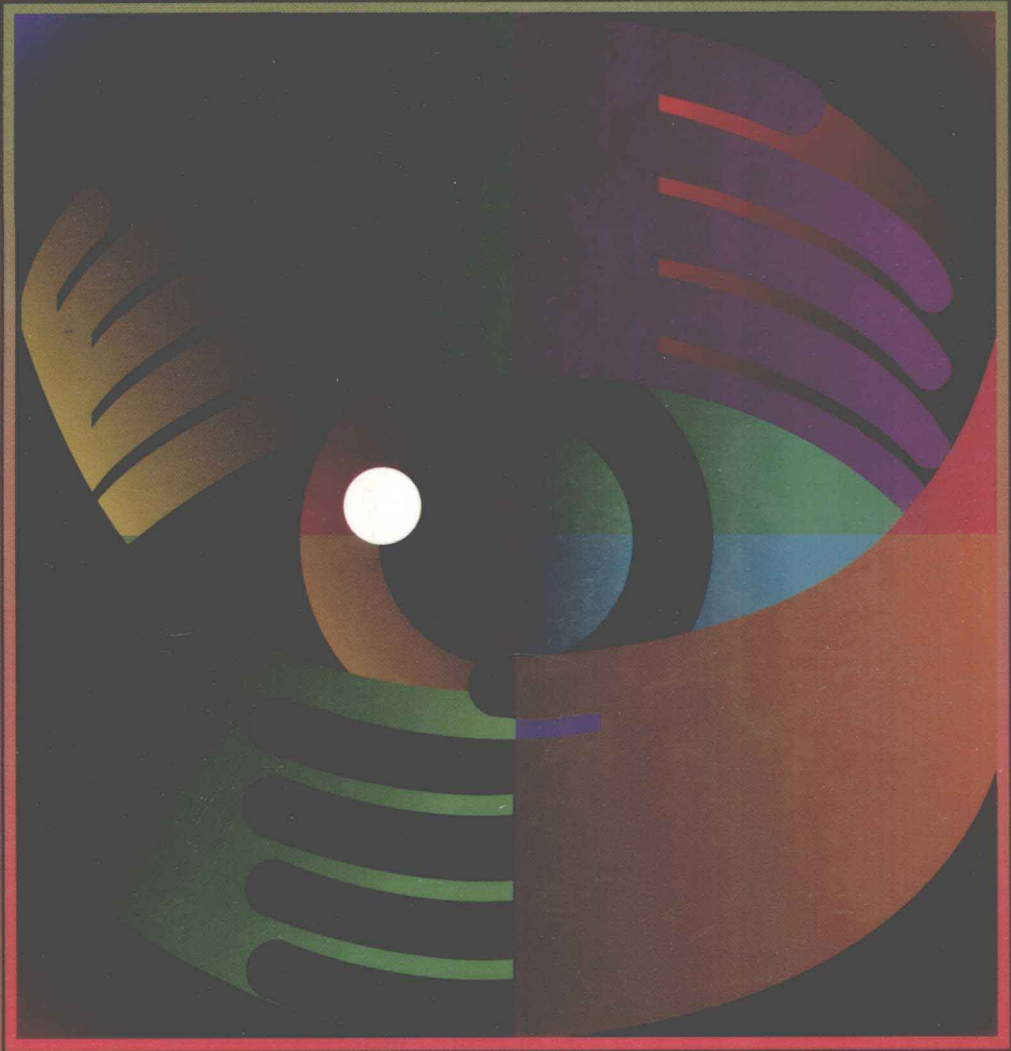


STUDY EDITION

Diana M. DiNitto

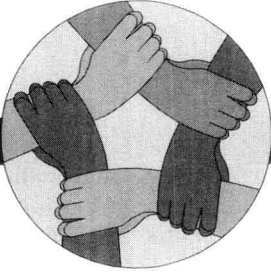


Social Welfare

POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

FIFTH EDITION

SOCIAL WELFARE



Politics and Public Policy

Fifth Edition

STUDY EDITION

Diana M. DiNitto
The University of Texas at Austin



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Social Welfare

For my family and for everyone who has known AIDS



Preface

Social Welfare: Politics and Public Policy, Fifth Edition, is intended to introduce students to the major social welfare policies and programs in the United States and to stimulate them to think about major conflicts in social welfare today. The focus of the book is on *issues*, and it emphasizes that social welfare in the United States involves a series of *political* questions about what should be done for groups such as the poor, the near poor, and the nonpoor—or whether anything should be done at all.

Social Welfare: Politics and Public Policy describes the major social welfare programs—their histories, trends, and current problems and prospects. But more importantly, it tackles the difficult conflicts and controversies that surround these programs. Social welfare policy is *not* presented as a series of solutions to social problems. Instead, social policy is portrayed as public conflict over the nature and causes of social welfare problems; over what, if anything, should be done about them; over who should do it; and over who should decide about it.

Some of the major policies and programs covered in this book are

Social Security	Special Supplemental Nutrition
Unemployment compensation	Program for Women,
Workers' compensation	Infants, and Children
Supplemental Security Income	Community action programs
Vocational rehabilitation	Job Training Partnership
The Americans with Disabilities	Act and other job
Act	programs
Child support enforcement	Mental health services
Temporary Assistance for Needy	The Older Americans Act
Families (formerly Aid to	Child welfare services
Families with Dependent	Medicare
Children)	Medicaid
General Assistance	Civil rights legislation
Food Stamp Program	Immigration legislation
School lunch and breakfast	
programs	

Although it is impossible to capture all the complexities of social welfare in the United States in a single volume, these policies and programs are described and analyzed, and alternative proposals and “reforms” are considered. Public policies that address gender inequities and the inequities faced by members of various ethnic groups are also addressed.

This book is designed for undergraduate and beginning graduate courses in social welfare policy. It does not require prior knowledge of social welfare, and it may serve as a springboard to further interest in social welfare policies and programs.

Many texts on social policy treat social insurance, public assistance, and social service programs *descriptively*; by so doing, they tend to obscure important conflicts and issues. Other books treat these programs *prescriptively*; by so doing, they imply that there is a “right” way to resolve social problems. *Social Welfare: Politics and Public Policy* views social policy as a *continuing political struggle* over the issues posed by poverty and other social welfare problems in society—different goals and objectives, competing definitions of problems, alternative approaches and strategies, multiple programs and policies, competing proposals for “reform,” and different ideas about how decisions should be made in social welfare policy.

An accompanying website and other technology-assisted supplements are available to accompany the text; the website address is www.abacon.com/dinitto.

I owe a special debt to Professor Thomas R. Dye. Although he no longer appears as a coauthor of the book, without him there would never have been a book at all. I wish to thank the reviewers who commented on previous editions, including reviewers of the Third Edition: Professor Doris Burton, Indiana University; Professor Matthew Kinkley, Lima Technical College; and Professor Lon Johnston, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, and reviewers of the Fourth Edition: Stephen C. Anderson, University of Oklahoma; Daniel R. Meyer, University of Wisconsin–Madison; Edward W. Ihle, Syracuse University; and Carole C. Upshur, University of Massachusetts, Boston. I wish to especially thank Professor Robert B. Hudson of Boston University who has provided extensive commentary on previous editions and on the draft of the Fifth Edition. Thanks also to Amy Dolejs, Mary Margaret Just, Kelly Larson, Melanie Sinclair, and Jaclyn Smith for their assistance in helping me complete this edition. Several users of the book, both faculty and students, have communicated with me about previous editions. I appreciate their interest and look forward to further contacts with readers.

D.M.D.



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CHAPTER



Politics, Rationalism, and Social Welfare

POLITICS AND SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY

No one is happy with the nation's public assistance system—not the working taxpayers who must support it, not the social welfare professionals who must administer it, and certainly not the poor who must live under it. Even the nation's social insurance system has become a source of controversy. Since the Social Security Act of 1935, the federal government has tried to develop a rational social welfare system for the entire nation. Today a wide variety of federal programs serve people who are aged, poor, disabled, sick, or have other social needs. **Income maintenance** (social insurance and public assistance) is now the largest single item in the federal budget, easily surpassing national defense. The Social Security Administration has the largest budget of any federal agency. The budget of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is not far behind, and many additional social welfare programs are administered by other departments. Yet even after sixty-five years of large-scale, direct federal involvement, social welfare policy remains a central issue in U.S. politics.

Social welfare policy involves a series of *political* issues about what should be done for the poor, the near-poor, and the nonpoor—or whether anything should be done at all. The real problems in social welfare are not problems of organization, administration, or service delivery. Rather, they involve political conflicts over the nature and causes of poverty and inequality, the role of government in society, the burdens to be carried by taxpayers, the appropriate strategies for coping with social problems, the issues posed by specific social insurance and public assistance programs, the relative reliance to be placed on providing cash rather than services to the poor, the need for reform, and the nature of the decision-making process itself. In short, social welfare policy is a continuing political struggle over the issues posed by poverty and inequality and by other social problems in society.

Policymaking is frequently portrayed as a *rational* process in which policymakers identify social problems, explore all the solutions to a problem, forecast all the benefits and costs of each solution, compare benefits to costs for each solution, and select the best ratio of benefits to costs. In examining social welfare policy, this book considers both the strengths and weaknesses of this rational model.

More importantly, it portrays social welfare policy as a political process—as conflict over the nature and causes of poverty and other social problems and over what, if anything, should be done about them. Social welfare policy is political because of disagreements about the nature of the problems confronting society, about what should be considered “benefits” and “costs,” about how to estimate and compare benefits and costs, about the likely consequences of alternative policies, about the importance of one’s own needs and aspirations in relation to those of others, and about the ability of government to do anything “rationally.” As you will see, the political barriers to rational policymaking are indeed very great.

Scope of Social Welfare Policy

Social welfare policy is anything a government chooses to do, or not to do, that affects the quality of life of its people. Broadly conceived, social welfare policy includes nearly everything government does—from taxation, national defense, and energy conservation, to health care, housing, and public assistance. More elaborate definitions of social welfare policy are available;¹ most refer to actions of government that have an “impact on the welfare of citizens by providing them with services or income.”²

Some scholars have insisted that government activities must have “a goal, objective, or purpose,” in order to be labeled a “policy.”³ This definition implies a difference between governmental actions in general and an overall plan of action toward a specific goal. The problem, however, in insisting that government actions must have goals in order to be labeled as “policy” is that we can never be sure what the goal of a particular government action is. We generally assume that if a government chooses to do something there must be a goal, objective, or purpose, but often we find that bureaucrats who helped write the law, lobbyists who pushed for its enactment, and members of Congress who voted for it all had different goals, objectives, and purposes in mind! Multiple goals are not necessarily a bad thing, especially when they mean that more people stand to benefit from a policy, but any of the intentions of a law (stated or not) may also be quite different from what government agencies actually do. All we can really observe is what governments choose to do or not do.

Political scientists Heinz Eulau and Kenneth Prewitt supply still another definition of public policy: “Policy is defined as a ‘standing decision’ characterized by behavioral consistency and repetitiveness on the part of those who make it and those who abide by it.”⁴ It might be a wonderful thing if government activities were characterized by “consistency and repetitiveness”—that they seem to have “rhyme and reason”—but it is doubtful that we would ever find a public policy in government if we insisted on these criteria. As you shall see, much of what government does is neither consistent nor repetitive.

Note that this book focuses not only on government action but also on government *inaction*—that is, on what governments choose *not* to do. Government inaction can have just as important an impact on society as government action.

For practical purposes, much of the discussion presented here is limited to the policies of government that directly affect the income, services, and opportunities available to people who are aged, poor, disabled, ill, or otherwise vulnerable. I discourage lengthy discussions of the definition of social welfare policy. These discussions are often futile, even exasperating, since few people can agree on a single definition of social welfare policy. Moreover, these discussions divert attention away from the study of specific social welfare policies.

The boundaries of social welfare policy are indeed fuzzy, but clarifying subjects of concern and interest can be viewed as a challenge, not an obstacle. Specifically, this book addresses major government programs in

Income maintenance

- Social Security

- Unemployment compensation

- Workers' compensation

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF, formerly Aid to Families with Dependent Children)

- General Assistance

Nutrition

- Food stamps

- School lunches and breakfasts

- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

- Congregate meals

- Meals-on-wheels

Health

- Medicaid

- Medicare

- Public health

Social services

- Child protective services

- Family preservation services

- Community mental health services

- Day care and preschool education for children

- Employment services

- Job training

- Independent living and long-term care services for people who are elderly or disabled

- Vocational rehabilitation