

CHAPTER 1

Competing Perspectives on Social Welfare

Political Perspectives and Social Welfare

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- This introductory chapter provides the authors' framework for understanding contemporary perspectives on social issues.
- Readers are introduced to the concepts of personal ideologies and political perspectives as a set of principles each of us uses to understand social problems.
- Although most of us agree that something must be done about such issues as child abuse and neglect, the rising costs of medical care, and crime, our personal ideologies and political perspectives frame our analysis of these issues and result in competing solutions to any given social problem.
- The authors categorize common political perspectives as radical, liberal, conservative, and reactionary, but focus on liberal and conservative perspectives.
- The chapter discusses the differing world views of these competing perspectives, including attitudes toward change, views of human nature, individual behavior, the family, and the social system.
- The chapter also explains the liberal and conservative perspectives on the government and economic system, and the underlying value systems for each perspective.
- Finally, the authors present data from the General Social Survey, which describe which kinds of people ascribe to which political perspectives.

CSWE COMPETENCIES FOUND IN THIS CHAPTER

Ethical Practice

Critical Thinking

Human Behavior

Policy Practice

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Political Perspectives and Social Welfare

The Worldview of Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals

Attitudes toward Change

Views of Human Nature

Views of Individual Behavior

Views of the Family

Views of the Social System

Views of Government and the Economic System

Political Perspectives in the Real World

Political Perspectives and Social Work Values

The Authors' Perspective

SUGGESTED IN CLASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the value system that is generally characteristic of liberals in the United States.
2. Ask students to make a list of all the social welfare benefits that they or their family members have received or are receiving. Discuss their lists. Ask the students to identify the social welfare ideologies, including the laws or acts that made the grants or benefits available.
3. Major political movements can be dichotomized as liberalism and left off center and conservatism as far right. How would you apply philosophies associated with these movements to contemporary arguments regarding principles of a social safety net and social justice?

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

1. Each student is required to compile a folder of 20 editorials from newspapers, magazines, or journals that illustrate liberal and conservative perspectives on social welfare issues. The editorials should be in ten matched pairs, one a conservative perspective on an issue and one a liberal perspective on the same issue. The students are asked to attach a 5x7 note card to each editorial, very briefly explaining why they classified it as they did. Students are allowed to have more than one pair of editorials on one issue but are encouraged to cover as wide a range as possible. Students should deal with six or seven different issues. The projects are graded according to the following criteria:
 - Range of items. Does the project contain a range of issues, or only one or two?
 - How clear is the perspective of the editorials selected? The object is to get items where the author expresses a point of view, rather than one in which the author tries to be balanced.
 - Number of sources.
 - Accuracy of classification of perspectives.
2. Have students read short excerpts from books on social policy and social welfare with clear and specific political perspectives, for example *Wealth and Poverty* by George Gilder, *Losing Ground* by Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve* by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *Equality* by William Ryan, *Rachel and Her Children* by Jonathan Kozol, *The New American Poverty and The New Left* by Michael Harrington, and *Regulating the Poor* by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward. Have students write about and/or discuss the conflicting points of view presented in the readings.
3. Another way to liven up the class is to bring speakers from various campus or community groups to discuss social welfare issues. The Young Republicans, Young Democrats, Greens (this is a group active on some campuses which combines feminism, environmentalism, socialism, etc., into one package), and Libertarians, will all spark a good deal of controversy. You might consider inviting speakers from two opposing groups and then conducting a class debate with members of the class taking the position of each side.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The CATO Institute <www.cato.org>: This web page includes news updates, copies of articles, speeches, and so on, all from the perspective of this conservative group.

Libertarian Party <www.lp.org>: News and views from the conservative Libertarian Party. Includes philosophy and practice, membership information, current activities, information by state, directories and lists, official documents, history, news, and announcements.

The Republican National Committee—Mainstreet <www.rnc.org>: The official web page of the Republican Party, including similar information as the Democrats' site.

Presidential Libraries

There are a number of presidential libraries, and all have web sites. These sites give complete descriptions of the libraries, including their collections, public displays, researcher information, directions, and so on. These libraries are great places to find primary data on social welfare activities of liberal and conservative presidential administrations. Some of the major libraries are the following:

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum <www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu>

John F. Kennedy Library and Museum <www.jfklibrary.org>

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and Museum <eisenhower.archives.gov>

Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace <www.NixonFoundation.org>

Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum <www.lbjlib.utexas.edu>

Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum <hoover.archives.gov>

Gerald R. Ford Library and Museum <www.ford.utexas.edu>

People with liberal and conservative worldviews often have strong, sometimes emotional, differences of opinion regarding many social welfare issues, including welfare reform.