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Social Egalitarianism: How Does Marginalization Affect an Individual's Support for Welfare Recipients?

Abstract

This work examines how identification in a historically marginalized group in the United States affects individuals' opinions towards welfare recipients. Using three marginalized groups: African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and Women, this study compares how each group views welfare recipients while discussing how people in general view welfare recipients. This study finds that there are some statistical differences between the opinions of welfare recipients between certain groups, but not amongst other groups, indicating the importance of society on American politics in the present day.

Keywords

Opinions on Welfare, Egalitarianism, Marginalized groups, Welfare programs

Disciplines

Cultural History | Sociology of Culture | United States History

Comments

Written for POL 215: Methods of Political Science

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Social Egalitarianism: How Does Marginalization Affect an Individual's Support for Welfare Recipients?

Brodie Edgerton

POL 215: Political Science Research Methods

Dr. Douglas Page

April 3, 2019

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

Introduction

As much as it is claimed that society is equal, the reality is that egalitarianism is more of an ideal as opposed to an instituted practice. In the United States, welfare programs are instituted to help close the gap between poorer members of society and those well off. Support for welfare programs and individuals on welfare varies throughout society, as public perceptions of welfare recipients play an important role in determining the extent to which people will support welfare policies. Attitudes towards welfare shift throughout societies amongst individuals due to group identifications and overall experiences within that particular society. Miriam Cohen (2014) highlights the “importance of a feminist perspective for understanding the history of American welfare and the importance of race to understanding this feminist theory” (Cohen, 2014, 180). Understanding the different social and cultural factors that influence support for welfare policies and beneficiaries, this study will examine how the opinion of marginalized groups impacts support of welfare recipients as opposed to the support welfare programs receive from non-marginalized members of society. Syracuse University (2018) defines marginalization as “the process of pushing a particular group or groups of people to the edge of society by not allowing them an active voice, identity, or place in it (Syracuse University, 2018). Included in this definition of marginalization are examples of marginalization (i.e. the use of defamatory language and expecting individuals to act a certain way based on stereotypes held about another’s identity) which will outline the basis of marginalization in this study. Previous studies have focused more on certain factors such as income level whereas this study focuses on race and illustrates how interconnected race is with political institutions. The examination of three groups that have been historically marginalized in the United States: African-Americans, Hispanics, and women, will test whether their opinions on welfare recipients differ from those

members who have been not historically marginalized (white, heterosexual males) in the United States, and how these disparities take place, ultimately drawing connections between social groups and egalitarian politics.

Welfare in the United States

Understanding the social dynamics of the welfare system today requires a basic understanding of historically marginalized groups in the United States and how discrimination continues to permeate throughout American society today. Samuel Roundfield Lucas (2013) highlighted how in a society, “norms, values and support mechanisms may be articulated within a particular area, but more likely they transcend any particular sphere” (Lucas, 2013, 10). In his article, Lucas illustrates how discriminatory institutions and ideas permeate throughout society and while they may not directly affect a particular aspect, they continue to indirectly affect groups that are marginalized as a result of these views. Mike Cole (2016) provides context for racism and discrimination in the United States, highlighting that although different ethnic groups have experienced different levels and types of discrimination throughout the history of the United States, these processes are linked to the “ongoing changes in the capitalist mode of production” (Cole, 2016, 129). Although different groups experience a variety of forms of discrimination, these forms can transcend a variety of aspects in society, indirectly impacting groups beyond their intended consequences.

Public attitude toward the welfare system and programs in the United States has historically been highly racialized and linked to many factors and studies into these factors have taken place for many years. Martin Gilens (1998) observes that white Americans have turned against blacks and fail to support programs that are perceived to benefit only racial minorities (Gilens, 1998, 172). Gilens focuses on several aspects of opposition, including self-interested

economic explanations and individualism, but focuses on an inclusion of racial attitudes on how people view welfare and the recipients of welfare. Examining white respondents, Gilens discovers that the respondents generally oppose welfare due to racial factors, stereotyping black welfare recipients as “lazy” (Gilens, 1998, 181). Morten Bleksaune and Jill Quadagno (2003) investigated public attitudes toward state welfare policies and stated that public attitude towards welfare is related to both situational and ideological factors (Bleksaune and Quadagno, 2003, 424). In examining the individual level, which is the principal level in this study, Bleksaune and Quadagno found that “women hold more positive attitudes toward welfare state policies than men”, which they suggest is due in part to the role that women have traditionally assumed in performing “a majority of the unpaid work for the sick and old and are more likely than men to gain paid employment when these responsibilities are assumed by the welfare state (Bleksaune and Quadagno, 2003, 425). Views on welfare, especially in the United States also have an inherently racialized component to them as well. James Garand, Ping Xiu, and Belinda Davis (2017) observed how a lack of enthusiasm can be traced back to the racial divide in the United States between whites and blacks and that in communities with higher racial diversity levels, support for welfare is lower (Garand, Xiu and Davis, 2017, 146).

Many scholars also address that the racialized divide between whites and blacks in the United States negatively impacts perception of policies that target marginalized groups, such as welfare. John Transue (2007) observed that in the United States, the “variation in salience of different identities matters for mass opinion and policy attitudes (Transue, 2007, 88). That identity then informs to an extent of how people view social institutions and policies. Additionally, Cybelle Fox (2004) describes contextual factors (i.e. interaction with various demographic groups and income level) as being important indicators of how people think about

welfare programs and highlights how in “disproportionately white states, the effect of the stereotype about Hispanic work ethic is *large, negative, and highly significant* (Fox, 2004, 602). Fox draws parallels to how white Americans perceive Hispanics and how white Americans perceive African Americans, noting how “whites’ stereotypes about black work ethic are also negative (Fox, 2004, 602). The impact of the portrayal of certain welfare recipients has continued to contribute to the lukewarm reception that welfare programs have in American society. Allison Harell, Stuart Soroka, and Shanto Iyengar (2017) illustrated how racial attitudes have long played an important role in shaping Americans’ policy preferences, especially with welfare, noting how welfare policies are racially coded and lower support is contributed to negative attitudes towards blacks and other minorities (Harell, Soroka, and Iyengar, 2017, 723).

These stereotypes and negative beliefs about welfare recipients that generally negatively impact opinion on welfare are reinforced in how welfare recipients are portrayed through the media. Kaia Smith (2017) observed that within the elite press, marginalized groups are unlikely to be used as portrayals of the welfare state unless they fit into certain criteria that is dictated by more dominant ideology (Smith 2017, 8). In addition, Bas W. van Doorn (2015) concludes that media coverage of poverty is unrepresentative in a manner consistent with stereotypes concerning African Americans and Hispanics, likely explaining the fact that welfare is unpopular, even after reform (van Doorn, 2015, 142). Given how negative attitudes towards certain marginalized groups are perpetuated through the media, Rick Sperling and Caroline Kuhn (2016) demonstrated that color-blindness plays an important role in decisions about whether or not to support egalitarian policies (Sperling and Kuhn, 2016, 180). When the identity of the individuals who will be supported is not known, individual opinions and preconceived notions on

certain groups of people cannot impact their decision and thus they judge the situation more on the merit of the program as opposed to who will be affected by it.

Racial and gender division continues to negatively impacts people's opinions of egalitarian programs and individuals who benefit from said programs in part due to the belief that government welfare programs disproportionately serve certain types of people that fit certain stereotypes, highlighting how racialized welfare programs and policy are in the United States. Timothy Callaghan and Adam Olson, in their study on the welfare state and its inherent connections to racial attitudes and political attitudes, found that "only when the hidden welfare state program is described using traditional stereotypes, support for the program drops significantly among racially resentful" (Callaghan and Olson, 2017, 63). Among those who are racially resentful are those who have been historically marginalized in the United States, such as Hispanics and African Americans. Their conclusions suggest that a difference on welfare exists between racial groups and the portrayal of individuals on welfare in a negative manner by using stereotypes diminish support for egalitarian policies that would benefit marginalized groups in American society.

Do Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Identifications Impact Opinion on the Welfare Program?

The welfare system has undergone many reforms in recent years to more accurately benefit those individuals who need the support. Certainly today, opinion on the welfare system as it is currently constituted is bitterly divided. Underlying opinion on this system are racial ideologies and attitudes that individuals have towards particular group. Since media portrayals of welfare recipients and the poor are "disproportionately black" (van Doorn, 2015, 157), racial attitudes towards welfare programs are impacted by racial views and leading to the formation of stereotypes of particular groups of people. These stereotypes and opinions are deep,

underlying facets of a racial divide issue (Garand, Xiu and Davis, 2017, 146) that sees implicit and explicit discrimination prevalent in many forms throughout American society today. As a result, people making sweeping generalizations about individuals based on their group identification. In a society that has historically prioritized certain groups of people over others, how does the opinion of those who have historically benefitted from their status in society affect their opinion on issues that seek to give back to those less fortunate? In understanding that these programs and the perceptions of these programs have been racialized historically (Callaghan and Olson, 2017, 63), the political and social institutions in the United States can seek to better inform welfare reform to have a lasting and positive influence.

This study hypothesizes that in a comparison of individuals, respondents who identify with historically marginalized groups within American society are more likely to support individuals on welfare than those individuals who have not been historically marginalized. Working with this logic, the independent variable for this study will be the different group identifications under consideration (whether the respondent identifies as African American, Hispanic, or a woman). Using the National Election Study from 2012, this study will use income levels as its control variables because Cybelle Fox (2004) noted in her study how the variation in income level impacted people's willingness to support welfare (Fox, 2004, 602). Additionally, this study will control for the amount of discrimination that an individual has experienced throughout their lifetime. The dependent variable in this study will be attitudes of people on welfare, as indicated by "ftgr_welfare" in the National Election Study dataset. Furthermore, this study will use nominal and interval levels of measurement, indicating not only whether an individual supports welfare programs or not, but to what extent they support these programs as well. Given the research that has been presented, this study anticipates that groups that have

historically been marginalized are more likely to support individuals on welfare and egalitarian measures than those who have not historically been marginalized. If this phenomenon becomes more present, further analysis would be warranted to determine why particular racial, ethnic, and gender identifications impact opinions on egalitarian measures.

Research Design

Introduction

In order to test this hypothesis, this study examined data from the National Election Survey of 2012 (NES) developed by STATA, a software platform for statistics and data science. The data includes 5,450 respondents from individuals throughout the United States during the build-up to the 2012 presidential election. This data is most appropriate for this study because it includes the necessary variables to quantify the impact that race, discrimination, and income have on an individuals' opinion on welfare. However, NES also has many constraints, most notably that its sample size is supposed to be indicative of the entire country, yet its sample size is small to reflect such nationwide trends. Additionally, the dependent variable which will be used within NES, "ftgr_welfare", quantifies feelings of people on welfare and individuals can respond from a 0-100 scale, but what is unclear is what aspects of welfare the individual approves of or disapproves of, meaning that it is difficult to interpret the results to determine *what* aspects of welfare people approve or disapprove of. Such analysis to determine these factors would require longer and more detailed analysis beyond the scope of this paper. Despite these limitations, NES provides an opportunity to ascertain the opinions that people have on welfare, which is helpful for the purposes of this paper in drawing a relationship between race, discrimination, income, and opinions on welfare.

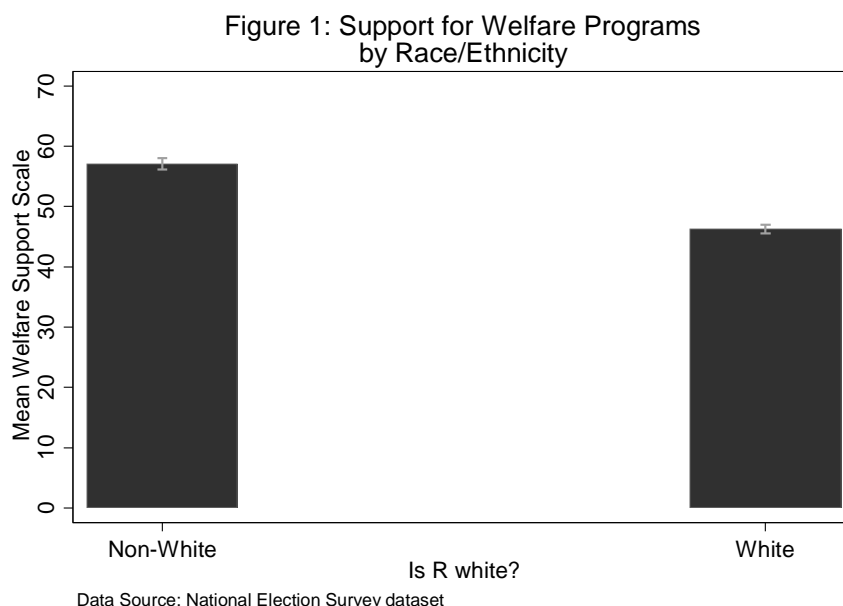
Variable Measurements

Within NES, “ftgr_welfare” is measured on an interval scale of 0-100. An individual submits one response to the survey, which asks their opinions on welfare. The results measure a feeling thermometer of the individual on welfare, a score of “0” indicates that the individual opposes welfare while a score closer to “100” indicates that the individual supports welfare initiatives and programs. For the purposes of this particular study and to generate descriptive statistics, “ftgr_welfare” was recoded into a ten-category interval measure so that it is easier to visualize the data. Table 1 illustrates the mean, median, and mode on the 100-point scale while Table 2 illustrates the respondent’s feelings on welfare using the recoded variables. Each category was recoded using responses on the 0-100 scale. For example, the category “0-10” represents all responses that fell between 0-10, and so on. The table illustrates the frequency of each response, the percent of each category in relation to the whole survey, as well as the cumulative percent.

Table 1: Mean, Median, Mode of Interval Level variable “ftgr_welfare”			
	Mean	Median	Mode
“ftgr_welfare”	50.60679	50	50
Source: National Election Survey 2012			

Table 2: Support on Welfare Recipients			
Level of Support	Freq.	Percent	Cum. Percent
0-10	306	5.61	5.61
11-20	321	5.89	11.50
21-30	432	7.93	19.43
31-40	786	14.42	33.85
41-50	1,535	28.17	62.02
51-60	770	14.13	76.15
61-70	604	11.08	87.23
71-80	132	2.42	89.65
81-90	325	5.96	95.61
91-100	239	4.39	100.00

Total	5,450	100.00
Source: National Election Survey 2012 recoded to ten categories		



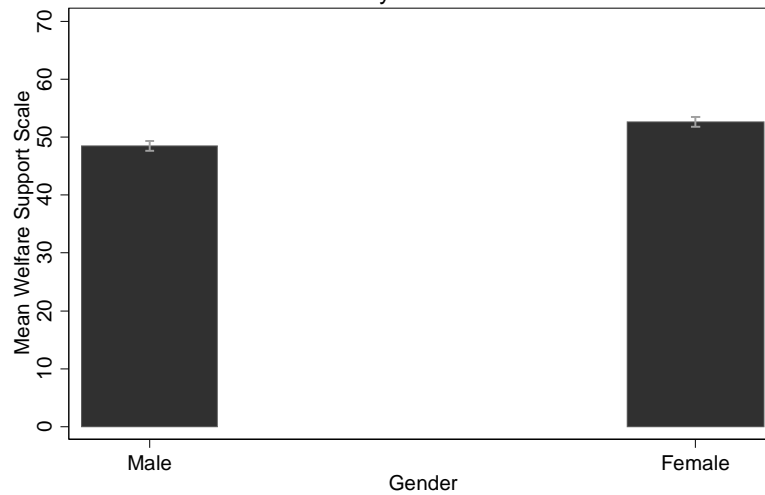
The “ftgr_welfare” variable, this study uses race and gender as its independent variables, expressed in NES as “white” and “female”. The “white” variable delineates between respondents who identify as white and non-white while the “female” variable differentiates those respondents who identify as male or female. Table 3 and Figure 1 highlights the support for welfare recipients by delineating between white and non-white respondents using the recoded categories of “ftgr_welfare”, illustrating the theoretical basis of the study and highlighting the difference in support of welfare recipients by gender. Meanwhile, Table 4 and Figure 2 describes the total support for welfare recipients by highlighting the difference in gender using two categories: male and female, illustrating a simple modal depiction of the recoded data.

Table 4: Support for Welfare Recipients by Gender

	Gender		
	Male	Female	Total
0-10	186	120	306
11-20	169	152	321
21-30	238	194	432
31-40	366	420	786
41-50	773	762	1,535
51-60	361	409	770
61-70	285	319	604
71-80	75	57	132
81-90	116	209	325
91-100	88	151	239
Total	2,657	2,793	5,450

Source: National Election Survey 2012 recoded to ten categories

Figure 2: Support for Welfare Programs by Gender



In these two tabular and graphic representations, the confidence intervals do not overlap. However, for the purposes of this particular study, the presence of three control variables: level of income, education level of the respondent, and the amount of discrimination

the respondent reported that they experienced, are necessary to evaluate the effect of individual's opinions of welfare recipients based on race and gender.

Model Estimation

The dependent variable for this study is an interval level of measurement and as a result, this study used OLS regression (linear regression) to approximate the expected values for opinions on welfare under a variety of conditions and controls. Ultimately, this study ran three separate models to analyze the effectiveness of a respondent's identification with marginalized groups within the United States (females, African Americans, and Hispanics) and their opinion of welfare recipients. The three separate models were necessary in order to run three different independent variables.

The first model interacted feelings towards welfare recipients with whether the respondent identified as an African American and male or female, while controlling for level of education, income level, and the amount of discrimination the individual has experienced. Using an interaction variable between African Americans and gender, the independent variables are a nominal level of measurement so it was represented by a dummy variable, holding each respective value where 1 represented African American while a 0 represented non-African-Americans. For the gender variable, a 1 represented females while a 0 represented males.

The second model interacted feelings towards welfare recipients with whether the respondent identified as white or non-white and male or female, while controlling for level of education, income level, and the amount of discrimination the individual has experienced. The independent variables used an interaction term, combining the white variable and gender variable, and are a nominal level of measurement so it was represented by a dummy variable, holding each respective value where 1 represented whites while a 2 represented Non-whites. The

representation of the gender variable was characterized as 1 representing females while a 0 represented males.

The third model interacted feelings towards welfare recipients with whether the respondent identified with Hispanic/Latino and male or female, while controlling for level of education, income level, and the amount of discrimination the individual has experienced. An interaction term was used, combining the Hispanic variable and the gender variable, and the independent variables are both a nominal level of measurement so it was represented by a dummy variable, holding each respective value where 1 represented Hispanic/Latino while a 2 represented Non-Hispanics/Latinos. With the gender variable, a 1 represented females while a 0 represented males.

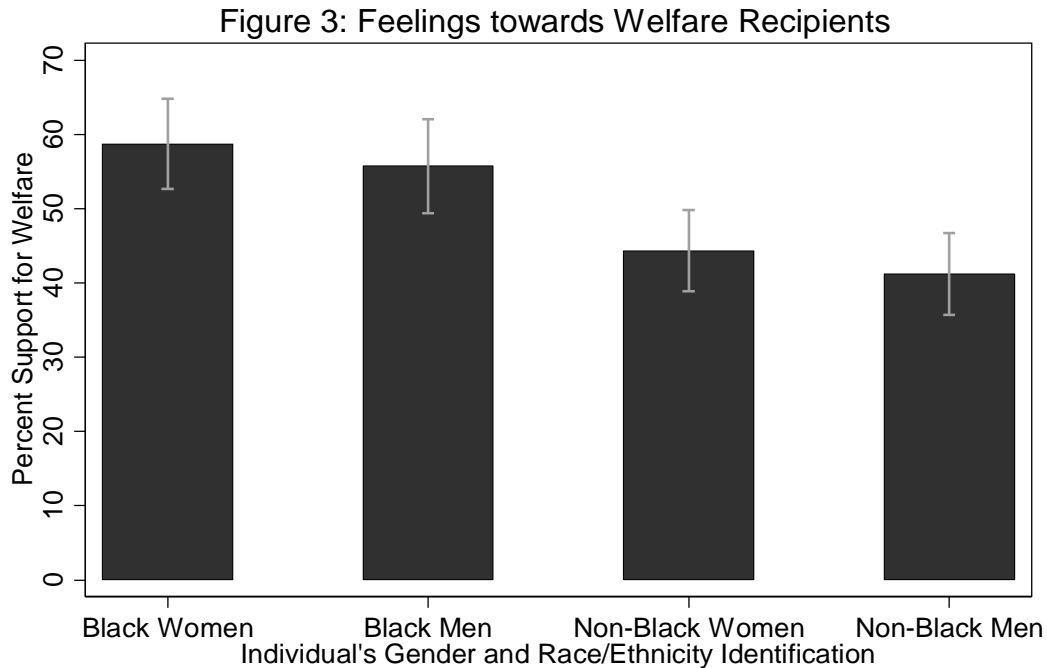
Results

Model 1: Interaction of African Americans, Gender and Feelings on Welfare Recipients

Table 5: Support for Welfare Recipients	
VARIABLES	ftgr_welfare
black	14.51*** (1.229)
female	3.145*** (0.648)
blackfemale	-0.182 (1.577)
dem_edugroup	0.00795 (0.279)
incgroup_prepost	-0.350*** (0.0402)
discrim_self	-0.960*** (0.296)
Constant	54.86*** (1.488)
Observations	5,242
R-squared	0.1063952

Standard errors in parentheses

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$



Data Source: National Election Survey dataset. Results estimated using linear regression, holding the amount of discrimination experienced, level of income, and education level of the respondent and its mean.

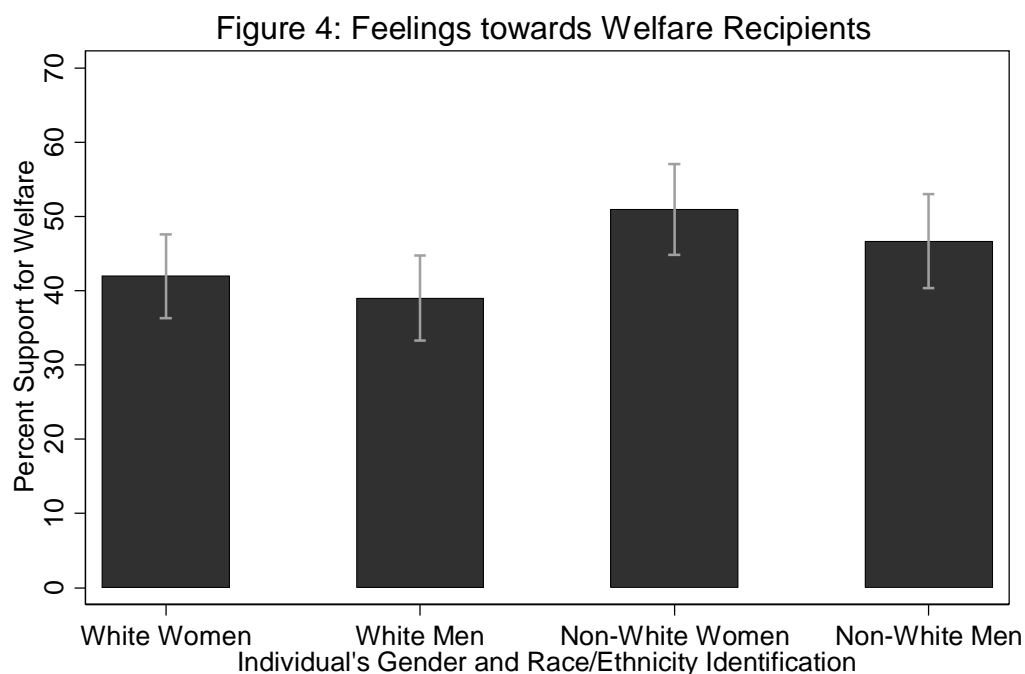
This model gives strong support to the belief that African American females have more favorable opinions of welfare recipients than African American males and non-African American males and females. However, the overlapping confidence intervals between African American men and non-African American males and females indicates that the null hypothesis (African American females and males are indistinguishable from non-African American males and females is indistinguishable with respect towards opinions of welfare recipients) failed to be rejected. The regression coefficients in Table 5 determine that for every unit increase of the independent variables (black and female), the dependent variable will increase 14.51 and 3.145 units greater than those respondents who are not black and not female. The difference between African American women and non-African American men is statistically significant due to the

lack of an overlap in confidence intervals. However, the hypothesis in this particular case is not completely supported because of the overlapping confidence intervals between African American men and non-African American women, which suggest a lack of significant statistical difference between the categories.

Model 2: Interaction of White/Non-White, Gender, and Feelings on Welfare Recipients

Table 6: Support for welfare recipients	
VARIABLES	ftgr_welfare
white	-7.662*** (0.933)
female	4.265*** (0.945)
whitefemale	-1.332 (1.217)
dem_edugroup	0.267 (0.284)
incgroup_prepost	-0.359*** (0.0408)
discrim_self	-1.123*** (0.310)
Constant	61.72*** (1.438)
Observations	5,242
R-squared	0.0819105

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1



Data Source: National Election Survey dataset. Results estimated using linear regression, holding the amount of discrimination experienced, level of income, and education level of the respondent and its mean.

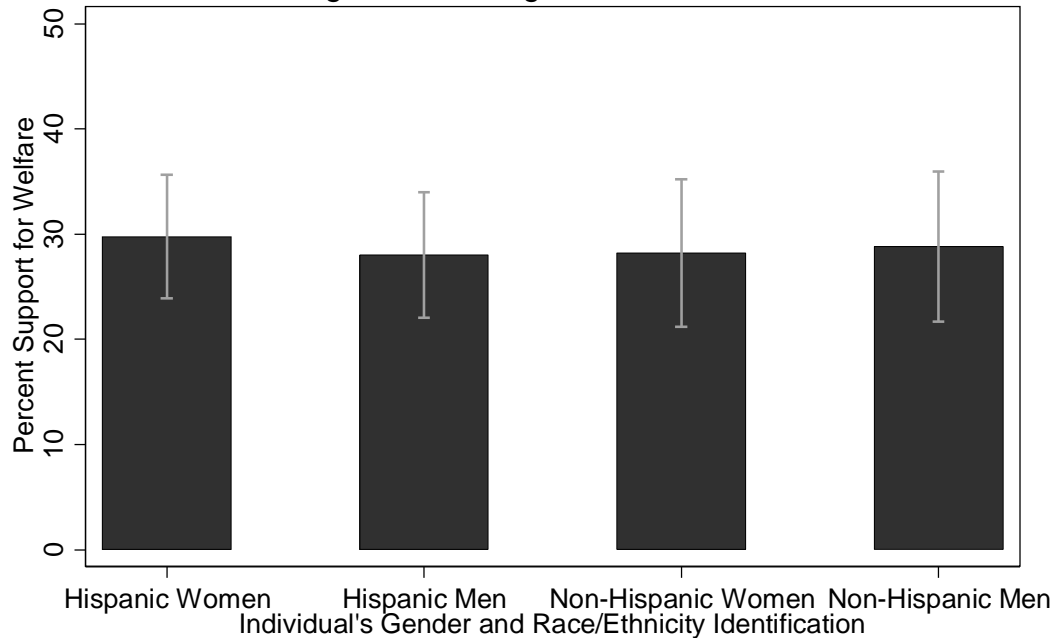
This model indicates that non-white males and females have more favorable opinions on welfare recipients as opposed to white males and females. Both white and non-white females favor welfare recipients more than their male counterparts within their same ethnic group yet due to the overlapping confidence intervals amongst all four categories, the null hypothesis (that the difference between white and non-white males and females in regards to welfare recipients is indistinguishable) failed to be rejected. The regression analysis yields that for every unit increase of the independent variables (white and female), the measure of the dependent variable is (-7.662) less than non-whites and 4.265 greater for females as opposed to males. Despite this trend, the overlapping confidence intervals in Figure 4 indicate that the theoretical hypothesis—white argues that marginalized groups (non-white, females) will be more likely to support welfare recipients than non-marginalized groups (white males)—is not supported.

Model 3: Interaction of Hispanics, Gender, and Feelings on Welfare Recipients

Table 7: Support for Welfare Recipients	
VARIABLES	ftgr_welfare
dem_hisp	-0.794 (1.156)
female	-0.569 (3.009)
hispanicfemale	2.345 (1.610)
dem_edugroup	-0.0489 (0.288)
incgroup_prepost	-0.419*** (0.0411)
discrim_self	-2.719*** (0.287)
Constant	66.59*** (2.378)
Observations	5,248
R-squared	0.0562412

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 5: Feelings towards Welfare



Data Source: National Election Survey dataset. Results estimated using linear regression, holding the amount of discrimination experienced, level of income, and education level of the respondent and its mean.

The model in Figure 5 indicates that Hispanic women slightly have favorable opinions towards welfare recipients as opposed to Hispanic Men and non-Hispanic men and women. The overlapping confidence intervals of all four categories suggest that the null hypothesis (the difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic men and women) failed to be rejected. The regression coefficients indicate that there is not a statistical difference between the feelings towards welfare recipients between Hispanic males and females in comparison to the feelings of welfare recipients by non-Hispanic men and women. Ultimately, the confidence intervals in Figure 5 and the regression coefficients in Table 7 indicate that this particular model provides no evidence to support the hypothesis that marginalized groups are more likely to support welfare recipients than non-marginalized groups.

Discussions and Conclusions

The null hypothesis cannot be rejected in any of the models that were run and as a result, the data presented, under the parameters examined in this specific example, does not support the study's theoretical argument that marginalized groups in the United States (African Americans, Hispanics, and Women) are more likely to support welfare recipients than non-marginalized groups (white men). Despite this inability to reject the null hypothesis, the study yielded interesting results, particularly between African American women and non-African American men, where the results suggested that the difference in support for welfare recipients was statistically different. These results within the overall study suggest that race and gender do not play a definitive role in people's attitudes towards welfare recipients, yet within the confines of this particular study, it does not yield statistical difference. Further research would be useful to determine what control factors yield statistical significance between race and gender and

opinions on welfare recipients. In identifying such relationships, connections could be made to help deduce how much of certain factors impacts people's opinions of welfare.

This study offers a newer approach to existing literature on race and welfare. While scholars such as Miram Cohen (2014) and Martin Gilens (1998) have examined gender and race and how that impacts the support of welfare programs, this study identifies how these categories influence opinion on welfare recipients, examining another important aspect of how people view welfare. Depending on how people view welfare recipients, this can impact how they view welfare programs as a whole and indicate what level of support they would give these welfare programs. Hopefully this study inspired other future studies to connect how people feel about welfare recipients and how that impacts their opinions of the overall welfare system. Such research may shed light on the origin of why welfare is not supported by everyone in the United States, and can stimulate future solutions that target the systemic roots of the problem. Until this is done however, welfare may remain largely unsupported in the United States and many people will negatively on welfare recipients, creating further social divisions and an inability to reach more economic and social equality.

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