

Written Debate Product

Our objectives for this debate are to prove that welfare reform has worked and dispute the opposition's argument that welfare reform has failed.

Outline

Initial Summary

On August 22, 1996 President Bill Clinton ended welfare as America knew it. In 1929, after the stock market crash and Great Depression, levels of unemployment reached an all time high and support could not be provided by churches and charities alone. The New Deal expanded aid to the elderly and single mothers. In 1969, there was 1,875,000 families on welfare. Aid was not distributed fairly, however. Families of color were largely left out and it was not difficult to manipulate the welfare system. Welfare reform ended the federal government running welfare programs and gave responsibility to the states. TANF changed cash assistance, added work requirements in order to receive benefits, shrinking the amount of adults that could qualify. "This legislation ended the entitlement status of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, made work mandatory, and put time limits on the length of time families can receive cash assistance." (DiNitto & Johnson, 2016) Welfare reform was intended to shift human behaviors and create a system where instead of one-way handouts that allowed for misuse, effort from recipients would be required in order for aid to be given. TANF had an underlying principle of "personal responsibility." The main **goal** of welfare reform was to reduce the number of individuals or families dependent on government assistance and to assist the recipients in their efforts to become self-sufficient. It was meant to change welfare from being a **hand-out to a hand-up**.

Keeping these goals in mind, welfare reform has worked because:

1. Poverty among children has declined (Manhattan Institute)
 - a. Robert Rector, senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation, found that over the last 10 years there has been a dramatic decline in child and single-mother poverty. Those were the two groups affected by welfare reform. Welfare reform was successful in moving single mothers off of lengthy dependence on welfare and into the labor force).
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7714067>
 - b. Welfare reform was and remains effective in reducing poverty among the two groups directly affected by the reform: single parents and children. Poverty among single parents, the main group affected by welfare reform, has fallen substantially over the past two decades while it remained constant or rose among groups **unaffected** by reform.
<https://www.heritage.org/welfare/report/did-welfare-reform-increase-extreme-poverty-the-united-states>
2. Fewer people in general are on welfare.
 - a. As opposed to the 1 million 875 thousand families on welfare in 1969, in 2012 approximately only 52.5 million people were receiving some sort of government assistance.
<https://www.history.com/news/clinton-1990s-welfare-reform-facts>

- b. In Kansas, a study by the Foundation for Government Accountability found after three months of reinstated work requirements, nearly 13,000 Kansans left the welfare rolls. Within a year, nearly 60 percent of these former enrollees found employment and increased their incomes by an average of 127 percent.
<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/economy-budget/291732-celebrating-20-years-of-successful-welfare-reform>
3. More unmarried mothers have entered the formal workplace because of welfare reform. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/22/the-enduring-legacy-of-welfare-reform-20-years-later/?utm_term=.b270358b7402
4. Families are less dependent on welfare. Previous to welfare reform, welfare was often a handout allowing recipients to become dependent. After welfare reform, because of work requirements and money/time limits, dependency on welfare is less possible. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/22/the-enduring-legacy-of-welfare-reform-20-years-later/?utm_term=.b270358b7402

Cross Examination

- Possible Opposition Argument:** Welfare reform does not move people out of welfare into solid working-class lives. It moves them out of welfare and into the world without health benefits, without childcare, without savings, and without the political power needed to address any of these problems.
Question: Welfare reform wasn't completely intended just to save money. It was intended to shift human behaviors, create a system where instead of one-way handouts we receive back from recipients of the aid being given. - Robert Rector (senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation). Are you all suggesting that we should have policy that encourages government dependence? Where does the hand out stop?
- Possible Opposition Argument:** The number of families in deep poverty has increased.
Question: Official poverty statistics can create a misleading impression that hardship has increased, and that this increase has been due to welfare reform. Government statistics underestimate the income of poorer families, exclude entirely the receipt of valuable benefits, and overstate inflation. The most reliable indicators showing some increase in hardship after 1996 reflect the rise and fall of the business cycle but do not rise steadily—and generally grew worse among groups of Americans who never received cash welfare. The idea that rolling back the 1996 welfare reform would help the poor is wholly unjustified by the evidence. Is it possible that there are other reasons that the number of families in deep poverty has increased and it is unrelated to welfare reform?
- Possible Opposition Argument:** While welfare reform effectively ended traditional welfare, tax credits, and programs such as food stamps and Medicaid continued. The amount spent on all programs actually increased.
Question: Welfare reform wasn't completely intended just to save money. It was intended to shift human behaviors, creating a system where instead of one-way handouts we receive back from recipients of the aid being given. Therefore, while the amount spent on welfare programs might have increased wouldn't you say that if the main goal of

reform was to shift behaviors and support self-sufficient individuals that it actually did work?

- **Possible Opposition Argument:** The 2008 Financial Crisis made some wonder if the old framework was as reliable during market downturns as it was in times of success. Critics argued that because the number of funds that states received in block grants had **not been adjusted for inflation** since the 1990s, states had significantly less money on hand to be able to meet welfare needs in a new era.
- **Possible Opposition Argument:** Welfare reform has made it difficult for anyone to receive these benefits provided by the state.
Question: According to census.gov, 21.3 Percent of U.S. Population Participates in Government Assistance Programs Each Month. What percentage of the country would you prefer to be dependent on social services?
- **Possible Opposition Argument:** Welfare reform does not encourage or “allow” poor mothers to go to college nor fund them in that effort. Welfare reform has created a system where we supply those in poverty with only enough to survive, if that.
Question: According to The Atlantic Federal welfare law does not prohibit states from providing college education to welfare mothers, states are able to send up to half of their caseloads to college if they so choose. How is this not supporting poor mothers?
- **Possible Opposition Argument:** Even though a large number of welfare recipients moved to take on jobs after welfare reform, they are still working at low wages and dependent on social services to actually survive.
Questions:
 - **The Hill** - In Kansas, a study by the Foundation for Government Accountability found after three months of reinstated work requirements, nearly 13,000 Kansans left the welfare rolls. Within a year, nearly 60 percent of these former enrollees found employment and increased their incomes by an average of 127 percent.
 - House.gov states, Work and earnings rose while welfare dependence and poverty has fallen. So, according to your argument, “they are depending on social services to survive” however, facts state that this is not true. What exactly do you consider a low wage?

Defense Arguments

The Manhattan Institute

- Children—in particular, those in single-mother families—are significantly less likely to be poor today than they were before welfare reform: child poverty overall fell between 1996 and 2014. This is the case because of household earnings, lower taxes, several refundable tax credits, food stamps and other non-cash benefits.
- “Deep poverty”—defined as having a family income below half the official poverty line—was probably as low in 2014 as it had been since at least 1979.
- Practically no children of single mothers were living on \$2 a day in either 1996 or 2012 (the latest year for which we have reliable statistics), once the receipt of all government

benefits are factored in. In 2012, fewer than one in 1,500 children of single mothers were living in what is called “extreme poverty.” This finding is consistent with other research.

- Official poverty statistics can create a misleading impression that hardship has increased, and that this increase has been due to welfare reform. Government statistics underestimate the income of poorer families, exclude entirely the receipt of valuable benefits, and overstate inflation. The most reliable indicators showing some increase in hardship after 1996 reflect the rise and fall of the business cycle but do not rise steadily—and generally grew worse among groups of Americans who never received cash welfare. The idea that rolling back the 1996 welfare reform would help the poor is wholly unjustified by the evidence.

<https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/poverty-after-welfare-reform.html>

Robert Rector, Senior Fellow at the Heritage Foundation

- Welfare reform wasn’t completely intended just to save money. It was intended to shift human behaviors, create a system where instead of one-way handouts we receive back from recipients of the aid being given.
- Federal welfare law does not prohibit states from providing college education to welfare mothers, states are able to send up to half of their caseloads to college if they so choose.

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7714067>

- “The overall percentage of children in poverty has decreased.” - Nina Nelson

TANF Facts from Administration of Children and Families

- 77% of adults on TANF are in their twenties or thirties
- 8% of recipients are teenagers
- 32% of recipients are African American
- 32% of recipients are Caucasian
- 30% of recipients are Hispanic

Key Terms

TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Deep or Extreme Poverty: Having a family income below half of the poverty line

The New Deal: A series of programs, public work projects, financial reforms and regulations enacted by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the United States between 1933 and 1936. It responded to needs for relief, reform and recovery from the Great Depression.

Welfare Reform: A movement to change the federal government's social welfare policy by shifting responsibility to the states and cutting benefits

Inflation: A general increase in prices and fall in the purchasing value of money

Social Work Values

We factored in the social work values of service, social justice, and dignity and worth of the individual. As Social Workers our responsibility is to provide services to those in need. Services

not only include social services like TANF, but also services that will help the client thrive in life. Welfare reform helped accomplish these goals by encouraging individuals to become self-sufficient and unable to be dependent on welfare. Social Workers also advocate for social justice. By having a clear set of guidelines in order to receive benefits, we are eliminating discrimination that might hinder certain individuals from receiving benefits based on their ethnicity, religion, affiliations etc. Lastly, we are devoted to upholding the dignity and worth of every individual. As mentioned previously, we advocate for every individual to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their situation. By promoting guidelines, we are stating that people in need are treated with respect and that we are willing to help them become successful.

Our group obtained information from online resources such as news articles, discussions, research evidence, statistics, and interviews.

General Information

“Hand up NOT hand out”

Even critics agree that poverty continued to decline after welfare reform and only in recent years has risen again.

In Kansas, a study by the Foundation for Government Accountability found after three months of reinstated work requirements, nearly 13,000 Kansans left the welfare rolls. Within a year, nearly 60 percent of these former enrollees found employment and increased their incomes by an average of 127 percent.- <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/economy-budget/291732-celebrating-20-years-of-successful-welfare-reform>

According to house.gov, Work and earnings rose while welfare dependence and poverty has fallen. <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/data-show-welfare-reform-has-been-overwhelmingly-successful/>

According to census.gov, 21.3 Percent of U.S. Population Participates in Government Assistance Programs Each Month. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-97.html>

Federal welfare law does not prohibit states from providing college education to welfare mothers, states are able to send up to half of their caseloads to college if they so choose. - Robert Rector (senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation)
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7714067>

Welfare reform wasn't completely intended just to save money. It was intended to shift human behaviors, create a system where instead of one-way handouts we receive back from recipients of the aid being given. - Robert Rector (senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation)
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7714067>

Welfare reform had prosocial effects on civic participation, as characterized by women voting
Corman, H., Dave, D., & Reichman, N. E. (2017). Effects of Welfare Reform on Women's Voting Participation. *Economic Inquiry*, 55(3), 1430–1451. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.southern.edu/10.1111/ecin.12433>

Poverty among single parents, the main group affected by welfare reform, has fallen substantially over the past two decades while it remained constant or rose among groups unaffected by reform.

Poverty rates of households without children (a group wholly unaffected by welfare reform) have risen sharply over the past 20 years;

According to the SIPP data, some 86.5 percent of families with children apparently living in extreme poverty in the U.S. have air conditioning in their homes or apartments; 89 percent have cell phones; 88 percent have a DVD player, digital video recorder, VCR, or similar device, and 67 percent have a computer. <https://www.heritage.org/welfare/report/did-welfare-reform-increase-extreme-poverty-the-united-states>

The poverty rate dropped consistently every year from 2015 to 2017 — a total of 2.5 percentage points — to a rate of 12.3 percent in 2017.

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/09/poverty-rate-drops-third-consecutive-year-2017.html>

In 2015, the Foundation for Government Accountability worked with Kansas officials to track nearly 41,000 people impacted by work requirements. To date, it's the largest welfare research study of its kind.

Working with the Kansas Department for Children and Families, we matched, person-by-person, individuals on food stamps with the state Department of Labor's hiring and earnings databases. Maine later adopted this methodology and replicated the study for nearly 10,000 able-bodied adults.

In short, both studies found work requirements resulted in more employment, higher wages, and less dependency. Not only were limited resources preserved for the truly needy, but those removed from the program were *better off*. They contributed more to their local economies, generating additional tax revenue that could be set aside for other priorities.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/08/30/the-truth-about-welfare-reform/#269d3f3177ee>

7 Persistent Myths About Poverty in America

1. Myth: Poverty alleviating programs induce laziness and even criminal behaviors, like drug use.

Reality: More than half of the families on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program are currently employed and 80 percent of those families using SNAP were employed at some point in the year before and after they received benefits. Additionally, states that require their safety

net recipients to undergo drug testing report lower levels of use amongst recipients than the general public.

2. Myth: Poor people live off of handouts while middle and upper income people earn everything they have.

Reality: The government spends billions on subsidies that help everyone from first time homebuyers, to farmers with bad crop yields, as well as companies looking for the next source of clean energy. Many of these subsidies are less visible, although just as expensive to the government, because people receive them through tax breaks as opposed to cash payments.

3. Myth: Living in poverty means making less than \$20,090 for a family of three.

Reality: Being poor cannot be summed up in one number, especially one that doesn't change depending on where you live. The formula that determines a family's poverty status has not been updated since the 1960s and does not take into account regional differences. The challenges one faces living on \$20,090 are different in Idaho than they are in California.

4. Myth: Welfare spending is the single largest item in the federal budget, even bigger than defense spending.

Reality: In 2014, the United States spent \$615 billion on defense spending. Compare that to the combined \$370 billion spent on the Earned Income Tax Credit, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Section 8 housing assistance, and other poverty relief programs. There are many government programs that help a lot of people, at different stages in their lives, in different ways. However, the programs that directly target poverty make up a relatively small portion of our federal budget.

5. Myth: The poor could earn a better life for themselves but are content living on government benefits.

Reality: Millions of Americans receiving government benefits work hard but still cannot make ends meet. More than 10 million of those living in poverty are "working poor," they either have jobs or have been looking work for at least half a year. The average length of time a family is on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is 8 to 10 months.

6. Myth: Education alone is a magic remedy for solving poverty.

Reality: Your parent's wealth is a much better indicator for success than where you went to school. Studies have shown that rich high school dropouts maintain their wealth at the same rate that poor college graduates remain in poverty.

7. Myth: The minimum wage is meant for teenagers working their first job in high school.

Reality: About half of those making the federal minimum are 25 years of age or older and 72 percent of the total federal minimum wage workforce has at least a high school degree.

<http://takano.house.gov/8-persistent-myths-about-poverty-in-america>

References

- Corman, H., Dave, D., & Reichman, N. E. (2017). Effects of Welfare Reform on Women's Voting Participation. *Economic Inquiry*, 55(3), 1430–1451.
- DiNitto, D., & Johnson, D. (2016). Social welfare politics and public policy. (8th edition). *Pearson*. (90, 237-280).
- Edwards, A. (2018). Poverty rate at 12.3 percent, down from 14.8 percent in 2014. *United States Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/09/poverty-rate-drops-third-consecutive-year-2017.html>
- Ehrenfreund, M. (2016). How welfare reform changed American poverty, in 9 charts. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/22/the-enduring-legacy-of-welfare-reform-20-years-later/?utm_term=.34fb49e6fdf4
- Ingram, J. (2017). The truth about welfare reform. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/08/30/the-truth-about-welfare-reform/#269d3f3177ee>
- Nelson, N. (2018, November 14). How did welfare reform work? [E-mail interview].
- Pilon, M. (2018). How Bill Clinton's welfare reform changed America. *History*. Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/news/clinton-1990s-welfare-reform-facts>
- Rector, R. (2007). Has welfare reform worked? *NPR*. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7714067>
- Winship, S. (2016). Poverty after welfare reform. *Manhattan Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/poverty-after-welfare-reform.html>