

**Robert Schuman Centre  
for Advanced Studies**

**Framing Welfare Reform in Affluent Societies:  
Rendering Retrenchment More Palatable?**

**FIONA ROSS**

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**ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE  
FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**

**Framing Welfare Reform in Affluent Societies:  
Rendering Retrenchment More Palatable?**

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**EUI Working Paper RSC No. 2000/15**

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## Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

### European Forum

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This Working Paper has been written in the context of the 1998-1999 European Forum programme on "Recasting the European Welfare State: Options, Constraints, Actors" directed by Professors Maurizio Ferrera (Universities of Pavia and Bocconi, Milano) and Martin Rhodes (RSC).

The Forum reflects on the domestic impact of European integration, studying the extent to which *Europeanisation* shapes the adaptation patterns, power redistribution, and shifting loyalties at the national level. The categories of 'interest' and 'identity' are at the core of the programme and a particular emphasis is given to the formation of new social identities, the redefinition of corporate interests, and the domestic changes in the forms of political representation.



## Abstract\*

This paper investigates the conditions under which political framing can render welfare restructuring more palatable. I start by asking two research questions. First, what are the necessary (albeit perhaps insufficient) conditions that allow leaders to successfully frame welfare reform? Second, to what extent are these conditions evident across welfare regimes? I identify four variables that affect leaders' opportunities for framing social policy: (i) extant frames, (ii) actors, (iii) institutions and (iv) policy arena. After examining four dominant types of frames across affluent societies, I review the discursive politics surrounding *The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* as a case where all four conditions for framing welfare retrenchment coalesced.

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## Introduction

The “new politics of the welfare state” is a term coined by Pierson (1996) to differentiate between the popular politics of welfare state expansion and the unpopular politics of welfare state retrenchment. It is a tribute to Pierson’s pioneering conceptualisation of welfare state politics that the “new politics” now refers to the broader restructuring literature. Yet, with welfare state restructuring gaining greater momentum across affluent societies since the early 1990s, it is increasingly apparent that welfare institutions are not quite so sticky nor so unassailably popular as has been portrayed in the ‘new politics’ literature (author, 2000). Far from being confined to a politics of blame-avoidance, political leaders are taking a more proactive role in crafting welfare reform and, in some notable cases, even gaining political credit for implementing harsh initiatives. Nowhere has this been more clear than in the abolition of AFDC by the Clinton administration and Republican-controlled Congress in the United States and New Labour’s New Deal in Britain (King, 1999).

Yet, portraying leaders as trapped between sticky, popular institutions and post-industrial transformations, the ‘new politics’ literature has dismissed elite influence over institutions, ideas or public opinion. Consequently, we have little understanding of how symbolic politics, the strategic deployment of political discourse, and policy framing can serve as strategies of agenda control. The mechanisms by which leaders can shape public opinion, aggregate interests and expand leadership options under conditions of constraint remain unclear.

These issues are particularly pressing in that new (or recycled) ideas concerning the welfare state seem to be triumphing over deeply entrenched welfare institutions, especially in the English-speaking world (see King, 1999). Political agendas are proving to be more than an amalgam of vested interests, institutional habits and public opinion. Ideas and their political advocacy do not simply serve as constraints in the welfare restructuring process, buttressing the status quo and locking-in popular welfare institutions. They also drive the reform process.

Assisted by the intervention of “new actors”, including policy experts, networks and think tanks (King, 1999), leaders across affluent societies have sought to implement increasingly adventurous welfare reforms since the early 1990s. While most pronounced in the English-speaking world, these agenda changes are well evident in the social democratic welfare regimes of the Nordic countries and, to a lesser extent, the catholic-conservative regimes of continental Europe.<sup>1</sup> Supra-national leadership efforts from bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation, in combination

with heightened global competitive pressures and post-industrial transformations, are re-defining the range of 'thinkable' political ideas among policy elites. Despite continuing public attachment to welfare institutions, leaders on the left and right reveal a growing scepticism towards state provision and an increasing acceptance of market-based approaches to social problems (see Rhodes, 1996:308).

The power of new and recycled ideas, however, in large measure depends upon how successfully they can be diffused among pivotal electoral constituencies. Framing and the selective application of political discourse, the processes whereby the advantages of a policy are styled and communicated, is one means by which leaders attempt to compensate for the disappointment and loss of legitimacy following the attrition of popular social supports. It is possible, of course, that where imbalances in programmatic coverage conflict with new and emerging values, leaders may enjoy opportunities for turning "vice into virtue" (Levy, 1999). More usually, however, leaders' struggle simply to transform unpalatable policies into tolerable necessities.

The politics of welfare state restructuring, in other words, is not simply an aggregate of institutional impediments, globalisation and post-industrial transformations. Nor is it simply a politics of "bottom-up" constraint, whereby elected officials are beholden to a watchful and defensive public. The politics of welfare state restructuring is also about ideas, their political advocacy and legitimisation.

In this paper I investigate the conditions under which political framing can render welfare restructuring more palatable. I start by asking two research questions. First, what are the requisite conditions for framing welfare reform? Can we specify a set of necessary (albeit perhaps insufficient) conditions that allow leaders to frame successfully welfare reform? Second, to what extent are these conditions evident across welfare regimes? To address these two questions the paper is divided into four sections. Following the introduction, section two reviews the concept of framing and identifies four variables that condition leaders' opportunities for framing social policy: (i) extant frames, (ii) actors, (iii) institutions and (iv) policy arena. Section three briefly illustrates how these four parameters vary across welfare regimes. Section four surveys the discursive politics surrounding *The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (PRWORA) as a case where all four conditions for framing welfare retrenchment coalesced.



## The Concept of Framing

### *Defining the Framing Exercise*

The concept of framing is predicated on the familiar assumptions of cognitive psychology: compounding time, energy and interest constraints, individuals are cognitively impaired and, therefore, resort to shortcuts when approaching the political world. The aim of the framer is to exploit these weaknesses in the hope of either reinforcing or changing the audience's choices. By specifying a policy's benefits, linking it with popular symbols, and effectively communicating with the audience, the framer seeks to control the process of evaluation (Kenski, 1996; Hacker, 1996).

The principal features of the cognitive framing exercise are well documented (see Entman, 1993; Chomsky and Herman, 1988). Some definitions include an element of priming, while others emphasise the conveyance of information. Iyengar, for example, defines framing as "subtle alternations in the statement or presentation of judgement and choice problems...", whereas Just and Cigler incorporate both communication and interpretation processes; frames amount to "conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information" (cited in Kenski, 1996:73-75).

While definitions of the *cognitive* framing exercise generate much consensus, the literature does use the term in a second, fundamentally different way. Rather than depicting the framing process as an active means of shaping discourse with the aim to reinforce or convert, the concept is also used to capture prevailing cultural perspectives, predispositions and prejudices that condition the way individuals, organisations and states interpret and approach the political world (Rein and Schon, 1994). This use of the concept is vitally important for understanding how existing frames serve as powerful defensive mechanisms to new frames. To comprehend the conditionality of new welfare frames they must be examined in tandem with entrenched cultural predispositions.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Impact of Framing*

The cognitive framing literature often appears extravagant in its claims regarding the power of framing (see Druckman, 1998 for a useful overview). The general thrust of framing studies often seems to be that artful leaders can manipulate a naive and trusting public with slim resistance so long as they deploy a cogent set of frames. In Druckman's (1998:2-3) words, "a common depiction of elite framing is that many citizens follow whichever frame they

hear most frequently and or most recently. The implication is that nearly any elite can potentially use a frame to manipulate public opinion". Thus, if leaders repeat (frequently and recently) that welfare cuts are really a hidden blessing then sooner or later the unsuspecting public is apt to see some virtue in the retrenchment exercise.

If framing possessed such power the notion of unpopular policies would hinge solely on leaders' framing abilities. Leaders could exert control over both the saliency and interpretation of any social issue. Though framing does tend to be more effective where an issue is either distant or new, or where the listener is ambivalent (Druckman, 1998), none of these criteria apply to welfare restructuring. Indeed, one of the more immediate problems with framing new welfare initiatives is the breadth of interested parties. New frames, therefore, must target broad sections of society not just a narrow band of immediately injured parties.

### *Framing as a Conditional Variable*

Like most political variables it is doubtful whether framing matters in a direct unmediated fashion. It is more plausible to expect an interactive relationship between the effective use of discourse and the broader partisan, cultural and institutional context within which meanings are embedded. Given a conducive set of circumstances, the framing effort may help summon support (or dampen opposition) for an issue that might otherwise fail to assemble the necessary coalition of adherents. Below, I consider four variables that condition leaders' opportunities for framing social policy. I conceive of these as necessary not sufficient conditions for successful framing. Together these parameters provide a preliminary model or ideal type against which empirical opportunities for framing welfare reform may be evaluated.

### *Extant Frames*

As intimated earlier, framing is a misnomer. New issues excepted, framing involves *reframing*. This is not a mere quibble over terminology. Rather, it reflects a flaw in the standard conceptualisation of the cognitive framing process; namely, the failure to account for the influence of extant frames. Not only are the public often assumed to be a trifle gullible, they are also portrayed as empty vessels.

As cognitive misers, humans already have an elaborate constellation of cognitive short cuts that serve as barriers to new information. The assumption that elites can override long-standing referents such as partisan identification or



deep-seated values regarding what constitutes just and equitable policy underestimates humans' loyalty and dependence upon prevailing cognitive tools. As powerful defensive mechanisms, standing frames insulate the welfare state against reframing initiatives. Especially important in this regard are what Rein and Schon (1994) refer to as "metacultural" frames. Symbols and meanings are communicated at different "levels of abstractness". Metacultural frames are cultural predispositions founded upon common norms and values. Cultural differences in attachments to values of efficiency and equity, rights and responsibilities produce identifiable patterns of welfare discourse.

Nested within metacultural frames are "institutional action frames" (Rein and Schon, 1994). These are the policy-specific frames that decision makers use when appraising, selecting and packaging policy alternatives. While actors are more likely to re-evaluate policy frames than cultural predispositions, both frames serve to lock-in prevailing welfare values and bind the range of acceptable policy options. To muster support, therefore, new frames must respond to those already operative. This is not to imply that societies are culturally homogenous, but rather that historical patterns of welfare state involvement have produced distinct welfare configurations with identifiable value patterns (see Esping-Andersen, 1990). Liberal welfare regimes, with their stronger emphasis on values of residualism, individual responsibility and means-testing, are most conducive to reframing welfare retrenchment. In extreme cases such as the United States, extant frames are comparatively retrenchment-friendly.

### *Actors*

The framing literature does not differentiate between partisan actors in their capacity to frame. For the most part, anyone who can command an audience can, in principle, frame with some success. It is not implausible to suggest, however, an interactive framing effect between partisan actors and issues, with the left commanding greater authority to frame on welfare than the right. This, of course, helps explain one of the processes by which partisan issue-associations take effect and why crafting a new consensus on the welfare state may be heavily dependent upon leftist parties (author, 1997, 1999; Green-Pedersen, 1998).<sup>3</sup>

Druckman (1998) contends that successful framing depends on two issues relating to the credibility of the source. The first pertains to the source's knowledge of the subject matter. There is little reason to expect this criterion to discriminate between parties of the left and right, although it is possible that because the public perceives the left to care more about alleviating poverty, they

may believe them to be more knowledgeable about welfare. The second criterion for successful framing relates to the trustworthiness of the speaker. This would seem to be the critical factor affecting the public's response to welfare restructuring efforts by the left and right. Very simply, voters do not trust rightist parties to reform the welfare state whereas they assume that social democratic parties will engage in genuine reform rather than indiscriminate and harsh retrenchment.

There is a second important issue relating to the actors involved in the framing exercise. Framing necessitates transmitting ideas *about* groups, e.g. the 'type' of people associated with the issue. For example, those reliant on non-contributory, means-tested benefits are a comparatively easy target for negative framing. These groups are often predominantly women and immigrants. In many places, the rhetoric of welfare restructuring has assumed explicitly nationalist, racist and sexist overtones. While this discourse cross-cuts regimes, it is considerably easier to frame in these terms where programs are heavily means-tested and where the normative role of the state corresponds to the liberal idea than where it embraces social equality or even state paternalism.

### *Institutions*

Parties are not free-floating actors who can roam the ideological spectrum with instrumentality and frame with liberty. They operate within a set of institutional rules and norms that provide varied incentives and possibilities for framing. Leaders must command the institutional authority as well as the credibility (based on trust) to frame. A key issue in this respect is the presence of a credible source of counter-framing. The multiparty systems of continental Europe with significant "far" left parties or where social partners play an integral role in the policy process retain higher degrees of frame-conflict, in turn, lessening the impact of reframing initiatives. In the case of minority (often coalition) governments, characteristic of the Nordic countries, leaders' reliance upon a broad-based cross-party parliamentary (and extra-parliamentary) consensus precludes significant reframing. Consensus-building strategies may depoliticise a modest cost-cutting program, yet almost by definition they rely upon framing issues around the status quo. Not surprisingly, the two-party systems of the English-speaking countries have reframed social policy far more significantly than their counterparts on the left or right elsewhere.

While two-party competition has served to reduce frame-conflict, some types of institutional power-sharing can facilitate reframing. The "decentralised" federal structure of the United States has provided national and sub-national leaders with a number of possibilities.<sup>4</sup> First, reframing welfare in



terms of state autonomy serves to eclipse the principle of national standards. Second, institutional power-sharing between levels of government has proved to be a highly interactive process, not simply a devolutionary one. Key states have effectively propelled their welfare frames onto the national agenda. The Southern states have been particularly successful in both hampering the emergence of a more extensive welfare system and in retrenching social policy (King, 1996).<sup>5</sup>

### *Policy Arena*

Policies are located in combinations of political arena, each with a different constellation of interests attached to them. To change the reach of welfare provision, leaders may shift services to the private sector, devolve them to non-national governments or other state and semi-state bodies, or dismantle them (Staeheli et al, 1997; Kodras, 1997). Each mode of restructuring involves recasting the political advantages and disadvantages associated with old and new policy arena. Dismantling, for example, demands that either the family or voluntary sector be framed as the optimal location for the execution of traditional welfare functions. Privatization requires that leaders frame the market as the most effective realm for the provision of services. Devolution demands that non-national governments are framed as best able to formulate and administer social policy. A government's capacity to adopt each strategy, of course, is partially conditioned by existing institutional and policy arrangements, and, as alluded to earlier, countries differ in their normative attachments to different policy arena. Framing the market as the optimal policy location, for example, is less arduous where private provision is already well established. Devolution is facilitated by a decentralized federal structure. Likewise, diversity in programmatic structure eases shifting the balance between arenas in a way that universalism resists.

These four variables provide a preliminary framework for analyzing leaders' reframing capabilities whilst exploring broad departures in welfare frames across affluent societies. The optimal conditions for reframing welfare are found in the United States where cultural and programmatic attachments to welfare residualism, individual responsibility and means-testing are already well-established, and the two-party system is combined with a decentralized mode of federalism. In the United States the market already enjoys a much elevated status in society and, as noted, a bi-partisan consensus has legitimated retrenchment and marginalised voices of dissent, especially since the mid-1990s. I return to explore the American case in section four. To provide a comparative context for this discussion, I first identify four dominant types of welfare frames.

**Table 1. Reframing Welfare Across Welfare Regimes**

	<b>Social Democratic Regimes</b>	<b>Conservative Regimes</b>	<b>Liberal Regimes</b>	
	<i>Exogenous-Systemic Frames</i>	<i>Exogenous-Defensive Frames</i>	<i>Exogenous-Anticipatory Frames</i>	<i>Endogenous-Inherent Frames</i>
<b>CASES</b>	Nordic countries	continental Europe	English-speaking left	English-speaking right & the USA
<b>EXTANT FRAMES</b>	weak	weak	moderate	conductive in the USA; moderate elsewhere
<b>ACTORS *</b>	a) mild benefits from issue-associations for the left  b) weak victimisation potential	a) mild benefits from issue-associations for the left  b) weak victimisation potential	a) beneficial issue-associations for leftist parties  b) strong victimisation potential	a) problematic issue-associations for rightist parties  b) strong victimisation potential
<b>INSTITUTIONS</b>	modest:  centripetal multiparty systems; important TUs	weak:  multiparty systems; important TUs	good:  two-party systems; weak TUs	good:  two-party systems; weak TUs USA: decentralised federalism
<b>ARENA</b>	state-based pluralism	state	market-based pluralism	non-state pluralism

- \*  
 (a): who can frame  
 (b): who can be framed

## Framing Reform Across “Worlds of Welfare”

Welfare frames across welfare regimes cluster into four dominant groups: endogenous-inherent, exogenous-systemic, exogenous-defensive and exogenous-anticipatory. Table 1 illustrates how amenable extant frames, actors, institutions and arena are to reframing welfare in each group. The table is designed to isolate important differences in welfare frames across regimes, not capture the detail of any one system. Despite the burst of scholarly works decrying the globalisation thesis, most leaders have resorted to exogenous frames, stressing the inevitability of reform under the constraints of economic competition. Yet they have done so in different ways, signaling quite different reform agenda.

### *Exogenous-Systemic Frames*

Exogenous-systemic frames are predominately found in the social democratic welfare regimes of the Nordic countries. According to this line of argument, exogenous shifts have resulted in a range of economic tensions (retarded growth, debilitating expenditure levels, unemployment, deficits, heightened competition) that preclude further expansion of the welfare state. These new economic challenges demand modest cutbacks in selective areas, whilst growing imbalances in the welfare system require some redistribution; increased affluence has alleviated the plight of traditional welfare clients while the new poor now find themselves without adequate coverage (Ploug, 1994). Thus, the reform process is driven by a combination of exogenously-induced economic tensions and, more minor internal (systemic) flaws. The latter, of course, favour benefit increases (not simply cuts) where feasible e.g. in the stronger performing economies of Norway and Denmark (see Eitirheim and Kuhnle, 1999; Lodemel, 1994:62). The pure retrenchments that have occurred (for example, in replacement rates for sickness insurance), are largely confined to Finland and Sweden—the two Nordic cases which have suffered the most severe economic stress (Eitirheim and Kuhnle, 1999:4, 7-8).

Metacultural frames in these cases, emphasizing the state's obligation for public welfare, have insulated the welfare state against an infusion of market-liberal ideas. Despite the unique challenges that Finland has confronted, where shifts in the international system have brought unusually harsh economic pressures, public opinion remains firmly supportive of the state as the principal welfare provider (Ploug, 1994:16). In Sweden the backlash against social policy cuts led the research director of Sifo polling to declare during the 1998 general election; “Talking about tax cuts in this campaign is like swearing in church”.<sup>6</sup>



Even minor parties on the far right have resorted to what Eitirheim and Kuhnle (1999:9) term "a strong welfare populism".

With policy frames emphasizing universal and comprehensive coverage and social rights attached to residence there are few programmatic cleavages along which "deserving" recipients may be separated from "undeserving" ones (Eitirheim and Kuhnle, 1999:1). Indeed, these regimes are notable for negating a new moralization of welfare--something that would be starkly at odds with prevailing conceptions of equality not to mention dominant family patterns.<sup>7</sup>

With respect to the framing powers of political actors, perhaps most interesting in the Nordic cases has been the cross-party convergence in welfare frames, especially evident in countries that have suffered the worse economic challenges (Eitirheim and Kuhnle, 1999:8-9). This has resulted in a distinct lack of frame-conflict, but in a direction that has locked-in existing welfare paths.

Part of the explanation for this depoliticisation is the effect that economic stress places upon traditional party politics and part appears to be explicable in terms of the Nordic countries institutional proclivity towards minority government (Eitirheim and Kuhnle, 1999:26). Depoliticisation of welfare discourse is essential for aggregating parliamentary (and extra-parliamentary) support behind minor retrenchments. To craft such broad coalitions, leaders must appeal to prevailing frames. Indeed, the strategic dependence of minority governments on intra and extra-parliamentary coalitions largely precludes significant reframing from the left or right. This institutional vulnerability, of course, also tends to deprive the left of the benefits that might be reaped from partisan issue-associations. Moreover, the possibility of voter-flight in even relatively centripetal multiparty systems has discouraged the major parties from adopting a more market-oriented rhetoric of reform.

The less extensive use and weak normative attachment to the market in the Nordic world have protected the welfare state against privatizing initiatives. This is not to imply that the relationship between arena has remained constant and, while still peripheral, the private sector has become increasingly visible in welfare provision. As indicated in table 1, a form of "state-based pluralism" has emerged, signaling greater use of the market but in a manner that is heavily circumscribed by a dominant state. Some parties on the center-right of the ideological spectrum have emphasized a greater role for the family in social welfare provision. However, these new responsibilities are envisioned to be firmly embedded within a state financed welfare system (see Eitirheim and Kuhnle, 1999:10; Palme, 1994:42).

An overall evaluation of exogenous-systemic frames illustrates the very weak opportunities leaders on either side of the political spectrum enjoy for reframing the programs and principles of the Nordic welfare state.

### *Exogenous-Defensive Frames*

Exogenous-defensive frames, characteristic of the continental European countries with strong leftist parties and powerful trade unions, seek to protect deeply entrenched welfare institutions to the greatest extent that exogenous imperatives will permit. Despite compelling pressures for modernisation in terms of policy coverage and the paternalistic values embedded within existing programs, these catholic-conservative regimes have framed comparatively modest reforms (especially in social security) in terms of maintaining existing programs (see Chabonnel, 1994:121). Exogenous pressures are deemed to be real in the sense of immediate budgetary and fiscal tensions, but not so crucifying that all manner of social protection must be eroded in anticipation of further global competition (see Esping-Andersen, 1996).

The combination of a multiparty system with significant far left parties and strong trade unions has played a critical role in defining the defensive tenor of this discourse. While Levy (1999) notes the objective possibilities for the left adopting a "vice into virtue" reform strategy in these cases, whereby social democratic governments can implement much needed progressive reform by emphasising the system's inequalities and exclusions, powerful interests tied to the status quo discourage such a strategy. Fractious labour movements continue to ensure that traditional leftist frames remain the basic reference point in any reform dialogue. More than left-right partisan conflict, antagonism between the parties and the trade unions, especially in France, keeps the welfare debate solidly grounded in a discourse of social rights.<sup>8</sup>

For this reason, issue-associations offer parties of the left very modest padding, although rightist parties have proved more vulnerable in their reform initiatives. Even limited reframing attempts by the right have brought a sweep of leftist parties to power across continental Europe. Moreover, with benefits founded on the principle of status maintenance, isolating deserving recipients from undeserving ones does not naturally divide along programmatic lines. Indeed, exogenous-defensive frames have displayed relatively little victimisation of welfare dependants as being fraud-prone or lazy--although second-tier social assistance recipients have, as elsewhere, fared comparatively worse.



Extant frames and policy arena are likewise hostile to reframing initiatives. Standing conceptions of justice favour a system of status maintenance and state paternalism guards against benefit residualisation. Indeed, the heavy role for the state (and the family as supported through state institutions) casts scepticism over privatised provision. Actors on both the left and right have decried what Prodi has called "sadist liberalism" (Magara, 1997: 11).

Although the most severe tensions afflict the conservative regimes of continental Europe where a combination of onerous payroll taxes, a heavy, skewed pension burden, high unemployment, low birth rates, and the exclusion of women from the labour market place immense stresses upon social programs, exogenous-defensive frames do not signal a major overhaul of the continental welfare state in the near future.

### *Exogenous-Anticipatory Frames*

Exogenous anticipatory frames, trumpeted by the English-speaking left (outside the USA), reflect the logic of structural dependency theses and embrace reform on the premise of its inevitability (Hay and Watson, 1997; Wickham-Jones, 1999). Changed global conditions require new welfare institutions, infused with new values to meet future global challenges. The successful countries of the next millennium will be those that have anticipated the inevitable and gained the competitive edge.

While the principal diagnosis of the welfare dilemma centres on economic requisites, these adjustments are framed as fundamentally dependent upon new social values and changed labour market obligations. Indeed, exogenous-anticipatory frames seek to radically shift the post-war welfare balance away from social rights and towards obligations. Inherent to such reframing initiatives is the implication that a rights-based welfare system breeds a culture of dependency. Not unlike its conservative counterpart, this frame discloses a strong moralism. Commenting on Britain's New Labour, Roy Hattersley lamented, "For all its slickness there is a chilling Old Testament quality about New Labour. The industrious are to be rewarded and the indolent to be punished".<sup>9</sup>

Particularly interesting here is the extent to which leftist parties have had to reframe their social and economic values. In the case of Britain's New Labour, for example, the party has gone to great lengths to renounce class politics and replace its traditional commitment to social and economic equality with a depoliticised discourse of economic and social pragmatism. To

disassociate itself from its socialist past. New Labour has issued proclamations such as "no return to past failures" and "the function of modern government is not to second-guess the market" (cited in Hay and Watson, 1997:14). Reviewing Blair's transformation, Seyd (1997: 49) reports, 'in his leaders speech to the 1995 Labour Party Conference, Tony Blair used the word new on fifty-nine occasions, 16 of them with reference to "New Labour". In contrast, he referred to socialism just once and to the working class not at all.'

The left's success in reframing its welfare agenda with considerable rapidity owes much to the interaction of the two-party system, crippled labour movements and favourable issue-associations. The two-party system and disempowered unions have removed a significant source of counter-framing from actors further to the left. In the absence of counter-frames protecting existing welfare values, issue associations have offered the left considerable cushioning. The unusual popularity of New Labour, despite pursuing remarkably similar initiatives to those tabled by previous Tory governments, is testimony to the authority the party can command on social policy reform.

Extant cultural and policy frames have also contributed to the relative success of exogenous-anticipatory frames. While cultural attachments to the welfare state are much more deeply embedded in liberal regimes outside the United States and policy structures are less exclusionary than in America, the principle and practice of targeting are well-established. Means-testing and residualism have eased the burden of framing welfare dependants as undeserving. Indeed, a discourse centred on labour market obligations by definition defines claimants as socially irresponsible.

The underlying pluralism of extant policy structures in the English-speaking world has assisted reframing initiatives in a way that universalism and status maintenance systems impede. Their historical attachment to classical liberal values has encouraged an acceptance of neo-liberal precepts that is lacking in social democratic and conservative regimes. Blending nineteenth and twentieth century welfare values, exogenous-anticipatory frames promote a form of market-based pluralism with the state retaining welfare functions in key areas. It is worth noting that its emphasis on labour market obligations for women as well as men discourages a system of family-based welfare provision.

Despite the fact that liberal regimes have confronted the least severe economic tensions, exogenous-anticipatory frames promulgated by the political left in these countries have reframed the values and institutions of the welfare state in significant ways.



Only one of the four frames identified here primarily draws on endogenous arguments. Endogenous-inherent frames are well established in the United States and, over the last decade and a half, have been deployed by rightist parties across liberal regimes. The thrust of this rhetoric is that elaborate welfare systems are *inherently* misguided and, far from ameliorating poverty, they are apt to induce social ills by rewarding indolence and discouraging individual responsibility. In Cope's (1997:190) words, "The underlying message is that that the causes of poverty lie with the *individual*--not with economic shifts, exploitation, race or gender discrimination, disinvestment in education and social supports, or a lack of available jobs". Framed in such individualistic terms, welfare recipients must have their labour market responsibilities thrust upon them. In Peter Lilley's infamous terms, the government must "close down the something for nothing society".<sup>10</sup>

This frame blends individualism and social morality with a logic of economic obligation (Staeheli, 1997). State welfare functions should be severely residualised, allowing a much greater role for private provision and charitable giving through the local community. Devolving functions to the family, of course, is less desirable simply because curtailing women's employment possibilities destabilises the labour market.

As noted above, extant frames in the English-speaking world tend to be more conducive to welfare restructuring than where values of equality of outcome or state paternalism are embedded. While the welfare state remains a popular set of institutions outside the United States, means-testing and residualism are well entrenched, facilitating further division between recipients. Though not enjoying the elevated status found in America, a basic acceptance of market-based provision in most liberal regimes also frees leaders from significantly reframing policy arena.

Reframing welfare in endogenous-inherent terms has certainly been aided by the two-party system and enfeebled trade union movements of the English-speaking world, both of which have reduced counter-framing from the far-left. The decentralized federal system of the United States has also facilitated reframing welfare in the language of devolution, state-power and local autonomy---traditional values with a deep normative appeal among the American public.

Outside the United States, where metacultural and policy frames remain less amenable to retrenchment, issue-associations have had a constraining



impact on the right and its harsh vilification of welfare recipients has invited backlash. This was evident during the Tories eighteen year reign in Britain. The Conservatives' fiery oratorical assault on the welfare state, combined with their institutional dominance, left the British public with a deep fear that their popular welfare services would be residualised at best or dismantled at worst. King (1997:192-3) recalls how the Conservatives "suffered from the near-universal belief among the electorate that, under the Tories, basic public services [...] had suffered, were suffering and would continue to suffer". Thatcher's successor, John Major, deliberately tempered his approach towards the welfare state on the explicit understanding that his party was particularly vulnerable on social policy--a moderation that did little to allay public unease.

While the most conducive parameters for reframing welfare are found in the liberal regimes of the English-speaking world, only in America are extant frames, institutions, actors and policy arena all conducive to reframing welfare in ways that can render retrenchment broadly popular.

### **Optimal Conditions for Framing Retrenchment: The USA**

The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) represents one of the most dramatic breaks in welfare provision in the recent history of the United States. Far from following a path-dependent pattern of change, the PRWORA illustrates how ideas have triumphed over institutions in the welfare restructuring process (see King, 1999). The Act dismantled Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), America's main federal cash entitlement program, replacing it with the block grant Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).<sup>11</sup> Though the PRWORA predominately reflected the Republican's welfare agenda, it passed with bi-partisan support in the House and Senate. And, though President Clinton twice vetoed earlier versions, he declared the third compromised measure, "ending welfare as we know it", to be largely consistent with his own agenda.

The PRWORAs complete retrenchment of AFDC was enabled by a highly successful framing initiative undertaken by the Republicans during their 1994 Congressional campaign and aggressively continued by speaker Gingrich after the party gained control of both Houses of Congress for the first time in forty years. The Democrats' shock at losing both the House and Senate in 1994, combined with their preparations for the 1996 elections, led the President to dramatically lurch to the right on welfare reform, collaborating in the highly punitive discourse of welfare dependency. Despite the excuses some Democrats proffered on Clinton's behalf, including his inability to capture the welfare

agenda owing to the burdens of health care reform, the Republicans' electoral success in 1994 sent the President an unambiguous signal that there were electoral benefits to be reaped in embracing a conservative vision.

Though AFDC never enjoyed the popularity of many European welfare programs, growing increasingly controversial in recent years, Cope (1997:183) correctly argues that it remains "politically difficult to simply do away with systems of benefits and long-standing entitlements for poor mothers and their children". The fact that the PRWORA acquired the support it did speaks to the success of the framing process. For sure, the American welfare state has always been considerably more minimalist than its counterparts in other liberal regimes, its programs more residualist and less deeply entrenched, and it has always sat uncomfortably alongside the basic values of a country whose political culture is characterised by a deep scepticism of government. While keenly relevant to our understanding of how a discourse of economic, social and moral obligation enjoyed such receptivity in the US, neither the modest popular support AFDC enjoyed nor its institutional fragility can alone explain why by 1996 diverse segments of American society, including the American poor, became convinced that AFDC was responsible for their plight (Staeheli et al 1997; Lake, 1997).

A forcefully espoused rhetoric of excessive welfare rights, eroded responsibilities, fraud and sloth successfully united discontented sections of American society (Staeheli et al 1997). For too long, it was argued, welfare recipients have been protected by a discourse and policy of social rights, freeing them to take from their communities without obligation or return. Hand-outs have encouraged anti-family practices, including illegitimacy, and robbed localities of the charitable function that integrates communities. Not only has AFDC fostered un-American values, it has done so on the back of the working American family.

Deploying a set of frames that located a range of social, economic and moral problems in the personal behaviour of welfare recipients, state and national leaders pieced together an unlikely amalgam of groups who, experiencing a flush of economic anxiety, were willing to direct their disaffection towards government (Staeheli et al, 1997; Lake, 1997). At the core of this temporary alliance were "Reagan Democrats", the white working poor who felt especially hard-hit (in expectations if not real income) by a slowing economy (Lake, 1997). Leaders linked the anxieties of these volatile voters to the concerns of the lower middle classes and business through a discourse that blamed the troubles of these materially antagonistic interests on an intrusive



federal government that squeezed working families, stifled fair competition with a plethora of regulation and rewarded idleness (Lake, 1997).

Drawing on the four parameters for successful framing discussed above, I now examine why this framing initiative proved so effective.

### *Extant frames*

Though losing the battle over constitutional ratification in 1789, many of the core concerns of the anti-federalists remain deeply rooted within the American value system. Recurrent fears of a remote federal government, impervious to the concerns of the common people, intensify during times of stress. Staeheli (1997:60) observes how “the anxiety created by economic and social restructuring has created a climate in which citizens return to long-standing debates over the nature of the Republic and the role of citizenship and community in self-government”.

Metacultural frames in the United States are unusually receptive to retrenchment. The American public has never welcomed welfare programs with the same enthusiasm as their European counterparts and heavy social spending has rarely served the legitimating function that it has routinely assumed in other affluent societies. More than cultural stereotypes, the values of individual responsibility and economic individualism are deeply embedded within the American value system. A recent survey conducted by the Washington Post, the Kaiser Foundation and Harvard University revealed that Americans’ prefer “smaller government with few services” by nearly two to one over a larger government providing more services.<sup>12</sup> With respect to economic liberalism the survey reported, ‘seven in 10 agreed that people who don’t succeed in life “have only themselves to blame”’.<sup>13</sup>

These sentiments intensify during times of stress. In the year leading up to the PRWORA, an earlier survey by the Washington Post, Kaiser Foundation and Harvard University revealed that; “America is becoming a nation of suspicious strangers, and this mistrust of each other is a major reason Americans have lost confidence in the federal government and virtually every other major national institution”.<sup>14</sup> Why these anti-government sentiments were explicitly directed towards AFDC recipients becomes more apparent when they are disaggregated: ‘nearly two in three Americans believe that most can’t be trusted [...].Half say most people would cheat others if they had the chance, and an equal proportion agree that “most people are looking out for themselves”’.<sup>15</sup>



It is hardly surprising, therefore, that diverse sections of the public proved so receptive to a discourse emphasising the personal failings of welfare claimants. Citizens classed as “economically anxious”, who constituted over one third of all Americans in the months leading up to the PRWORA’s enactment, were particularly prone to these sentiments.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, rather than increasing public support for more vulnerable members of society, worsening economic anxieties would seem to have the opposite effect. That these anxieties directly flowed from economic shifts yet were widely attributed to an over-active government and irresponsible under-class says much about America’s cultural attachment to the market (Staeheli et al, 1997).

Despite these sentiments, leaders still had to aggregate a coalition out of materially antagonistic interests in order to retrench AFDC. One reason why they were able to do so under conditions of divided government is due to the value cleavages that cut across party lines. Detecting five distinct clusters of Democrats and four clusters of Republicans, a recent survey found that “libertarian Democrats” (9 % of all democrats) actually favour cutting welfare benefits after five years, as do 6 out of 10 “New Generation Democrats” (15 % of all democrats). Even “determined liberal Democrats” (30% of all democrats) show an ambivalence towards government, favouring bigger government but fearful of federal inefficiencies and intrusions, whilst poor “discouraged Democrats” (19 % of all Democrats) have no expectations that the government should rectify their plight with hand-outs. Indeed, only “helping hand Democrats” (22% of all Democrats) embrace both a larger federal government and the extension of welfare benefits beyond a five year period.<sup>17</sup>

The survey also revealed, however, that “liberal Republicans” (19% of all Republicans) actually favour further government services and about 2 in 3 of all “Big Government Conservatives” (23% of all Republicans) report that “government should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all Americans”. The majority of “Big Government Conservatives” oppose terminating welfare benefits after 5 years.<sup>18</sup> It is these cross-cutting cleavages that allowed leaders to fuse competing material interests behind a retrenchment agenda.

Policy frames in the United States were also congenial to retrenchment initiatives. Long described as a welfare “laggard”, American social policy never matured to the same extent as its European counterparts. When other welfare states were expanding and entrenching during the second half of the 1960s, access to benefits was being incrementally eroded in the United States. The passage of the Work Incentives Program in 1967 signalled that women without pre-school infants should assume work or training in exchange for benefits. By

the time Reagan signed the Family Support Act in 1988 workfare was already established in principle and the FSA significantly broadened its application. The Bush administration granted a comparatively small number of federal waivers, allowing the states to innovate with their own welfare arrangements--a practice massively extended by President Clinton. Indeed, by granting waivers so freely, Clinton collaborated in undercutting the very principle of a federal entitlement.

In sum, both metacultural and policy frames supported retrenchment. Americans are apt to blame government in times of hardship rather than turn to it for help. As a non-contributory program, AFDC attracted limited support and the concept of workfare was already institutionally embedded.

### *Actors and Institutions*

The success of framing welfare retrenchment in the United States was in many respects the result of a distinct partisan and institutional power-sharing dynamic. Consequently, it makes most sense to examine the second and third framing parameter together. Both the Republicans and the Democrats introduced welfare reform bills seeking to terminate AFDC in 1995. The Democrats softened theirs with a number of provisions, including child care for mothers moving off welfare and into work, and the cost of the two bills differed to the tune of \$41 billion.<sup>19</sup> The cost differentials, however, were a function of Republican cuts in food stamps and support for legal immigrants, not AFDC's retrenchment. Clinton himself argued that these differences were of peripheral importance to the PRWORA's principal aim and, as Congressional Quarterly reported, "Clinton never insisted that an individual's entitlement to Aid to Families with Dependent Children [...] be retained".<sup>20</sup>

The climate of retrenchment, in other words, cannot be reduced to Republican rhetoric alone. The Republican version of welfare reform came to dominate owing to the tardiness of the Clinton administration in presenting its plan before July 1994. However, a clear bi-partisan consensus had already developed on the fundamental principle of dismantling AFDC.

After the Republican victories in the 1994 Congressional elections, much of the drive for reform flowed from the legislature. The Democratic President, however, assumed a critical role in dismantling AFDC. First, it is questionable whether a Republican president could have condoned such a harsh measure without incurring a major electoral risk. Note how Dole lost two traditionally Republican states, Florida and Arizona, in the 1996 election due to fears of pension and Medicare reform. While these two programmes have always enjoyed considerably higher approval ratings than AFDC, the public's



perception of the Republicans as hostile to any social spending, coupled with the rhetorical severity of a purely conservative approach, seems likely to have incited public concerns that AFDC was the beginning of a 'slippery slope' in social spending. The public reaction against the extremity of the 104th Congress at the 1996 elections returned a much reduced Republican majority promising to be altogether more moderate.

Likewise, a united Republican administration risked inviting far more ferocious criticism from Congressional Democrats than emerged under conditions of divided government. Voices of dissent were noticeably quietened as social liberals tempered their opposition to the President. Indeed, Clinton's 'big spending liberal' image and compensatory policies (anointing social security with cabinet status, raising the minimum wage, increasing the flexibility of health insurance, the earned income tax credit, the Family and Medical Leave Act) helped excuse his collusion in retrenching AFDC among social liberals.

A critical component of institutional and partisan power-sharing in the United States that is absent from most European style coalitions is that it occurs *within* the context of the two-party system. Under conditions of divided government, therefore, power is split between the centre-left and centre-right, providing few opportunities for significant counter-framing. The American parties in the modern era have never splintered on fundamentals in the way their European counterparts have. And, while no longer 'tweedledum and tweedledee', both the Republicans and the Democrats share the same broad policy frames. Much of the argument between the parties on welfare reform focused on policy details (albeit important details for those effected), not the principle of whether 'big government' in general and AFDC in particular must be dismantled.

A further component of America's mode of institutional power-sharing is its decentralised federal structure. Intimately associated with the virtues of small government, a rhetoric of state rights enjoys periodic renewal in American politics, most recently with Reagan's New Federalism. Reagan imparted a rhetorical and programmatic legacy that glorified the dissolution of national standards and celebrated geographical disparities in the name of state autonomy, civic virtue and efficiency. In retrenching AFDC, both Republicans and Democrats trumpeted these themes, omitting any serious discussion of the very obvious pitfalls of dismantling the federal entitlement. Framing retrenchment in the language of localism gathered further momentum once waiver success stories flooded in.



American institutions, of course, are typically prohibitive of major policy change. The separation of powers, checks and balances, decentralised federal structure, as well as the partisan proclivity for divided government present veto players with multiple access points. However, not all veto players are equal. It would be usual to expect some asymmetry in the importance of interests in relation to specific policy problems. When welfare retrenchment was on the agenda the most powerful activists proved to be supporters of retrenchment frames. Confronting new competitive pressures from an increasingly internationalised marketplace, American business assumed a critical role in framing economic anxieties as a direct consequence of welfare policies that escalated the labour costs and eroded the competitiveness of American firms. These material interests were legitimated by anointed 'experts' and conservative think tanks who mustered scientific evidence in support of their arguments (see King, 1999).<sup>21</sup>

Federalism does provide a legal basis for state complaint against the national government, presenting possibilities for policy overturn. Access points are not only relevant during the pre-enactment period. Veto players are often most effective after the fact--when the consequences of painful measures become clear and when concerned parties have had an opportunity to mobilise. In the case of the PRWORA, several states initiated law suits against the federal government immediately following its enactment. In less than a year, Florida had filed a suit claiming that the PRWORA placed a crippling financial burden on the state (in excess of \$1 billion per annum) owing to its large number of legal immigrants.

The legal challenges mounted by isolated states, however, have concerned specific policy details, not the overriding principle of reform. With AFDC dismantled, opponents of the PRWORA had few political possibilities for aggregating a national response. This is not to imply that states cannot frame initiatives on their own terms. The success of the southern states in curbing social policy expansion and forcing their interpretation of welfare dependency onto the national agenda are well documented (King, 1996). The political cohesion of the now solidly Republican southern states and their institutional ascendancy within Congress enabled them to take the lead in framing retrenchment.

Lacking these attributes, however, most states cannot hope to have this impact. Indeed, most states have simply perpetuated Southern frames. Despite the celebration of local diversity, state policymakers have sustained a discourse of dependency based on "deeply aspatial assumptions" (Cope, 1997:186). Almost without exception, the overarching principle driving state welfare

programs is a logic of individual responsibility, regardless of whether claimants reside in an urban metropolis or rural outpost, in the north-east or in the south-west. Cope (1997:204) makes note of this fact by pointing to the title of state initiatives, such as Colorado's "Personal Responsibility Project", Missouri's "Families Mutual Responsibility Plan" and Georgia's "Personal Accountability and Responsibility Project".

Aided by severe means-testing and a legacy of divisive AFDC stereotypes, victimisation of welfare claimants has come easily in the United States. In part, these stereotypes are perpetuated by policymakers' failure to hear directly from politically marginalised claimants, allowing the welfare debate to assume "an exaggerated ideological form" (King, 1999:272). Americans' receptivity to these simplistic arguments, however, may also have something to do with their high levels of political ignorance.<sup>22</sup> The unusually explicit racism plaguing welfare in America is well documented (Quadagno, 1994). Myths of the black 'welfare queen', so successfully propagated by the Reagan administration, have played an integral part in framing workfare as a necessary corrective to the un-American values held by minority communities.

In sum, on top of these divisive stereotypes, the success of retrenchment frames also owe much to the lack of possibilities for counter-framing from the left, the expanded opportunities provided by a system of decentralised federalism, and the bi-partisan politics that emerged under conditions of divided government to unite constituencies on the left and right.

### *Policy Arena*

The rhetoric that sustained the PRWORA maligned big government, or more accurately the federal government, while emphasising the merits of three alternative policy arena: devolved state and local government, the market and the charitable sector (see Staeheli et al, 1997; Kodras, 1997). A discourse of favouritism and unfairness framed each of these arena: robbed of their constitutional and political authority by a gigantian federal government, the states, and by extension the American people, had endured anxiety and hardship; a welfare system that corrupted market principles, drove up labour costs and thwarted US competitiveness had discriminated against American business; American society at large bore the suffering a welfare system that caused community breakdown by displacing social institutions, such as the church, family and charitable sector, leading to a host of social ills, including divorce, drugs, crime, illegitimacy and an inter-generational culture of dependency (see Staeheli et al, 1997).



The rhetoric linking these injustices was populist in orientation, returning power to the people and acclaiming the virtues of self-determination. Devolution would take government out of the hands of professional Washington politicians. Removing barriers to the market and encouraging private provision would encourage individual responsibility and entrepreneurship. Reviving a role for charitable giving would allow localities to assume responsibility for their own needs and integrate the socially excluded.

Far from being called into question, the importance of the market for ensuring social and economic justice received further approbation (Staeheli et al, 1997). A rhetoric of exploitation or counter-frames challenging market orthodoxy never surfaced. The fact that Americans, including poor Americans, could readily accept that their economic anxieties derived from societal rather than market changes, indicates, in Staeheli's (1997:xxviii) words, "the porousness of the boundaries between capital and civil society and the ability of politicians to discursively manipulate those boundaries".

In sum, America's deep normative attachment to the concept of the free market, community and the role of charitable giving were discursively exploited by national and sub-national leaders to renew hostility towards the federal government and dignify a highly fragmented and residual form of workfare.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to estimate the precise impact of political framing. While many cognitive framing studies have tended to exaggerate its importance (Druckman, 1998), the role of political framing is well illustrated by the host of 'spin doctors' and media personnel employed in the political arena (Campbell, 1998). Politics is essentially about ideas, irrespective of whether these ideas are driven by material interests. Ideas only matter to the extent they are successfully diffused and capture the imagination of important sections of the voting public. To do so they must be framed in a manner that is compelling. Whether or not ideas can be framed in a convincing fashion, however, does not simply hinge upon leaders' framing abilities, but primarily on whether extant cultural and policy frames, institutions, policy arena and an actor's own issue-associations are conducive.

I argued at the outset of this paper that the 'new politics' literature has neglected the role political leadership can play in crafting welfare reform. Yet, just as the reform process is not a 'bottom-up' one of public constraint, neither is it as 'top-down' as might be expected from framing studies. The four framing



parameters considered here illustrate both top-down influences on the welfare reform process and the limitations to elite control. Where cultural, institutional and policy legacies are conducive to reframing welfare, political leaders can hope to reframe social policy with some success, especially if they enjoy public trust on the issue. Conversely, where these receptive conditions fail to coalesce as neatly as they do in the United States, public opinion has placed far greater constraints upon elites' framing capabilities.

This analysis indicates that the power of political framing can be highly variable, depending on at least the four parameters discussed above. It is clear, however, that the discursive politics and symbolic elements of the reform process are worthy of further attention. Extant frames, institutions, actors and policy arena constitute necessary not sufficient conditions for successful framing. Leaders deploy a variety of instruments in framing social policy that warrant further consideration. Desmond King (1999), for example, has recently illustrated the influential role expertise can play in legitimating social policy reform.

With welfare reform gathering momentum since the mid-1990s, it is evident that an overly static and institutionalised portrait of welfare restructuring requires revision. To account for change more effectively, the new politics needs to be infused with a source of political agency. The dynamics driving restructuring cannot be reduced to exogenous pressures or post-industrial transformations. To obtain political significance, objective trends must be framed as both salient and pressing. A fruitful way forward, therefore, may lie in probing the relationship not between exogenous and endogenous imperatives, but between elite-driven agenda politics (whereby exogenous and endogenous trends are framed as more or less pressing) and public-driven approval politics (whereby elite frames are accepted as more or less convincing).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Esping-Andersen (1990) distinguishes between three types of welfare regimes: liberal (characteristic of the English-speaking world), social democratic (associated with the Nordic countries) and conservative (typical of continental Europe). While this division between "worlds of welfare" has not escaped criticism, it continues to provide the principal typology for differentiating between systems of social provision.

<sup>2</sup> The social psychology literature on social movements has been most adept at integrating the two uses of the concept (Gamson, 1992; Snow and Benford, 1992; Tarrow, 1992; Glenn, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> The concept of partisan issue-associations reflects the logic of the 'Nixon goes to China' thesis: leaders who are perceived to be closest to a politically delicate issue are likely to find themselves most constrained. When unpopular policies are on the agenda, the latitude for leadership is largely reserved for those who seem least likely to act, e.g. it took a vehement anti-Communist such as Nixon to open diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1972. According to the logic of the Nixon goes to China thesis, party issue-associations interact with policy problems to limit and expand the scope for leadership. When issue-associations become a liability, the possibilities for leadership grow increasingly slim.

<sup>4</sup> Pierson (1995) draws a useful distinction between types of federal system. Rather than simply implementing national mandates, decentralised federations enjoy considerable autonomy over policy.

<sup>5</sup> Veto points may only limit the scope of retrenchment where they encourage veto players to mobilise on the left. Federalism does not exhibit any obvious relationship to the mobilisation of left-wing interests and thus can enhance rather than weaken leaders' retrenchment capabilities in the manner described above. Two institutional factors appear to be responsible for the presence of leftist veto players: the multiparty system and mechanisms for integrating trade union movements.

<sup>6</sup> International Herald Tribune, September 21, 1998:6. See also Palme, 1994; Eitheim and Kuhnle, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> New Right arguments regarding the negative behavioural effects of generous welfare benefits have gained some currency in the Nordic world. As Plovsing (1994:31-2) observes in the Danish case, the "active line" approach has been accompanied by 'slogans, such as "there is a need for everyone", "from passive to active" and "give and take", indicating important shifts in the ideology of social policy. Similar changes have been occurring in Norway, with a move away from "passive" to "active" welfare (Lodemel, 1994:61 see also Ploug, 1994; Plovsing, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to Bruno Palier for stressing the primacy of union-party conflict when I presented an earlier version of this paper at the Robert Schuman Centre, European University Institute.

<sup>9</sup> Roy Hattersley, "New Labour's Program is Chilling and Draconian", *The Independent* 18th November 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Lilley, then social security secretary for the UK, made this announcement at the 1992 Conservative Party Conference. Cited in Sinfield, 1994:130.

<sup>11</sup> Providing for limited exemptions, the PRWORA's main conditions specify that any individual can only receive welfare assistance for five years during their entire adult lifetime; within two years of receiving welfare, claimants must work; participation in community service is mandatory after two months of receiving benefits; no person between the ages of 18 and 50 (without children) may receive food stamps for more than three months in a three year period; to qualify for TANF funding, any parent under the age of 18 must live in an adult-

supervised setting; states may impose family cap policies on recipients; illegal immigrants and many post-PRWORA legal immigrants cannot qualify for either TANF benefits or Medicaid.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, "Patterns of Belief Fray Party Seams", *Washington Post*, Sunday October 4, 1998; Page A01. see [//search.npost.com/wp-srv/Wplate/1998](http://search.npost.com/wp-srv/Wplate/1998).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> R. Morin and D. Balz, "In America, Loss of Confidence Seeps into All Institutions". *The Washington Post*, Sunday January 28th, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> The economically anxious are defined as "people who see the economy worsening, their own financial future deteriorating and who doubt their children will fare better than they have". *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Richard Morin and Claudia Deane, "Patterns of Belief Fray Party Seams", *Washington Post*, Sunday October 4, 1998; Page A01. see <http://search.npost.com/wp-srv/Wplate/1998>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> "Changes in New Law Hinge on Budget Deal", *Congressional Quarterly*, November 23 1996 p. 3311.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3310.

<sup>21</sup> The social psychology literature on framing illustrates the role evidence can have on the success of competing frames. See Tarrow, 1992; Snow and Benford, 1992.

<sup>22</sup> R. Morin and D. Balz, "In America, Loss of Confidence Seeps into All Institutions". *The Washington Post*, Sunday January 28th, 1996. Reviewing the findings of one survey by the *Washington Post/Kaiser Foundation/Harvard University*, the authors report, "The overwhelming majority of those surveyed don't know the names of their elected representatives, don't know that Robert J. Dole (R. Kan) is the Senate majority Leader, don't know that the country spend more on Medicare than it does on foreign aid. A third of all Americans [...] thinks that Congress has already passed health care reform--or aren't sure; four in 10 don't know that the Republicans control Congress; and half either think the Democratic Party is more conservative politically than the GOP or don't feel they know enough to offer a guess".





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