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Triggering Support: Understanding Common-sense Assumptions that Underlie Social Policy Discourse and Their Implications in the 2019-2020 U.S. Presidential Debates

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List of Acronyms

ADC Aid to Dependent Children

AFDC Aid to Families with Dependent Children

CDA Critical Discourse Analysis

DNC Democratic National Committee

PoC People of Color

RNC Republican National Committee

TANF Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

UBI Universal Basic Income

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This research paper is a critical discourse analysis of the perceived role of the government in social policy and their underlying ideologies as put forth by Republican and Democrat candidates in the 2019-2020 presidential primary debates. In this research I argue that the competing discourses on social policy employed by the presidential candidates were laden with common-sense assumptions that are based on the unholy trinity of historically prevalent ideologies of 'deserving'/'undeserving', individual responsibility, and austerity. Yet these constructs were also challenged by a counter-narrative of social citizenship through the proposal of citizenship-based entitlements and processes of decommodification/defamilialization by Democrat candidates. The prevalence of these counter-narratives in the context of rigid political systems and the hegemonic control of economic liberalism challenges claims that policy is constrained by constructs put forth by political scientists such as Lowi (1964), as well as Schneider and Ingram (1993). Instead, revealing the more flexible nature of ideologies, and the potential for counter-narratives to disrupt these processes of power.

Relevance to Development Studies

This research contributes to further awareness of the historical, political, and cultural context, as well the power relations, social constructions and ideologies that are inherent in the common-sense assumptions that politicians employ when speaking about social policy. In naming the prevailing ideologies inherent in institutionalized political speeches and the power relations supporting them, this research provides policy makers with supplementary tools to challenge oppressive aspects of the current social policy systems that are made rational and to more effectively make the case for citizenship-based entitlements. Moreover, it attempts to "make strange" the One-World World in order to open up the potential for "thinking beyond" capitalcentric solutions.

Keywords

Presidential debates, social policy, social citizenship, critical discourse analysis, defamilialization, politics of needs, common-sense assumptions, ideologies, social constructions of target populations

Chapter 1: Introduction

    The provisioning of basic needs for members of a society may appear to be a common goal, predicated upon human decency. Yet in reality, the struggle for the provision of needs in a society are hard-fought contestations over power. Rather than objective processes, policies designed to meet the needs of society are based on "values, ideologies, and images of what constitutes the 'good society'" (Reisman, 2001, p. 29). It is these choices, based on competing discourses, that can lead to such sharp divides in a society when it comes to defining what it means to care for the most vulnerable and ensure social reproduction. From this standpoint, things that are taken for granted ('problems', 'institutions', and 'subjects') are understood as being "shaped in ongoing interactions with discourses and other practices" (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 4).

    This study utilizes theories of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and post-structuralism, which understands 'discourse' to be language as a social practice and the belief that "language use is constitutive of social identities, social relationships, and systems of knowledge and belief" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). In this context, "political processes are understood as societal struggles in which power relations amongst groups are (re)produced through discourse" (Leipold and Winkel, 2016, p. 7).

    Political scientists such as Lowi (1964) as well as Schneider and Ingram (1993) argue that there is a connection between policy and politics, with policy shaping politics and in turn, social constructs. Through the lens of post-structuralism, this research understands these processes of power as more flexible, as counter-narratives that 'make clear' the way power is at work may allow for these processes to be disrupted (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). Through a critical discourse analysis of the 2019-2020 presidential primary debates this research seeks to fill the gap of grasping the impact of the debates as a discursive event and to ascertain whether the prevalence of counter-narratives of citizenship-based entitlements in a mainstream, political event points to the potential for a paradigm shift within the United States's social policy system, challenging the notion that policy is determined by constructs.

1.1 Background

In the United States, the government's social policy practices have led to a bureaucratic, paternalistic welfare system that yields limited, if not regressive, results. Though the United States is pinpointed as one of the richest countries in the world, the lived experiences of many U.S. Americans[1] do not reflect this wealth. As the national GDP and wealth of the top percent has risen, the incomes and real wages of the average U.S. American have fallen. "In 2018, households in the top fifth of earners (with incomes of $130,001 or more that year) brought in 52% of all U.S. income, more than the lower four-

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[1] In this research, I will refer to residents of the United States as "U.S. American" in an endeavour to challenge U.S. imperialism and the erasure that occurs when U.S. residents are referred to as "American" when many other countries and people groups exist in the continents of North, South, and Central America.

fifths combined" (Schaeffer, 2020, n.p.). Conversely, the median wealth decreased by nearly 40 percent between 2007 and 2010 (Blyth, 2013, p. 14). These harsh disparities of inequality are experienced more deeply by women and people of color (Moller and Misra, 2014). Rising inequality within countries is not solely a problem in the United States, but rather a global phenomenon that has coincided with the advent of neoliberalism and the globalization of capitalism. Yet when compared to other wealthy, Western countries, the United States has experienced the fastest growing and highest rates of post-tax-and-transfer inequality, a phenomenon that is "partially attributable to limited efforts by the state to redistribute income" (Moller and Misra, 2014, p. 606).

At the same time as economic inequalities have been increasing, social programs meant to mitigate these effects have been reduced (Mettler and Walker, 2014, p. 634). In 1996, welfare reform enacted under Democrat President Bill Clinton's administration implemented work requirements, sanctions, and lifetime limits as conditions of eligibility for social programs (Moffitt, 2008). Further effects of the 1996 welfare reform include a rise in paternalism along with a "disciplinary turn in social policy that appears to have undermined the political and civic rights of welfare recipients" (Brady and Destro, 2014, p. 590). The current system is prone to scrutinize the poor and to provide racially unequal treatment of beneficiaries (Fording, Soss, and Schram, 2011).

Why social policy has been unable to adapt to meet the needs of U.S Americans may be because the condition of the United States' social policy system reflects deep-seated common-sense assumptions that are embedded within certain aspects of U.S. culture. In this research, I use the term 'common-sense assumptions' as defined by Fairclough to define and identify the use of social constructions. According to Fairclough (1989, p. 2) common-sense assumptions "are a means of legitimizing existing social relations and differences of power, simply through the recurrence of ordinary, familiar ways of behaving". They are ideologies, reflected in the conventions which guide the use of language, which people are largely unconscious of even as they utilize them (Fairclough, 1989, p. 2). These beliefs cause many U.S. Americans to support the government's role in social policy as it exists today or lobby for a further decrease in the coverage provided by the state.

The coverage by the state in the United States is currently provided through a welfare system that is founded on economic liberalism, otherwise coined a 'liberal welfare state' by Esping-Andersen (1990). Within the liberal welfare state, labour force participation is relied upon as the main provisioner of needs and an eligibility requirement for social programs. The programs that do exist are for a few targeted 'deserving' and offer minimal transfers that rely on outdated poverty lines to determine eligibility, which do not account for inflation and the current costs of living (Brady and Destro, 2014). Borne out of a fear that people will cease to seek out 'productive' work in the formal labour market if their needs are met through government transfers, these conditions exacerbate cyclical poverty and stigmatization of the poor (Block and Somers, 2003). Due to the market-centric model of economic liberalism, universal programs in the United States are nearly non-existent outside of public education. The United States falls far behind all other wealthy countries in "the availability or generosity" of its

policies (Moller and Misra, 2014, p. 609). U.S. American social policy is also guilty of mirroring market, gender and racial inequalities (Moller and Misra, 2014, p. 609). These institutional factors have fed into the social constructions of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor that are based on physical and moral categorical divides (Chhachhi and Truong, 2009, p. 9; Fraser, 1989).

Debates within social policy in the United States have historically been dictated by tensions between theories that champion individual responsibility (classic liberalism) versus those who believe that systemic failure must be addressed (social liberalism). In the United States those who ascribe to social liberalism are commonly known as 'liberals', while those who believe in classic liberalism are frequently called 'conservatives'. Within the United States' residual, market-centric approach to social policy, individual responsibility has remained the hegemonic narrative, strengthened by the common-sense assumptions of 'deserving'/'undeserving' target populations.

In the current political, economic, and social climate, social policy debates in the U.S. are shrouded beneath the governing project of "n"eoliberalism. Ong (2006) stresses the importance of differentiating between neoliberalism with and "N" and an "n". "N"eoliberalism emerged in the 1970s and perpetuates the hegemony of individual responsibility as a guiding ideology through an economic doctrine of capitalist accumulation. This doctrine advances political economic practices that cast the institutional framework of private property rights, free markets, and free trade as the optimal environment to foster human well-being "by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" (Harvey, 2007, p. 2). "N"eoliberalism "values market exchange as 'an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs'" (Harvey, 2007, p. 3).

"N"eoliberalism is then "a fixed set of attributes with predetermined outcomes" while "n"eoliberalism is a biopolitical "logic of governing that migrates and is selectively taken up in diverse political contexts" (Ong, 2007, p. 3) and "centers on the capacity and potential of individuals and the population as living resources that may be harnessed and managed by the governing regimes" (Ong, 2006, p. 6)."n"eoliberalism takes form in the United States through variations of liberalism such as economic liberalism, social liberalism, classic liberalism, opportunity liberalism, entitlements liberalism, and "N"eoliberalism that have become embedded in much of U.S. American culture as common-sense assumptions. While these theories have differences, they all operate as justification for the larger "n"eoliberal governing regime.

Bolstered by the common-sense assumptions of 'deserving'/'undeserving' and individual responsibility, austerity has come to hold sway in social policy debates. Perpetuated by the "N"eoliberal, push for decreasing state capacity, austerity is "the policy of cutting the state's budget to promote growth" and is carried out through "a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budgets, debts, and deficits" (Blyth, 2013, p. 2).

Within a capitalist system that relies on the failure of some, the state plays an integral role in ensuring the redistribution of resources in order to create an environment that fosters equality and seeks to bolster up marginalized groups, which is largely achieved through social policy (Kabeer, 2014; Moller and Misra, 2014, p. 603; Wax, 2007). Influenced by a myriad of common-sense assumptions including, but not limited to, the aforementioned ideologies of 'deserving'/'undeserving', individual responsibility, and austerity; the social policies enacted by the U.S. government have struggled to fulfil this role and to provide the protection that so many Americans deeply need.

Through the analysis of the 2019-2020 presidential primary debates, this research will seek to ascertain whether the unholy ideological trinity of 'deserving'/'undeserving', individual responsibility and austerity will continue to hold social policies captive, aligning with Lowi, as well as Schneider and Ingram's assertion that policies follow constructs. Or, whether the counter-narratives of citizenship-based entitlements that emerged during the primary debates are effective in disrupting these hegemonic narratives and could be a catalyst for social transformation.

Components of various of theories have been combined for this research including Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach to CDA, post-structural, and social-constructivist theories, as well as the theories of social citizenship, politics of needs, and social constructions of target populations, which will be explored in chapter two. This fusion aligns with Fairclough's (2009) assertion that in order to understand the social process of meaning-making (semiosis) that emerges from the interaction between different dialectical elements (e.g., social relations, power, institutions, beliefs, and cultural values), CDA must be situated within a trans-disciplinary framework. To that end, this research also takes into consideration the economic, political, social, and historical context which the presidential primary debates take place within. Utilizing the dialectical-relational perspective helps root this analysis in an awareness of how the presidential debates are simultaneously influencing and being influenced by ideologies, social constructions, and cultural values. Their relationship is complicated and co-constitutive.

To this end, this research is organized into seven chapters. Chapter two provides a detailed summary of the methodological approach and analytical framework that guides this analysis. Chapter three will position the reader within the historical, cultural, and political context that the presidential debates take place within, following the dialectical-relational perspective. Chapter 4 will analyse the presidential candidates' perceptions of the government's role in social policy through the identification of the key problematizations and 'solutions' put forth and their underlying assumptions and ideologies. Chapter five will explore the impact of social constructions on policy discourse through the lens of politics of needs and social constructions of target populations. Chapter six will examine the counter-narratives presented in the debates and whether they were effective in making the case for social citizenship. Chapter seven will summarize this research's findings and implications with concluding remarks.

1.2 Objectives and Research Question

This research's objective is two-fold. First, to ascertain the historically situated and deeply entrenched ideologies and social constructions that underlie U.S. social policy, their implications and why they hold sway over the imagination of many U.S. Americans. Motivated by the triangular relationship between ideologies, social constructions, and social policy, I wish to shed light on the meaning-making processes that occur through the correspondence of these elements during political discursive events. Second, my objective is to explore if and how these ideologies and social constructions are challenged in the discourse utilized by the presidential candidates and the media in the 2019-2020 presidential primary debates.

From this point of departure, this study asks what common-sense assumptions are reproduced or challenged by the presidential candidates about the state's perceived role in the realm of social policy during the 2019-2020 presidential primary debates. The following five sub-questions further narrow the main research question into points of operation from which the analytical framework explained below has been implemented.

- What are the discourses about government spending on social policy measures that are employed in the debates?
- What arguments are used for and against the implementation of universal health care in the presidential debates and the media's response?
- What arguments are used for and against the implementation of universal basic income (UBI) in the presidential debates and the media's response?
- What are the arguments used for and against the implementation of paid family leave and universal child care in the presidential debates and the media's response?
- What are the counter-narratives that are being presented in the presidential primary debates and media? How are they in/effective in making the case for social citizenship?

1.3 Scope and Limitations

There are multiple limitations of the scope of this research. One of these is the discursive restrictions of partisan politics that occurs in the presidential primary debates due to the hegemonic control of the majoritarian, two-party system in the United States. Many of the candidates' arguments that refer to social policy are often subsumed by the binaries imposed between 'Republican' and 'Democrat', or 'liberal' and 'conservative'. While the limitations that these political systems place on social policy discourse is challenged in this research, it is still a factor that detracts from capturing more varied or competing discourses that may exist with the U.S. American culture.

This research also presumes the legitimation of the modern nation-state which is inherently a site of exclusion and for some, violence. Alongside this, the theory of social citizenship employed in this research can be prone to ethnocentrism and androcentrism (Fraser and Gordon, 1992). This leaves out the consideration of those who are denied the status of 'citizen' and those whose rights are not protected by the nation-state. While these are serious limitations, my hope is that this research can be an initial step towards thinking beyond and "making strange" our current systems.

In order to challenge the inaccessibility of academic writing this paper utilizes a writing style that is clear and accessible. This decision stems from my belief that this research is needed not only for academia but for communities within the United States in order to facilitate self-reflection about the damaging effects that many common-sense assumptions about the welfare systems have on people of color and the poor, and the need for social transformation.

1.4 Positionality and Reflexivity

My position within this research is layered as a White, middle-class, American woman. I have only been a witness to the indiscriminate burden federal social programs place on their recipients through a few of my family members and my work experience as a social worker. My position removes me from being able to personally speak to the lived effects of how the stigmatization and oppression of the poor and people of color is experienced within these programs. Because of this it has been my desire to avoid the appearance of 'speaking for others'. By focusing on the common-sense assumptions that influence U.S. social policy, having seen first-hand how these beliefs can so easily go unquestioned amongst people with privileges like mine, I hope I can present information that encourages others with a similar background to re-evaluate their beliefs, understand the injustice that exists within the current American welfare system, and critically analyze the narratives given by politicians and the media. This is a journey of learning or 'unlearning' that I am still on and my hope is that this research invites others to walk this path along with me.

As my research is based in social constructivism, it is important to acknowledge that this research is in itself a meaning-making process that is influenced by the "ancestrality, history, memory and multiplicity of knowledges" that shape my values and beliefs (Chavez and Vazquez, 2017, p. 39). As Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, p. 15) claim, "research *makes* rather than *reflects* worlds". Rather than an objective, neutral process, this analysis is influenced by my belief that my own freedom is bound up in other's liberation, that care is a communal activity that should be entrenched in the institutions of our society, and that the value of a person is not sequestered to their formal labor participation.

Chapter 2: Analytical Framework

This chapter will lay out the theories and concepts that guide this research's analytical framework through two sections: social policy and methodology. In the first section, a map of social policy is provided as a guidebook for this research through the definition of social policy and the forms it takes in the United States. The second section dissects the methodological approach of CDA and post-structuralism, as well as the theories of social citizenship, politics of needs, and social constructions of target populations which aid this research in deconstructing the power relations, ideologies, and social constructions that are inherent in the candidates' discourse on social policy.

2.1 Social Policy

2.1.1 Defining Social Policy

When seeking to define social policy, there is no simplistic answer. Broadly speaking, social policy refers to the complex web of actors, institutions, and processes which play a role in providing "services and support across the life course from childhood to old age" (Platt, 2020, n.p.). Some of these actors include, but are not limited to, national governments, the family, civil society, the market, and international organizations (Platt, 2020). Social policies are based on the belief that we can enact change to 'better' society as we see fit and play redistributive, protective and transformative roles (Mkandawire, 2004, p. 1; Reisman, 2001).

How a society perceives what social policy is and the shape they believe it should take is predicated upon their unique values and historical situatedness. Richard Titmuss' stressed that social policy is influenced by culture and a society's "values, ideologies, and images of what constitutes the 'good society'" (Resiman, 2001, p. 29). He believed that social policy in any given context is concerned with two elements. First, "those needs which must be satisfied if the existing social matrix is to continue into existence" and second, "those states of dependency which are generally recognised by the collectivity to be collective responsibilities" (Reisman, 2001, p. 30). Social policies also mirror and reproduce beliefs about the nature of inequality "and the potential for state intervention to correct it" (Moller and Misra, 2014, p. 604). Moving from a social-constructivist approach, Titmuss' understanding of social policy aligns with the critical analysis of the underlying values and ideologies that determine why certain policies come into being. In the effort to combat depoliticization and rationalism within debates on social policy, it is integral that we acknowledge these values.

From the shared perspective of CDA and post-structural theory, social policy is understood as directly related to power and politics (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016; Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002; Fairclough, 1993). Politics is understood expansively as extending "well beyond political institutions, parties and so on to include the heterogeneous strategic relations and practices that shape who we are

and how we live" (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 14). Relevant to this research is the understanding that "governmental practices produce 'problems' as particular kinds of problems" (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 14). The creation of 'problems' then legitimizes government intervention and the implementation of policies to 'fix' the said 'problem' (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 16). Because of this, some political scientists argue that policy designs can be understood as the cause and producers of politics. Lowi claims that the options presented by policy "create the arena in which politics is played out, with different types of policy producing variations of pluralist or elitist politics" (as cited in Schneider and Ingram, 2003, p. 204). Schneider and Ingram build on Lowi's work, claiming that through political processes, messages are conveyed to members of a society "what government is supposed to do, which citizens are deserving (and which not), and what kinds of attitudes and participatory patterns are appropriate in a democratic society" (Schneider and Ingram, 1993, p. 340). Policy then becomes constrained in a feed forward effect, where policy designs are both shaping and being shaped by political institutions and the broader culture. This in turn, shapes "variable opportunity structures as well as targeted messaging from government that all interact to continually shape the social construction of the target population" (Pierce et al., 2014, p. 6). Social constructions of target populations will be explored more deeply as an analytical tool further on in the chapter.

2.1.2 U.S. Systems of Social Policy

 The collection of programs that fall under the realm of social policy and are provided by the state are often referred to as the 'welfare state' (Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2014, p. 4). This is derived from Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare state regime[2] types and "refers to the relationships among governments, markets, and families in the provision of welfare" (Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2014, p. 4). Within this typology, the United States is considered a liberal regime, also known as the residual welfare state. Within this system, labour force participation is relied upon as the main provisioner of social protection and an eligibility requirement for social programs (Esping-Anderson, 1990). It is important to note that Esping-Andersen utilizes the European definition of 'liberal' which "refers to promarket and individualistic ideas and institutions" (Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2014, p. 6). These values are largely considered 'conservative' in the United States.

As discussed in the previous section, there exists debate on whether the United States has ever had what could be classified as a welfare state. As O' Connor (2004, p. 21) explains, even at its height, the United States' "liberal welfare state" was nothing more than "a piecemeal and poorly structured entitlement system". Because of this debate, this research will prioritize the term social policy over welfare state with the understanding that while this paper primarily focuses on the state's

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2 Esping-Andersen's work has been criticized for his disregard of gender and his Eurocentric approach to both his models and how he classifies countries/regions (Lewis, 1992; Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2014).

role in social policy, social policy is made up of an intricate web of actors, institutions, and processes that are each integral in carrying out social provisioning for communities.

The United States has a complex social policy regime that is limited by factors such as the public/private overlap and the electoral system (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2014; Crepaz, 1998). There exist three main categories that social policy tends to fall under: social assistance (e.g., TANF), social insurance (e.g., Medicare, SSI), and universal benefits. In the U.S., access to benefits is highly predicated on an individual's participation in the formal labour market while social assistance programs such as TANF offer minimal transfers that rely on outdated poverty lines to determine eligibility (Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2014; Brady and Destro, 2014). Alleviation of poverty is further thwarted by the conditions of these programs that results in families rarely receiving direct financial assistance, the granting of minimal transfers which are not adequate to lift families out of poverty, and the penalization of families who fail to meet extensive work requirements (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2019). Borne out of the perversity thesis and a fear that people will cease to seek out 'productive' work in the formal labour market if their needs are met through government transfers, these conditions exacerbate cyclical poverty and stigmatization of the poor (Block and Somers, 2003).

The United States' social policy system actively commodifies its population as policies are based on increasing market participation (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 111). Commodification refers to processes that sequester the value of a citizen and their access to benefits based on their contribution in the formal market (Lewis, 1997, p. 164; Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 111). Within a social policy system where only those already steeped in poverty are eligible for assistance, being a recipient of government assistance becomes a source of social stigma (Mettler and Walker, 2014; Schneider and Ingram, 1993). Class political dualism emerges in this environment, exacerbating social stratification and creating further isolation between the lower and middle class (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 111). Through the social construction of target populations, social policies determine who qualifies as a member of the political community and "can influence citizens' sense of their own or others' civic status, conveying notions of deservingness" (Mettler and Walker, 2014, p. 629). The consequences of social constructions of target populations will be explored more in the analytical framework below.

2.2 Methodology

This research utilizes critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to explore the underlying ideologies and common-sense assumptions that are prevalent in the discourse on social policy from the 2019-2020 presidential debates. CDA employs an interpretive research approach, highlighting the reiterative process that occurs during qualitative research (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2015). The flexibility of interpretive research allows for an abductive logic of inquiry where "understanding and concepts are allowed (indeed, expected) to emerge from the data as the research progresses" (Yanow and Schwartz-

Shea, 2015, p. xix). Following interpretive methods, this research was shaped by the data and the meaning-makings that emerged from the analysis such as the relevance of social citizenship due to the prevalence of discourse on redistribution, decommodification/defamilialization, and social/economic rights amongst the Democrat candidates. This analysis was also shaped by the use of social constructions related to 'deserving'/'undeserving, individual responsibility, and austerity during the debates.

CDA explores social issues through the analysis of linguistic manifestations of power (Fairclough, 1989; Mullet, 2018). As previously mentioned, discourse refers to the social process of meaning-making that occurs through language use (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 2009). Through the lens of CDA, control over discourse is understood as a struggle of power or, in other words, a struggle over which discourse becomes 'hegemonic' (Fairclough, 1993). Underpinning these discourses are ideologies which can be defined as "a system of ideas, values and beliefs oriented to explaining a given political order, legitimizing existing hierarchies and power relations and preserving group identities" (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002, p. 187). Those in power treat these belief systems as universal or commonplace, obscuring the power relations that are working to uphold them (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough, 1993). Fairclough refers to these beliefs as 'common-sense assumptions' and explains that they are often naturalized into the social fabric of a society to the point that people utilize them subconsciously (Fairclough, 1989, p. 2).

Post-structuralism complements this analysis' endeavour to 'make strange' the naturalization of power in social policy discourse. With a focus on the plurality of practices, our comprehension of reality is understood by post-structuralism as being socially constructed and open to challenge. Instead of assuming the *being* of 'things', post-structural theory provides the lens for us to explore the *becoming* of things that is constituted through social constructions and discourse. This opens up room for the contestation of assumptions, for if things are 'made' it is then possible that they can be 'unmade' (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 15). Acknowledging the plurality of practices challenges the One-World World (OWW) that is advanced through Eurocentrism. The One-World World, perpetuated by the liberal belief in universalism, has led to Western countries deeming their capitalist, rationalist, patriarchal, White world-making practices as the 'only' way of being and has resulted in the domination, subjectification, and erasure of other worlds (Escobar, 2016, Nijs, 2016).

This research specifically employs the use of post-structuralism's approach to policy analysis. Policy in this sense is understood as not being an objective, self-evident response to social issues, but as "problematizations that produce 'problems'" (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 6). Problematizations put forth by the presidential candidates (regarding social policy) are understood as being rooted in "taken-for-granted knowledges" whose "underlying assumptions and their implications" must be explored (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 6). Combined with Freeman's (2012, p. 13) definition of policy as "a shared understanding of a problem", we can conceptualize policies as 'shared problematizations'. While there are a multitude of events, actors, and practices that shape and

reproduce the ideologies and social constructs that underlie social policy, this research will focus specifically on the discursive event of the presidential primary debates.

Combining CDA and post-structuralism enables this research to explore the processes of *becoming* and power relations at work which shape social policy in the United States and the candidates' varying discourse on it, opening the ability to challenge that which has been 'made' and the systems of social policy that have been naturalized (Mullet, 2018, p. 119). CDA theorists believe that by raising people's awareness of how language "contributes to the domination of some people by others", not only aids in their own emancipation but can also serve as a catalyst for resistance and change (Fairclough, 1989, p. 1). In this way, language can be both socially reproductive and socially transformative By making clear the ideologies and common-sense assumptions (social constructs) that politicians draw upon, this analysis will endeavour to identify which discourses used by politicians result in the reproduction of existing power relations and those which offer a counter-narrative that could lead to social transformation. Post-structuralism then enables this research to question whether arguments that policy is crafted around constructs holds true in the face of these counter-narratives of resistance.

2.2.1 Text Selection

For this research, the presidential primary debate transcripts were chosen for textual analysis. In order to give equal attention to both parties' debates, two Democrat and two Republican presidential primary debates were selected for a detailed linguistic analysis. Because the current president, Donald J. Trump, is a Republican and running for re-election, there were limited debates amongst his Republican challengers. Considering this, only three debates were held for the Republican primary candidates[3]. Trump declined to participate in any of them. Business Insider, Forbes Under 30 Summit, and Politico each held a debate in 2019. Out of the three, only Business Insider and Forbes had complete recordings of their events available which naturally narrowed down the Republican debate selection to these two. During the Business Insider debate only two of the Republican candidates were present, Governor Weld and former Congressman Walsh. At the Forbes Under 30 Summit, all three candidates were present which included former Governor Sanford.

Twelve debates were sanctioned by the Democratic National Committee (DNC), six took place in 2019 and six in 2020. The two Democrat debates were selected for analysis based on their representation of the diverse viewpoints of the candidates and on the degree to which they focused on social policy issues. The MSNBC and Washington Post debate held in 2019 was chosen for analysis as it was one of the final Democrat debates before the field was narrowed down to only white candidates. This factor was considered based on the importance of representation in a political system

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3 A summary of the presidential primary candidates who participated in the debates analysed is included in Appendix 1

that has been historically dominated by white politicians and the fact that racial inequality was a main theme in the Democrat debates. The debate was also late enough in the primaries to highlight the key contenders who appealed to the audience. The CBS debate held in 2020 was selected as it was the second to last primary debate before the candidates were narrowed down to the final contenders, Biden and Sanders. This debate reflected the candidates who captured the most support and presumably, had the most compelling messages. The popularity of the candidates and their messages was seen as a reflection of the common-sense assumptions/ideologies that resonated most with the audience and as an indicator of U.S. Americans current stance on the government's role in social policy.

2.2.2 CDA Methods

The initial two stages of analysing the various discourses on the government's role in social policy in the presidential debates were done using processes of coding and categorisation. In the first stage, codes were created to pinpoint the proposed policies, concepts, and values that were considered pertinent to the discourse on social policy. The proposed programs that were coded included health care, education, and universal basic income (UBI). During the analysis, paid family leave and universal childcare emerged as relevant codes to include. Concepts of spending, debt, and deficit were coded to ascertain the discourses about government spending on social programs. In addition, codes based on the concepts of power, justice, class, gender, and inequality were created to explore processes tied to social citizenship such as social stratification and social rights. Actors, processes and nominalizations were coded in order to explore how different policies, institutions, and beliefs were naturalized in the debates.

After this initial coding, the resulting quotations were explored through the themes of government responsibility, rights, needs, mechanisms, and target populations. These themes were chosen based on the desire to ascertain the degree to which counter-narratives of social citizenship including citizenship-based entitlements, decommodification/defamilialization, and the minimization social stratification were furthered or limited through the multiple discourses presented.

In addition to coding and categorisation, the What is the Problem Represented to be? (WPR) method was used to analyse the selected texts. WPR is a method rooted in post-structuralism that aids the critical exploration of the production of 'problematizations' in "governmental policies and practices" as discussed above (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 13). Five of the seven WPR questions were employed in the analysis of the candidates' discourse on the government's role in social policy and their own proffered policy solutions[4]. The WPR questions used for analysis were chosen based on their ability to assist in answering the main research question and sub-questions. These questions were used to identify the main problematizations candidates identified as policy concerns, to pinpoint

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4 The five guiding questions used are summarised in the chart on Appendix 2

the underlying ideologies and common-sense assumptions, ascertain what was left unproblematic in the discourse, and determine how the hegemonic discourses on social policy were disrupted.

2.2.3 Analytical Tools

Social Citizenship

Social citizenship is viewed in this research as both a tool of analysis and as integral to fostering an equitable, just society. T. H. Marshall (as cited in Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 105) made the case that social citizenship should be the guiding principle of a welfare state. This research understands citizenship as a "normatively produced as an exclusionary concept, with rights and belonging to a fixed status of nation-statehood gained through political struggle" (Askins, 2016, p. 524). T.H. Marshall believed that the foundation to ensuring social citizenship is the granting of social rights. Decommodification and the minimization of social stratification were two ways that Esping-Andersen (1990) believed this could be achieved.

From the concepts of social citizenship and defamilialization, citizen-based entitlements can emerge. Citizenship-based entitlements are based on the belief that social security and the provisioning of basic needs are rights that should be based on citizenship alone (Chhachhi, 2009, p. 12). In the quest for equity, these measures must also advance recognition, redistribution, and representation which are crucial to creating parity of participation[5] in a society (Chhachhi, 2011, p. 304). A society that understands the meeting of basic needs as a right may then be able to value the important role of the state in providing social provisioning (Chhachhi, 2009).

Decommodification/Defamilialization

In a capitalist society where workers are forced to sell their labour for profit, decommodification entails the degree to which "citizens can freely, and without potential loss of job, income, or general welfare, opt out of work when they themselves consider it necessary." (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 23). Decommodification creates an environment where individuals can step away from the formal labour market when they need to in order to care for family, their health, and when other life issues arise.

Defamilialization goes a step beyond decommodification by bringing in the perspective of gender and the relationship between paid work, unpaid work, and welfare (Lewis, 1997). Though the role of women in the unpaid care economy is crucial to the functioning of a society, in capitalist societies government often choose to value and protect capitalist production and the formal economy

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5 Parity of participation refers to the idea that in order to have a just society, all people should be able to participate equally and fully "on terms of parity in social life" and thus any obstacles to this equal participation must be removed (Fraser, as cited in Chhachhi, 2011, p. 304).

over the safeguarding of human beings and valuable processes of social reproduction[6] that occur in the unpaid care economy (Elson, 2012). This exacerbates gender disparities and perpetuates the undervaluation of spheres considered 'feminine'. Defamilialization can be understood as the ability of individuals (who have historically been and are still today primarily women) to choose between the right to care and the right not to care (Lewis, 1997, p. 173). Rather than assuming what is "good" for women, the notion of defamilialization recognizes women's complex position within social policy measures and that the right to engage in both paid/unpaid work or to not engage in paid/unpaid work should both be considered (Lewis, 1997, p. 173). The concepts of decommodification and defamilialization will be utilized to gauge the degree to which the hegemony of market reliance is disrupted.

Universalism

Universal social policies emphasize the responsibility a state has towards its population in protecting rights based on citizenship. Challenging the discourse of efficiency, incentives, and cost-benefit that coincide with a residual approach, universalism points to the economic and social externalities that factor into the well-being of a society that are largely ignored in residual discourse (Kabeer, 2014). Policy regimes are never consigned as solely 'universal' or 'targeted' but instead lie somewhere on a continuum between the two (Mkwandire, 2005, p. 22). Ultimately, a universal approach challenges the stigmatization of the poor, racial biases, and androcentrism that are entrenched in the social constructions of target populations. Encouraging cross-class engagement, universal policies bolster social cohesion and foster the valuation of 'care' within a society (Mkwandire, 2005). In this research, a universal approach based on concepts of social citizenship is an antidote to the reproduction of stratification and commodification that is carried out in the targeted social programs that serve as the foundation for the U.S. social policy regime.

Politics of Needs

In asserting that governmental social provisioning of basic needs is a right of social citizenship, the recognition of the politics of needs is integral to this analysis. Fraser and Gordon (1994, p. 310) explain, "a crucial element of politics, then, is the struggle to define social reality and to interpret people's inchoate aspirations and needs". Within patriarchal, capitalist societies boundaries between what are deemed the 'political', 'economic', 'domestic' and 'personal' spheres are reinforced,

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6 Social reproduction is defined as "the process by which all the main relations in the society are constantly recreated and perpetuated" (Mackintosh, as cited in Elson, 2012, p. 63).

depoliticizing a diverse array of matters and issues. These boundaries are not static, though, and are often challenged through oppositional needs-talk (Fraser, 1989, p. 300).

Fraser defines three struggles that take place within the politics of needs. (1) The struggle to have a need designated as a legitimate political claim, (2) the struggle over who defines a need and consequently, how it should be resolved, and (3) the struggle over the use or denial of provisions that would alleviate a need (Fraser, 1989, p. 294). Within stratified, pluralist welfare-state societies, "needs-talk appears as a site of struggle where groups with unequal discursive (and non-discursive) resources compete to establish as hegemonic their respective interpretations of legitimate social needs" (Fraser, 1989, p. 296). While expert and oppositional needs discourse politicize needs, reprivatization discourse strives to depoliticize them, often utilizing components of oppositional needs discourse while simultaneously undermining them (Fraser, 1989, p. 303). Politics of needs will be utilized to ascertain these sites of struggle that occur within the discourse used by the presidential candidates and the media, complementing the CDA and post-structural analysis of policy problematizations and social construction of target populations.

Social Constructions of Targeted Populations

Social constructions of target populations are intrinsically tied to politics of needs discourse and this research's analysis of the *becoming* of things that is constituted in political discourse. The choice of target populations in policies is based on value choice and power dynamics (Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Schneider and Ingram, 2003). Schneider and Ingram (1993) came up with four types of target populations: advantaged, contenders, dependents, and deviant. These social constructions are based on the political and social power of the group and whether they are perceived negatively or positively within a society. In the United States, target populations are largely based on the common-sense assumptions tied to constructions of 'deserving'/'undeserving'.

Social constructions of target populations are key tools in political rhetoric. Aware of these constructions' power and dependent on their personal ability to convince the electorate of the validity of their policies, public officials tend to choose or manipulate target populations in a way that will garner the most public support (Schneider and Ingram, 1993). Positively constructed groups are reaffirmed in their status as 'valuable' members of society, while negatively viewed groups often internalize messages about their perceived inferiority, impacting their motivation and access to political participation (Fraser, 1989; Schneider and Ingram, 1993). In order to advance parity of participation in a society, positive constructions of target groups and the equalization of political power must be sought after in policy design (Schneider and Ingram, 1993).

The concepts and theories explored in this chapter lays out the framework for this research's attempt to identify how common-sense assumptions tied to perceptions of the government's role in social policy are reproduced or challenged in the presidential candidates' discourse. CDA and post-

structuralism facilitate the ability to unearth processes of power in social policy discourse by 'making strange' strange candidates' representations of policy 'problems' and 'solutions', as well as identifying the underlying ideologies, common-sense assumptions and silences. Utilizing politics of needs and social constructions of target populations enables us to pinpoint discourses that result in the social reproduction of power while the theory of social citizenship brings to light socially transformative discourses through concepts of decommodification/defamilialization, redistribution, and citizenship-based entitlements.

Chapter 3: Deconstructing Context

This chapter will employ the dialectical-relation approach to CDA by locating the discursive event of the presidential primary debates and candidates' discourse on social policy within their contextual environment. To this end, this chapter will explore the historical, cultural, political, and institutional background of U.S. social policy.

3.1 Historical and cultural analysis of social policy in the U.S.

Common-sense assumptions tied to the notion of 'welfare' dictate and limit many U.S. Americans' conceptualization of the state's role in social policy, largely due to the social constructs of 'deserving'/'undeserving', individual responsibility, and austerity. In the endeavor to make clear and understand the impact of the common-sense assumptions that guide U.S. social policy today, the historical, political, and moral connotations that have been tied to the concept of 'welfare' are important to understand. We must start at the roots of the United States' social policy if we are to understand the branches that exist today.

3.1.1 Roots of Social Policy

One of the most influential concepts that underlie U.S. social policy began in Great Britain, the concept of 'deserving'/'undeserving' poor which was supported through the social construction of *dependency* as explored by Fraser and Gordon (1994). The social construction of 'deserving'/'undeserving' poor was brought about through the 19th-century New Poor Law which was passed in response to the Old Poor Laws (Block and Somers, 2003). The Old Poor Laws, passed in 1795 in Speenhamland, were a paradigm shift from the poor relief of the time which was designated only for those who were considered 'non-able-bodied': the elderly, the sick, and dependents. The Old Poor Laws instituted relief for those considered 'able-bodied', those who were physically able to work but were unable to due to "cyclical or long-term unemployment" (Chhachhi and Truong, 2009, p. 6). These measures ensured aid-in-wages to the poor that covered the gap between wages and the cost of bread (Block and Somers, 2003, p. 286).

The New Poor Law was passed in 1834 as a counterattack against the inclusion of the 'able-bodied' that the Old Poor Laws allowed for. The New Poor Law based its legitimacy on faulty surveys, in which the clergy and the elite confirmed the perceived immorality of the poor. Consequently, it was surmised that Speenhamland and the Old Poor Law were "wrong-headed intrusions of state power into self-regulating labor markets" (Block and Somers, 2003, p. 287). This verdict became the basis for the perversity thesis which surmises that "well-intentioned policies that provide poor assistance will harm recipients by substituting perverse incentives in place of market mechanisms that teach the

poor to work hard and exercise sexual restraint" (Block and Somers, 2003, p. 285). Under the New Poor Law, the poor were perceived as a problem to be solved and as deviant (Block and Somers, 2003). The poor were divided into the aforementioned categories of 'able-bodied' or 'non-able bodied', also known as the 'undeserving' or 'deserving' poor. This led to the classification of the poor based on physical and moral categorical divides (Chhachhi and Truong, 2009, p. 6).

The notion of the 'deserving'/'undeserving' poor was further bolstered by the influence of the Calvin work ethic. In the UK and later on, the United States, Calvinists taught that one's work was a calling from God (Hudson and Coukos, 2005). Conscientious, hard work and self-control brought about material blessing and conversely, idleness was a direct failure to carry out God's will and would result in loss. By the mid-19th century the Calvin work ethic had transformed from a religious to a cultural value. Removed from the mitigating effects of religious and civic obligations that Protestant ethics also espoused, the Calvin work ethic became a prime tool for the wheels of capitalism as work became defined in the minds of many as solely formal labor market participation (Chhachhi, 2011; Hudson and Coukos, 2005). These common-sense assumptions have supported the belief in individual responsibility that holds sway in the minds of so many U.S. Americans.

Fraser and Gordon's (1994) study of the genealogy of dependency sheds clarity on how perceptions of welfare have been juxtaposed with market labor, disproportionately impacting women and people of color. According to Fraser and Gordon (1994, p. 311), *dependency* is an ideological word that has guided perceptions of welfare. In pre industrial England, under the feudal system, the term *dependency* was understood to mean a 'normal' social relation of subordination, specifically reliance on another for work, where "subjection, not citizenship was the norm" (Fraser and Gordon, 1994, p. 313). The rise of democratic revolutions and the white workingmen's movement to gain political rights in the 18th and 19th century led *dependency* in the political and sociolegal register to be considered unconscionable for white men under new values of citizenship. *Dependency* shifted from meaning a reliance upon someone else for wages, to wage labor becoming a symbol of independence. While economic dependency was normalized, sociolegal and political dependency was recognized as appropriate for white women and with new constructions of race, people of color, but despicable for white men (Fraser and Gordon, 1994, p. 315). These constructions brought about the moral/psychological register which removed the acknowledgement of social relations and instead posited *dependency* as a "defect of individual character" (Fraser and Gordon, 1994, p. 320) and under the sociolegal register to being assigned to "an anomalous, highly stigmatized status of deviant and incompetent individuals" (Fraser and Gordon, 1994, p. 331). The conceptualization of *dependency* has determined many U.S. Americans perceptions of who is considered 'deserving'.

3.1.2 Early Days of Social Policy

Skocpol (1992) argues that while many define the United States' welfare state as laggard in comparison to its European counterparts, the U.S. had universal social programs early on that were

based on the protection of soldiers and mothers. The Civil War pension system was "America's first large-scale, nationally funded, old-age and disability system" (Skocpol, 1992, p. 1). In the early 1900s, workers' rights advocates attempted to expand the Civil War pension system into universal publicly funded benefits but were thwarted by the elite, middle-class who perceived the pension system as corrupt and wasteful (Skocpol, 1992, p. 2). When the pension system ceased to exist, the state became essentially inactive in providing social protection measures until the Great Depression (Skocpol, 1992, p. 3).

One exception to this is maternal policies. Even as women were denied political rights until white women gained the right to vote in 1920, federations of local women's clubs successfully led initiatives to implement maternalist policies including mother's pensions, minimum wage regulation, and the creation of the federal Children's Bureau (Skocpol, 1992, p. 2). These women's clubs championed the idea that the morality and care ascribed to the domestic 'separate sphere' designated to women should be moved into the public sphere through governmental policies designed to help women and families (Skocpol, 1992). According to Skocpol (1992, p. 18), the presence of the Civil War pension and maternalist policies challenges the narrative that liberalism, individualism, and culture/ideological values were the deciding factors in inhibiting comprehensive federal social policies. Instead, the trifecta of religious virtue, social housekeeping, and public virtue have provided justification for various governmental social policies throughout U.S. history (Skocpol, 1992, p. 21).

Folbre (1995) argues that the success of the Civil War pensions, better called the Union Army pensions, is not an example of a successful universal federal pension program as Skocpol claims. Instead, it was a regionally applied program that denied Confederate veterans' eligibility and received its funds from agriculture tariffs that came primarily from the South (Folbre, 1995, p. 871). Furthermore, racial discrimination and eugenic theories were prevalent in both the early labor reform and the women's movement, with benefits going primarily to white workingmen and widows. Folbre explains that because of these disparities in access and inclusion, the origins of social policies in the U.S. lies not in the provisions for soldiers and mothers, but in "invidious distinctions among its citizens. These distinctions, only partially overcome by the Social Security Act of 1935, permanently weakened all collective efforts for social provision" (Folbre, 1995, p. 874).

3.1.3 The Rise of (Social) Liberalism

In the United States, the ideological beliefs in individual responsibility and 'deserving'/'undeserving' did not go unchallenged. In the late 19th century the immersion of a new liberalism, or social liberalism became an important part of the debate on 'welfare' (Gaus, Cortland, and Schmidtz, 2018). Liberalism, now known as classic liberalism, was predicated on the belief that an economic system based on private property and the free market embodied and protected individual liberty. Social liberals broke off from classic liberalism as they saw the instability of the market and believed that property rights fostered "an unjust inequality of power" which made government

regulation necessary in order to address such inequality (Gaus, Cortland, and Schmidtz, 2018, n.p.). Other movements during this time, such as 'labor republicanism', challenged the normalization of economic dependency through a surge of class consciousness (Skocpol, 1992). Oppositional discourses such as these have endeavored to bring attention to the social relations of subordination into the discussion of *dependency*.

The effectiveness of the private charitable aid and public-private partnerships that served as the main vehicles of social policy after the Civil War pension program ended began to be questioned under the massive economic crisis of the Great Depression in the 1930s (Danielson and Stryker, 2014, p. 136). This opened the pathway for a surge of federally funded social insurance and public assistance policies emerged through the New Deal. The Social Security Act of 1935 became the "framework for nationwide public social provision" (Skocpol, 1992, p. 4). Even as it expanded federal social protection measures, the New Deal furthered the ideology of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor through the creation of a two-track welfare system (Fraser and Gordon, 1994). The first-track programs included unemployment and old age insurance which were considered contributory, funded through taxes citizens paid through their participation in the labor market. Those who were eligible for these programs, primarily white men, as women and people of color were banned from being recipients, were thus considered "deserving" and were exempt from being considered *dependents* (Fraser and Gordon, 1994).

The second track was made up of public assistance programs, the largest of which was the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), later called the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). These programs were designed to separate out the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' through means-testing and other surveillance measures. As the money for these programs came from general tax revenues, recipients were viewed as falling under the stigmatized view of *dependency*-those who were reliant on 'unearned' welfare aid. To this day, the social constructions created through the New Deal are seen in the way "most Americans today will distinguish between 'welfare' and 'non-welfare' forms of public provision and see only the former as creating dependency" (Fraser and Gordon, 1994, p. 322).

Within this environment, the notion of dependency still held sway and remained both feminized and racialized (Fraser and Gordon, 1994, p. 323). Groups such as the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), an organization of women welfare claimants who organized in the mid-1960s, strove to challenge the negative association of welfare with *dependency* (Fraser and Gordon, 1994, p. 329). The women of the NWRO brought attention to the value of their domestic labor and argued that the government assistance they received surmounted to claiming their rights. The work of the NWRO led to a movement of "poverty lawyers and radical intellectuals to develop a legal and political-theoretical basis for welfare as an entitlement and right" (Fraser and Gordon, 1994, p. 329).

During the New Deal and the Great Society of the 1970s, the American welfare system experienced some of its most pronounced expansions (O'Connor, 2004). Yet even as new social programs such as Medicare and Medicaid were created, private health and pension benefits grew exponentially. Beland, Howard, and Morgan (2014, p. 7) assert this seemingly dual consciousness in U.S. social policy is crucial to our "understanding of the complex and fragmented social policy system that remains in place to this day". Both the U.S. American presidents during these eras, Roosevelt and Johnson, believed in the government's responsibility and ability to alleviate poverty. They were also influenced by a decided bias against social assistance programs that had a perceived potential for creating *dependency*. O'Connor (2004) explains that the mixture of a strong presence of liberalism and welfare expansion during the Great Society era led to the creation of the term 'liberal welfare state' to describe the U.S. policy system. Many liberals in the 1960s agreed with Johnson's fear of dependency and focused on government assistance that encouraged employment and seemed to uphold 'American values'. These beliefs were defined as opportunity liberalism. Conversely, those who ascribed to entitlement liberalism argued for the guaranteed income for the poor during this period (O'Connor, 2004, p. 21). Under opposition to the social liberal movement, the differences between entitlement liberalism and opportunity liberalism were overlooked as they were aggregated under the title of 'liberalism'.

3.1.4 The Reign of "N"eoliberalism

In the late 1970s, conservatives crafted and pushed a discourse that caricatured (social) liberalism as disrespect for family values, the law, religion, and patriotism (O' Connor, 2004). Consequently, during the 1980s and 1990s proposed policies that were considered liberal faced greater resistance and the attachment of 'liberal' to 'welfare state' gave the 'liberal welfare state' a negative connotation in the minds of many (O'Connor, 2004). The depiction of (social) liberalism as "un-American" by conservatives coincided with the emergence of "N"eoliberalism and a surge of resistance to poverty initiatives (O'Connor, 2004; Wax 2007).

Neoliberalism can take different forms depending on the context one is studying. In the United States, "N"eoliberalism is seen in the espousal of market-based policies and neoconservatism (Ong, 2006). "N"eoliberals advanced a narrative of government inefficiency and failure in the delivery of social policy measures, instead calling for policies of austerity, deregulation, and privatization (Hackworth, 2012; Kabeer, 2014). The message that U.S. Americans receive from the media and politicians is that austerity is necessitated by the sovereign debt crisis, caused by states over-spending (Blyth, 2013, p. 5). Blyth (2013) argues that the current perceptions of the sovereign debt crisis emerged due to the government bailing out banks, rather than inefficient social policy measures. Since the 1970s, there has been a push and pull between the "politics of austerity and attempts to expand social benefits to fill gaps in the American welfare state" resulting in a "complicated mixture of expansion and retrench" (Beland, Howard, Morgan, 2014, p. 7).

The Cold War has also had significant ideological impacts on social policy in the United States. The rise of authoritarian governments under the banner of communism fertilized the discourse of an ideological battleground where the "free world" of liberal nation-states was pitted against "fascist" state control. Socialism became synonymous with communism and authoritarian governments in the minds of many U.S. Americans (Slevin, 2019). Today, government interventions in the realm of social policy that would provide provisions for more than a targeted 'deserving' are often labeled as 'socialist', drawing on common-sense assumptions that are based in a fear of authoritarianism.

In 1994, the Republican party experienced a renewed rise in power (Hackworth, 2012, p. 5). Under a call for welfare reform to "eliminate fraud and to prevent 'welfare dependency'", Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act in 1996 (Hudson and Coukos, 2005, p. 1). According to Hudson and Coukos (2005, p. 1) this was "the most dramatic change in public welfare since the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935". This bill replaced the AFDC with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, implementing work requirements, sanctions, and lifetime limits as conditions of eligibility for government social assistance (Hudson and Coukos, 2005; Moffitt, 2008). The racialized understanding of welfare recipients was also perpetuated by Ronald Reagan's use of the 'lazy welfare queen' stereotype to describe Black single mothers who received government assistance, as well as the media's racialized depiction of the poor and welfare recipients ((Henry, Reyna, and Weiner, 2004, p. 35; Western Michigan University, 2000, p. 202).

The disciplinary, paternalistic trend enacted under TANF continues to dictate the norms of state social assistance programs. Yet, we continue to see the tension between politics of austerity and individual responsibility and the push for the entrenchment of notions of social citizenship in U.S. social policy play out in discourse. From the start of its inception, social policy in the United States has been largely rooted in various forms of liberalism and has been riddled with the concepts of the 'deserving'/'undeserving' poor, individual responsibility, and austerity. Continuously and to this day, the negative construction of 'undeserving' has been ascribed to the poor, women, and people of color. These common-sense assumptions have proved to be have a powerful hold on many U.S. Americans beliefs about social policy It is within this historical context that we will be able to better understand the common-sense assumptions that are utilized in the 2019-2020 presidential primary debates and position the question of whether they will retain their hegemony.

3.2 Federalism: Political systems and their impacts on social policy

Political systems are one of the main arenas where social policy plays out. Understanding the institutions, systems, and processes that constrain the crafting and implementation of policies is crucial to our ability to recognize both the naturalization and resistance of power within social policy discourse. In the U.S. government, the structures of federalism and a presidential government disperse political power across diverse institutions, creating multiple points of influence. This results in a more porous system, weakening parties and making the system more vulnerable to the influence of special interest. Hall and Wayman (1990, p. 797) explain that "members (of Congress) are more responsive to organized business interest within their district than unorganized voters even when voters have strong preferences and the issue at stake is salient".

This dispersion of power also increases the potential for veto points which can make it difficult to enact significant policy change. Unlike any other advanced industrial nations, Congress is a parliamentary body that is "so powerful yet so fragmented and porous in its institutional setup" (Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2014, p. 8). It is important to note that veto points are not inherently negative. For example, multiparty systems such as consensus democracies that allow access to political power to many groups in society often rank the highest in welfare spending. Examples of such systems include Sweden and the Netherlands. But these systems offer collective veto points and with a higher representation of a diversity of social groups, are often more competent at responding to diverse welfare issues. Conversely, the United States' presidential system creates competitive veto points as "different political actors operate through separate institutions with mutual veto powers" (Crepaz, 1998, p. 64). The separation of power between the executive and legislative branches often discourages cooperation, instead centering political strategizing over the pursuit of common interest to dictate interactions between these entities. This system has the "greatest potential to reach deadlock, immobilization and government shutdowns" (Crepaz, 1998, p. 64).

The majoritarian political system also limits the political power of Americans as it is "often quite narrow, exclusionary, and in most cases unrepresentative of a majority of the people, though they may carry legislative majorities" (Crepaz, 1998, p. 66). The hegemonic control of a two-party system reduces the likelihood that the resulting government will reflect the desires of the median voter (Huber and Powell, 1994, p. 324). In contrast, multiparty systems such as those in the Netherlands or Brazil include the participation of more members of society and grant more access to minority groups (Crepaz, 1998)

The separation and limitations of power inherent in the U.S. electoral system has "prevented the introduction of radical welfare policies", through processes such as the rule of the political and wealthy elite in the Senate until the 20th century and the role the U.S. courts have played in vetoing redistribution measures (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004, p. 79). Further, having an electoral system that is based on geographically based districts tends to make legislators prioritize geographically targeted spending programs versus proportional systems which have national districts and tend to produce more universal benefits (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004, p. 78). This, coupled with decentralization and the

fact that "many public programs that have redistributive impacts are taken locally" often results in major regional inequalities (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004, p. 89). This decentralization design of thousands of small localities is no accident, but a reflection of politicians who have sought to keep spending down by consigning it to the states. While decentralization can have some benefits and is seen by those who distrust government intervention as protection against a flawed system and excessive taxes, decentralization is coupled with shrinking government size and consequently, its role in social provisioning (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004).

These distinctive traits of the U.S. American political institutions are the stage upon which social policy plays out and the resulting barriers that have made it difficult to enact any social policy changes that are more than incremental (Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2004).

3.3 Political debates as a discursive event

Situating the presidential debates as a genre enables us to highlight the linguistic choices made by presidential candidates and how they impact discourse. Fairclough (2009, p. 3) defines genres as "semiotic ways of acting and interacting...part of doing a job, or running a country, is interacting semiotically or communicatively in certain ways, and such activities have distinctive sets of genres associated with them." The patterns of language employed during a specific event (genre) and who has control over such an event are often where "power is exercised and challenged" (Wodak, 2001, p. 11). Candidates' styles are heavily influenced by the genre in which presidential debates are situated (Fairclough, 2009).

Presidential debates function as both a job interview, where politicians seek to convince viewers that they are the best person for the role, and as entertainment (McGuire, Garavan, Cunningham, and Duffy, 2014). The entertainment aspect of presidential debates amplifies the importance of a candidate's image-based rhetoric (Tan and Wee, 2002). The first presidential debate in the United States took place on September 26, 1960 between Democrat candidate John F. Kennedy and Republican candidate Vice President Richard M. Nixon (Schroeder, 2016, p. 1). Presidential debates are not unique to the United States. Countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Korea, and New Zeeland have also participated in the practice (Benoit, Hansen, and Verser, 2003, p. 335).

Debates significantly influence issue knowledge, issue salience, issue preference, agenda setting, understanding of a candidate's character, and vote preference (Benoit, Hansen, and Verser, 2003; Benoit, McKinney, and Holbert, 2001). Candidates rely on emotional triggers, often provoked through the use of common-sense assumptions, to further agenda setting (Cho and Ha, 2012). Considering this, the choices made by the networks on which 'problems' are raised as pertinent issues

and the directions that candidates' take in how they frame these 'problems' are important social events which can determine what the key policies or 'issues' are that Americans understand and perceive as the most salient (Boydstun, Glazier, and Pietryka, 2013). Because presidential debates occur as a specific social event, the discursive elements used to discuss social policy during the debates have unique, yet oftentimes predictable, characteristics.

Chapter 4: Ideologies

This chapter will explore the discourse of the Republican and Democrat candidates to ascertain the level of responsibility they ascribe that the government has in the arena of social policy, and the common-sense assumptions that underlie these representations. This is explored with the guidance of WPR by identifying the key problematizations and proffered solutions, as well as the silences and underlying ideologies within these framings. The varying discourses utilized concerning government programs such as health care, universal basic income (UBI), paid family leave, universal childcare, housing, education, taxes, and jobs were explored in order to feed into our understanding of the macro-level message on the government's perceived role in social policy.

4.1 Positioning Government Responsibility

4.1.1 Democrats

Problematizations of inequality

During the Democrat debates, government responsibility in the social arena was positioned around the need to address problems that arise from injustice and inequality. These terms are used almost interchangeably, with inequality being equated to injustice. The Democrat candidates' emphasis on inequality and injustice perceived systemic failure and discrimination as barriers to parity of participation for specific portions of the populations, drawing on tenets of social liberalism.

Inequality is discussed by candidates along multiple lines: gender, class, race, and power with class and racial inequality highlighted more frequently. Democrat candidates, such as Yang, Warren, Klobuchar, and Harris, posited that the impacts of gender inequality are felt in the higher expectations and scrutiny women are subject to in the political realm, the reality "that women are not paid equal for equal work" which is exacerbated along racial lines, and the unpaid care work that women perform within the home that continues to go unvalued (Harris, as cited in CBS News, 2019, n.p.).

When it comes to class, inequality is framed as a juxtaposition between the rising wealth of the top percent of U.S. Americans as opposed to the struggles of the ordinary U.S. American. Inequality is being perpetuated by a rigged economy, "with three people owning more wealth than the bottom half of America" (Sanders, as cited in NBC News, 2019, n.p.). While half of U.S. Americans are living paycheck to paycheck (Sanders, as cited in CBS News, 2020, n.p.) and "far too many Americans have to fight like hell just to hold on to what they've got" (Buttigieg, as cited in NBC News, 2019, n.p.).

Racial inequality is conceptualized by the Democrats as a problem of unequal access and discrimination that has been advanced through policies and institutions in the United States. The

criminal justice system, the prison system, the War on Drugs, red-lining, gerrymandering, gentrification, the financial industry, the housing market, and voter suppression are named as specific policies or systems that require reform (CBS News, 2020; NBC News, 2019). Disparities in health, wealth, access to affordable housing, increased exposure to air and water pollution, and disproportionate imprisonment rates of Black and Latino U.S. Americans vs. white U.S. Americans are all discussed as the effects of these racist policies, institutions, and systems.

According to the Democrat candidates', a corrupt political system, or inequality of power, is blamed for inhibiting the potential for policy change that is expected and demanded by the U.S. American people. Candidates claim that the political system has been corrupted by unchecked corporate power and billionaires who have undue power over the political process (CBS News, 2020; NBC News, 2019). If there is any hope to address issues from health care to climate change, the corporations holding power and inhibiting change must have their stranglehold over the government broken. The inability to enact change is also blamed on party politics and infighting. These two 'problematizations' stress the institutional shortcomings that exist within U.S. American political systems in both the bi-partisan control of Congress and the vulnerability of the legislative branches to special interests (Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2014; Crepaz, 1998; Hall and Wayman, 1990; Huber and Powell, 1990)

Solutions: The antidote of justice

As a nominalization, justice is considered to be a moral imperative, yet the use of the noun obscures the verbs (processes) as well as supporting values that are being cast as just. During the debates, justice is used to name a plethora of problematizations including racial justice, gender justice, economic justice, reproductive justice, health care justice, educational justice, justice for children, justice for teachers, and a just taxation system (NBC News, 2019; CBS News 2020). The concept of justice by the Democrats is crafted around the beliefs that justice occurs through redistribution, the transformation of institutions, and the protection of rights.

As noted, the Democrat candidates posit that public and private institutions, as well as policies, must be transformed in order to address racial and class inequality (CBS News, 2020; NBC News, 2019). These transformations, Democrats posit, will come from ending harmful policies and engaging in redistributive measures. These arguments further social citizenship by placing the minimization of social stratification as a key concern in policy (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Redistribution of both resources and power is put forth as a main solution and moral necessity during the Democrat debates. While the value of redistribution as a tool to address inequities (caused specifically by issues of race, class, and gender) that exists within society seems to be an agreed upon common-sense assumption amongst the Democrat candidates, competing discourses emerge over the mechanisms and desired outcomes of redistribution. Because of this, the Democrat candidates'

discourse on social policy is layered, at times challenging the hegemonic discourse of market-based solutions and at other times, employing the same common-sense assumptions.

Democrat candidates such as Buttigieg, Bloomberg, Steyer, and Klobuchar are most vocal in their criticism of universal policies and utilize more common-sense assumptions related to austerity, individual responsibility and 'deserving'/'undeserving'. Klobuchar caricatures more expansive, universal policies as "broken promises that sound good on bumper stickers" (CBS News, 2020, n.p.). Buttiegieg continually asserts "let's talk about the math" (CBS News, 2019; NBC News, 2020). While Steyer claims, "Bernie Sander's analysis is right. The difference is, I don't like his solutions. I don't believe that a government takeover of large parts of the economy makes any sense for working people or for families", drawing on the common-sense assumption that social policy equates government intervention which impedes the perfect balance of market competition and subsequent societal thriving (CBS News, 2020, n.p.).

This naturalization of austerity arguments treats it as an objective, rational approach, obfuscating the *becoming* that occurs through the choices that are made in social policy which are based on values and ideologies (Reisman, 2001). As Elson and Cagatay (2000, p. 1359) point out, "national budgets reflect choices that governments have made, but more fundamentally they reflect the values and the claims made on resources by various social groups, i.e., the balance of power within a society". A silence within candidates' discourse on limited resources, is that austerity is connected to political processes of distribution rather than merely "an economic problem of accounting" (Blyth, 2013, p. 14).

Some candidates, including Steyer, Booker, and Biden, more readily use language that pulls on tenets of opportunity liberalism. The use of 'opportunity' is employed during the Democrat debates when candidates speak of populations who they believe have been excluded, either through racial discrimination or barriers to social mobility (CBS News, 2020; NBC News, 2019). In their acknowledgement of market inequalities, some candidates attach the idea of 'opportunity' to solutions mainly targeted at providing PoC and women entrepreneurs with access to resources for their businesses. This common-sense assumption is directly related to the belief that *dependency* must be avoided and subsequently, government assistance must come in forms which encourage employment and seems to uphold 'American values' (O'Connor, 2004, p. 21). The responsibility of the government within this narrative is to push people towards 'productive' labor.

Conversely, the hegemony of market-based solutions and liberal thought is challenged by candidates such as Warren, Sanders, Yang, Harris, and at times, Klobuchar, through the presentation of policies that are rooted in tenets of social citizenship. Policies such as Medicare for All, universal childcare, paid family leave, student debt forgiveness, and UBI (coined the Freedom dividend by Yang) are universal entitlements based on citizenship alone.

4.1.2 Republicans

Problematizations: The sovereign debt crisis and government intervention

While the Democrat debates are rife with dialogue about specific policies and programs that candidates put forth as avenues that would fulfill their perception of the government's role in social policy, the Republican debates are noticeably silent. This silence reflects Republicans' beliefs about the government's role in social policy: the less they do, the better. Or, as Walsh responded when asked about the government's role in addressing the inflated cost of college tuition, "I believe the government needs to get out of the way" (Forbes, 2019, n.p.). Guided by the ideologies of austerity and individual responsibility, the Republican candidates focus on the problematizations of debt and government intervention.

In the Republican candidates' discourse on debt, it is framed as a problematization that subsumes other issues. Sanford claims that "There are two extinction events for all of us as Americans. Climate change and the American debt" (Forbes, 2019, n.p.). Walsh casts the sovereign debt crisis as a problem that is "bankrupting future generations" (Forbes 2019; Zeballos-Roig, 2019) while Weld states that Millennials will "reap the whirlwind" on issues of climate change and debt (Forbes, 2019, n.p.). By borrowing language from the environmental movement, Sanford and Weld tug on the emotional trigger of eco-anxiety and channels it towards the problematization of the sovereign debt crisis (Forbes, 2019) The Republican candidates juxtapose the pressing need for fiscal austerity as an antidote to Democrat candidates' plans to expand the government's role in social policy which is perceived as government intervention. "Nobody talks about how much this health care is going to cost. And to the young people in the audience, your country right now is almost 32 trillion dollars in debt. I'll be done. I'm not going to pay that back. You are." (Walsh, as cited in Zeballos-Roig, 2019, n.p.).

The singular focus on the 'economic' sphere advanced in austerity discourse excludes the consideration of other important spheres of society ('domestic', 'political', etc.) that are vital to the health of a society. A silence within this discourse is that there exists a mutually constitutive relationship between social policy and economic growth (Reisman, 2001).

The Republican candidates represent citizenship-based entitlements and redistributive measures as 'free' stuff. Underlying this argument is the belief that the meeting of basic needs must be met through 'productive' work in the formal labor market. Inputs of social reproduction and tax payments that U.S. Americans bring to their society are disregarded in this discourse. Walsh posits, "Look, I respect all of these Democrats but you want to be a candidate for the office, the easiest thing for me to do is to promise you free shit. Free this and free that" (Forbes, 2019, n.p.).

The Republican candidates' problematizations of spending and 'government intervention' in the form of social policy measures draws on classic liberal ideology that perceives 'government intervention' as a direct inhibitor of the prime conditions needed for a well-functioning society and an infringement on the 'freedom' that is found in the market (Braedly and Luxton, 2010; Hackworth, 2012). Republican candidates utilize the rhetoric of liberty and freedom as the antithesis of government intervention. As Walsh claimed, I'm a Republican and conservative because "I think freedom is better than government" (Forbes, 2019, n.p.).

Underlying this resistance to citizenship-based entitlements and redistributive measures is the common-sense assumption that people are individually responsible for their state of welfare (Sherman, 2000). These common-sense assumptions may also speak to the Republican candidates near silence on issues of inequality. As Earls explains (2000, p. 58), "the penchant to believe that people themselves are responsible for the state of their welfare and well-being weakens the incentive to consider persons in this predicament as full-fledged citizens. This alone makes the issue of inequality less relevant, less evident, and less axiom".

Solutions: Cut Spending, expand market-based solutions, and foster job growth

The Republican candidates shared a consensus, rooted in ideologies of classic liberalism, on what the needed solutions are to their main problematizations of government intervention and the sovereign debt crisis: expand market-based solutions, cut taxes and state spending, and foster market participation. A common discursive strategy used by the Republican candidates when asked questions about specific problematizations relating to the needs of U.S. Americans, was to present or affirm targeted, market-based solutions and then redirect the conversation back to the problematization of debt. By focusing on solutions that favor targeted measures and further minimize the role of government, the exclusionary nature and social stigma attached to targeted programs in only providing for the few deemed 'deserving' goes unacknowledged.

For example, when asked about how he would ensure that all U.S. Americans have health care in light Republicans' attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act, Walsh presented as a solution the maintenance of the current system: the provision of targeted measures for a few 'deserving' and private market solutions for the rest of the population. To the same question, Weld presented the solution of tax advantaged health saving accounts and diminishing the role of the government in the Affordable Care Act. Within this discourse, Weld frames the problem of lack of healthcare in the United States as an issue of *choice* instead of *access*, saying that his proposed policies would "place more decisions in the hands of patients and their doctors and have people making their own health care decisions instead of having that all come from a federal bureaucracy" (Zeballos-Roig, 2019, n.p.). A silence within these arguments for targeting is the expensive administrative costs of targeted social programs and their ineffective impact on poverty reduction (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Korpi and Palme, 1998; Lewis, 1997; Mkwandire, 2005).

The candidates' call for the further diminishment of the government's role in social policy as a response to 'social issues' presented to them, aligns with the "N"eoliberal push to diminish a state's capacity and advance privatization. Within this solution are the beliefs cast forth by classic liberalism that resource allocation "is a process that needs to be driven by market fundamentals and that "inefficient resource allocation destroys value and capital and impoverishes all citizens" (Nijs, 2016, p. 23).

The solution of fostering participation in the formal labor market is an area in which the candidates break away from their problematization of government intervention, instead arguing that the state has a clear role to play. Their two main emphases are on fostering the conditions for small, indigenous businesses and aiding displaced workers. The candidates assert that both the state and federal governments have a role to play in ensuring that workers receive technical skills training (Forbes, 2019; Zeballos-Roig, 2019). Weld states "so what does government need to do? Help retrain those workers. Because you can't stop the market. You've got to keep the market going. You've got to keep the market changing. It'll lead to good things" (Forbes, 2019, n.p.). In their divergence from problematizing government intervention, processes of 'n'eoliberal governing are seen in candidates' proposals to intervene in order to facilitate capital (Ong, 2006).

Chapter 5: Social Constructions

This chapter will explore how needs and target populations are socially constructed by the presidential candidates, utilizing the concepts of politics of needs and social constructions of target populations. WPR will again be utilized in order to continue the examination of the underlying ideologies and inherent silences, shedding light on the processes of *becoming* that are taking place through the candidates' discourse. This approach has been taken in order to address the question of what common-sense assumptions are employed by candidates and whether they reproduce or challenge hegemonic narratives. Are policies self-fulfilling prophecies of social constructions, as Lowi, as well as Schneider and Ingram posit, or are policies able to disrupt these conceptions?

5.1 Democrats

5.1.1 Politics of Needs

While the Democrat candidates speak on a plethora of social policies, the main needs that Democrats highlight as key problematizations that require government intervention through social policy include affordable housing, universal childcare, paid family leave, public education, economic opportunity and universal health care. While most of the protections provided by these programs are not specifically named as rights, except for health care, they are cast as needs that are essential for the government to meet in order to ensure justice and equality. Further, meeting these needs is imperative in order to protect and foster social cohesion.

Out of the three struggles that Fraser (1989) highlights as part of the politics of needs, Democrats spend the most time crafting these needs as political claims through the presentation of statistics and sharing of stories about U.S. Americans who have suffered from inequality and injustice. To strengthen their needs discourse, Democrats often assert that the government must meet certain needs under the premise that the United States is 'behind' other countries. These arguments quickly segway into the struggle over which provisions should be used to meet these needs.

The key dispute between the Democrat candidates exists over which mechanisms should be used to satisfy needs, often revealing the competing discourse of targeted versus universal policies and market-based solutions versus concepts of social citizenship. The struggle over who gets to define a need is nearly nonexistent within the debates as each candidate attempts to pose themselves as having the best policy solutions. This is not a new silence in expert needs discourse which relies on administrative rhetoric that assumes the legitimacy of existing institutions (Fraser, 1989). The translation of "politicized needs into administrable needs" repositions the target population being discussed as passive, "potential recipients of predefined services rather than as agents involved in interpreting their needs and shaping their life conditions" (Fraser, 1989, p. 306-307). The power

relations and exclusionary aspects of the U.S. American electoral systems remain largely unchallenged as candidates take for granted that they have the right to determine solutions.

5.1.2 Social Constructions of Target Populations

As discussed in the previous section, Democrats main target populations are those who they deem as suffering due to inequality and injustice. While many of the programs they advance are citizenship-based entitlements, Democrats bring up target populations that have been historically considered 'deserving' to garner support. For example, in Yang's proposal for a UBI program which he deems a 'Freedom dividend' which would provide a stipend to *every* adult, he immediately talks about how this will benefit parents and allow them to choose to be with their children instead of having to rely solely on the formal labor market (NBC News, 2019). Most commonly, they speak of how these programs would help workers, the working poor, working families, and the average U.S. American triggering the positive construction of the 'deserving' worker who is in "need through no fault of their own" who U.S. Americans are more willing to help (Wax, 2007, p. 1374; CBS News, 2020; NBC News, 2019). Even as they subvert and challenge the notion of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' through universal programs that position needs as social rights, they channel these common-sense assumptions in order to trigger support.

When arguing for redistributive policies, some of the Democrat candidates turn the negative social construction of the 'free-loading' welfare recipient against the rich and corporations. Triggering U.S. Americans concern that benefits only going to those deemed 'deserving' who have 'earned' it, Warren claims that she is "tired of free-loading billionaires" (NBC News, 2019, n.p.) and Booker asserts that "everybody's tired of corporations getting away with paying zero taxes" (CBS News, 2020, n.p.).

Democrat candidates are not immune to the common-sense assumptions tied to social constructions of target populations and utilize them in resistance to universal policies. For example, Klobuchar, casts doctors and teachers as a 'deserving' population who should receive free education in exchange for filling needed positions but the draws on the negative social construction of the rich as she argues against free public universities as they would send "rich kids to college for free" (NBC News, 2019, n.p.).

5.2 Republicans

5.2.1 Politics of Needs

The sites of struggle that occur in politics of needs discourse are nearly non-existent during the Republican debates. This may be due to the fact that candidates are heavily influenced by values of classic liberalism, within which the designation of needs as a legitimate political claim becomes less relevant as the market is deemed able to "cater to the needs of the individual at the lowest marginal cost possible" (Nijs, 2016, p. 24). This is affirmed by Walsh's statement that human rights, health, education are best dealt with in the private sector (Forbes, 2019, n.p.). Through the previously discussed solutions of market-based solutions to the problematizations of the needs of U.S. Americans, the Republican candidates engage in reprivatization discourse by "defending the established social division of discourses" between the 'political', 'economic' and 'domestic' spheres and deny the political claims of oppositional needs courses (Fraser, 1989, p. 304).

5.2.2 Social Constructions of Target Populations

As the Republican candidates have limited engagement with the politics of needs, the discussion of target populations is also restricted. The main target populations that the Republican candidates focus on are workers who will experience job displacement due to automation and small businesses: both groups which have historically been positively constructed social groups (Forbes, 2019; Schneider and Ingram, 1993; Zeballos-Roig, 2019). The Republican candidates framing of displaced workers as a 'deserving' target population who should receive free technical skills training from the government is influenced by this social construction. The framing of this target population resounds with the common-sense assumption amongst many U.S. Americans that those who are 'deserving' poor are those who are seen as hard workers who are struggling due to circumstances outside of their control (Henry, Reyna, and Weiner; 2004). It is also based on a tenet of classic liberalism: that the state's role is to foster opportunities for individuals to participate in the formal labor market (Nijs, 2016).

Coinciding with their silence on inequality, the Republican candidates focus on the target populations of the middle class or the bottom percentage of income earners, emphasizing the 'deserving' worker. Use of the word 'poor' only occurs once: when Weld states that "income inequality in this country has gotten so extreme that we as a society simply have to do something about it or else the door to the middle class is going to be slammed in the face of the working poor" when talking about the need for tax cuts. Racial constructions of target populations and henceforth, the acknowledgement of systemic discrimination are non-existent within the Republican candidates' discourse as racism is sequestered to individual acts of discrimination such as Walsh' past racist statements or Trump's rhetoric against immigrants (Forbes, 2019; Zeballos-Roig, 2019).

Chapter 6: Emergence of Change

Through the identification of the key 'problems', 'solutions', politics of needs, and the social construction of target populations discourse resplendent in the presidential candidates' discourse on the government's role in social policy, this analysis has identified both the perpetuation and disruption of power played out within this discursive event. On both sides of the aisle, Republican and Democrat candidates' discourse on the government's role in social policy revolved around policies that maintain and reproduce the ideologies/common-sense assumptions of 'deserving'/'undeserving', individual responsibility, and austerity through the proposal of targeted programs, market solutions, and limiting redistribution. Due to this, much of the discourse on social policy was socially reproductive, affirming that there is some validity to claims by Lowi (1964), as well as Schneider and Ingram (1993), that policies follow social constructions. The 'reality' that shapes the candidates' social policy discourse is delineated largely around these social constructs and ideologies, as well as the political, economic, and social systems that the debates take place within.

Yet, these social constructs and ideologies did not go unchallenged. The presentation of socially transformative policies of citizenship-based entitlements was unprecedently prevalent amongst Democrat candidates. These universal, citizenship-based entitlements subvert and resist the exclusionary and stigmatized nature of a social policy system based on economic liberalism, instead providing avenues of citizenship-based entitlements that could lead towards the decommodification and defamilialization of the U.S. population. Drawing from WPR, this section will explore how hegemonic narratives were disrupted within some of the policies set forth by Democrat candidates and further paths towards change. What is left unproblematic in Democrat discourse and the limitations to change will also be explored.

6.1 Counter-narratives of Equity

The citizenship-based entitlements championed by Democrat candidates included such as UBI (Freedom dividend), Medicare for All, paid family leave, and universal childcare. Other universal policies were put forth such as canceling student debt as well as providing universal preschool, kindergarten, and universities. Since public education is generally accepted as a citizenship-based entitlement in the U.S., these policies are significant but do not seem to signal as much of a paradigm shift.

The proposed universal measures are rooted in the social citizenship in their underlying pursuit to diminish the level of market dependency (commodification) that is experienced by the U.S. population (CBS News, 2020; NBC News, 2019). In his pitch for the Freedom dividend, Yang

champions decommodification in his argument that "we should not be pushing everyone to leave the home and go to the workforce" (NBC News, 2019, n.p.).

The right to care or not to care (defamilialization) is presented in candidates' framing of these universal provisions as providing *choice*. Yang, Sanders, Harris, and Warren assert that provisions such as the Freedom dividend, paid family leave, and universal childcare would provide choice to parents to stay home with their children. Yang asserts, "many parents see that tradeoff and say if they leave the home and work, they're going to be spending all the money on childcare anyway. In many cases, it would be better if the parent stays home with the child" (NBC News, 2019, n.p.). Sanders signals the paradigm shift that these policies present, claiming "our campaign is about changing American priorities. Instead of giving tax breaks to billionaires, we're going to have high-quality, universal childcare for every family in this country" (CBS News, 2020, n.p.)

Both Harris and Warren identify the double care burden women face in their policy discourse (NBC News, 2019). When speaking on care work that takes place within the home Harris claims, "the burden principally falls on women to do that work" in her argument for paid family leave (NBC News, 2019, n.p.). Advocating for universal preschool, Warren claims that this social provision will alleviate the exploitation of women, especially women of color, as they shoulder a disproportionate amount of the responsibility in the unpaid care economy (NBC News, 2019).

These policies further defamiliazation and decommodification, while acknowledging the valuable 'reproductive' and domestic labor that women perform within the unpaid care economy as essential to the continuation and health of a society (Fraser, 1989). This discourse disputes the conceptualization of work as solely 'productive' work that is performed in the formal labor market, usurping the separation of the 'domestic' from the 'economic' that has become a common-sense assumption within male-dominated, capitalist societies (Fraser, 1989, p. 300). The significant presence of universal policies put forth by many Democrat candidates offers a counter-narrative of collective care and social citizenship. Instead of treating social policy as an additive to macro-economic policies and market-based solutions, there is an acknowledgement that "all macroeconomic policies take place within a certain set of distributive relations and institutional structures and will have social outcomes" (Elson and Cagatay, 2000, p. 1347).

Further, while some of the Democrat candidates subvert social constructions of target populations in their efforts to galvanize support for their universal policies, the proposal of universal policies challenges these very constructs. Under citizenship-based entitlements the social constructs of 'deserving'/'undeserving' hold no weight as all members of a society become beneficiaries. This compelling counter-narrative brings into question Schneider and Ingram's (1993) theory that social constructions of target populations place significant constraints on policy. Even within the same inflexible political, economic, and social environment and in the face of resistance, these counter-narratives of universal policies emerged as viable policies on the presidential debate stage.

6.2 Narratives of Resistance

The popularity of citizenship-based entitlements holds weight, but whether they are able to build the traction necessary to result in the transformation of systems is not completely clear. These counter-narratives were challenged using common-sense assumptions pertaining to partisan politics and socialism.

Partisan political arguments were a foundational component of the debates. Amongst Democrat candidates, many of these arguments were lobbied in opposition against the democratic socialist candidate, Senator Sanders and Senator Warren, who had similar policy proposals. Employing a rhetoric of fear, most of the Democrat candidates made claims that if Sanders became the Democrat presidential candidate, not only would Donald Trump win the presidential election, but Democrats would also lose their ability to have a majority rule in the two chambers of Congress, the Senate and the House of Representatives. At one point, Bloomberg claimed,

"If you keep on going, we will elect Bernie. Bernie will lose to Donald Trump. And Donald Trump and the House and the Senate and some of the State Houses will go red. And then, between gerrymandering and appointing judges, for the next 20 or 30 years we're going to live with this catastrophe" (CBS News, 2020, n.p.).

Candidates also argue that Sanders' policy proposals go against what the U.S. American people want (CBS News, 2020). Other Democrat candidates, such as Buttigieg and Klobuchar, utilize Sanders' claim that there is a majority movement to enact progressive change as an argument against universal health care. For example, Buttigieg states that "(universal health care) is not the right approach to unify the American people around a very, very big transformation that we now have an opportunity to deliver" (NBC News, 2019, n.p.).

These partisan-based arguments reveal the discursive barriers perpetuated by the institutional setting as candidates focus on trying to sway median voters. These narratives ignore what Sander's popularity signaled-that his policies are not driving away voters but were rather galvanizing social engagement. But this does not hold enough weight in some of the candidates' eyes due the pressure placed on parties in a two-party system to capture the median voter (Huber and Powell, 1994). The emphasis then is placed on maintaining 'middle ground' policy positions, rather than trying to create social transformation. In their resistance to transformative social policies, many of the Democrat candidates fall prey to the same constraints of political strategizing that have played a role in the social policy change occurring only incrementally in the United States (Beland, Howard, and Morgan, 2014; Crepaz, 1998). This partisan discourse utilized by both Democrat and Republican candidates', in painting the election of the other party as signs of doom, naturalizes the power relations inherent in

the majoritarian, two-party political system and the limited political power of the U.S. American people (Crepaz, 1998).

In their bids against Sanders' policy proposals, candidates also take advantage of common-sense assumptions that trigger Cold War fears, conflating socialism with authoritarianism (Slevins, 2019). Candidates assert that Sanders is "too radical" and Buttigieg compares Sanders beliefs as "nostalgia for the revolutionary politics of the 1960s" alluding to what he perceived as Sanders' support for Cold War era authoritarian regimes (CBS 2020, n.p.). The debate staff also engaged in this discourse, inquiring of Sanders, "can Americans trust that a democratic socialist president will not give authoritarians a free pass?" (CBS News, 2020, n.p.).

The Republican candidates' use of common-sense assumptions surrounding socialism treat Democrat candidates as monolith and often point more generally to the 'sovereign debt crisis' and state spending. Sanford states that "A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote for themselves largesse from the public treasury, with the result that their democracy always fails under loose fiscal policy, and is generally followed by dictatorship", attributing the quote to Sir Alex Francis Tyler (Forbes, 2019, n.p.). Sanford and Weld both refer to Hayek's *Road to Serfdom,* which was written in 1944 and espouses the belief that while socialism is a well-meaning ideology based on utopia, that it will lead to dangerous consequences of totalitarianism (Hayek; 1944)

Both partisan arguments and the triggering of Cold-War fears create discursive barriers to the implementation of policies based on social citizenship. Yet even the socially transformative policies offered have their own limitations. In their struggle for citizenship-based entitlements, the presidential candidates fail to offer visions of world-making beyond the political and capitalist systems of the modern nation-state. The counter-narratives presented do not challenge capitol-centric solutions, but merely strive to grant workers more protection within this unnatural social relation of economic subordination (Skocpol, 1992). Rather than providing a way out from "n"eoliberal control, these citizenship-based entitlements may more deeply entrench the "n"eoliberal governing project by alleviating the "detrimental consequences of commodification in order to deflect oppositional collective action"[7] (Nilsen, n.d., p. 8).

6.3 A Way Forward

In the face of the reproduction of hegemonic discourse that occurred within the presidential candidates' discourse on social policy, the question remains whether the counter-narratives that emerged could be a catalyst for 'unmaking' the 'reality' that U.S. social policy operates within. In their

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[7] This form of neoliberalization comes from Nielsen's conceptualization of "inclusive neoliberalism" (n.d.))

failure to go beyond capitalocentric solutions, is there the potential for transformative change in candidates' arguments for citizenship-based entitlements?

This research has revealed both the struggle for discursive control and naturalization of power that occurs within political events through the identification of the competing discourses that candidates' lobby. To some degree, the findings coincide with Schneider and Ingram's (1993) assertion that social constructions determine constructs as the ideological "stickiness" of the common-sense assumptions of 'deserving/'undeserving', individual responsibility, and austerity hold sway in the rationalization of many candidates' policy decisions and consequently, in the minds of many U.S. American.

Yet, the potential within the counter-narratives espoused may reveal the cracks in these power relations. For even as many of the Democrat candidates argued against some the citizenship-based entitlements presented, there were still kernels of decommodification and defamilialization within many of their policies. These kernels may reveal a level of openness to values of social citizenship that did not exist prior. The popularity of candidates such as Sanders and Warren, whose campaigns were based on the call for a variety of citizenship-based entitlements, may also be a signpost to a rising social consciousness amongst U.S. Americans of the limitations and unequal power relations that are fundamental to economic liberalism and the social policy system it has created.

Following post-structuralism, the very identification of these processes of power opens the door to resistance and further deconstruction. There may be hope to move beyond capitalcentric solutions and the hegemony of the One-World World (Escobar, 2016). As we look beyond the rational binaries of inclusion/exclusion as laid out by the nation-state, we can turn to other ways of being and theories to discover postcapitalist and postdevelopment possibilities[8]. In the endeavor to move toward these possibilities and to embed the value of collective care within our society and social policies systems, the way forward may be within communal spaces where we delve into the lives and feelings of others and their experiences of belonging[9]. In these meaningful encounters, views of the 'other' (the gendered, racialized *dependent*) can be shifted making way for the development of "inclusive notions of citizenship and enable minority rights to public space" (Askins, 2016, p. 516). It is within relationships with others that our stereotypes borne out of social constructions can be challenged, empathy (recognition with) can emerge, and an awareness of our interdependence on each other can take root.

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[8] This is conceptualized as "Thinking Otherwise" by C. Rojas (2007) and stems from Epistemologies of the South

[9] This social transformation is deemed "emotional citizenry" by Askins (2016).

Chapter 7: Conclusions

The Democrat and Republican presidential candidates had competing expectations of the government's role in social policy yet both shared a degree of complicity in reproducing hegemonic narratives of 'deserving'/'undeserving', individual responsibility, and austerity. Republican candidates discourse on the government's role in social policy was to maintain targeted programs for a few 'deserving', reduce 'government intervention', and enhance market-based solutions, considering their core problematizations of the sovereign debt crisis and government intervention. On the other hand, the Democrat candidates perceived the state's role as addressing inequality and injustice through the transformation of institutions, redistribution of resources and power, and the protection of rights.

These discourses on the state's responsibility relied upon specific understandings of what leads to a 'good society'. On one side of the spectrum, Republican candidates understood the free market as best suited to meet the needs of society and perceived economic 'freedom' through participation in the formal labor market as a catalyst for the thriving of individuals. Some Democrat candidates fell on the middle of the spectrum, pulling on a few select values of social citizenship as they perceived equity to be the removal of barriers to economic participation and the mitigation of the worst effects of inequality through redistribution and targeted programs, pulling. On the opposite side of the spectrum, some of the Democrat candidates perceived social citizenship as a necessary foundation to justice, championing the minimization of social stratification, as well as processes of decommodification and defamililiazation through the proposal of citizenship-based entitlements. The Democrat candidates' position within this spectrum was often layered, as they at times both utilized and challenged hegemonic narratives.

Under the political practices of "n"eoliberal governing, both parties participated in the naturalization of the majoritarian, two-party system and failed to break away from market logic as the policies offered remain entrenched in capitalcentric solutions. Though the counter-narratives offered have these limitations, the unprecedented prevalence of citizenship-based entitlements and acknowledgement of systemic inequity within the Democrat presidential primary debates points to the potential for even greater deconstruction of institutions, ideologies, and social constructions that retain current power relations. The ability for these counter-narratives to emerge within rigid political systems and the prevalence of the aforementioned social constructions reveals the limitations of theories by political scientists such as Lowi, as well as Schneider and Ingram, that espouse that policy creates and is then constrained by politics, caught within a never-ending feedback loop. Through the lens of post-structuralism, this research reveals that ideologies and constructs do not remain static, but have the ability to be disrupted or molded through counter-narratives of social transformation.

The critical discourse analysis of this research, aided by post-structural theory, contributes to the process of 'making strange' social policy choices that are treated as objective responses to 'problems'.

By revealing the underlying ideologies and social constructions utilized as emotional triggers by politicians, this analysis provides tools of critical thinking and challenges the naturalization of power that takes place through discourse. Most importantly, my hope is that this research may open the door for others to embark on an examination of their common-sense assumptions about social policy and open the door to imagining ways of being that go beyond the One-World World and instead, towards collective care.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary of Candidates Present for the Debates

Business Insider Debate	Republican
Joe Walsh	Former Congressman of Illinois
Bill Weld	Former Governor of Massachusetts
Forbes Debate	**Republican**
Joe Walsh	Former Congressman of Illinois
Bill Weld	Former Governor of Massachusetts
Mark Sanford	Former Governor of South Carolina
CBS News Debate	**Democrat**
Pete Buttigieg	Former Mayor of South Bend
Bernie Sanders	Senator of Vermont
Amy Klobuchar	Senator of Minnesota
Elizabeth Warren	Senator of Massachusetts
Michael Bloomberg	Former Mayor of New York City
Joseph Biden	Former Vice President of the U.S.
Tom Steyer	Hedge Fund Manager
NBC News Debate	**Democrat**
Tulsi Gabbard	Congresswoman for Hawaii
Andrew Yang	Entrepreneur and philanthropist
Cory Booker	Senator of New Jersey
Kamala Harris	Senator of California
Pete Buttigieg	Former Mayor of South Bend
Bernie Sanders	Senator of Vermont
Amy Klobuchar	Senator of Minnesota
Elizabeth Warren	Senator of Massachusetts
Joseph Biden	Former Vice President of the U.S.
Tom Steyer	Hedge Fund Manager

Appendix 2: WPR Question Guide

#1 What is the problem represented to be?

#2 What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?

#3 How has this representation of the problem come about? (only utilized in the literature review)

#4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?

#6 How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?

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