**RESEARCH NOTES**

**CIVIL DISORDER AND THE WELFARE EXPLOSION: A TWO-STEP PROCESS**

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Upon not finding a direct relationship between civil disorder and welfare growth in American cities in the late 1960s, some analysts have rejected the Piven and Cloward (1971) thesis that the expansion of welfare in the late 1960s operated largely as a form of social control so as to recreate political stability. We hypothesize that the welfare explosion in the late 1960s was in part the result of a two-step process in which civil disorder impelled the national government to enact liberalizations of welfare policy which in turn were most actively implemented by those states most wracked by rioting. Analysis of the relative state growth rates in the number of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children suggests the plausibility of our hypothesis and the Piven and Cloward thesis.

Piven and Cloward's (1971) thesis on the role of welfare in western capitalist societies lies at the center of the debate over the welfare explosion of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the United States. According to Piven and Cloward, the historical role of public welfare has been one of cyclical expansion and contraction in response to the alternating needs of the state for political stability and acceptance of low-wage work by the poor. During times of political stability, public welfare primarily functions to enforce on the poor the work norm of self-sufficiency by restricting access to aid. During periods of unrest among the poor, public welfare functions largely to promote political stability by easing the poor's access to aid. In the 1960s the growing political unrest of poor blacks escalated into over 160 major riots between 1965 and 1968 (Feagin and Hahn, 1973) and prompted the dramatic rise in welfare recipients in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Piven and Cloward, 1971:222–47).

Various researchers have provided empirical support for the relationship between civil disorder and welfare growth in the late 1960s (Betz, 1974; Jennings, 1979; Isaac and Kelly, 1981). Critics, however, have rejected this thesis upon finding no relationship between riot-torn cities and increases in welfare (Durman, 1973; Albritton, 1979). Our analysis seeks to resolve these conflicting findings. We provide evidence supportive of the hypothesis that the welfare explosion was in part the result of a two-step process in which civil disorder in the late 1960s impelled the national government to enact liberalizations of welfare policy which in turn were most actively implemented by those states most wracked by rioting.

**A TWO-STEP PROCESS**

From one perspective, the relationship between civil disorder and welfare growth was indirect rather than direct. Frequent and intense rioting in certain cities contributed to national changes in welfare policy which led to welfare growth in all cities (Piven and Cloward, 1979:1012; Isaac and Kelly, 1981:1259). We augment this perspective with the possibility that the states most wracked by rioting most actively implemented these changes. Therefore, we suggest that the relationship between civil disorder and welfare growth was both direct and indirect.

For several reasons, we focus our analysis on the growth in the number of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). During the 1960s, this program had the broadest coverage and was the most expensive of all programs for the poor. It was also the welfare program most strongly associated with the poor, black underclass which was implicated in the disorder of the 1960s (Albritton, 1983). For both the national and state governments, the structure of AFDC made it convenient as a means of quelling disorder. Since its inception AFDC has been a national-state program for which the national government sets basic guidelines and provides at least half of the funding. It represented an income

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transfer program which was both relevant to the population associated with the rioting and at the disposal of the national government. This was not the case with the other income transfer program of relevance to poor blacks, General Assistance (GA), which is exclusively financed and administered by states. Also, states had the incentive of having the national government pay for at least half of the welfare growth when it occurred under AFDC. In fact, in the early 1960s, northern states quickly sought to save money by shifting GA families to AFDC under the AFDC-UP (Unemployed Parent) option, which was established by the national government in 1961 (Piven and Cloward, 1977:184–89). This type of shifting of welfare recipients probably continued as states sought to have the national government shoulder as much of the burden of welfare growth as possible.

The structure of AFDC enabled states rather than cities to play a pivotal role in the two-step response by government to the disorder. The national government’s ability to liberalize the poor’s access to welfare was contingent upon how state governments implemented national changes. Historically, states have had substantial latitude in implementing AFDC (Albritton, 1983). While states did vary their responses, the national changes in AFDC in the late 1960s were broad revisions in policy which required each state to implement them evenly throughout its jurisdiction (Patterson, 1981:27–36). Such changes limited the extent to which localities could vary their responses. Of course in the 35 states where local governments did not at this time participate in the administration of AFDC, local discretion was probably even more limited.

The specific national changes in AFDC in the late 1960s lend support to this argument. Much of the national government’s actions came by 1969—the year following the period of frequent and intense rioting by poor blacks in many American cities (1965–1968). In the year that followed, the national AFDC rolls increased an unprecedented 36 percent as compared to 17 percent for the entire decade of the 1950s (Rodgers, 1979:93). By 1969, the Social Security Amendments of 1967, along with new regulations for 1969, went into effect so as to liberalize the working poor’s access to welfare (Steiner, 1971). By 1969, the legal rights services of the national government’s Economic Opportunity Act were having an impact. This push for legal services for the poor culminated in the landmark welfare case Shapiro v. Thompson (1969). In this case, the United States Supreme Court abolished the residency requirements many states had for determining eligibility for welfare and made large pools of previously ineligible, newly arrived poor automatically eligible for welfare. By early 1970, the Court ruled in Goldberg v. Kelly (1970) that poor people could not be denied or terminated from welfare without “due process” and welfare agencies were prodded into being more careful than in the past as to whom they kept off the rolls. In 1969, a series of additional revisions to the AFDC program expanded its coverage to various groups of poor persons, including older children.

Although several of these national policy changes began before 1969, most, if not all of them, were not pushed by the national government until the rioting had already peaked. All of these changes represented broad revisions in policy which required each state to implement them evenly throughout its jurisdiction. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the national government liberalized AFDC in response to the riots and once it did, so, riot-torn states actively implemented these general policy changes throughout their jurisdictions.

Although there may have been a relationship between civil disorder and other social welfare programs, in most instances this was not the case, and in other instances the relationship is difficult to document. Many of these programs, such as Unemployment Compensation, were not of direct relevance to the poor black underclass. Other programs, such as Medicaid, which were relevant to this population, were new, thereby creating the possibility of mistakenly attributing growth rates common to new programs to the disorder of the 1960s. Finally, other relevant programs, such as Food Stamps, were to be fundamentally transformed and expanded in coverage during the late 1960s and early 1970s, thereby making study of the relationship between their growth and civil disorder impossible (Rodgers, 1979:82–117). In sum, government’s response to the civil disorder of the 1960s may have been in part, but not exclusively, a two-step process of the national government liberalizing AFDC and the states most wracked by rioting most actively implementing those changes.

THE NEED THESIS

The welfare explosion cannot be explained by the major alternative thesis that welfare expanded to meet increasing needs.1 Poor blacks who migrated out of the south to the north

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1 Gronbjerg (1977) argues that the welfare explosion was largely attributable to an increasingly liberal commitment by our society according welfare to all who needed it. For a critique of this perspective, see Schram and Turbett (1983).
increasingly found unemployment and a need for welfare (Beardwood, 1968; Patterson, 1981). This process, however, began after World War II, and sharp increases in the welfare rolls were not registered until the latter half of the 1960s (Piven and Cloward, 1971). Nor can the dramatic growth in the rolls be explained by increases in poor black, female-headed families accompanying the black migration to northern cities (Moynihan, 1965). Between 1960 and 1972, the proportion of nonwhite families headed by single females rose from slightly one-fifth to one-third (Levi-tan et al., 1975:114). Yet, if all the new female-headed families in the period between 1959 and 1966 had received welfare, this would only account for about ten percent of the increase in the AFDC program during the same period (Lurie, 1968).

In any case, the idea that increases in poor black female-headed families translate directly into increases in the AFDC rolls is fundamentally misleading, for it assumes that eligible poor families automatically apply and get accepted for AFDC. This hardly was and still is not the case, although application rates of poor people for AFDC increased in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Doolittle et al., 1977). In the early and mid-1960s, only about one-half of all eligible poor families were receiving AFDC (Piven and Cloward, 1971:186). Welfare agencies now as then avoid publicizing the availability of AFDC and invoke a series of practices from fraud investigations to long waiting periods in order to keep the rolls down. An expanded pool of poor families eligible for AFDC created only the potential for increases in the AFDC rolls. Yet, it was not large enough to create the welfare explosion and was insufficient by itself in doing so.

DATA ANALYSIS

Our data analysis employs a series of measures in order to test for the two-step thesis while taking into account other factors, such as need, which may have promoted AFDC growth in the states. We used data on the frequency and intensity of rioting in the states between 1965 and 1968—the period of most intense rioting in American cities in the 1960s (United States Senate, 1968). From these data we constructed a standardized riot severity score for each state

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3 Our index of the severity of rioting is the summation of the standardized z-scores for the number of civilians killed and injured, the number of law officers killed and injured, the number of arrests, and the number of arsons during the riots between 1965 and 1968 for each state. Isaac and Kelly (1981) include duration in their index of riot severity; however, the length of time of a riot is not a good indicator of riot severity in that many riots had long periods of inactivity between violent incidents (see National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968:589–631).


5 Our measure of interparty competition is based on Austin Ranney's (1971) scale for party competition in American States. Ranney's scale is based on data for 1956 to 1970 for all states and includes measures for each state of: (1) the state senate seats held by the Democrats; (2) the average percentage of popular votes won by Democratic gubernatorial candidates; and (3) the percentage of all terms for governor, senate, and house in which the Democrats had control. To calculate the scale, Ranney added these 3 measures together and divided by 3. This yields a score for each state ranging from .0000 to 1.0000 (representing total Democratic success), with .5000 representing balanced two-party competition. To convert Ranney's scale to one in which balanced competition was on one end of the scale, we subtracted the Ranney score for each state from .5000 and took the absolute value.

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2 We recognize that there was sporadic rioting by the poor preceding and following the 1965–1968 period. Yet, 1965–1968 was undoubtedly the period of most intense rioting by the poor and therefore, our data should be representative of the extent to which states were wracked by rioting in the 1960s.
count for variations in state increases in the welfare rolls.6

We examine two time periods for assessing variation in our dependent variable—AFDC roll growth following the 1965–1968 period of intense rioting. We measure change in the AFDC rolls for both the first year (1969–1970) and the first three years (1969–1972) immediately following the riot period. As we have mentioned, 1969–1970 is the year of unprecedented AFDC growth; it is also the first full year after the most intense rioting by the poor in the 1960s and the first year after the national government took a series of dramatic steps to liberalize the poor’s access to welfare. For these reasons, it merits our attention. We examine AFDC growth for 1969 to 1972 because it measures such growth from the time the national government liberalized access to AFDC in the wake of intense rioting until the AFDC rolls began to level off. We measure growth as the increase in the number of families receiving AFDC per 1000 poor families.7

Table 1 presents the results of multiple regression equations which assess the relative effects of each of the above independent factors on welfare growth, controlling for the other independent variables. The effects of severity and frequency of rioting were assessed in separate equations because of their high intercorrelation (r = .80), thereby making it difficult to distinguish their relative effects simultaneously. The standardized regression coefficients for the severity of rioting indicate it to be the most important predictor of 1969–70 AFDC roll growth and the second only to median income for 1969–72 roll growth. The frequency of rioting is second only to median income as a predictor for AFDC increases for both 1969–1970 and 1969–1972. Also of particular significance is the fact that measures of need generally are not important factors in explaining the variation in state welfare growth for the periods under study. Differences in the level of civil disorder are more important than dif-

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6 We recognize that expenditures are a crude measure of effort by community action programs to increase services to the poor; however, no other measures are at our disposal and state community action expenditures per poor person do correlate well in our state data (r = .52) with increases from 1969 to 1972 in the number of families receiving AFDC per 1000 poor families.

7 We do not use the simple percent increase in the number of families receiving AFDC because percent change measures such as this are heavily dependent on the base values.
ferences in need in explaining state variations in AFDC roll increases after 1969. Severity appears to be much more strongly associated than frequency of rioting with welfare growth for 1969–1970; however, they seem to be equally associated with AFDC growth for 1969–1972. The data suggest that intense rioting had acute effects promoting dramatic welfare growth in riot-torn states once the national government liberalized access to AFDC in 1969. The frequency of rioting’s effects on welfare growth was greater for 1969–1972 than in the year following the intense riot period. Nonetheless, the frequency of rioting seems to have been less of a factor than riot severity in explaining welfare growth. Replacing frequency with severity of rioting in the equations increases the total variance explained 14 percent for welfare growth 1969–1970 and 3 percent for 1969–1972.8

The multiple regression results in Table 1, however, are insufficient by themselves to substantiate the two-step hypothesis. For instance, should our multiple regression equations produce similar results, indicating a relationship between rioting and welfare growth for a period preceding 1969, then we could not conclude that riot-torn states were more likely than other states to increase their welfare rolls only after the national government had liberalized AFDC in 1969. In other words, it may be that riot-torn states tended to have higher welfare increases than other states for reasons other than variations in state reactions to national welfare policy changes. Table 2 casts doubt on this possibility by indicating that variations of state welfare growth during the period of intense rioting (1965–1968) were unrelated to the frequency and intensity of rioting but were related to a number of other factors.9 The results in Table 2 lend some support to the idea that riot-torn states were likely to undergo welfare growth more so than other states only after the na-

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8 Isaac and Kelly (1981) found in their examination of national data that the frequency rather than the severity of rioting in the nation in any one year was the better indicator of national welfare growth in the subsequent year.

9 Comparing the unstandardized b’s for AFDC growth 1960–1964 in Tables 1 and 2 reveals that state variations in welfare growth for 1965–1968 were tied to variations in growth for 1960–1964, but state variations in welfare growth after the rioting were not. This shift suggests that something occurred to alter the 1960–1968 pattern of welfare growth. These data buttress our argument that the states most wrecked by rioting tended to have the largest AFDC roll growth only after the period of intense rioting and only after the national government liberalized the program in 1969.

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### Table 2. Factors Affecting AFDC Roll Growth, 1965–1968 for the 50 American States*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Increases in AFDC Families per 1000 Poor Families</th>
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<tr>
<td>1965–1968</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b            Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity of Rioting</td>
<td>.0073 .06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median Income           -0.0003 −.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP Expenditures       .0009 .11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Migration         3.95 .22</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interparty Competition  −.0006 −.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Central City          −.33 −.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFDC Growth, 1960–1964  .36 .26*</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Unemployed            7.91 .16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita Revenue      .006 .78*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% Poor Female-headed Families 10.29 .35</td>
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</tbody>
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R² = .69

* All figures represent the result of simple multiple regression.

* F is significant at the .01 level.

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**Additional support for this two-step process can be gleaned from Table 3, which shows that the frequency and severity of rioting in a state in any one year were most often not good predictors of welfare growth the following year. Only the severity of rioting in 1965 was related to welfare growth the following year, and this relationship may be the product of the fact that a small number of states (5) suffered a few intense riots in 1965, and these states tended to be states which were undergoing above average welfare growth at that time. Although we have evidence indicating that rioting in 1965 was directly related to welfare growth the following year, the data in Table 3 generally lend support to the idea that rioting was not directly related to AFDC increases until after the national government liberalized the program in 1969.**

The relationships we found between the frequency and intensity of rioting and welfare
growth for states most often do not hold for cities of 200,000 or more in population. If we limit our analysis to cities with populations in 1965 of 500,000 or more, we do find a relationship between the severity of rioting in a city and welfare growth 1969–72 ($r = .34$). Beyond that, however, the links between rioting and welfare growth which we found for states were not present in cities. These data lend some support to the idea that it was states, not cities, which had the fiscal capacity and authority to vary their responses to rioting; and once the national government acted to liberalize AFDC, riot-torn states implemented these changes more actively than others so as to ease the poor’s access to welfare. Once a riot-torn state so acted, the welfare rolls were apt to rise at an above-average rate in both riot and nonriot cities in that state, thereby diminishing the probability that riot-torn cities would tend to have higher welfare roll increases than other cities.

**CONCLUSION**

Although our findings are not unambiguous, the general pattern in our data is consistent with the idea that the relationship between civil disorder and welfare growth in the late 1960s and early 1970s was the product of a two-step process. Rioting by the poor exacerbated a volatile political climate compelling national liberalizations in welfare policy, which in turn were most actively implemented by the most riot-torn states. Our findings offer support for the Piven and Cloward thesis that welfare largely operates as a form of social control and in the late 1960s it expanded as part of government efforts to recommit a rebellious poor population to the existing social order. These findings also complement a growing body of literature on the role and function of welfare in capitalistic, industrialized societies which argues that welfare performs a social-control function for the state (e.g., O’Connor, 1973; Wolfe, 1977; Gough, 1979).

In the past, when analysts such as Albritton (1979) failed to find a direct relationship between civil disorder and welfare growth in cities, they took this as a refutation of Piven and Cloward’s thesis that welfare largely operates as an agent of social control. The absence of a direct relationship between civil disorder by the poor and welfare growth in American cities in the late 1960s does not refute this thesis. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, welfare may have performed a social-control function by responding to civil disorder through a two-step process of national liberalization of welfare policy and active implementation of such changes by riot-torn states.

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