or potential of the poor but refuse to accept a work test; this usually indicates a low view of competence. Nor does the desire to “empower” or offer choice to the poor indicate a high view, unless serious demands are made. Conservative can be hostile to the poor but more respectful of their abilities.

Unlike with issues, you need not find specific statements that evoke these themes, but neither can you infer them just from the issue positions taken. You have to have some sense of the witness/speaker’s *general* inclinations about government and the individual. Code as “Unsure” if there is evidence for the speaker’s opinions but you’re unsure how he or she leans. Code as “NoEvidence” if there is insufficient evidence to make a judgment.

**Comment:** Comment on anything unusual about this witness, or problems with the coding scheme.

*Coder:* Enter your name.

*Date:* Enter the date of the code.