NOT FOR WIDOWS ONLY: INSTITUTIONAL POLITICS AND THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF AID TO DEPENDENT CHILDREN*

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We argue and demonstrate that Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), the central "welfare" program in the United States, marked a fundamental departure from previous U.S. efforts to aid families without breadwinning fathers. In addition, we elaborate an institutional politics theory of public social provision. This theory proposes that institutional conditions limit public social provision and that reform-oriented regimes and state bureaucrats are the main forces behind social spending. We appraise this theory with a historical analysis of ADC's creation and its development from the Great Depression until after World War II and with multiple regression analyses of state-level variation in the quality of ADC programs. Our results indicate that the institutional politics theory explains much of the historical development of ADC and cross-state variation in ADC programs.

Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), Title IV of the 1935 Social Security Act, sparked little debate among policy experts and encountered little opposition in Congress. The expansion of ADC over the next 15 years was similarly uneventful. This lack of concern is mirrored today by scholarly inattention to ADC's formative years (for exceptions, see Hanson 1990; Howard 1992; Gordon 1994; Zylan 1995, chap. 4). Other periods in the program's history have

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been studied more thoroughly and are presumed to be more momentous.1 Yet it was during the 1930s and 1940s—not before, not after—that ADC became an integral component of U.S. public social provision, setting the parameters of current debates over "welfare." ADC was not simply an extension of "mothers' pensions," poorly-funded state-level statutes whose few beneficiaries were primarily White widows (Skocpol 1992, chap. 8; Ladd-Taylor 1994, chap. 5). ADC recipients included mothers who were abandoned, divorced, or never-married, and mothers whose husbands were unable to work. The change was dramatic. In 1931, mothers' pensions were granted in less than one-half of the country and reached only 6 percent of female-headed families

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1 Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—the program's name since 1962—attracted the attention of social scientists following the urban uprisings of the 1960s (Piven and Cloward 1977; Skocpol and Amenta 1986:138–39). In the last decade, AFDC has been the focal point of a debate about poverty (Murray 1984; Ellwood 1988; Jencks 1992). And recently, historians and social scientists have investigated the adoption of "mothers' pensions," a forebearer of ADC (Goodwin 1992; Skocpol 1992; Michel 1993; Skocpol et al. 1993; Ladd-Taylor 1994, chap. 5).
with children. Only .04 percent of the U.S. gross national product was committed to mothers’ pensions. By 1950, ADC was being granted nearly nationwide, and the number of recipient families accounted for 25 percent of female-headed families with children. Approximately .19 percent of the GNP was devoted to ADC.2

We chronicle the origins and early development of ADC, focusing on the timing of adoption and content of key national legislation. Created in the 1935 Social Security Act, ADC had been augmented and revised several times by 1950, when it became a fixed commitment. A means-tested grant-in-aid or “federal” program, ADC gave individual states great influence over its parameters, leading to divergences in the program across the country. For this reason, we also document ADC’s “quality”—its benefits and coverage—across the states. These differences form an important part of any account of ADC, a nationwide program with benefits provided unequally across the country.

To explain developments in ADC in its formative years we elaborate an “institutional politics” theory of public spending (also see Amenta and Poulsen forthcoming). This theory reconceptualizes and synthesizes several hypotheses employed in comparative research: “institutional” or “state-centered” hypotheses (Heclo 1974; Orloff and Skocpol 1984; Skocpol 1992; Orloff 1993; Steinmo 1993), and “social democratic” (Esping-Andersen and van Kersbergen 1992), “politics matters” (Castles 1982), and “political resources” (Hicks and Misra 1993) hypotheses. The institutional politics theory focuses on the role of political institutions, state actors, and “reformist” regimes.

In our analyses, we depart from standard practice in research on public social provision, which typically concentrates on the adoption and content of key legislation (Orloff 1993) or analyzes spending for particular programs (Huber, Ragin, and Stephens 1993; cf. Stephens 1979). We combine a historical analysis of ADC’s legislative development with multiple regression analyses of ADC’s quality. Theories of public social provision make general claims and thus ought to be able to explain both legislative changes and variation in program outcomes.

THE INSTITUTIONAL POLITICS THEORY

Theories of public social provision or “the welfare state” have been burdened by an overstated conflict between theories portrayed as “state-centered” and theories portrayed as “society-centered.” Our institutional politics theory synthesizes elements of these theories (for other theoretical syntheses, see Korpi 1989, 1991; Esping-Andersen 1990; Skocpol 1992; Hicks and Misra 1993; Huber et al. 1993). Designed to explain the origins, character, and spending for public social provision, the theory directs attention to the structural aspects of political life and to political actors.

Institutional Conditions

The institutional politics theory begins with institutional conditions: the structure and democratic practices of the political system and the character of its party system. We argue that the structure of the polity affects the form and extent of social policy: The more fragmented the polity, the greater the conflicts over social policy, the more difficult it is to construct a national policy, and the more likely it is that innovations will be vetoed (Skocpol 1992, chap. 1; Steinmo 1993). Such arguments are sometimes supported in cross-national research that finds that federal policies tend to spend less on public social provision (DeViney 1983; Huber et al. 1993). Following Marshall (1963), we also argue that the existence and extension of political rights in ostensibly democratic polities stimulates social spending (Flora and Alber 1981). In Marshall’s terms, political rights tend to lead to social rights. In addition, we argue that the character of political party systems varies from programmatic to patronage-oriented. In programmatic party systems, parties win constituents through the provision of collective goods that potentially benefit all members of a specified group or category. In contrast, patronage-oriented parties reward supporters with individual benefits, such as government jobs or contracts (Shefter 1977). Pa-

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2 In 1990, AFDC spending was .38 percent of the GNP (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992).
tronage-oriented parties—organized initially when U.S. politics were dominated by patronage issues—usually oppose modern social spending programs because they remove discretion from public policy.

Although the United States is not the extreme case on all of these structural dimensions, it differs from many European countries in important respects. Political authority in the United States was born fragmented and has remained that way. Moreover, the United States by the 1930s had fallen behind other representative democracies in the extension of voting rights, multiple-party competition, and other political rights, such as the protection of political association. At the end of the nineteenth century, notably, the polities of the South restricted voting rights for African Americans and many poor Whites, both potential supporters of public spending initiatives (Kousser 1974), and eliminated the Republican Party as a serious contender for power (Key 1949). Furthermore, the U.S. political system was often run by parties concerned more with patronage than with programs (Skowronek 1982; Mayhew 1986). These party organizations, which were formed in the nineteenth century and survived reform efforts during the first two decades of the twentieth, were mainly situated in the Northeast and Midwest (Shefter 1983).

From the character of the U.S. polity we expect the following impacts on public policy. First, the fragmentation of the American political system means that sub-national polities will influence public spending policy. For example, states should vary significantly in public spending outcomes. In addition, representatives from the same political party but different states may differ in their support for social spending. Moreover, we expect deficient democratization and patronage parties to constrain public social provision. For example, those parts of the polity lacking democratic institutions should produce social spending programs that are less generous and less extensive. Their representatives in national politics should generally oppose increased social commitments to citizens through public spending. A similar but weaker effect is expected for patronage-oriented political parties. Thus, representatives who favor social spending innovations are most likely to emerge from states that are democratic (i.e., voting and political rights are secured) and “open” or “programmatic” (i.e., not dominated by patronage-oriented political parties).

**State Actors, Administrative Capacities, and Proposals for Reform**

The institutional politics theory also highlights the role of state actors in proposing and designing reforms. We expect state bureaucrats to influence the content of proposals for social spending—a factor that is not explored by most theories of public social provision and is underdeveloped in most statist approaches. Theorists of political learning, for instance, ascribe the content of new programs to the efforts of state administrators and reformers puzzling over social policy questions with the experiences of previous programs in mind (Heclo 1974; Skocpol 1992, chap. 1; Orloff 1993). State bureaucrats gather and interpret information about existing programs, allowing them to diagnose problems and propose solutions. But political learning theorists do not specify what determines if, when, or how policymakers will respond to issues they perceive as problematic.

The institutional politics theory holds that administrators' perceptions are shaped by existing programs and bureaucratic capabilities. A bureau's formal powers, its recruitment practices, the time allotted to problem-solving, and the type and amount of information available to administrators structure and constrain the range of policy alternatives. Policymakers will devise only those solutions they can control or enforce. For these reasons, the distribution of planning and implementation capacities across state institutions influences the type and character of programs proposed.

The theory expects that innovations and improvements in social spending are more likely in the states and those parts of the national executive branch with powerful and relatively autonomous domestic bureaucracies. Officials in such bureaucracies are loyal to their bureau's mission rather than to political parties or economic interest groups (Skocpol 1985). The existence of loyal and well-trained bureaucrats gives the public confidence that new programs will address
their stated goals rather than be diverted to patronage (Orloff 1993). Thus, we expect that the greater the number of such actors in a polity, the more likely it is that social spending programs will be proposed and that existing programs will be generous and extensive. In a period of change in social spending, the proposals and programs of bureaucracies with greater capacities and program experience will have an advantage.

If there is more than one level of government, many bureaucracies and their occupants are likely to compete over social spending policy. The theory expects that programs controlled by one level of government will be difficult to transfer to another level. In addition, proposals with high-level bureaucratic sponsorship will be more likely to get on the political agenda than will programs lacking such bureaucratic sponsorship. Thus, sponsored programs are also more likely to be enacted. The theory diverges from other theories that stress the importance of bureaucratic actors and capacities, however, in contending that the presence of powerful state actors is not sufficient to secure the passage of new commitments for social spending.

Reformist Regimes and the Passage of Legislation

Like the social democratic model or power resources theory (Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi 1991; Esping-Andersen and van Kersbergen 1992), the “politics matters” hypothesis (Castles 1982), and the “political resources” theory (Hicks and Misra 1993), the institutional politics theory holds that political party regimes have a strong impact on public social provision. We expect such regimes to be responsible for the passage of public spending legislation and increases in social spending efforts. An important determinant of cross-national social spending outcomes is the extent to which social democratic or left-wing political parties control government. But however this social-democratic influence is measured (Myles 1989; Esping-Andersen 1990; Huber et al. 1993), the United States usually scores zero. Some researchers consider the Democratic Party a “center” party that should promote moderate gains in social spending, whereas the Republican Party, as a party of the right, is expected to oppose increases in social spending (Castles and Mair 1984; Hicks and Misra 1993). The institutional politics theory also argues that pro-social-spending or “reformist” regimes are possible in the United States, but unlike the “center party” hypothesis, the theory holds that a U.S. pro-social-spending regime requires more than Democratic Party control of the executive and legislative branches of government.

According to the institutional politics theory, a U.S. pro-social-spending regime must surmount the structural obstacles we have noted—a fragmented political system that is partly undemocratic and a party system partly dominated by patronage-oriented organizations. At the national level, a pro-social-spending regime requires a President allied with reform organizations such as the labor movement. But it also requires a large reformist contingent in the legislature. We define as “reformist” Democratic and third-party legislators from democratic (i.e., with voting rights secured) political systems and “open” (i.e., non-patronage-oriented) party systems. This reformist contingent must be large enough to overcome resistance from Republicans and from Democratic legislators representing undemocratic and patronage-dominated polities. Thus, we expect the greatest gains in social spending legislation when such reformist contingents are sizable; we also expect social spending setbacks when such groups are small. Similar regimes at the state level of the U.S. polity should lead to similar results.

THE CREATION OF AID TO DEPENDENT CHILDREN

The Failure of Mothers’ Pensions

Mothers’ pensions, a precursor to ADC, did not lead inevitably to the new program (Leff 1973; Skocpol 1992, chap. 8). The first mothers’ pension laws were enacted in 1911. By 1917, 35 states had passed such legislation, and by 1935 only South Carolina and Georgia had not (Abbott [1941] 1966; Skocpol 1992). Mothers’ pensions were designed to allow poor mothers without a male breadwinner to care for their children at home rather than having the children forced into institutions or foster care. Employing
“maternalist” arguments, reformers successfully argued that mothers served society by raising their children to be good citizens and that mothers could fulfill this role only if freed from breadwinning (Abbott [1941] 1966:264; Skocpol 1992, chap. 8; Ladd-Taylor 1994, chap. 5). However, the vast majority of mothers’ pension laws merely enabled the provision of benefits on a “county-optional” basis. Thus, county-level politics and revenues determined the degree of participation, if any. Most statutes required an investigation of applicants and ongoing supervision of recipients (U.S. Children’s Bureau 1933). Moreover, mothers’ pensions were administered unevenly—in 37 states, they were administered at the local level with little or no state supervision (Brown 1940). For these reasons, mothers’ pensions were poorly funded, coverage was highly selective, and benefits were meager.

The U.S. Children’s Bureau, part of the Department of Labor, monitored mothers’ pensions from their inception. In 1933 the Bureau released a damning study of the programs, documenting their sparse and selective coverage and low benefits. The Bureau estimated that in 1931 only one-half of all counties authorized to grant benefits were doing so. The study also indicated that over 80 percent of recipients were widows and only 3 percent were Black (U.S. Children’s Bureau 1933).3

In 1934 mother’s pensions were superseded by programs of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), a New Deal agency that dispensed national funds to the states for means-tested relief. In August 1934, approximately 719,000 children whose mothers were widowed, separated, or divorced received FERA aid compared to 280,500 children aided by mothers’ pensions (U.S. Social Security Board 1937). The generation-long experiment of mothers’ pensions was coming to an end.

**The Rise of Aid to Dependent Children**

President Roosevelt’s Committee on Economic Security (CES), a cabinet-level group appointed in June 1934, released in January 1935 its proposal for what would become the “Social Security Act.” The CES was chaired by Frances Perkins, the Secretary of Labor, and also included Harry Hopkins, the Federal Emergency Relief Administrator. The legislation produced by the committee included titles for Old-Age Assistance, Old-Age Insurance, and Unemployment Compensation, among other programs. Title IV, creating ADC, was designed mainly by the Children’s Bureau. Katharine Lenroot, acting chief of the Bureau, took the lead in researching and proposing the program, with the guidance of Grace Abbott, the Bureau’s former chief (Witte 1962).

In August 1935, the Social Security Act established ADC as a federal-state grant-in-aid program. To receive federal funding, states had to make benefits available statewide and to designate a single agency to administer the program or supervise local administration. The legislation defined “dependency” more broadly than did mothers’ pensions—it included children “deprived of parental support or care by reason of the death, continued absence from the home, or physical or mental incapacity of a parent” (U.S. Social Security Administration 1991:80). The Act specified that states would be reimbursed for one-third of their expenditures up to $18 per month for the first child and $12 for each additional child (Witte 1962:162–65). This compared unfavorably to the one-half reimbursement level for Old-Age Assistance (OAA), Title I of the Social Security Act. Moreover, ADC provided no grant for caretakers. Although the CES named FERA to administer both ADC and OAA, Congress assigned the programs to the newly created Social Security Board and its Bureau of Public Assistance. (Table 1 summarizes the historical trajectory of national legislation for ADC.)

Amendments to the Social Security Act in 1939 signified an increased federal commitment to ADC. The legislation increased the
Table 1. Aid to Dependent Children Legislation, 1935–1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Legislative Developments</th>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Title IV of the Social Security Act establishes Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). Federal reimbursement set at 1/3 of state expenditures up to $18 per month for the first child and $12 for each additional child.</td>
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| 1939 | Amendments to the Social Security Act:  
(1) Revise benefit formula for ADC, increasing federal reimbursement to 1/2 of state expenditures up to existing maximums.  
(2) Establish survivors’ insurance to provide benefits to survivors of those eligible for Old-Age Insurance. |
| 1946 | Amendments to the Social Security Act revise benefit formula. Federal reimbursement increased to 2/3 of the first $9 per child (averaged), plus 1/2 the balance, up to $24 for the first child and $15 for each additional child. |
| 1947 | Federal regulations require states to promptly process applications and provide benefits to all eligible applicants. |
| 1948 | Amendments to the Social Security Act revise benefit formula. Federal reimbursement increased to 3/4 of the first $12 per child (averaged), plus 1/2 the balance, up to $27 for the first child and $18 for each additional child. |
| 1950 | Amendments to the Social Security Act:  
(1) Allow one relative (caretaker) to be included with dependent child as a recipient for federal matching purposes; reimbursement formula increased to 3/4 of the first $12 per recipient (averaged), plus 1/2 the balance, up to $27 for the caretaker, $27 for the first child, and $18 for each additional child.  
(2) Require states to provide all individuals wishing to apply for ADC the opportunity to do so, and to grant an opportunity for a fair hearing to any individual whose claim for ADC is denied or not acted on with reasonable promptness. |

Sources: U.S. Social Security Administration (1991); Bell (1965).

The federal share of ADC from one-third to one-half, the same as for OAA. The maximum benefit level subject to federal reimbursement was not increased for ADC, although the amendments raised the OAA maximum from $30 to $40 (U.S. Social Security Administration 1991). In addition, these amendments created survivors’ insurance, which paid benefits to the dependents of eligible workers who died. Thus, some widows and their children would be aided by Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI).

In November 1940, Roosevelt instructed the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), an agency in the Office of the President, to devise social policies for postwar America. The result was Security, Work and Relief Policies, written by the Committee on Long-Range Work and Relief Policies (U.S. NRPB Committee 1942; Warken 1979; Clawson 1981). The Committee proposed ending special assistance programs like ADC and OAA. In their place, the Committee called for a new consolidated public assistance program to be run by a single agency in each state. These proposals were incorporated in the Wagner-Murray-Dingell bills of 1943 and 1945. However, these bills, which also called for augmenting social insurance, failed in Congress (Amenta and Skocpol 1988).

In the 1940s, only minor changes were made in ADC. Congress changed the reimbursement formula in 1946 and again in 1948 to require the federal government to pay a higher share of the first dollars spent per child (U.S. Social Security Administration 1991). The new approach favored states that
provided low benefits, enabling them to extend coverage greatly without spending much from their own treasuries. A second change cracked down on restrictive practices. In 1947, the Bureau of Public Assistance required states to process ADC applications promptly and provide benefits to all eligible applicants. The regulations were aimed at "waiting lists," used by some states to limit the number of recipients or to discriminate against particular applicants (Perkins 1951; Bell 1965). These changes increased coverage but did little to increase the amount of individual grants.

In 1950, Congress finally increased the generosity of ADC by making the caretaker eligible for benefits. This provision increased the level of benefits subject to federal reimbursement by $27 (U.S. Social Security Administration 1991). The same Social Security Act amendments upgraded the OASI program, which became almost universal in coverage.

**ADC: Not for (White) Widows Only**

The sharp contrast between mothers' pensions and ADC is shown by comparing the recipients for each program. The number of children aided by mothers’ pensions remained virtually unchanged from 1931 to 1935—about 250,000 to 280,000 each month. By 1941, however, some 925,000 children were receiving benefits under ADC, and the number of recipients reached 1.6 million in 1950. Equally striking were changes in the characteristics of recipients. Most ADC recipients were children in families headed by someone other than a widow. By 1941–1942, only 20 percent of children accepted for ADC lived with a widowed mother. Another 39 percent had fathers who were absent due to desertion, separation, divorce, or institutionalization, or their parents were unmarried. Children in two-parent families were eligible for ADC if the father was mentally or physically "incapacitated"; by 1941–1942, 31 percent of children accepted for aid were living with both parents (U.S. Social Security Board 1943:30). ADC was far less racially restricted than were mothers’ pensions. Black children comprised 14 percent of all children accepted for ADC in the 1937–1938 fiscal year—a dramatic change that was not confined to the North. In 1937–1938, African American children represented nearly 30 percent of all children accepted for aid in South Carolina, 27 percent in Louisiana, 22 percent in North Carolina, and 12 percent in Georgia (Sterner 1943:283). Although these percentages were much smaller than the percentages of Black children in need in these states, they represented vast increases over the percentages receiving mothers’ pensions (Sterner 1943). By 1948, non-White families receiving ADC constituted 30 percent of recipients (Alling and Leisy 1950:5).

This historical summary suggests several questions about ADC, ranging from the setting of the political agenda and the determination of policy content to the passage of legislation (Kingdon 1984; Skocpol and Amenta 1986; Burstein 1993). What accounts for the inclusion of ADC in the initial proposals for the Social Security Act—putting it high on the Roosevelt administration’s agenda? What accounts for ADC’s passage as part of the Social Security Act? Why was ADC constructed as a federal-state means-tested program emphasizing “dependent” children, with the expectation that their mothers would not work for wages? Why did the program resurface on the administration’s political agenda and become augmented by national legislation in 1939 and 1950? What accounts for plans to reform public assistance, including ADC, in the early 1940s and the failure of these plans to be enacted?

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4 The dramatic decrease by 1942 in the proportion of ADC recipients with a widowed mother was not a result of the addition of survivors’ benefits to Old-Age Insurance. That program was not established until 1939 and had few beneficiaries in the early 1940s. In 1942, only 57,000 widowed mothers received survivors’ insurance in comparison to the 349,000 families receiving ADC (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975:348, 356).

5 The remaining 9 percent of children accepted for aid in 1941 to 1942 lived with their fathers (2 percent) or another relative (7 percent).
of the existence of mothers’ pensions and the presence of reformers in the Children’s Bureau, ADC was placed on the agenda of the Committee on Economic Security. The Children’s Bureau was given some autonomy in planning for ADC because social policy capabilities in the national state were fragmented. Regarding the program’s content, ADC was more likely to be enacted as a federal-state matching program rather than a national program because mothers’ pensions already existed at the state level. In addition, ADC’s normative assumptions—that women with children below working age should not seek paid employment—fit within the larger scheme of New Deal reform, which emphasized reserving scarce jobs primarily for male household “heads.” Most of the later changes in ADC’s content, mainly incremental improvements, were suggested by the Social Security Board, which administered ADC. Other reform proposals were more far-reaching because of the creation of the National Resources Planning Board, which established centralized national planning capacities for social policy. Yet why these proposals passed or failed depended on the fortunes of a critical fraction of the Democratic Party and opponents of spending in Congress. Because of institutional constraints, notably the presence of representatives who were not democratically elected and were thus biased against social spending, proposals for spending regimes were scaree. These circumstances affected other public spending proposals as well as ADC.

**State Actors and Capacities, Previous Policies, and Proposals for ADC**

ADC achieved its place on the Roosevelt administration’s agenda and was incorporated into proposals for the Social Security Act because of the configuration of national social spending capacities and previous policies—the failure of mothers’ pensions and the imminent end of emergency relief. Although the Committee on Economic Security (CES) was provoked in part by congressional passage of old-age pension legislation, the committee was designed to deal with social policy as a whole. The fragmented nature of policy administration inherited by Roosevelt meant that each national bureau dealing with social policy would have a hand in the process.

Among these was the Children’s Bureau, which had overseen and studied mothers’ pension programs for 20 years. The CES charged the Bureau with making recommendations for several programs targeting children (Witte 1962:32, 162). The Bureau’s research on mothers’ pensions revealed both their promise and their failure. Leaders of the Children’s Bureau attributed their failure to a lack of funding and inadequate coverage; they concluded that leaving funding to states and localities was a mistake. The Bureau did not dispute the premise underlying mothers’ pensions—that the solution to the problem of children without breadwinning fathers was to provide the mothers with ongoing aid, not jobs. In the words of Grace Abbott, former chief of the Children’s Bureau:

> These [mothers’ pension] laws are predicated on the theory that . . . the mother’s services are worth more in the home than they are in the outside labor market . . . [and] she should be enabled to stay home and take care of the children . . . until the children reach working age. (U.S. House of Representatives 1935:211)

It may be too simple to say if there had been no Children’s Bureau, there would have been no ADC. But the example of workmen’s compensation, another state-level program, underscores the Bureau’s importance in getting ADC on the reform agenda. Workmen’s compensation, which was not being studied or overseen by a national bureau, was on the initial list of policies for the CES to explore but was dropped (Altmeyer 1934). “Aid to dependent children” was not on this list but was added later—probably at the Children’s Bureau’s behest (Brown 1940:163, 303).

The Children’s Bureau’s proposals for ADC followed from its studies of the inadequacies of mothers’ pensions, the example of federal emergency relief, and the bureau’s desire to gain supervision over a comprehensive set of policies for children. The experience of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) opened political opportunities for further innovations in social spending. The direct cash payments provided by FERA aided not only those left unemployed by the Great Depression, but also those whom reformers referred to as
"unemployab1es"—the blind, the aged, and mothers of young children (Brown 1940: 140–49; Charles 1963:23–43). Thus the Bureau’s specific recommendations reflected policies already in existence; for example, the one-third reimbursement level for ADC was similar to that employed by FERA.

The Children’s Bureau proposed that ADC be a “federal” program with some national funding and control by states and localities because mothers’ pensions were already in operation at the state level. To make the new program appear innocuous, the Bureau wanted to stress continuity with previous aid programs (U.S. Social Security Board 1937: 231). Proposals for ADC were constructed with the best state mothers’ pension programs in mind. Similarly, about one-half the states had means-tested old-age pension laws and programs by the end of 1934, and Old-Age Assistance (OAA) was constructed to reinforce the best of these. In contrast, the newly created Works Progress Administration was funded and administered nationally as was the new Old-Age Insurance program. There were no precedents for these programs at the state or local levels.

New Deal Social Policy and the Retirement Principle

Understanding ADC requires reference to other breakthroughs and innovations in New Deal public spending policy. ADC was part of a New Deal social spending system designed to provide work mainly for young to middle-aged male breadwinners; others were to be removed or “retired” from the paid labor force with pensions, schooling, or training. Accordingly, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was the centerpiece of Roosevelt’s social spending policy in 1935 (Altmeyer 1966). The program’s existence was assumed by the Committee on Economic Security (1935:9), which argued that public employment “should be recognized as a permanent policy of the Government and not merely as an emergency measure.” Centered on nationally controlled labor-intensive projects, the WPA was devised to provide jobs to “employables”—typically male heads of households, but also some women without children below working age. Quickly enacted, the WPA employed more than 3,000,000 people in February 1936 (Howard 1943). The Roosevelt administration sought to combine public employment with other policies—OAA and Old-Age Insurance—that would provide for the aged and retire them from the labor force. This left younger workers to compete for scarce private sector and WPA jobs. ADC was consistent with this “retirement” approach: The program would withdraw another category of potential workers—mothers without breadwinning husbands—from the labor market.

ADC’s fate was closely intertwined with that of the politically more central OAA program. The CES initially assigned the Children’s Bureau to administer ADC and FERA to administer OAA. But representatives of FERA argued that their agency should control both special assistance programs (Witte 1962:162). Of the two programs, OAA was the larger and politically more important, and of the two agencies, FERA was by far the more powerful.6 Despite the objections of the Children’s Bureau, the CES agreed to FERA’s recommendation and granted it control of both ADC and OAA. This administrative arrangement failed to satisfy Congress, however, which assigned all the special assistance programs—ADC, OAA, and Aid to the Blind—to the newly created Social Security Board. Most members of Congress considered FERA to have a temporary mandate and assumed its function would be replaced by the WPA. Some conservative members also feared the power of FERA and wanted to ensure its demise.7

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6 While FERA was the command post of national social spending, having spent and overseen the spending of some $5 billion (Charles 1963), the Children’s Bureau had become increasingly marginal, especially after the demise in the late 1920s of the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act (Muncy 1991).

7 The Senate also removed from the initial bill the stipulation that ADC and OAA provide “a reasonable subsistence compatible with decency and health.” Southern members of Congress feared that the federal government might impose high standards for OAA, undermining the economy and the racial order in the South (Altmeyer 1966:35). Having removed these standards for OAA, the Senate also removed them for ADC.
Why Proposals to Augment and Replace ADC Took the Forms that They Did

After 1935, the Social Security Board (SSB), with its control over ADC, took the lead in devising improvements in the program. To rationalize and standardize ADC, the SSB proposed numerous changes without being prompted by Congress or outside groups. The 1939 increase in the federal share of funding was proposed by the SSB's Bureau of Public Assistance to make it conform with the Bureau's better-funded and more widespread OAA program. The SSB also promoted important improvements to ADC in 1950, as well as minor changes in the "matching formula" in the mid- to late 1940s. In 1939 and 1950, the board also suggested improvements in Old-Age and Survivors' Insurance (Altmeyer 1966:96–98; Derthick 1979:90–92).

In the early 1940s, the Roosevelt administration called for a second remaking of the public spending system. Unlike 1934, when it constructed the Committee on Economic Security from various cabinet agencies, in 1940, the administration had its own policymaking body—the National Resources Planning Board (NRPB). Situated in the Executive Office of the President, the Board took a more centralized view of social policy and called for a complete reorganization of the New Deal spending system (U.S. NRPB Committee 1942; Amenta and Skocpol 1988). The NRPB proposed eliminating ADC and other special assistance programs and incorporating them into a larger and more nationally regulated program of assistance. This plan barely made it onto the political agenda in a bill sponsored by New York's Senator Robert Wagner, one of the key sponsors of the Social Security Act. However, political conditions were not favorable for this or other social spending reforms.

Pro-Spending Political Contingents in the 1930s and 1940s

We argue that some ADC proposals succeeded while others did not because of the varying sizes of political contingents for social spending reform. According to the institutional politics theory, a Democratic President and a Democratic majority in Congress are not enough to ensure passage of programmatic social policies. Considering the Democratic Party as a party of the political "center" (Castles and Mair 1984) is somewhat misleading as well, because several smaller and ideologically divergent political parties were included under the Democratic label. Indeed, the Democrats constituted a party of the left, center, and right—all in one. The dispersion of political authority enabled these representatives to act on their disparate preferences.

Two structural obstacles hindered the formation of a pro-social spending majority. The most formidable obstacle was the incompletely democratized polity. In the South the planter class and state Democratic parties viewed generous social spending policies as a threat to the system of labor control (Quadagno 1988, chap. 6). Because most poor people could not vote, Democratic representatives had few incentives to appeal to them through public spending. Most southern representatives ran unopposed in primaries (Key 1949) and in the 1930s, the South had 102 of the 435 House seats. Thus, to have a majority, pro-spenders had to win about two-thirds of the remaining seats. A second, though less severe, obstacle to social spending reform was the dominance in some states of party organizations devoted to providing patronage. Leaders of these traditional patronage-party organizations were inclined to avoid programmatic benefits (Mayhew 1986, chap. 10). In the 13 states in which traditional patronage-party organizations flourished we would not expect Democratic congressional representatives to routinely back social spending proposals.

We argue that the adoption of social spending changes required both a Democratic President and a Congress dominated by Democrats from areas in which organized labor and other progressive groups, often agrarian radicals, were strong. Representatives of radical "third" parties that were launched in the 1930s—such as the Wisconsin Progressive Party and the Minnesota Farmer Labor Party—also tended to favor social spending. In addition, anti-spenders had to be in a minority. We would expect new legislation for ADC to pass in periods in which pro-social-spending forces were rela-
Table 2. Size of Pro-Social-Spending and Anti-Social-Spending Contingents in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1931–1950

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pro-Spending Members</th>
<th>Anti-Spending Members</th>
<th>Size of Pro-Spending Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highly Probable</td>
<td>Probable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931–1932</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933–1934</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>Large/medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935–1936</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937–1938</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939–1940</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941–1942</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943–1944</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Medium/small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945–1946</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947–1948</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949–1950</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Congressional Quarterly (1985); Mayhew (1986).

tively large—the larger the pro-spending contingent, the more far-reaching the legislation. When the pro-spending contingent was small, we would expect far-reaching and moderate reforms to be rejected.

Although Democrats won each Presidential election from 1932 through 1948 and controlled the Senate from 1933 to 1947 and again in 1949, the House of Representatives varied greatly in its makeup, thus determining whether a pro-spending majority was attainable. We divide representatives in the House into four groups according to how likely they were to favor social spending proposals. The first group, "highly probable pro-spenders," includes (1) Democratic representatives from states with democratic political systems and open parties, and (2) representatives from radical third-parties or representatives who were endorsed by them. We expect these legislators to support spending legislation and that a sizable contingent of them is necessary for social spending innovation. Arrayed against them on the right are "highly probable anti-spenders," who include (1) Democrats from the nondemocratic South and (2) Republicans from traditional patronage-party systems. Among the "probable pro-spenders" we include northern Democrats from patronage-oriented party systems. We anticipate that these Democrats might support social spending but may need inducements from the President. We count Republicans from open party systems as "probable anti-spenders" because ideology, not party organization, dampened their spending proclivities.

Table 2 shows that the fortunes of these groups varied greatly from 1931 to 1950. The highly probable pro-spenders, ranging in number from 28 to 106, never outnumbered the highly probable anti-spenders, but in several periods—notably after the elections of 1934 and 1936—the margin between the two groups narrowed. The last column of Table 2 identifies the period from 1935 through 1938 as the period with the largest pro-spending contingent. Thus, we expect the most dramatic reforms in social spending in this period. By contrast, the highly probable anti-spenders numbered more than 200 in four Congresses. After the off-year elections of 1942 and 1946 the highly probable anti-spenders constituted a majority in the House, making the years 1943 to 1944 and 1947 to 1948 the most difficult periods for the pro-social-spenders. We expect defeats for social spending proposals in these periods. In the years 1933 to 1934, 1939 to 1942, and 1949 to 1950, highly probable anti-spenders were not a majority and the pro-spending contingent was sizable. Thus, we expect moderate gains for social policy in these periods.
Pro-Spending and Anti-Spending Contingents and ADC Legislation

The historical pattern of these contingents mirrors the pattern of legislation for ADC and other social spending programs. After the 1934 elections, when the pro-spenders outnumbered the anti-spenders, Congress passed spending breakthroughs like the Works Progress Administration and the Social Security Act. Thus, passage of the initial legislation for ADC, like that for OAA and the social insurance programs, occurred during a period of congressional alignment that we expected to be favorable for reform. The congressional configuration Roosevelt faced in 1939 was somewhat less favorable for social spending, but it was not dominated by conservatives. Congress adopted moderate amendments to the Social Security Act, augmenting ADC and other programs.

The pro-spending contingent was smaller in the 1940s, especially after the 1942 elections, and the anti-spenders were more numerous. In 1943, the National Resources Planning Board’s radical proposals to nationalize and reform public assistance were defeated. The composition of the House of Representatives after 1942 did not favor even minor increases in social spending. Congress changed the federal “matching” formula for ADC in 1946 and 1948—years during which the pro-spenders were greatly outnumbered. However, the primary effect of these changes was to direct more federal money to states that paid low benefits, which meant that southern states were the primary beneficiaries. When the electorate returned Truman to the White House in November 1948, it also elected pro-spending and anti-spending contingents in the House similar in size to the ones elected in 1938. In 1950, Congress reinforced established spending programs, including the enactment of the caretaker grant for ADC.

All in all, the institutional politics theory helps explain the creation of ADC and legislative developments in its formative years. Proposals for ADC came from actors within the state; the character of these proposals depended on the bureaucratic positions of these actors as well as the legacies of prior policies. ADC was devised mainly by the Children’s Bureau because the Bureau had monitored mothers’ pensions and because the Committee on Economic Security, composed of cabinet officials, delegated its authority to various interested governmental agencies. ADC was adopted because of a sizable pro-social spending contingent in Congress consisting of Democrats from outside the South and representatives from radical third parties. The Social Security Board later proposed augmentations in ADC to make it consistent with the other special assistance programs, notably OAA. Improvements suggested by the SSB were adopted in 1939 and 1950, when the pro-social-spending congressional contingent was moderately large. In the early 1940s, the National Resources Planning Board, from its central position in the White House, proposed amalgamating all assistance programs. This far-reaching plan failed because it was proposed during a period when the pro-spending contingent was small and the anti-spending group was large. In short, the overall legislative development of ADC reflected political configurations, defined in part by institutional impediments to building political majorities for reform.

EXPLAINING STATE-LEVEL DIFFERENCES IN ADC

Because of state and local control over the implementation of ADC, the quality of ADC programs varied widely across the country. A theory should be able to explain not only a program’s legislative development but also cross-sectional differences in program outcomes like spending. The states provide enough cases to use standard statistical techniques of inference to appraise our institutional politics theory and other hypotheses about cross-sectional differences in public spending. Institutional theories are often better at explaining the adoption of a program than explaining spending on the program (Amenta 1993), so these quantitative analyses provide a strong test of the scope of the institutional politics theory. Cross-sectional data are better than historical developments for examining structural arguments because the units vary widely on structural characteristics.
Table 3. ADC Program Quality Index: Top 10 and Bottom 10 States, 1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Program Quality Index</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Program Quality Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>20.76</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>19.07</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Mississippı</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>17.59</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>16.54</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>16.23</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>13.35</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>13.16</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>11.64</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>10.56</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>10.37</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the end of the 1930s, ADC varied widely among the states. In 1939, ADC benefits ranged from an average of $2.46 per child per month in Arkansas to $24.53 in New York; the national average was about $13. Coverage also varied widely. To take both generosity and coverage into account, we multiplied the two to create a program quality index. We define generosity as the average payment per child recipient as a share of per capita income; we measure coverage as the number of recipient families as a share of female-headed households with children (U.S. Social Security Board 1940b; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1930, 1940). For the eight states that had not adopted ADC by 1939, we use figures for mothers' pensions. We do this because each state had already had four years to adopt ADC, a period in which all states adopted OAA. Mothers' pension programs were similar to the ADC program and were counted as "aid to dependent children" in the Social Security Board's (1940b) analyses of programs in each state. Thus, these states had made political decisions to continue mothers' pensions and not to adopt ADC, but they should not be counted as providing no aid to dependent children.

Measuring the potential recipient base for ADC presents several difficulties. Potential recipients included poor children living in (1) single-parent families, (2) two-parent families in which the father or both parents were physically or mentally incapacitated, and (3) families headed by a relative other than the child's parent. Because data on the number of such families—or the number of children living in such families—are not available, we used the number of female-headed families with children as the base. Not all such families were poor, but a majority undoubtedly were. Although our measure does not capture poor two-parent families with an incapacitated parent or poor families headed by a relative, the majority of ADC recipient families were female-headed, and so we believe our figure provides the best estimate of potential recipient families.

Table 3 lists the top and bottom 10 states on the program quality index in 1939—before the amendments adding survivors' insurance and increasing the federal matching formula. Most of the top 10 states are in the West or Midwest, with Utah at the very top, followed by Idaho and Wisconsin. Most of the bottom 10 are southern states—the only non-southern state among the bottom 10 are Illinois and Connecticut, neither of which adopted ADC in the 1930s.

The institutional politics theory encompasses structural as well as proximate causes that affect the quality of ADC programs. The theory expects different institutional conditions at the state level to foster pro- and anti-spending biases. We expect to find the highest quality ADC programs in states that (1) protected democratic rights, (2) were not dominated by patronage parties, and (3) had by a relative other than the child's parent. Because data on the number of such families—or the number of children living in such families—are not available, we used the number of female-headed families with children as the base. Not all such families were poor, but a majority undoubtedly were. Although our measure does not capture poor two-parent families with an incapacitated parent or poor families headed by a relative, the majority of ADC recipient families were female-headed, and so we believe our figure provides the best estimate of potential recipient families.
long-standing traditions of administrative reform. In the short-run, we anticipate that states with reformist regimes in power for long periods of time produced high quality ADC programs.

We test the institutional politics theory with four measures. Voting rights is defined as the percentage of eligible voters in each state who voted in the 1932 Presidential election (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975:1071–72). We then take the natural logarithm of these percentages because we are more concerned with differences between low and medium voter participation than differences between medium and high voter participation. We assume that low voter participation indicates a restricted franchise and we expect only democratic systems to produce high quality ADC programs. Traditional patronage-party organization strength identifies states with strong traditional or patronage-oriented parties, which we expect to inhibit social spending. This measure is based on Mayhew’s study of all political parties in each state. Values of this measure range from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating states in which patronage parties predominated (Mayhew 1986:196). State supervision and administrative power identifies state-level bureaus that had administrative authority over special public assistance by 1937. States score 1 on this measure if they passed federally approved OAA and ADC legislation by 1937 and the two programs were run in a joint fashion (Bucklin and Lynch 1938); otherwise states are scored 0. States with such administrative authority are expected to have higher quality ADC programs.

Reformist regime measures whether the Democratic Party or a third party controlled the state government under favorable structural circumstances. These reform Democrats were free from the patronage demands of traditional parties and could make programmatic appeals. More important, Democratic parties in democratic political systems would also be more likely to appeal to lower- and lower-middle class constituencies, seeking their votes. A state scored 1 on this measure if each of the following conditions was met: (1) a Democratic or third-party regime held power for four or more years in the 1930s (Hansen 1983:158); (2) the regime was in a democratic political system—it scored above a natural break on the measure of voting rights; and (3) the regime was situated in an open party system, meaning it scored less than 4 on the measure of traditional patronage-party organization. All other states are scored zero.

We juxtapose our institutional politics theory to other hypotheses that have proven useful in explaining cross-sectional differences in public policies across states or across rich capitalist countries, or both. One key hypothesis is that working-class political activity determines public spending outcomes. Labor strikes can gain the attention of political incumbents who may respond by increasing public spending (Myles 1989:89–91). According to this hypothesis, which has received support in research on cross-national public spending outcomes (Myles 1989; Hicks and Swank 1992), states with greater strike activity should have higher quality ADC programs. We use two measures to examine this hypothesis. Strike volume is the number of person-days of labor lost due to strike activity per nonagricultural worker per year (U.S. Department of Labor 1933–39; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1948:194–96). We use the figures for each year from 1933 through 1939, the New Deal era, to calculate an average for each state. Union density, a standard indicator of the degree of labor organization and mobilization, is measured as union members in 1939 as a share of the nonagricultural labor force in 1940 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1948:194, 196; Troy and Shefflin 1985). Strike volume indicates the collective action of labor, and union density indicates the potential for action. The expectation is that strike volume and union density positively affect social spending programs, including ADC.

A second hypothesis centers on the pluralist argument that closely contested elections between major parties make politicians eager to promote public social spending (Key 1949, chap. 14). This hypothesis has helped explain social spending efforts among rich capitalist nations as well as among states (Dawson 1967; Sharkansky and Hofferbert 1969; Pampel and Williamson 1988; Myles 1989; cf. Hewitt 1977; Hicks and Misra 1993). It suggests that competitive state-level politics will produce high quality ADC programs. We measure electoral disparity as the
average difference in the percentage of the vote received by Democrats and Republicans in gubernatorial elections from 1918 to 1934 (Congressional Quarterly 1985). High scores indicate greater electoral disparities between the two parties (i.e., less competition). Thus, this measure should be negatively related to social spending—the program quality index.

Another hypothesis that has received empirical support concerns the role of business interests, which typically are opposed to social spending policies (Skocpol and Amenta 1986; Hicks and Misra 1993). High levels of employment among women might inhibit spending for ADC: Employers who rely on women’s labor have an interest in curtailing programs that might deter women from seeking wage labor. Specifically, Skocpol et al. (1993:694) argue that business interests may have been especially resistant to the adoption of mothers’ pensions in states in which women were a relatively high proportion of the gainful labor force; they found that this factor was associated with late passage of mothers’ pension legislation. Likewise, high labor force participation by women may have inhibited the size and scope of ADC programs. We use the measure percent female in the labor force—women workers as a share of all workers in 1938, which we interpolate from the figures for 1930 and 1940 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1948). The measure should be negatively related to the ADC program quality index.

REGRESSION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We first generated models for the institutional politics theory and then models estimating the effects of the alternative hypotheses. To rigorously appraise the relative strengths of the two sets of measures, we entered the four measures derived from the institutional politics theory, added the four measures derived from the alternative hypotheses, and then performed an F-test to determine whether the four alternative hypotheses measures significantly increased the explained variance. We then eliminated measures that did not add to the adjusted explained variance, in a backward stepwise procedure. Using these results, we examined this best-fitting model employing several control measures, including the average OAA pension. We then ran a number of diagnostics on the best-fitting model.

Preliminary results presented in Table 4 indicate some support for each of the two theoretical approaches. Model 1, which includes only the four measures of the institutional politics theory, explains about one-half the variance in the ADC program quality index after lost degrees of freedom are taken into account. Each coefficient is in the predicted direction—positive for all measures except the measure of traditional patronage-party organization. Model 2, which includes only the four alternative hypotheses measures, explains about 16 percent of the variance in the ADC program quality index, with standard adjustments. All coefficients, except that for strike volume, are in the expected direction, but none is significant. The negative coefficient for strike volume may have occurred because it is highly correlated (.60) with union density.10

Model 3 indicates that the favorable results for the alternative hypotheses are more apparent than real. If the four alternative hypotheses measures are added to a model that includes the four institutional politics factors, the alternative hypotheses measures provide less than one percent of additional explained variance. An F-test for this group of measures indicates a significance level of only .35. If the four institutional politics measures are added to a model that includes the four alternative hypotheses measures, the

10 We include both measures in the model because our initial investigations are designed to see whether the model as a whole helps to explain variation in the quality of ADC programs. The multicollinearity value for the model is 17.65, indicating the presence of some degree of multicollinearity, but there is no significance test for multicollinearity. In cross-national studies, strike volume and union density are sometimes negatively correlated (Korpi and Shalev 1980; Misra and Hicks 1994; Western 1995). This is not true, however, across states in the 1930s, perhaps because strikes in this period were often designed to win organizational rights or perhaps because the relationship has an inverted-U shape. If the strike volume measure is eliminated from the model, the coefficient for union density is reduced; if the union density measure is eliminated, the coefficient for strike volume remains negative (results not shown; available on request).
institutional politics measures are significant at the $p < .0001$ level and provide an increase in explained variance of about 37 percent. Model 4 eliminates nonsignificant measures using a backward stepwise procedure. It includes all the institutional politics factors except traditional patronage-party organization. In short, the institutional politics theory provides a better explanation for differences among states in the ADC program quality index than does the set of alternative hypotheses.

Next, we examined several potential control measures, adding them one by one to the best-fitting model. These controls included measures of previous and related programs and a measure of the potential recipient base for ADC. The only control measure that was significant, however, was Old-Age Assistance generosity, measured as the average OAA pension in 1939 as a share of per capita income (U.S. Social Security Board 1940b; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1942:243–45). This measure indicates a state’s commitment to public assistance to the aged, a more politically salient group than children. Because OAA and ADC were similarly constructed programs, the politics of OAA at the state
dicate that states did not change their generosity and coverage for ADC. However, the quality of mothers’ pensions had no significant effect when included in the best fitting model (results not shown, available on request). These results indicate that state-level experience with mothers’ pensions had little relationship with ADC programs in the 1930s. We also examined whether a relatively large potential recipient base for ADC is associated with low program quality. Our measure, the number of female-headed families with children as a share of all families, was not significant net of other measures in Model 4 (results not shown; available on request).

11 We examined a measure of the quality of mothers’ pensions in 1932. This variable tests the degree to which the ADC program quality index in 1939 is related to the quality of mothers’ pensions. A strong impact of this measure would in-
level may have influenced the politics of ADC, as occurred at the national level. When entered with the three measures from the institutional politics theory, the coefficient for OAA generosity is positive and significant (Model 5 in Table 5). Overall, Model 5 is a slight improvement in fit over Model 4.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} The coefficient for reformist regime falls just short of significance, probably because it is highly correlated (.55) with OAA generosity. The reformist regime measure may influence ADC primarily through its impact on OAA (Amenta, Carruthers, and Zylan 1992). We include the reformist regime measure in Model 5 because it adds to adjusted explained variance. We ran several standard specification diagnostics on this model. The Kiefer-Salmon test indicated that the residuals were not significantly nonnormally distributed. Also, the model had no “outliers”—values at least three standard deviations removed from predicted values. However, two states, Utah and Indiana, had standardized residual values approaching 2.5, so we removed these states and reran the model. The results (not shown, available on request) are not significantly different from those in Model 5. Also, there was no evidence of heteroskedasticity in the best-fitting model.

Next, we ran a substantive elaboration of Model 5. First, we examined race, measured as the percent Black in the population in 1930 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1935). This measure is highly correlated (−.92) with the voting rights measure, and so it made little sense to include both measures in the same model.\textsuperscript{13} We also substituted this measure for the voting rights measure for the 37 states outside the former Confederacy. Model 6 shows that the coefficient for the race measure was not significant. Thus, there is little evidence that race affected the overall quality of ADC programs across the states of the North.

\textsuperscript{13} When the race measure was substituted for the voting rights measure in the best-fitting model (results not shown), the coefficient for race was significant and negative. However, the model as a whole did not explain as much variance as the model using the voting rights measure and omitting the race measure.

| Table 5. Coefficients for Regression of ADC Program Quality Index on Selected Independent Measures and Controls |
|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Independent Measures | Model 5 | Model 6 | Model 7 | Model 8 |
| Institutional Politics Theory | | | | |
| Voting rights, 1932 | 3.114** | -- | 2.733** | 3.150** |
| | (2.93) | | (2.42) | (3.63) |
| Reformist regime, 1930s | 2.018 | 1.864 | 1.695 | 2.405* |
| | (1.48) | (1.15) | (1.17) | (1.95) |
| State supervision and administrative power | 4.252** | 4.448** | 4.627** | 4.077** |
| | (3.72) | (2.89) | (3.81) | (3.76) |
| Control Measures | | | | |
| Old-Age Assistance generosity, 1939 | .102* | .099 | .114* | .092* |
| | (1.70) | (1.24) | (1.80) | (1.70) |
| Percent Black in population, 1930 | -- | --.092 | -- | -- |
| | | (−.438) | | |
| Lambda | -- | -- | -- | −.058 |
| | | | | (−1.13) |
| Number of states | 48 | 37 | 48 | 48 |
| F-statistic | 13.62** | 5.92* | 12.23** | NA |
| Adjusted R² | .518 | .353 | .489 | NA |

* *p < .05 \ **p < .01 (one-tailed tests)
To ensure that our results were not based on an unusual year, we regressed the program quality index over the period from 1939 through 1941 (U.S. Social Security Board 1940a, 1940b, 1941) on the measures in Model 5. We constructed this new dependent measure similarly to the calculation of the 1939 measure of quality, taking the average of the three yearly quality scores. The program quality index for 1939 and the average program quality index for 1939 to 1941 are highly correlated (.98), however, indicating that 1939 was not an unusual year.\(^ {14}\) Thus, it is no surprise that the results (Model 7) differ little from those in Model 5. About the same amount of variance is explained and none of the coefficients is significantly different from its counterpart in Model 5.

Finally, we examined the possibility that ADC policies were correlated across space. Decisions about generosity and eligibility in a given state might have been “contaminated” if the state’s policymakers knew about and coordinated their policy with the policies of its neighbors (Lieberson 1985). Thus, states may not have been independent cases. Technically speaking, if spatial autocorrelation were a significant problem, it would make the OLS estimates less efficient. To examine this, we constructed a “contiguity” matrix in which spatially adjoining states were scored 1 and others were scored 0, and employed the SPACESTAT (V1.03, R17) statistical package (Anselin 1993). However, the OLS residuals (results not shown) for the best-fitting model showed little evidence of significant spatial autocorrelation (Anselin 1993, chap 27). To make certain, we examined both “spatial effects” and “spatial disturbances” specifications (Doreian 1980) and Model 8 reports the latter. The results differ little from the OLS results. The estimated lambda coefficient is negative and not significant, but the coefficient for reformist regime is now significant.

All in all, the results support the institutional politics theory. Voting rights had a strong impact on the quality of ADC, as did the character of the administration of state-level assistance programs. In some models, the reformist regime measure also had a significant impact, suggesting that partisanship in the U.S. political party system influences social policy. By contrast, measures based on alternative hypotheses did not add to the explanation provided by the institutional politics model.

CONCLUSION

Our study suggests, first, that the creation of Aid to Dependent Children deserves more attention than it has received to date. ADC marked a fundamental departure from the unevenly distributed and chronically underfunded mothers’ pensions, which primarily reached a small and select group of White widows. Because of this failure and because of increased need in the Depression, the task of aiding families without male breadwinners was taken over by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Moreover, the federal commitment to ADC, including new forms of administrative supervision and relatively high funding, meant that ADC would reach many more recipients than did mothers’ pensions. Non-widows were ADC’s main recipients even before the creation in 1939 of survivors’ insurance, and from the outset the percentage of African-American recipients for ADC was almost five times that for mothers’ pensions.

Moreover, it is useful to analyze ADC in the historical context in which the U.S. welfare state was being created. Like other New Deal social spending programs, ADC was marked by its origin in the Depression and was not the most significant means-tested program or even special assistance program of that era. These honors fell to the Works Progress Administration and Old-Age Assistance, a special assistance program that became a central political issue in state-level politics. Like these, ADC fit with the “retirement principle” that drove U.S. public policy in the Depression. The New Deal was designed to secure jobs, public or private, primarily for male heads of households—and simultaneously to pension off others, like the aged, the blind, and mothers with dependent children, who were deemed “unemployable.” National reformers created and expanded ADC partly under the political cover of OAA, which was constructed and administered similarly to ADC. Like OAA, ADC was

\(^ {14}\) In 1941, only three states had no ADC program.
soon provided across the nation with greatly varying standards among states.

More important, the development of ADC and variations in its quality across the country provide a means to assess theoretical arguments about the growth, development, and quality of public social provision. Our assessment combines analytical attributes treated separately in other studies. We address the timing of adoption and the content of initial legislation as do comparative studies based on a few countries, but we also explain agenda-setting for ADC and further developments in the program. Moreover, like comparative studies based on many nations, we quantitatively examine the ADC program across states, but we go beyond standard measures of spending to explore the program's overall quality. This sort of research provides a way to assess the mechanisms of theories as well as their arguments about long-term determinants of public social provision.

The origins, content, and development of ADC are best explained by the institutional politics theory, which relies on institutional and political arguments. National legislative developments in ADC were closely related to the actors and mechanisms advanced by the theory. The incorporation of ADC into the bill that became the Social Security Act was a result mainly of the strategic situation of women reformers in the Children's Bureau in the early 1930s. Workmen's compensation, like ADC, was enacted in the Progressive Era, but, unlike ADC, had no national agency overseeing it and thus was not included in the Social Security Act. Like OAA, which had state-level precedents in old-age pension programs, ADC took its federal-state form in part because of the existence of mothers' pensions. All the same, the enactment of the program and its legislative advances, as well as failures of reform proposals, followed the rhythms of pro-spending and anti-spending contingents in Congress. The pro-spenders, consisting of third-party representatives and Democratic representatives from democratic political systems and open party systems, had to be a sizable group. The anti-spenders, Republicans and Democratic representatives from undemocratic political systems, could not be in a majority. Our analyses indicate that the structural barriers to establishing reform majorities were substantial in the United States and were strengthened by the lack of democratic rights in many U.S. polities.

The institutional politics theory also explains much of the state-level variation in the quality of ADC. These analyses provide a key test of the structural elements of the theory. The wide variation in ADC programs across states can be explained by the degree of voting rights in these states, previous administrative reforms, and the existence of reformist regimes—Democratic and third-party regimes in states not dominated by undemocratic political systems and patronage-oriented political parties. The results concerning voting rights, for instance, are similar to recent findings about political participation in cross-national studies (Hicks and Misra 1993).

Theoretically speaking, the results underline the usefulness of synthesizing the insights of institutional and political explanations of public social provision—explanations that have proven useful in explaining differences in the adoption of and spending for social programs cross-nationally (Amenta 1993). We call for additional theorizing of the connections between institutions and politics. Future studies of public social provision should address other programs (Wennemo 1992) and different time periods (Hicks, Misra, and Ng 1995).

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