

# The Role of Party Identification in Social Welfare Attitude Formation

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**Abstract:** This paper aimed to answer the question whether republicans are more likely to hold an opposed attitude towards social welfare compared to those identifying as Independents or Democrats. Building upon prior research and employing statistical analyses through SPSS, our findings strongly indicate a significant tendency among Republicans to oppose social welfare initiatives than independents and democrats.

**Keywords:** Party Identification; Welfare Attitudes; Gender Influence.

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## 1. Introduction

Why do Republicans exhibit a higher propensity to oppose social welfare initiatives compared to Democrats and Independents? This study hypothesizes that political party affiliation will emerge as the primary and most influential factor determining an individual's stance on social welfare. The well-established phenomenon of Republicans expressing greater opposition to social welfare than their Democratic and Independent counterparts provide the motivity for this research. Upon identifying there's a research gap on this topic, this study aims to contribute by either affirming or refining the prevailing understanding of the complex relationship between party identification and social welfare attitudes. Answering this research question is the key for advancing our comprehension of how political affiliations shape views on government intervention, social programs, and the broader discourse surrounding social welfare. Beyond theoretical contributions, addressing this question holds practical significance, offering insights into avenues for mitigating political polarization and fostering a more informed and equitable public discourse on social welfare policies, as others suggest that partisanship is largely an informational short cut (Downs 1957). The intersection of political identity and social welfare attitudes remains a dynamic area deserving of continued scrutiny.

The theoretical framework guiding this exploration rests on three interconnected concepts. Firstly, grounded in political ideology, Republicans, who often embrace a limited government philosophy, may perceive expansive social welfare as infringing upon individual liberties, aligning with their commitment to minimal state intervention. Secondly, economic conservatism and the emphasis on individual responsibility within the Republican ideology may drive opposition to social welfare, as such programs could be seen as undermining the principle of self-reliance. Lastly, the role of partisan socialization and group identity is considered, positing that Republicans, through party affiliation, are socially conditioned to align their attitudes with the party's traditional attitude against comprehensive social welfare (Christopher, 2015). Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted factors shaping Republicans' distinctive attitude on social welfare.

This study also incorporates a control variable, sex, that is respondents' gender, to enhance the precision of the analysis.

Previous research has suggested that gender roles and societal expectations can influence perspectives on government intervention and social programs (Julian L. G. & Hanna S, 2021). By introducing gender as a control variable, this study seeks to isolate the impact of political affiliation on social welfare attitudes, ensuring that observed differences are not confounded by gender-related variations.

While investigating the question of why Republicans exhibit a higher propensity to oppose social welfare initiatives compared to Democrats and Independents, it is crucial to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in this research endeavor. The complex and multifaceted nature of political attitudes and social welfare perceptions suggests that a single variable may not comprehensively account for an individual's stance on these issues. This study recognizes the intricate interplay of various factors influencing attitudes towards social welfare and refrains from asserting the existence of a singular explanatory variable. Instead, it seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse by exploring how political affiliation, among other potential factors, shapes attitudes towards social welfare.

The results show distinct patterns in attitudes towards welfare based on party identification and respondents' gender. Male and female Republicans consistently express a higher propensity to believe there is "Too Much" welfare compared to Democrats and Independents. Statistical analyses confirm a significant association between party identification and welfare attitudes for both genders. These findings highlight the influence of political affiliation on perceptions of welfare, with Republicans exhibiting a higher likelihood of viewing welfare as excessive.

## 2. Literature Review

The formation of public attitudes toward social welfare is a complex process influenced by various factors such as race, party identification, gender, and individualism. While previous research has extensively explored the impact of factors like race, resulting in a relatively comprehensive theory, the influence of party identification remains underexplored, creating a notable research gap that this study aims to address.

Laura S. Hussey and Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz's 2012 research demonstrates the predictable partisan differences between Democrats and Republicans on issues like welfare spending, national health insurance, and attitudes toward

undocumented immigrants. Democrats generally favor increased welfare spending and are more open to national health insurance, whereas Republicans tend to prefer decreased welfare spending. Additionally, Republicans' opposition to national health insurance is more ideologically driven, while Democrats' opposition is influenced by both ideology and attitudes toward illegal immigrants. The study analyzes data from the 2004 and 2008 American National Election Studies to examine opinions on welfare programs. Dependent variables include support for "welfare" and national health insurance. The study employs multinomial logit estimation for welfare spending and binary logit for health insurance. Key independent variables are respondents' ratings of "illegal immigrants" and "Hispanics" on a feeling thermometer. The models control for various demographics, ideological factors, and opinions on blacks' work ethic.

Logan Dancey and Paul Goren's 2010 study provides further evidence of the impact of party identification on public attitudes toward social welfare. Their research reveals that citizens adjust their issue attitudes and party loyalties in response to news coverage of divisions among partisan elites. Notably, during periods of heightened media attention on issues like health care reform, affirmative action, gay rights, and welfare reform, individuals adapted their party affiliations and issue attitudes accordingly. This underscores the role of situational cues within the information environment in shaping the connection between individual-level political affiliations and policy preferences. The study defines and measures party identification using the standard 7-point NES scale and feeling thermometers for the Democratic and Republican Parties. The feeling thermometers are combined into a single difference score measure, serving as observed indicators of latent party identification. Both observed and latent partisanship variables are normed to a 0.00–1.00 range, with higher scores indicating stronger Republican identifications. For economic welfare attitudes, health care preferences are measured on a 7-point scale, indicating the direction and intensity of preferences for national health insurance versus private insurance. Welfare preferences are assessed through a pair of items asking about federal spending on "welfare programs" and "food stamps," combined into a 5-point scale. Social issue attitudes are measured using indicators for gay rights and affirmative action. The gay rights indicator is a 7-point scale combining responses on laws protecting homosexuals from job discrimination and allowing homosexuals to serve in the U.S. armed forces. Affirmative action attitudes are tapped via a 4-point question on preferences for giving blacks preference in hiring and promotion due to past discrimination. All observed and latent variables are set to a 0.00–1.00 range, with higher scores reflecting more conservative preferences. The study employs structural equation models for analysis. The NES issue questions capture the core aspects of each policy debate, providing reasonable proxies for health care reform, welfare redesign, civil rights for homosexuals, and affirmative action attitudes during the 1990s.

Susan W. and John G. P.'s 1980 study, though not directly focused on the same topic, offers insightful conclusions applicable to the public. The findings suggest that state senators tend to align as "liberals" or "conservatives" based on social rather than economic concerns. The study also highlights the influence of political culture, with senators from moralistic political cultures showing liberal tendencies on social and economic welfare issues. Republicans lean

more conservatively on social issues, and education emerges as a positive factor associated with a liberal position on both social and economic welfare scales. The study conducted in the fall of 1975 mailed questionnaires to 978 state senators in twenty-four randomly chosen states, with some substitutions for geographic diversity. The first two waves resulted in a 42% return rate, and a third questionnaire was sent to 171 nonrespondents, with a 21% return rate. The final sample consists of 441 state legislators, showing response rates ranging from 21% in California to over 78% in North Dakota, with slightly higher response rates in rural states. Political culture is operationalized based on Ira Sharkansky's suggestion, with a modification from the original Elazar formulation. The sample is collapsed into three major subtypes for some analyses: moralistic states (coded as one), individualistic states (coded as two), and traditionalistic states (coded as three). Dependent variables include three scales measuring attitudes toward social issues, economic and welfare issues, and corruption. These scales were derived from a factor analysis of fifteen items representing various issues on each topic. A fourth variable reflects the individual's self-designated position on a five-point liberalism scale, ranging from very conservative to very liberal. The study primarily explores the relationship between political culture and these attitudes, controlling for party identification and education in a multiple classification analysis.

In summary, existing research emphasizes the need to explore the influence of party identification on public attitudes toward social welfare, given the limited attention this factor has received compared to others. Insights from various studies provide a foundation for understanding the nuanced dynamics that shape individuals' perspectives on social welfare policies.

### 3. Methodology

My research hypothesis is whether individuals who align themselves with the Republican political affiliation tend to express opposition towards social welfare when compared to those identifying as Independents or Democrats. And a null hypothesis to my research hypothesis is that there's no significant difference in the predisposition to express opposition towards social welfare among individuals who align themselves with the Republican political affiliation, Independents, or Democrats. To test the null hypothesis, I choose the independent and dependent variable from the dataset GSS 2016. The General Social Survey (GSS) 2016 dataset is a nationally representative survey conducted in the United States, aiming to collect data on a wide range of social, economic, and political issues. It involves face-to-face interviews with individuals to gather information on their attitudes, behaviors, and demographic characteristics. The GSS 2016 data can be used to examine the relationship between individuals' self-identified political affiliation (Republican, Independent, Democrat) and their expressed attitudes or opinions regarding social welfare. By analyzing responses to relevant survey questions on social welfare issues, researchers can assess whether there are significant differences in the predisposition to express opposition to social welfare among individuals associated with different political affiliations.

The original variable, party id, would be recoded from a 7-category nominal measure into the following 3-category nominal categories: Democratic, Independent, and Republic. There are several reasons for me to recode it. Firstly, the

original variable had seven categories, which could result in small cell frequencies for certain combinations, making it challenging to draw meaningful conclusions. For example, in the "TOO LITTLE" category, the original variable had relatively small counts for some party identifications, such as "Strong Democratic," "Independent Democratic," "Independent Republican," and "Strong Republican." By recoding into three categories, I create larger and more balanced cell frequencies, which can improve the reliability of the analysis. Moreover, with seven categories in the original variable, the chi-square test resulted in a high degrees of freedom (12) and a significant p-value. This suggests that there might be statistical significance, but the interpretation of specific relationships is difficult due to the complexity of the variable. By recoding into three categories, the degrees of freedom decrease (4), making it easier to interpret the statistical significance of the relationship between party identification and attitude towards welfare. And makes it easier for readers or researchers to understand and discuss the relationship between party identification and attitudes towards welfare. Last but not least, the recoding enhances the practical significance of the findings. For example, it's more meaningful to examine attitudes towards welfare within the context of broader political affiliations (Democratic, Independent, Republican) rather than within seven specific categories that have limited practical relevance.

The dependent variable I chose is natfare, which measures attitudes towards welfare categorized into three groups: "TOO LITTLE," "ABOUT RIGHT," and "TOO MUCH.". It is a composite measure that reflects respondents' opinions on the adequacy of welfare programs.

In assessing whether individuals aligning with the Republican political affiliation are more inclined to express opposition towards social welfare compared to Independents or Democrats, various measures will be employed to examine the hypothesis. The significance of the relationship will be evaluated through the chi-square test. Instead of manually referencing a chi-square probabilities chart for the critical value, SPSS software will automatically generate this value during the analysis. By scrutinizing the p-value, the

determination of statistical significance will guide the subsequent calculation of the relationship's strength. A critical alpha level of .050 or lower will be sought, providing a minimum 95% confidence to safely reject the null hypothesis suggesting no association between party identification and attitudes towards welfare. Meeting this alpha level ensures confidence in avoiding a Type I error. Post-verification of significance, attention will shift to degree and form. To quantify the degree of association, Cramer's V measure will be employed, given the nominal by ordinal nature of the relationship. It is hypothesized that a moderate relationship exists between the independent variable (party identification) and the dependent variable (attitude towards welfare), as indicated by the value of Cramer's V.

The chosen control variable is sex, that is the gender of respondents. Given that certain welfare policies, such as maternity leave, free sanitary napkins, are intricately linked to gender considerations, it is hypothesized that gender may influence individuals' attitudes towards social welfare. By incorporating gender as a control variable, the analysis aims to discern whether observed variations in attitudes towards social welfare among political affiliations remain robust when accounting for the potential influence of gender-related factors. This consideration adds a nuanced layer to the investigation, acknowledging the interconnectedness of political ideology and gender perspectives in shaping attitudes towards social welfare policies.

#### 4. Data Analysis

Two sets of analyses will be carried out. The initial analysis will involve the recoded Party Identification variable categorized into three groups (Democratic, Independent, Republic) and the dependent variable, representing an ordinal measure of attitudes towards welfare (TOO LITTLE, ABOUT RIGHT, TOO MUCH). The second analysis will replicate the first, incorporating the same independent and dependent variables, but introducing a control variable in the form of dichotomous gender measurement.

**Table 1.** Analysis #1 Attitude towards Welfare by Party ID in 3 categories <sup>a, b</sup>

			Party ID in 3 categories			Total
			Democratic	Independent	Republic	
Welfare	TOO LITTLE	N	197	49	53	299
		%	30.9%	20.9%	11.2%	22.2%
	ABOUT RIGHT	N	233	95	124	452
		%	36.5%	40.4%	26.2%	33.6%
	TOO MUCH	N	208	91	297	596
		%	32.6%	38.7%	62.7%	44.2%
Total		N	638	235	474	1347
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
a. Source: GSS, 2016						
b. Chi (DF) = 117.951 (4), p = < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.209						

I used SPSS to conduct a statistical analysis, and the subsequent results were found. As demonstrated in Figure 1, there's a significant relationship between independent and dependent variables. The statistical scrutiny, conducted through the Chi-square test, produced a significant result with a statistic value of 117.951 and 4 degrees of freedom, yielding a p-value of < 0.001. This conveys a robust statistical foundation for rejecting the null hypothesis and asserting a

substantive association between Party Identification and attitudes towards welfare. The rejection of the null hypothesis is justified by the low p-value, allowing us to be at least 99.9% confident in claiming statistical support for our research hypothesis without making a type I error. Transitioning to the strength and form of the relationship, Cramer's V, calculated at 0.209, denotes a moderate association. This signifies that Party Identification does indeed play a discernible role in

shaping attitudes toward welfare, yet the impact is not overwhelmingly strong. It being weak means that there are other possible explanations for this dependent variable, a

concept was alluded to in the introduction section.

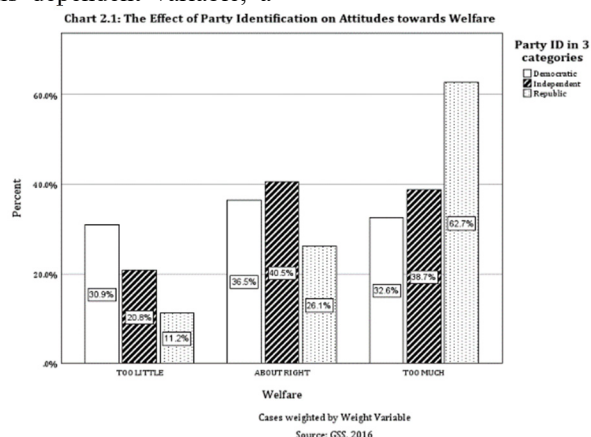


Figure 1. The Effect of Party Identification on Attitudes towards Welfare

Examining the nuances within each Party ID category reveals intriguing patterns. Specifically, the Republican category exhibits a notably higher percentage of respondents expressing that welfare is "TOO MUCH" compared to their

Democratic and Independent counterparts. This aligns coherently with the theoretical premise that Republicans might exhibit a greater inclination to express opposition towards social welfare.

Table 2. Analysis #2 – Introduction of Control Variable Attitude towards Welfare by Party ID in 3 categories or Respondents' Sex<sup>a, b, c, d</sup>

Respondents' Sex				Party ID in 3 categories			Total
				Democratic	Independent	Republican	
MALE	Welfare	TOO LITTLE	N	73	19	20	112
			%	32.7%	20.7%	10.4%	22.0%
		ABOUT RIGHT	N	92	38	59	189
			%	41.3%	41.3%	30.6%	37.2%
		TOO MUCH	N	58	35	114	207
			%	26.0%	38.0%	59.1%	40.7%
Total			N	223	92	193	508
			%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
FEMALE	Welfare	TOO LITTLE	N	124	30	33	187
			%	29.9%	20.8%	11.7%	22.3%
		ABOUT RIGHT	N	141	58	65	264
			%	34.0%	40.3%	23.1%	31.4%
		TOO MUCH	N	150	56	183	389
			%	36.1%	38.9%	65.1%	46.3%
Total			N	415	144	281	840
			%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total	Welfare	TOO LITTLE	N	197	49	53	299
			%	30.9%	20.8%	11.2%	22.2%
		ABOUT RIGHT	N	233	96	124	453
			%	36.5%	40.7%	26.2%	33.6%
		TOO MUCH	N	208	91	297	596
			%	32.6%	38.6%	62.7%	44.2%
Total			N	638	236	474	1348
			%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
a. Source: GSS, 2016							
b. Total: Chi (DF) = 118.403 (4), p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.210							
c. Male: Chi (DF) = 55.220 (4), p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.233							
d. Female: Chi (DF) = 67.966 (4), p < 0.001, Cramer's V = 0.201							

The second analysis introduces respondents' sex as a control variable. As displayed in, the chi-square tests were conducted for the total sample and separately for males and females. The findings reveal notable patterns and statistical associations that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between these variables. For the total sample, the chi-square test brought out a significant result with a statistic value of 118.403 and 4 degrees of freedom, resulting in a p-value of < 0.001 and a Cramer's V of 0.210. This outcome supports the rejection of the null

hypothesis, indicating a substantive relationship between respondents' sex, Party Identification, and attitudes toward welfare. The association is moderate, as indicated by the Cramer's V value. Breaking down the results by sex, both males and females exhibit statistically significant relationships. For males, the chi-square test resulted in a statistic value of 55.220, p < 0.001, and a Cramer's V of 0.233. Similarly, for females, the chi-square test produced a statistic value of 67.966, p < 0.001, and a Cramer's V of 0.201. The results highlight a significant, moderately strong relationship

within each gender category. Cramer's V values indicate the association's strength, emphasizing that respondents' sex plays a role but doesn't exclusively determine variations in welfare attitudes based on Party Identification.

## 5. Discussion

Divergent behavioral tendencies across political affiliations and cognitive variations based on gender are the foundational concepts underpinning the research and theories expounded in this study. Republicans, who often embrace a limited government philosophy, may perceive expansive social welfare as infringing upon individual liberties, aligning with their commitment to minimal state intervention. By controlling for respondents' sex, we were able to eliminate gender as a strong intervening variable since the relationship between party identification and attitude towards welfare stayed statistically significant across both two categories of the control variable. The statistical analyses, particularly the significant chi-square tests and Cramer's V values, offer solid evidence of a moderate relationship between party identification and attitude towards social welfare. While the influence of party identification on behavior is not very strong in this study, it still highlights the impact of party allegiance on how people behave.

One notable limitation of my research is the lack of nuanced categorizing of the types of welfare. Since the circumstances vary from person to person, they may hold different attitudes towards different social welfare policies. Some respondents might strongly support unemployment benefits but hold reservations about certain healthcare provisions. Others might favor education-related welfare policies while expressing opposition to housing assistance programs. The question may be too general for the respondents to answer, which may make them confused at the point, and may answer it casually. Future research could address this limitation by employing a more granular approach to categorizing attitudes toward welfare. This might involve breaking down the broad categories into specific policy domains, allowing for a more detailed understanding of respondents' preferences and aversions. For example, attitudes toward healthcare, unemployment benefits, food assistance, and housing support could be examined separately to capture the diverse range of opinions individuals may hold within the broader construct of "attitudes toward welfare."

Another notable limitation in current study stems from the dichotomous categorization of the control variable, sex. The bipartite classification into male or female overlooks the complex nuances inherent in gender identity and expression, and this oversimplification restricts our ability to comprehensively capture the multifaceted ways in which gender may shape attitudes toward welfare. Within the assumed categories of "male" and "female," there exists a potential oversight of nuanced variations within each gender group. The exclusion of individuals identifying as non-binary, genderqueer, or transgender diminishes the inclusivity of our analysis, disregarding their unique experiences and perspectives that could significantly influence attitudes toward welfare policies. For a more distinct exploration of this aspect, future research should embrace a more inclusive approach to gender categorization. This could involve offering respondents options beyond binary choices, allowing them to self-identify in a manner that authentically reflects their gender identity. Such an approach is imperative for a more accurate representation of the diverse gender landscape

and a comprehensive understanding of how gender intricacies may contribute to shaping attitudes toward welfare policies.

The limited sample size of 1347 is also a notable research constraint, representing a small fraction of the vast U.S. population. This raises concerns about generalizability, as the study may not fully capture the diverse factors influencing welfare attitudes. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples to improve external validity and enhance understanding of the intricate relationships between Party Identification, respondents' sex, and attitudes toward welfare at a national level.

## 6. Conclusion

People's attitudes towards social welfare are rather complex, which are influenced by numerous factors such as party education, individualism, as well as identification and gender that are shown in this study. A striking revelation surfaces in the data: a staggering 62% of Republicans express the belief that there is "too much" welfare, a figure that is double the proportions observed among Independents and Democrats. This stark contrast underscores the significant impact of party identification on shaping individuals' attitudes towards social welfare, revealing a substantial influence on behavioral patterns within this domain. Understanding the influential role of party affiliation, education, individualism, and gender in shaping attitudes toward social welfare can guide the development of more targeted and effective policies. Policymakers may consider crafting welfare initiatives that are sensitive to the diverse perspectives within different party affiliations and gender identities. Recognizing the impact of these factors can lead to more nuanced and inclusive welfare programs that better resonate with the varied attitudes within the population.

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