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Abstract

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A Unified Voice: The US-Taliban Peace Deal — *Matthew Feldstein, Gettysburg College*

Executive Summary:

The United States signed a peace deal with the Taliban on February 29th, 2020 that would result in the complete withdrawal of US forces from the country at the end of a fourteenth month period, assuming the Taliban holds up their end of the deal. This would mark the end of one of the longest wars in United States history, lasting nearly two decades. The purpose of this paper is twofold, to determine if there is a presence of bias or misinformation by five major public policy think tanks in the United States and to examine the United States – Taliban peace deal through the analysis of content from the same five public policy think tanks. Those think tanks are the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Heritage Foundation, and the Wilson Center. The findings of this paper show that these public policy think tanks are in relative unity in their opinion and recommendations regarding the peace deal, showing that across ideological lines this peace deal is rushed and unsatisfactory in its current state, and should either be renegotiated or torn up. This unity in both opinion and recommendation also show that these think tanks are fulfilling their duty to both the public and policymakers by informing them on what is best to help move the United States forward, regardless of ideological pressure or economic benefits to the contrary.

The methodology of this paper is based on grounded theory, where content from each of the five public policy think tanks was collected, organized, and analyzed in order to determine the themes found within. A total of sixty articles would be considered to be substantively relevant, and from them came nine thematic codes that would be further encompassed by three major themes. The largest and most prevalent theme throughout the sixty articles would be *Taking the Easy Way Out*, in which the peace deal is seen as betraying our Afghan ally in favor of withdrawing from Afghanistan as fast as possible without answering key questions. Questions such as whether there will be government representation for the Taliban or if the Taliban will accept the inclusion of women's rights throughout all aspects of Afghan society or will insist on enforcing their interpretation of Sharia law. The largest concern across all think tanks and all articles was that the Afghan government had not been present at any peace negotiations prior to the deal being signed and as such could not address any of their concerns. The Taliban had agreed to talks with the Afghan government following the signing of the deal, but at this point, those discussions have been both delayed and called off, with now only limited attempts from the Afghan government to rekindle negotiations.

From the content that has been analyzed, it is clear to me that the US – Taliban peace deal is not only inadequate in its current state but is immoral in its execution. Abandoning an ally who depends on our security in favor of negotiating with the terror organization that has plagued Afghanistan is a mistake. There is time to renegotiate this deal, and if primary United States and Afghani concerns are not met then we must recommit to the fight at hand. A bad deal is inherently worse than no deal at all.

Introduction:

Policymakers in the United States are highly dependent on current and accurate information in order to make what they feel are the best decisions for their constituents. This is no less true for the Executive policymaker for the United States, President Donald Trump. And one of the main responsibilities of the President is to determine and make foreign policy decisions that have a wide range of implications for both the citizenry of the United States and individuals all across the world. Bringing us to the main topic of this paper, the United States – Taliban peace deal that was signed on February 29th, 2020 that is one of the largest foreign policy decisions enacted by any presidential administration in the last decade. Even though this decision effectively puts the United States on track to end a war that has lasted nearly two decades at the time that this is being written, it has received what can only be described as limited media coverage by major United States news organizations save for the initial statements and reactions on the week the deal was signed. This can most likely be attributed to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has placed a stranglehold on the news cycle that most Americans had been accustomed to, with twenty-four hour coverage applied almost solely to information regarding the disease. I in no way intend to mean this as a bad or poor decision, but I feel that even in the face of a global pandemic we cannot ignore foreign policy decisions of this magnitude.

Returning to the focus on receiving the best information possible in order to make the best decisions, I analyzed content from five major public policy think tanks that focused on the United States – Taliban peace deal in order to determine two important factors. The first being on the subject of the peace deal itself, whether it was a good deal for the United States and if it should have been pursued. The second was determining whether there was any noticeable bias from these

five major public policy think tanks due to ideological or economic pressures. What became clear after this research was conducted was that there is a relatively unified voice between these five major public policy think tanks, staying consistent across all ideological lines that the peace deal signed between the United States and the Taliban is inadequate in its current state and places undue strain on an ally in the region, the Afghani government, who at this point has still not been present at any negotiations between the United States and the Taliban and have not held any one-on-one talks with the Taliban themselves. A factor most concerning when you realize that this deal invariably shapes Afghanistan's future, and our government has been either unable or unwilling to give them a voice in the decision-making process.

Content Analysis of Think Tanks: What We Know So Far

The purpose of this paper is to determine the presence of bias, or lack thereof, within major foreign policy think tanks in the United States regarding the topic of the ongoing negotiations between the United States government and the Taliban. The importance of this is that these think tanks are influential within both the halls of Congress and the White House, helping to develop United States policy throughout the world. Over the course of this literature review, I will be looking at what content analysis is, the purpose of think tanks, their historical implications on United States foreign policy, and publications on the negotiations with the Taliban and the prospect of peace within Afghanistan.

Gilbert Winham provides the historical context and definition of content analysis which is "the objective and systematic analysis of communications" (Winham 1969, 191). It is most widely used to study and understand the decision-making processes of foreign powers, most notably in decisions to engage in war with another power (Winham 1969). The use of content analysis in research did not start to pick up until the 1960s and was largely pushed by fields that were outside

the realm of political science, most notably in the field of linguistics and psychology where content analysis was used to help determine the intensity or association structure between communications within groups (Winham 1969). The use of content analysis allows for a researcher to provide an in-depth analysis of a foreign policy situation, such as the United States negotiations with the Taliban, and it allows for the testing of generalizations within international behavior (Winham 1969). Given the subject of this research paper, the dominant content that I will be analyzing will be the postings of major public policy think tanks within the United States such as Brookings or the Heritage Foundation in order to better determine the differences in their opinion on the negotiations and how those biases bleed into their overall policy recommendations for the United States government.

Content analysis allows for a researcher to develop a specialized dictionary, also known as thematic codes, where textual items within the content are collected and later placed into separate categories (Dasgupta 1975). This specialized dictionary, once it is created, allows for a researcher to begin making inferences based on the data provided by the content, allowing for both a better understanding of the topic and a greater ability to determine how the author portrays the situation at hand (Dasgupta 1975). Dasgupta brings up the concern from researchers who do not engage in content analysis that it should not be up to the researcher to make inferences or jump to conclusions but rather organize the facts and present them to the reader in order for them to make their own conclusions (Dasgupta 1975). Yet this concern refutes the purpose of content analysis in its entirety, for if the goal was just to organize facts and lay them out neatly for the reader then no research was truly done, nothing was added to the discussion. The inferences brought about by content analysis are what readers and policymakers are looking for, for it can provide new context

and understanding for the issue at hand with the backing that this inference was developed after looking at dozens if not hundreds of literary works (Dasgupta 1975).

Foreign policy think tanks in the United States arose most notably in the 1980s due to increases in globalization, the Cold War coming to an end, and the rise of truly transnational problems (McGann 2010). These think tanks, in particular, are noted with having some of the greatest impact on United States public policy by nurturing the “government’s willingness to rely on the private sector by playing an active role in advising government officials in both the executive and legislative branches” (McGann 2010, 36). These think tanks are capable of providing rapid information and analysis to those policymakers who do not have the relevant experience in the policy field at a critical time in the process, when the legislative agenda is still being debated (McGann 2010). This ability to provide critical information quickly is integral to the effectiveness as a think tank when dealing in the field of foreign policy, for the world of foreign policy constantly has the interests of the United States competing with those of foreign actors. Waiting too long for crucial information that these think tanks can provide could leave the United States in a compromising position and needing to play catch-up with a foreign actor. Even worse though is if the report given by a respected think tank has been muddied by economic or ideological interests, causing policymakers to embrace choices that they would not have otherwise had they maintained their neutrality on the matter, a subject I will go into more detail with shortly. When dealing in the field of foreign policy the choices made by policymakers affect the nation as a whole, and a wrong decision could mean plunging the nation into a conflict that could have easily been avoided had a different avenue been taken. Think tanks ensure that those other avenues are considered by “providing alternative views to administrations and fostering debate on contentious topics” (McGann 2010, 37).

Colin S. Gray states that a think tank is “committed to improving public policy, as opposed to the making of money... devot[ing] itself to the attempted education/persuasions of (a) officials, (b) legislators, [and] (c) the general public (via society’s opinion leaders)” (Gray 1977, 183). Gray recognizes that think tanks are regularly contracted to fulfill studies by clients which could lead to bias or a favoring of one recommendation to another, posing an example of a think tank receiving one million dollars from the United States Air Force to study their role and mission of 1980 to 1990. In this example, the think tank makes the correct assessment by recommending that the Air Force’s strategic air command should be dissolved completely in favor of providing support to submarine and ship-based nuclear cruise missiles to provide an optimal deterrent. By making this recommendation the think tanks would most likely lose the air force as a client because their recommendation would likely go against their wishes, in that no major branch of the military would want to give up power and funding from the government (Gray 1977). This would be detrimental to the think tank as while profit should not be its only goal it rationally has to ensure that it makes enough money to continue to operate without being inhibited. In a similar vein of economic concerns creating biased recommendations, should a President’s administration take on a think tank as a client to analyze the policy implications of a political promise made on the campaign trail, it is quite clear what the Presidential administration is hoping to receive as an answer. Reports that go against what the President had been seeking or portraying to the public as beneficial will undoubtedly strain any future relationship between the think tank and access to the President’s ear. By saying what the President or political administration wants to hear, it helps to ensure that the think tank has continuous access, and therefore power in future policy decisions.

According to Bertelli and Wagner think tanks have proliferated across Washington D.C. due to the “nature of debate in legislative committees” which drive the need for the type of

information that only think tanks seem able to provide (Bertelli & Wagner 2009, 225). Due to the nature of both Congress and the polarization of politics within the United States many think tanks tend to be ideologically aligned to some predetermined set of values determined by the owners or researchers that inhabit the think tank. As such, based on both the values held by the think tank and if anyone commissioned that particular report could help determine the overall policy recommendation prior to any true research being conducted (Bertelli & Wagner 2009). The overall finding of Bertelli & Wagner is that the greater the polarization of Congress the more think tanks are created and supplied to officials in order to better supply research and data that support their legislative agenda (Bertelli & Wagner 2009). Given that today's current political climate has been aptly described by many news outlets as being the most polarized in modern American history it can be safe to say that this effect is also present in the ongoing policy regarding the United States and Taliban negotiations.

Think tanks have had a notable impact on United States foreign policy decisions throughout the decades that they had been created and gained their relative strength and political repertoire. Some notable examples include a change in relations with North Korea, dealing with the crisis in Darfur, and the American military strategy in the Iraq war (McGann 2010). The Heritage Foundation, most notably Richard Fisher, had consistently argued that agreeing to a nuclear weapons freeze in North Korea rather than full disarmament as the United States had done in 1994 would eventually lead to the United States losing any initiative in denuclearizing the peninsula (McGann 2010). When President George W. Bush eventually entered into office his policy towards North Korea followed the outline provided by the Heritage Foundation, including refusing to enter into bilateral talks directly with North Korea while insisting that all nuclear weapons owned by the regime be destroyed through multilateral talks between six other nations (McGann 2010). This

caused criticism to arise from the Brookings Institution, another public policy think tank that argued that by avoiding bilateral talks it was unlikely that the North Korean regime would ever voluntarily disarm themselves, for it did not provide them the respect and recognition they believed they deserved from the United States (McGann 2010). The Hudson Institute argued that Congress should implement sanctions against Sudan due to the humanitarian crisis happening in Darfur, much like the sanctions placed on Apartheid South Africa (McGann 2010). President Bush was unwilling to follow along, however, most notably following the advice given by the Cato Institute that argued for the problem to be solved regionally without American involvement (McGann 2010). Most importantly they argued that any solution should not include the presence of United States ground troops due to the belief that United States forces had already been spread increasingly thin, and at this point in time there has not been any action taken by the United States due to the crisis in Darfur (McGann 2010). A final example was seen in the “surge strategy” advised to President Bush in Iraq by the American Enterprise Institute, which saw an increase of twenty thousand United States soldiers being deployed to the region with most being deployed in Baghdad to provide greater counter-terrorism protection to American assets (McGann 2010). This decision went against a Congressional bipartisan committee, the Iraq Study Group, which advised an overall downsizing of the American presence in Iraq and recommended that American assets be phased into the existing Iraqi defense force so that they could begin to take the mantle of defending their nation themselves (McGann 2010). This last example provides possibly the greatest example of the power and capabilities of think tanks to influence the policy-making decisions taken by the Office of the President. The American Enterprise Institute was able to convince the President to ignore the advice of Congress, the eminent legislative body of the United States.

Donald E. Abelson's article focuses "on the origins of several prominent foreign affairs and defense policy think-tanks and to reveal, drawing upon selected case-studies, how a small group of American think-tanks has become active and vocal participants in the policymaking process" (Abelson 2014, 126-7). Abelson notes that current American think tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, have resources that are explicitly used to influence policymakers and public opinion on a wide range of issues (Abelson 2014). As such, the way that think tanks work and produce quality research is focused on getting their message out quickly to their primary audience, policymakers (Abelson 2014). Congress and the White House, unlike university scholars who can take their time researching a specific subject, is typically a reactive force, especially when dealing in the realm of foreign policy (Abelson 2014). As such when dealing with the ongoing negotiations the information and policy recommendations are being presented as soon as more information is being received, and the cost that these negotiations may wreak might be too high for some think tanks as compared to others. If the goal of these think tanks is to either promote these negotiations or attack the content of the peace deal in question to sow public dissent they have to ensure that their readers and audience have that information as soon as possible. Once, the policy has already been implemented the think-tanks shift to not whether or not it should be but how this new policy will affect the United States.

The current negotiations with the Taliban have been shrouded in relative secrecy, with no relative details being provided, save for that if the deal is signed it will result in a controlled troop withdrawal from Afghanistan to occur over a number of years (Mashal et al. 2020). The current state of negotiations involves only the United States and Taliban representatives in the city of Doha, Qatar. This has brought up significant issues within Afghanistan as the current Afghanistan government has no representatives present due to their unwillingness to work with and trust the

Taliban (Finnegan 2019). Given that the Afghan government is one of our primary allies in the region it damages our relationship if we abandon them after negotiating an independent peace deal that does not include them. The major arguments that have promoted these peace deals are that it could limit international terrorism that threatens the United States as the Taliban have agreed to prevent other groups from using Afghanistan as a center to launch their own terror attacks (Kleiner 2014). It is also meant to spur a more active peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban, with an aspect of the deal supposedly contingent on the agreement that the Taliban will enter into bilateral peace talks with the Afghan government, who have essentially been fighting an ongoing civil war since the United States invasion back in 2001 (Kleiner 2014). The prospects of this occurring have become less and less likely due to the ongoing political crisis that has crippled any unified response in Afghanistan due to disagreements on who the actual President of Afghanistan is (Kaura 2020). The United States recognizes Ashraf Ghani as the legitimate President of Afghanistan but the country's chief executive Abdullah Abdullah swore himself in as President at a rival ceremony, with both men claiming victory in the last election cycle (Kaura 2020). The crisis has reached such a fever pitch that the political leaders of the Taliban have reached out to try and remind both men of their responsibility to try and continue these peace talks, even though the Taliban actually recognizes neither men as being Afghanistan's ruler (Kaura 2020). This is because they believe that any man claiming that title is nothing more than a puppet of the United States as the Afghan government in its current state was formed following the United States invasions that removed the Taliban from power back in 2001 (Mashal et al. 2020). A more politically motivated reason is that the President has stated that he wants to get American troops home prior to the 2020 Presidential election as a promise to his constituents (Baker 2019). Political promises not kept can be the death of any first-term presidency, which is what the Trump

Administration finds itself in currently (Aragonès et al. 2007). I would not be surprised if both the President and his advisors remember the infamous promise President George H.W. Bush made to the American public that he would implement no new taxes, only to suffer from an economic downturn during the end of his first term causing him to go back on his word (Klein 2018). The breaking of that promise led the Republican party in Congress to break ranks with the President against the budget deal that saw those taxes be implemented and would later hamper Bush during his reelection campaign to the point that he would lose to Bill Clinton (Klein 2018). The Trump Administration surely wants to avoid a similar fate to that of President Bush's re-election campaign, and at this point, they may feel locked into this decision-making strategy of pursuing peace with the Taliban in order to not be attacked politically in the 2020 presidential election cycle by their Democratic opponent.

How these arguments are presented, both by policymakers and by think-tanks is incredibly important, for they shape how the American public views our place and responsibility in the region. The United States involvement in Afghanistan has been our longest-running war, going on for almost two decades at this point. It is important to know what resources provide unbiased and critical research that our policymakers can rely on, biased propaganda should have no place in our modern institutions, especially when considering the costs that could be paid in the form of American soldiers' lives. Public policy think tanks across the United States have a responsibility to provide recommendations based on fact and not based on their personal interests. Along with this, policymakers have the responsibility to make decisions based on the best information available to them, and as such are heavily dependent on these public policy think tanks.

Methodology:**Table 1:**

Name of Think Tank:	Total Results	Facially Relevant:	Substantively Relevant:
Brookings	60 Articles	31 Articles	18 Articles
Center for Strategic & International Studies	70 Articles	50 Articles	12 Articles
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	15 Articles	11 Articles	6 Articles
Heritage Foundation	47 Articles	24 Articles	10 Articles
Wilson Center	39 Articles	22 Articles	14 Articles
Total: 5	231 Articles	138 Articles	60 Articles

The sources of the content being analyzed for the purpose of this piece were articles, podcasts, interviews, and videos produced by five different public policy research think tanks within the United States. Those think tanks specifically were the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Heritage Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. These think tanks were selected purely based on the fact that they were the top five rated public policy think tanks listed by the University of Pennsylvania. Articles that were recovered from these sources were organized into non-relevant, facially relevant, and substantively relevant categories based on the subject matter found within.

Non-Relevant articles were those pieces that had absolutely nothing to do with the subject matter of this paper, namely the peace deal that has been negotiated and signed between the United States and the Taliban. Specifically, when reading or listening through the pieces there was absolutely no mention of the peace deal, most did not even have the words the “Taliban”, “negotiation”, or “peace deal”. Facially relevant articles were those pieces that either only mention the peace deal briefly, one sentence, up to the point where the entire subject of the article is on the peace deal. Lastly, substantively relevant articles were those pieces where a significant portion, at

least fifty percent if not all of the article, is focused on the peace deal between the United States and the Taliban.

The process of finding and collecting data from each of the think tanks was performed the same way. Firstly when entering each of the think tanks' respective websites I immediately signed up for e-mail updates if they were offered by the institution. Second, I used the Boolean search term "Taliban" in each of the think tanks search bars. The results, most of which numbered in the hundreds, were further reduced by applying a filter of a specific time range. That time range is from January 1st, 2019 up to March 27th, 2020 where the most recent articles had been released by the time of this section being written. This time frame was chosen based on finding relevant articles and to aid in the completion of this piece. Given that the subject of the peace deal is a recent event, in terms of United States policy, it becomes increasingly unlikely that any articles would be found that would be substantively relevant before January 1st, 2019. On the other side, given that the subject of this paper is a Capstone that is needed to be completed over the course of one college semester, had I increased the number of articles needing to be analyzed by increasing the time range decreases the chance of either this paper being completed or having a well-researched piece.

The total number of results from using the Boolean search term "Taliban" across all five think tanks from January 1st, 2019 to March 27th, 2020 was 231. The totals were split as follows: the Brookings Institution had 60 results, the Center for Strategic & International Studies had 70 results, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace had 15 results, the Heritage Foundation had 47 results, and the Wilson Center had 39 results. The total number of articles considered to be facially relevant across all five think tanks was 138 and were split up as follows: the Brookings Institution had 31 facially relevant articles, the Center for Strategic & International Studies had 50 facially relevant articles, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace had 11 facially relevant

articles, the Heritage Foundation had 24 facially relevant articles, and the Wilson Center had 22 facially relevant articles. The total number of substantively relevant articles came out to 60 articles which were split up as follows: the Brookings Institution had 18 substantively relevant articles, the Center for Strategic & International Studies had 12 substantively relevant articles, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace had 6 substantively relevant articles, the Heritage Foundation had 10 substantively relevant articles, and the Wilson Center had 14 substantively relevant articles.

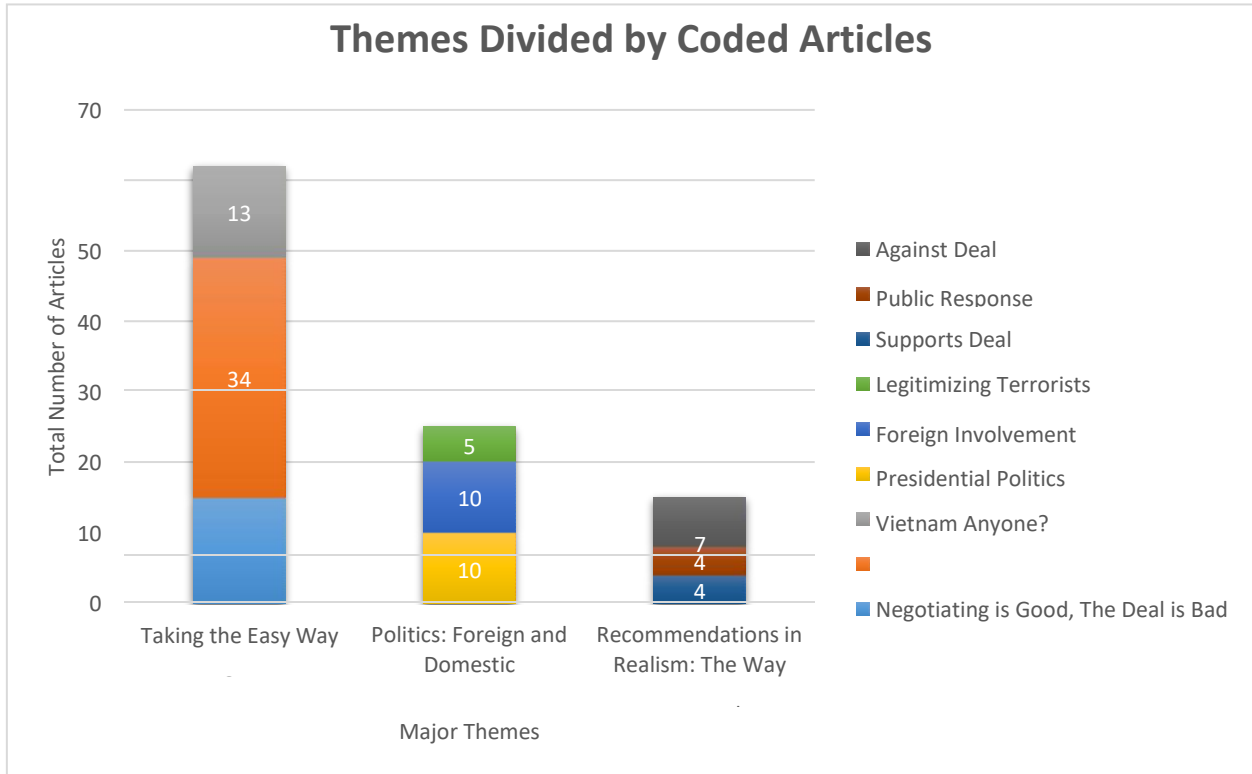
The basis of my coding methodology for this content analysis was in grounded theory, which is “a set of systemic inductive methods for conducting qualitative research aimed toward theory development” (Charmaz 2006). The 60 articles determined to be substantively relevant were analyzed again and organized based on the major themes found within. This process, known as axial coding, was used to relate the found articles across all five think tanks to determine similarities, differences, and find possible sources of political bias. Those major themes were then analyzed within the frame of the collected articles to determine if more specific and less generalizable themes were present in the articles. For example, if theme one was present in multiple different works but the Brookings Institution viewed it as a positive while the Heritage Foundation viewed it as a negative then those articles were placed in them 1a and 1b respectively.

This content analysis on the subject of the US – Taliban peace deal will help determine if these major public policy think tanks are holding themselves to the standards laid out in both their mission statements and their overall purpose of providing unbiased policy research and recommendations or if they have been pursuing a greater ideological change through biased policy recommendations. This process was pursued on the basis of grounded theory and axial coding to appropriately determine the subject matter and overall purpose of the respective pieces. The results

of this methodology will be laid out in the following section detailing what was found in each of the 60 substantively relevant articles.

Discussion of Results:

Graph 1:



The content analysis of the five public policy think tanks, the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic & International Studies, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Heritage Foundation, and the Wilson Center, revealed that there is an overall consensus between policy experts on the United States – Taliban Peace Deal. This goes against my initial assumption which was that across five public policy think tanks of various political ideologies that reports and policy recommendations would vary wildly in the field of foreign policy. This fact is quite comforting, in that it shows that these think tanks whose purpose is to help inform and provide recommendations on various policies to both policymakers and the American public as a whole. In regards to the specific policy, the US – Taliban Peace Deal, three major themes appear from the

analysis of the substantively relevant articles: *Taking the Easy Way Out*, *Politics: Foreign and Domestic*, and *Recommendations in Realism: The Way Forward*. A majority of the articles all express similar views, that the peace deal unequivocally betrays our ally, the Afghan government, leaving them at the mercy of falling back into a civil war with the Taliban which at best would leave them back into a crisis so severe they would become increasingly dependent on international support and aid and at worst would be destroyed entirely, leaving the Taliban the sole organization in Afghanistan able to effectively lead and operate the country.

As noted in Graph 1, the three major themes are further divided by three smaller thematic codes that were present in the respective articles. *Taking the Easy Way Out* was formed by combining the smaller thematic codes: *Negotiating is Good*, *The Deal is Bad*, *What About Afghanistan?*, and *Vietnam Anyone?*. *Politics: Foreign and Domestic* was formed by combining the smaller thematic codes of *Presidential Politics*, *Foreign Involvement*, and *Legitimizing Terrorists*. *Recommendations in Realism: The Way Forward* was formed by combining the smaller thematic codes of *Supports Deal*, *Against Deal*, and *Public Response*. These smaller thematic codes are an integral part of the content analysis process, as they are what allowed me to build back up to my major inferences and conclusions.

As noted from just a cursory glance of Graph 1, the largest and most prevalent theme present throughout all of the think tanks articles was *Taking the Easy Way Out* with a total number of 62 articles expressing the smaller thematic codes within. Those wondering how it is possible that 62 articles were expressing this theme when only 60 total articles were being analyzed must remember that my methodology allowed for each article to express multiple thematic codes. This means that one article could encompass all three thematic codes present in the major theme and be counted all three times. Quite simply this theme expresses the author's frustration or concern about

either the negotiated language of the peace deal, the lack of certain guarantees that put United States interests or moral standing at risk, or historical similarities to similar US policy action in the past in favor of getting US troops out of Afghanistan as quickly as possible regardless of the consequences. Those articles that were coded as *Negotiating is Good, the Deal is Bad* expressed support for the United States engaging in peace talks with the Taliban but were against the peace deal in its current state. These concerns tended to focus on the disagreement between the United States and the Taliban that would allow for the presence of a counter-terrorism taskforce to remain in Afghanistan. This would be to help enforce that no international terrorism will spread from Afghanistan or the fact that it was an incredibly short time frame implemented between signing the deal and the complete withdrawal of all United States forces. Those articles that were coded as *What About Afghanistan?* expressed concern over the fact that the Afghan government has not been included in the negotiating process between the US and the Taliban and that no major Afghan issue, such as government representation for the Taliban or the inclusion of Women's rights has been included in the peace deal, allowing for the US government to dodge the hard issues. The final code, *Vietnam Anyone?*, include those articles that express the historical similarities between this situation and the situation of the US declaring peace and victory in Vietnam before leaving in a mass exodus, allowing Vietnam to descend back into a civil war and our ally, South Vietnam, being conquered by the North. If the United States is simply declaring peace and leaving, we leave our long-standing ally, the Afghanistan government, at the mercy of the Taliban without us being able to support them.

The second major theme, *Politics: Foreign and Domestic*, encompassed a total of 25 articles after tabulating how many articles included the smaller thematic themes of *Presidential Politics*, *Foreign Involvement*, and *Legitimizing Terrorists*. This theme encompassed those articles

that looked at the peace deal from a purely political angle, whether that be from the Trump Administration to those foreign governments who are watching the peace process with hawkish eyes. Those articles coded as *Presidential Politics* expressed concern over the actions of the Trump Administration in its pursuit of this peace deal. The biggest concern or critique was that this peace deal was being negotiated with a purely political timetable in mind, with the President not shying away from stating that he wanted all US troops out of Afghanistan by 2020, a crucial election year. Negotiating with the basis of a political timetable inherently weakens the United States' negotiating position from the beginning, as the Taliban knows that the longer they hold out before signing a deal the better the deal gets for them as the President will grant more and more concessions to ensure his political time table stays intact. Those articles coded as *Foreign Involvement* examined the peace deal from either the perspective of a foreign government or examined the actions of foreign actors in regards to the pursuit of peace in the region. The most notable examples include the influence of Pakistan in the negotiations, with Prime Minister Imran Khan having met with President Trump, given that Pakistan has been a long-standing advocate for negotiating a political settlement with the Taliban (Azfal 2019). Along with this includes statements from both Russia and China that were issued jointly with the United States in promoting the peace process in Afghanistan (Mohan 2019). The fact that Russia was involved raised some concerns given the Soviet Union's invasion and occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s and is seen as Putin's attempt to pivot back into the region with a more positive image (Mohan 2019). Finally, articles coded as *Legitimizing Terrorists* expressed concerns over the fact that the United States was granting the Taliban increased power and legitimacy by addressing them as equal partners. This legitimacy helps cement the Taliban as an irrefutable part of Afghanistan's political future and helps promote the spread of their terrorist tactics to other groups who will see this as

proof of concept that terrorism is not only a viable strategy but that it can even bring superpowers to their knees.

The last major theme, and surprisingly the smallest, was *Recommendations in Realism: The Way Forward* with only 15 articles falling under this category. The purpose of this theme was to express both the author's or public's opinion on the peace deal and what that should mean for the process as a whole. Those articles coded as being both *Against Deal* and *Support Deal* are the simplest thematic codes to explain throughout the whole piece. Quite simply, any article that is coded as being *Against Deal* sees the author as being against the peace deal and the prospect of a peace deal with the Taliban to be the completely wrong decision and policy action for the United States. It differs from a previous thematic code, *Negotiating is Good, the Deal is Bad* in that these authors don't disagree with the content of the peace deal they disagree with even having one with the Taliban due to moral, economic, or military concerns. On the other side, those articles coded as *Support Deal* are both for pursuing a peace deal with the Taliban and for accepting it in its current state as they believe that prolonging the peace process or constantly renegotiating will lead to a worse deal in the future. Those articles coded as *Public Response* include reports on both the American and Afghanistan's public reaction to the peace deal and how they feel about the contents within. The American public overwhelmingly has expressed concerns about the peace deal, with 82% of respondents to a Brookings Institution poll not supporting signing a deal with the terrorist organization (Telhami & Kopchick 2020). Similarly, an independent poll presented by the Wilson Center showed that 41% of Afghans, a plurality in this poll, did not support the need for a peace agreement with the Taliban (Rahim 2019). While this was not a prevalent focus of these five think tanks, the lessons learned within still inform both policymakers and stakeholders that peace in

Afghanistan will not be an easy sell to each nation's respective populace, causing an additional political cost.

This research helps to address the overall concerns that many Americans and people all over the world have been facing in recent years, and that is ensuring they are receiving news and information from reliable and trustworthy sources. The fact that these five major public policy think tanks expressed similar reasoning on concerns on the US – Taliban Peace Deal across ideological lines proves that they put informing the public and policymakers over the pursuit of any particular political agenda. In regards to the policy in particular this research shows that there is a nearly unified voice regarding how this peace deal is viewed and the consequences that will occur because of it. Peace is an admirable and respectable goal to pursue, but no peace is worth leaving our allies to suffer and fall apart for political and economic gains. Afghanistan currently finds itself locked out of the conversations that will determine its future, with the Taliban refusing to enter into direct talks due to their view that the government is just mere puppets of the United States. The United States granting more and more concessions to ensure a quicker withdraw with relatively little guarantees that the Taliban will honor its end of the deal echoes the images of helicopters flying off of embassies in Vietnam. Should this peace deal fall apart after the United States has already left the area it sends a message to both our allies and our enemies? To our allies, it shows that relationships built over decades can be thrown away when it is politically beneficial or it becomes too expensive for the United States government to maintain its commitments, a worrying prospect for any future diplomatic agreements that include military support. To our enemies, it shows that the United States is capable of being beaten as long as you are able to hold out, for if you are able to survive long enough that you are no longer the most concerning factor

for the United States you have no reason to surrender and give yourself in. In any case, it is most certainly a message that the United States should not be projecting to the world stage.

Policy Recommendation and Future Research:

Future research possibilities and opportunities arise from the fact that public policy think tanks across the United States should always be held to a standard that ensures they are providing unbiased information to both the public and policymakers. This content analysis looked at only five public policy think tanks out of the hundreds that are providing advice and recommendations to policymakers every single day across the United States. Further content analyses on other groups of public policy think tanks can help paint a picture for both the public and policymakers on where these groups lie on the ideological spectrum and help to show whether or not they suffer from any implicit biases that would make their recommendations in certain situations needed to be taken with a grain of salt. On the subject of the US – Taliban peace deal itself, should the deal continue in its current state there will be research opportunities to see the actual effects the deal has for both the United States and Afghanistan. Its effectiveness, or lack thereof, will certainly be a point of research and discussion in the coming years as the full effects of this deal are played out.

The recommendation for the United States is simple, get a better deal that addresses the concerns of the Afghan government and helps secure our vital interests in the region or reassign a large amount of military resources to continue the fight until we achieve victory. A bad deal is inherently worse than no deal at all, and what we have right now, based on the content presented by these five public policy think tanks is a bad deal. I recognize of course that the recommendation is simple to say, but one that in reality will be incredibly difficult to put into effect with short notice. Trying to renegotiate a deal that has already taken years of bilateral talks and was recently signed will almost surely raise tensions both with the Taliban and with the political structures of

the United States. The Trump Administration has already spent a large amount of political capital in the pursuit of this deal and in their mind this may be a problem that can be readdressed following the 2020 election campaign, where they don't have to worry about a reelection campaign. Or if they lose in 2020 and a Democratic President takes office then it is a problem that is no longer theirs to solve, being able to pass the buck on as it were. Should the United States decide instead to pursue a military victory against the Taliban it would require the influx of a massive amount of military equipment and personnel the likes of which haven't been seen since the first Persian Gulf War to ensure the greatest chance of success. This of course is also unlikely because of the political and purely logistical restraints that such an operation would face. The war in Afghanistan has already lasted nearly two decades, and over that time we were unable to defeat the Taliban and have been consistently downsizing the total number of United States forces in the country. To authorize such a conflict of this scale would almost certainly need some type of support from Congress, and supporting the continuation of America's longest war is a title that many members of Congress would quickly try to avoid.

What has to be recognized is that the right choice is not always the most popular, and leaving Afghanistan with the deal in its current state will cause complications for the United States in the region for the duration of generations. Seeking the end of this war is an admirable and right way to move forward, and a peaceful resolution is of course preferable to a continuation of America's longest war. But by committing to this peace deal with the Taliban we leave our ally, the Afghanistan government, to suffer alone and possibly watch their nation descend into a Civil War should they not be able to succeed in developing their own peace deal. The pursuit of peace at such high of a cost to our national interests and international standing is not peace but is a surrender.

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Argument for H.R. 82 “The Social Security Fairness Act” – Troy Domini M. Ayado, Gettysburg College

I. Introduction

Social Security stands as the most politically divisive issue in the last half-century. Solutions for maintaining the solvency of the fund and the benefit mechanisms have left policymakers struggling and frustrated. Elected officials find themselves in a difficult situation: Increasing benefits or cutting overall spending; in other words, a balancing act between the beneficiary and budgetary concerns. This white paper focuses on a component of the problems with Social Security: The *Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision*. Both provisions mentioned intend to limit supposed “double-dipping” by retirees in terms of pension funds available. Currently, the social security Administration services 54 million retirees and subsidizes some plans relating to Medicare.¹

H.R. 82, “The Social Security Fairness Act” of 2021, eliminates the *Windfall Elimination Provision and Governmental Pension Offset* of the Social Security Act of 1933.² This White Paper, while publicly accessible, is directed to the leader and members of the House Ways and Means Committee and Senate Finance Committee. This paper exhaustively analyzes the nuances of H.R. 82, “the Social security Fairness Act” of 2021. Using the “SWOT” Analysis, this paper explores the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of H.R. 82 when passed and implemented.

The structure of the paper is as follows: The crux of this work is in the “SWOT” analysis portion. As previously mentioned, “SWOT” focuses on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to social security and two amendments considered. The *strengths* being discussed about the bill include increases in overall benefits, decreases in participation in external government subsidy programs such as SNAP

¹ “Securing Your Today and Tomorrow,” SSA, accessed December 11, 2022, <https://www.ssa.gov/>.

² “Th St Congress Session H. R. 82,” accessed December 12, 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr82/BILLS-117hr82ih.pdf>.

(Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), restoring full benefits to the public sector, and spousal benefits. The weaknesses of H.R. 82 consist of tackling a profoundly political issue, increasing deficit spending, and providing inequitable policy. H.R. 82 provides policymakers with an *opportunity* to promulgate new policy reforms for social security benefits. As such, this act allows representatives to suggest reforms in the financing and benefits-allocating mechanisms of the social security act. The “Social Security Act” of 2021 provides substantial benefits but poses potential *threats*. The possible dangers of the bill include increases in the federal deficit and overburdening individual states’ pension funds. In these sections, the analysis is critical yet mindful of the pitfalls and inadequacies. Thus, this paper also provides policy recommendations that amend the considered bill.

In all, this white paper lays out a thoughtful analysis of the implications of passing and enacting H.R. 82, the “Social Security Fairness Act.” It intends to provide readers with a sense of the immediate impact it has on the lives of many Americans- in that it raises benefits and decreases welfare rollcalls and the fiscal health of the federal and state pension funds.

II. “SWOT”

This section deals with the method of analysis used in this white paper. To best understand the nuances of H.R. 82, “the Social Security Fairness Act” of 2021, this paper uses “SWOT” analysis. “SWOT” refers to policy strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This form of scrutiny is highly effective when used to analyze policies that involve cross ranges of interests and sectors. Angel Giusti, a researcher, describes “SWOT” as “an intersectoral approach.”³ “SWOT” is the appropriate means of analysis since it focuses on long-term sustainable policy. Moreover, in accounting for opportunities and threats, “SWOT” provides flexibility for policymakers and agility for leaders to make amendments or change policy outright. *Refer to Figure. 1 below for a breakdown of “SWOT” for H.R. 82.*

³ A Giusti and M Maggini, “SWOT Analysis of Policies and Programs on Prevention and Management of Diabetes across Europe,” *European Journal of Public Health* 26, no. suppl_1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckw168.030>.

<p>Strengths:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Increases Pension Benefits 2.) Reduces Rolls in SNAP 3.) Spousal and Public Sector Employees Benefits Improve 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Increases overall spending on social security and other pension funds
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Provide policymakers and representatives the opportunity to re-evaluate the current state of the funding and benefits mechanisms of the social security program 	<p>Threats:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.) Increases the burden on state pension budgets 2.) Expanded life expectancy

Figure 1. Breakdown of Analysis⁴

III. Brief History and Development of the Social Security Act and the *WEP and GPO*

Social Security stands as the staple project of the American Welfare Society. History records that FDR and his New Deal policies advanced social programs that expanded the role of the Federal Government. Passed in 1935, Social Security endeavored to fight poverty by instituting elderly insurance. Before the passage in 1935, pension funds exclusively belonged to large-industrialized firms and non-union labor. Private pension funds proved unsound and ran deficits. Add to that the strain of the Great Depression, and the public erupted in support of an expanded welfare program. At the most basic, Social Security is a public pension fund. The benefits apply to those 65 and older. A source of substantial political disagreements, social security stands as a cornerstone welfare policy rife with turmoil. Not long ago, however, amid the

⁴ This graph was made by the author of this paper.

great depression, its architects endeavored for this policy to curtail the amount of impoverished elderly. Before its passage in 1933, insurance or other types of benefits rested on the capabilities of private firms.⁵ In enacting social security, Congress instituted the payroll tax to serve as the primary source of revenue.

In its original form, social security failed to include public sector employees. Reforms in the 50s and 60s resulted in the inclusion of public-sector retirees. Estimates provide that the first recipients received at least \$400 in yearly benefits.⁶ The number of elderly retirees who qualify for benefits exponentially increased.⁷ Hoping to improve the sustainability of Social Security, Congress instituted the GPO and WEP to prevent “double dipping” among recipients.⁸ However, the changes in the fifties brought these people into the fold. As such, Congress created a system distinguishing between covered and non-covered workers.⁹ This distinction directly affects public sector employees since, after 1950, changes to the social security bill made membership for this sector of workers participatory. Those considered “covered” enjoy the security of having their pension funds provided by federal coffers. However, 6% of public sector retirees are considered “non-covered” individuals.¹⁰

The enactment of the *GPO* and *WEP* stems from the fear of policymakers and legislators that retirees may take advantage of the pension offered under social security and state pension funds. In 1977, the Supreme Court found that requiring men to a certain standard to receive benefits is inherently discriminatory. Once the court overturned this barrier, social security offices became flooded with spouses petitioning to receive their survivor pensions. To prevent the influx of individuals from receiving full

⁵ Colin Gordon, “New Deal, Old Deck: Business and the Origins of Social Security, 1920-1935,” *Politics & Society* 19, no. 2 (1991): pp. 165-207, <https://doi.org/10.1177/003232929101900203>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ A study conducted in 2004 found that women receive fewer Social Security Benefits than in years prior. Moreover, the study found that women from the baby-boomer generations can retire through their own personal retirement plans. However, the research also found that access to spousal benefits is vital to their overall financial security.

⁸ Christopher R. Tamborini, Howard M. Iams, and Kevin Whitman, “Marital History, Race, and Social Security Spouse and Widow Benefit Eligibility in the United States,” *Research on Aging* 31, no. 5 (2009): pp. 577-605, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0164027509337196>.

⁹ Ayado 2022

¹⁰ John Schneider and David Auten, “Why Social Security WEP or GPO Could Ruin Your Retirement,” *Forbes* (Forbes Magazine, June 29, 2021), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/debtfreeguys/2018/09/06/why-social-security-wep-or-gpo-could-ruin-your-retirement/?sh=58f514e3571b>.

spousal benefits and inter-governmental pensions, the U.S. Congress instituted the *Windfall Elimination Provision* and *Governmental Offset*.¹¹

IV. *Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP)*

An amendment to the Social Security Act, the *Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP)*, limits the overall benefits that a widow or disabled spouse may receive. The WEP does not, however, affect survivor benefits. Beneficiaries. The 6% of non-covered workers receive cuts through the WEP. *The percentage of reductions vary among different level of income. A 2021 study by the Congressional Research Services found that two million Americans find their benefits cut by at least 50% or an average of \$512.*¹² See the table below for the estimates for the reduction in monthly earnings for 2022.¹³

Table I. Social Security Benefit Formula for Workers Who Attain Age 62, Become Disabled, or Die in 2022

Factor	Average Indexed Monthly Earnings (AIME)
90%	of the first \$1,024 of AIME, plus
32%	of AIME over \$1,024 and through \$6,172, plus
15%	of AIME over \$6,172

Source: CRS, based on Social Security Administration, *Benefit Formula Bend Points*.

V. *Government Pension Offset*

The GPO or Government Pension Offset makes it so that spouses considered “non-covered,” who receive a pension, get their social security reduced. For example, if a non-covered Person receives \$1200 from a personal account, and their spouse or widow receives \$800 in social security benefits, the GPO equation dictates the following:

¹¹ “Social Security: The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP ... - Congress.” Accessed December 13, 2022. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10203>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Published by the Congressional Research Service

$$\$1200 - \$800 = \$400$$

\$400 serves as the only benefit provided to the non-covered person. By law, the equation deducts using a dollar-per-dollar ratio. According to the Congressional Research Services, 1.4 million Americans suffer cuts because of the GPO.¹⁴ The Government Pension Offset applies to former state and local employees who have worked for less than 30 years.¹⁵

VI. Issues Related to the GOP and WEP

Both the GPO and WEP reduce benefits provided to specific people. To fully assess H.R. 82., using “SWOT” it is prudent to discuss the issues.

In his article, *The Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision: Issues and Replacement Alternatives*, Glenn Springfield charges the WEP as reducing the benefits of retired public sector workers with less than 30 years of work experience.¹⁶ The paper concludes that WEP excludes from benefit calculations all those “non-covered.”¹⁷ Springfield notes that lower lifetime earners endure most of the WEP reductions. More pressing is that the WEP cuts affect disabled workers and their life savings.¹⁸ Barbara Bovbjerg, Director of Education, Workforce, and Income Security, in her testimony to the Senate subcommittee on Social Security Pensions and Family Policy, outlined the defects of the *WEP* provision of Social Security.¹⁹ Bovbjerg asserts that the WEP proves too complicated to enact, citing the lack of complete and accurate information on non-covered and covered individuals.²⁰ Likewise, her testimony points to the inequitable side of the *WEP*. Bovbjerg testifies that the *WEP* remains challenging to apply equally between federal and state-level retirees.²¹ Refer to Table 3: The percentage of reduction based on the number of years worked the Government Pension Offset (GPO) suffers equal hindrances from the *Congressional Research Services*.²²

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ “The Distributional Effects of the Social Security Windfall Elimination ...,” accessed December 13, 2022, https://crr.bc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/7_1.pdf.

¹⁶ Springstead, Glenn. “The Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision: Issues and Replacement Alternatives.” SSRN, August 22, 2019. <https://deliverypdf.ssrn.com>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Gao-08-248T Social Security: Issues Regarding the Coverage of Public ...,” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-08-248t.pdf>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Table 3. Maximum WEP Reduction for Workers Who Become Eligible in 2022, by Years of Substantial Coverage

Years of Social Security Coverage										
20 or fewer	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30+
First factor in formula:										
40%	45%	50%	55%	60%	65%	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%
Maximum dollar amount of monthly WEP reduction for workers who first become eligible for Social Security in 2022 ^a (\$):										
512.0	460.8	409.6	358.4	307.2	256.0	204.8	153.6	102.4	51.2	0.0

Source: CRS analysis.

Writing in *Forbes* Magazine, Schneider and Auten highlight the negative impact of *GPO* on retirees.²³ The authors posit that *GPO* instructs Social Security to cut the benefits a retiree receives if they receive concurrent payments from a state pension fund.²⁴ The article to the fundamentally unfair system promulgated by *GPO*. A study published by the *Congressional Research Services* found that *GPO* harms the retirement security of former state and federal government employees.²⁵ The study reports that “spousal benefits are reduced dollar-for-dollar.” Moreover, their research concludes that total reductions equal two-thirds of overall benefits.²⁶ Barbara Bovbjerg, in her testimony, advanced that the provisions breed concerns and uneasiness. She states that *GPO* “has been a continuing source of confusion and frustration for more than 7.3 million government workers affected.”²⁷

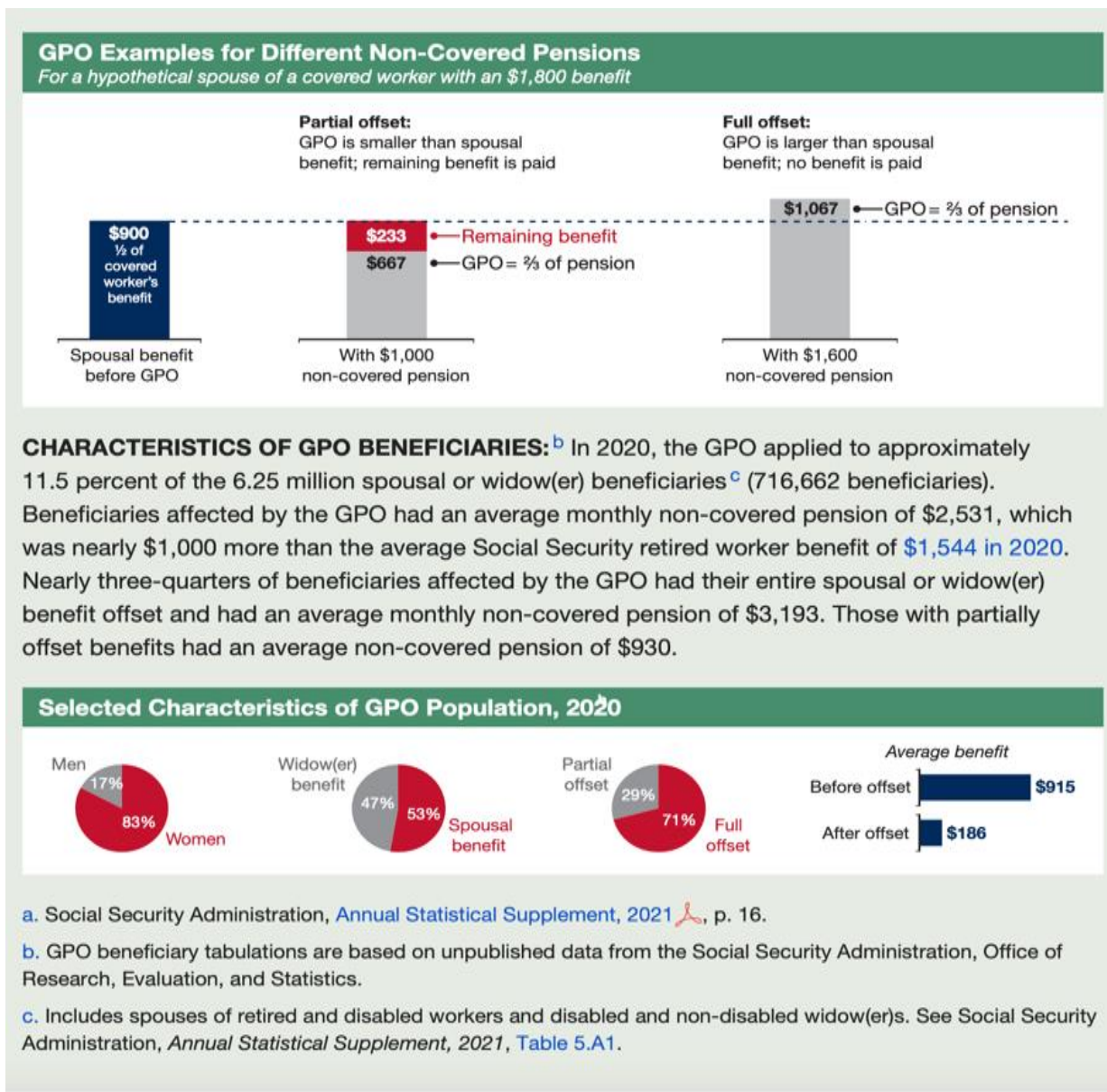
²³ “John Schneider and David Auten, “Why Social Security WEP Or GPO Could Ruin Your Retirement,” *Forbes*, September 6, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/debtfreeguys/2018/09/06/why-social-security-wep-or-gpo-could-ruin-your-retirement/>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ “Social Security: The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP ... - Congress,” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10203>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Social Security: Issues Regarding the Coverage of Public Employees.” Policy File. U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2007.



This chart is from the Social Security Administration which breaks down the number of people and their demographics affected by the cuts imposed by the WEP and GPO.²⁸

²⁸ “Program Explainer: Government Pension Offset.” Accessed May 9, 2023. <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/program-explainers/government-pension-offset.html>.

VII. “SWOT”- Strengths

1. Increases Overall Benefits

The previous section emphasizes that the *WEP and GPO* limit social security retirement benefits. For the *WEP* and depending on which income index a person falls under, the cuts range from \$1,024 to \$5,000. The only limitation of the *WEP* is the guarantee that reduction accounts for only one-half of a retiree’s income.²⁹ The *GPO*, a more arbitrary way of cost-saving solutions, reduces the benefits of a person who has worked in various sectors by a quarter of the total amount they deserve.³⁰

H.R. 82., the “Social Security Fairness Act,” repeals the *WEP and GPO* and ensures that retirees receive appropriate compensation for their years of work. The fundamental strength of this act is that it adds to the overall financial security of a retiree. In the Stakeholders analysis brief, the paper asserted that public sector retirees and deceased spouses’ beneficiaries have the most to gain for H.R. 82 passing.³¹

For retirees, a repeal of the *GPO* and *WEP* results in their standard of living going up an estimated 30%.³² The increase in monthly benefits affords them much leeway in spending. The United States, a country that prides itself on a meritocracy, encourages talent and emphasizes its necessity in the workforce. There is no law prohibiting public sector workers from crisscrossing career paths and switching from state to federal employment. As such, passing H.R. 82. Continues this tradition of talented employees moving forward in their career paths. The passage of H.R. 82 sends a message: their work is valued, and their retirement is secure.

The cap on benefits affects primarily former government employees, considered “low-income” retirees. In their retirement, these individuals suffer considerable financial constrictions.³³ In phasing out the two amendments, recruitment of talented individuals continues and prospers since their finances and pensions remain secure. If not for economic and financial reasons, repealing the *WEP and GPO* serves a societal purpose. As Vice President Hubert Humphrey states, “The measure of a civilization is how it treats its

²⁹ “Social Security: The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP ... - Congress,” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10203>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

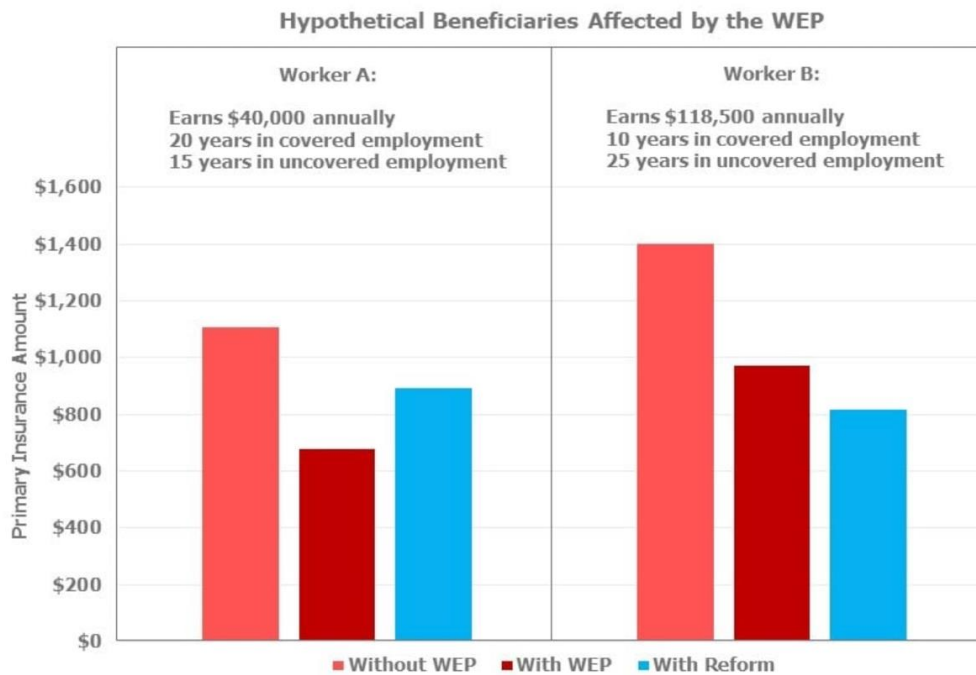
³¹ Ayado 2022 (Stakeholder Analysis: [Stakeholder Analysis.docx](#))

³² *Ibid.*

³³ “Social Security: The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP ... - Congress,” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10203>.

weakest members.” Meaning that there exists a social understanding that the elderly requires and deserve security- be it physical or financial.³⁴ Furthermore, Humphrey states, “The moral test of government is how that government treats...those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.³⁵” In repealing the *WEP and GPO*, it sustains the original notion behind Social Security in that while it may not guarantee full retirement insurance, it serves as an extra safety net for all retiring. Moreover, passing the bill provides the American public to help their neighbors and contribute to the common good.³⁶ See the graph from the *Bipartisan Budget Center*.³⁷

REFORMING WEP WOULD MAKE SOCIAL SECURITY MORE EQUITABLE FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYEES



2. H.R. 82: A work of Bipartisanship

³⁴ The Columbian, “Letter: Quote from Humphrey, Not Gandhi,” The Columbian (The Columbian, November 10, 2016), <https://www.columbian.com/news/2016/nov/11/letter-quote-from-humphrey-not-gandhi/>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “Repeal Wep,” US congressman Kelvin Brady-Proudly Serving Texas' 8th District, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://kevinbrady.house.gov/legislation/repeal-wep.htm>.

³⁷ Ritz Akabas, “One Social Security Reform That Democrats and Republicans Agree On | Bipartisan Policy Center,” 2016, <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/one-social-security-reform-that-democrats-and-republicans-agree-on/>.

A strength of the H.R. 82 is that it is bi-partisan work, supported by both Democrats and Republicans. The anecdote that best encapsulates the politics behind social security is that it is the “third rail of politics-you touch it, you die.” Since its passage in 1933, Social Security has become a lightning rod for partisans from both sides. Democrats and Republicans equally employ social security to bash each other’s heads come election day. Democrats charge Republicans as unfeeling that they would risk seniors by raising the retirement age and cutting benefits; Republicans attack Democrats for being inclined to spend money risking the overall soundness of the U.S. economy.

Leadership and members of both parties support the passage of H.R. 82. In fact, the person who introduced Congressman Rodney Davis, a Republican from Illinois. H.R. is co-sponsored by prominent Democrats and Republicans such as Richard Neal (D-Mass), and Kevin Brady (R- Tex).³⁸ The total co-sponsors result in 305 members of the House of Representatives, Democrats and Republicans.³⁹ Having a mix of co-sponsors and supporters from both parties eases some political pressure from Social Security.

In passing H.R. 82., Congress resumes its role as an effective and functioning legislator. R. Douglas Arnold notes in *The Politics of Reforming Social Security* that social security is ripe for partisans, thus making it difficult to legislate meaningful reforms.⁴⁰ In his research, Arnold found that social security makes for better political theater than actual government work.⁴¹

Concededly social security stands out as a problem in a myriad of other impactful problems. As such, a strength of H.R. 82 is that it endeavors to start with a particularly small but fundamental issue: costs and benefits. If politics remain a component in the effort to ensure the continuity of the program, and the security of the elderly, then social security remains a political football. In passing H.R. 82, it clarifies that Congress is willing to work.

³⁸ “H.R.82 - Social Security Fairness Act of 2021 - Congress.gov,” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/82>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “The Politics of Reforming Social Security - Princeton University,” accessed December 13, 2022, <https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/arnold/files/psq98.pdf>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

More importantly, H.R. 82 caters to the desires of both sides of the political spectrum. In raising overall benefits, Democrats can flaunt that their party remains a fierce advocate for unions and the elderly. Similarly, Republicans can boast that they managed to increase benefits without increasing taxes.

3. Removes Seniors from SNAP Rolls

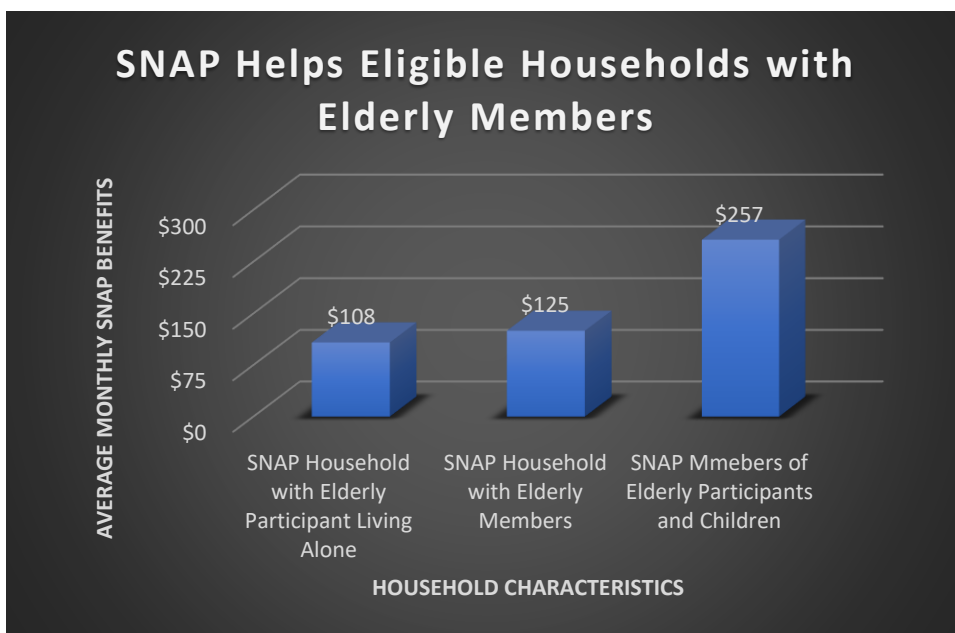
A strength of H.R. 82 is that it lessens dependency on seniors in other welfare programs such as SNAP. SNAP is the Supplemental Nutrition Assisted Program, a federally funded food voucher initiative. The funding for SNAP rests on the total amount of individuals on the roll sheet. Currently, 24% of retirees receive SNAP benefits nationally.⁴² As clarified in previous sections, there will be a noticeable increase in monthly pensions for seniors in repealing the *WEP and GPO*. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the increase in monthly allowances allows retirees to move away from welfare dependency.⁴³ H.R. 82 allows for less money for the SNAP program. The Congressional Budget Office believes that passing H.R. 82 \$2 billion (about \$6 per person in the US) saved since the decrease in the people involved results in savings in spending.⁴⁴ *See Diagram.*⁴⁵

⁴² Ayado 2022.

⁴³ “Congressional Budget Office September 20, 2022 Cost Estimate,” accessed December 13, 2022, https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2022-09/hr82_0.pdf.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Snap Helps Seniors in Pennsylvania,” Coalition Against Hunger, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.hungercoalition.org/protectsnap/forseniors>.



VIII. “SWOT”- Weakness

1.) Increases Overall Spending

A weakness of H.R. 82., is that increases in total benefits go with an increase in overall social security spending. The United States spends 19% of the National GDP on entitlements such as Medicare, Medicaid, and social security. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that larger benefits force Congress to fix and provide more mandatory spending.⁴⁶ See *CBO estimate Charts in Appendix 3.*⁴⁷

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that repealing the *WEP* and the new retirees qualified for benefits increases spending by \$880 billion (about \$2,700 per person in the US).⁴⁸ The Research also found that repealing the *GPO* increases budget spending by \$107 Billion.⁴⁹ See *the 10-year cost breakdown on the effect of Repealing GPO and WEP prepared by the Congressional Research Services in Appendix 2.*⁵⁰

⁴⁶ “Social Security: The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and the Government Pension Offset (GPO).” Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service, 2015.

⁴⁷ “Congressional Budget Office September 20, 2022 Cost Estimate,” accessed December 13, 2022, https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2022-09/hr82_0.pdf.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

These increases in benefits and overall spending require new taxes to catch up with the ten-year projection. In increasing the taxes to match the financial outlay, this bill opens the initiatives of H.R. 82 to political attacks since no one favors taxes. Another weakness is that the increases in benefits result in increases in deficit spending placing the social security fund in concerning financial insolvency.⁵¹ See the Graph below prepared by the Congressional Budget Office for deficit outlays.⁵²

Table 2.
CBO's Estimate of the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Effects of H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act of 2021, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Ways and Means on September 20, 2022

	By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars											2022-2027	2022-2032
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032		
	Net Decrease in the On-Budget Deficit												
Pay-As-You-Go Effect	0	-80	-225	-225	-220	-215	-215	-210	-205	-205	-200	-965	-2,000

2.) Inequitable Benefits

Another weakness is that the distribution of the expected benefit increases may be inequitable. Equity dictates that a law or policy affects all equally without any preferred favor. As discussed, this policy opens the possibility of inequity since the benefits might go to individuals who possess private individualized retirement funds. Conversely, as mentioned in the previous briefs, the *WEP and GPO* disproportionately affect low-income retirees. Thus, repealing both provisions might benefit those struggling by allowing them to receive more Social Security money. Kathleen Romig, in her article, *Repealing Social Security's WEP and GPO Rules Would be Misguided*, writes that

⁵¹ Ayado 2022

⁵² "Congressional Budget Office September 20, 2022, Cost Estimate," accessed December 13, 2022, https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2022-09/hr82_0.pdf.

this bill only benefits well-off individuals.⁵³ This paper elucidates that the bill crystalizes the free effect that permeates social security benefits. As stated, the point of social security is to assist those within or below struggling.⁵⁴ Ample evidence, however, maintains that this repeal benefits those who do need not the extra money. This inequity opens the policy to political attacks and public backlash. *See the graph for the projected disparity in distribution.*⁵⁵

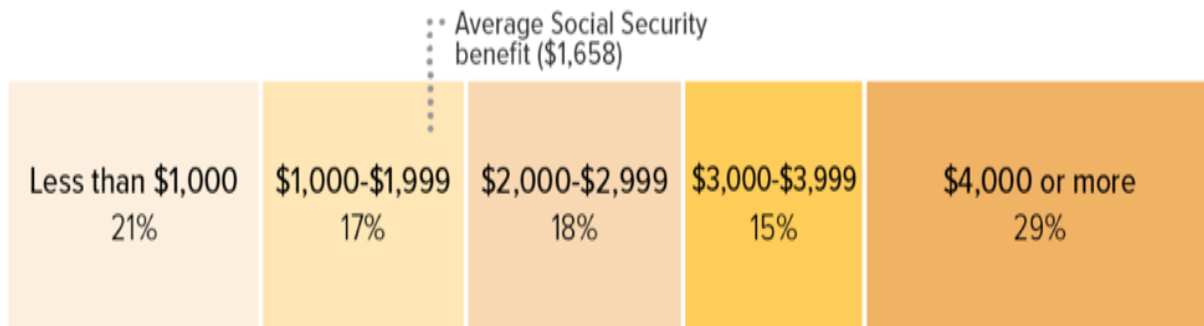
IX. Opportunities

1.) Provides the Chance for Further Improvements and Reforms

H.R. 82 presents a chance for a major reform of the social security act. More specifically, H.R.

Most WEP-Affected Beneficiaries Have Pensions Higher Than Average Social Security Benefits

Monthly noncovered pension amount for workers affected by Social Security's Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP)



Note: Social Security's Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) is designed to treat workers with work not covered by Social Security comparably to workers whose whole careers are covered. Average Social Security benefit reflects retired worker benefits. All figures are from December 2021.

Source: Zhe Li, "Social Security: The Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP)," Congressional Research Service, March 7, 2022. Social Security Administration, Monthly Statistical Snapshot, December 2021, Table 2.

⁵³ "Social Security Hearing Materials: Chairmen Brady, Johnson Opening Statements, Witness Testimony on Repealing/Replacing WEP/GPO." Congressional Documents and Publications. Washington: Federal Information & News Dispatch, LLC, 2016.

⁵⁴ Ayado 2022

⁵⁵ "Social Security Hearing Materials: Chairmen Brady, Johnson Opening Statements, Witness Testimony on Repealing/Replacing WEP/GPO." Congressional Documents and Publications. Washington: Federal Information & News Dispatch, LLC, 2016.

82 enables policymakers to restructure the financing and benefit outlay of social security. When it was passed in 1933, social security funds were raised through an "advanced funded system," in which long-term solvency became the priority. For example, social security was passed in 1933, but the benefits were not distributed till 1942.⁵⁶ Through forceful advocacy of various interest groups, financing, and benefits of social security switched over to a "pay-as-you-go" system.⁵⁷ Under this system, benefits are provided to individuals quickly but forego any consideration of future solvency. Switching to the pay-as-you-go system and further changes in social security have resulted in the inability of the trust fund to raise revenue. CBO expects insolvency of the trust fund by 2035.⁵⁸ Moreover, they estimate that \$9 trillion (about \$28,000 per person in the US) of pension benefits will not be provided.⁵⁹

This grim reality of insolvency provides a basis for policymakers for reforms to the operations of social security. To keep pace with the new spending that H.R. 82 brings, it seems prudent for leaders to provide new ways to raise revenue for the fund. H.R. 82 creates a precedent for lawmakers to work in a bipartisan manner on such a heated topic as social security.

In a hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions, and Family Policy, Barbara Bovbjerg emphasized the red tape that goes with the execution of the *WEP and GPO*.⁶⁰ In conjunction with the testimony by Bovbjerg, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) advocated for the repeal of the *WEP and GPO*. *The GAO reasons that "eliminat[ing] the GPO and WEP provisions...simplif[ies] administration."*⁶¹ Perhaps H.R. 82 will provides policymakers with an *opportunity* to re-assess the overall efficiency of social security. Feasibly, "the Social Security Fairness Act" inspires members of Congress to

⁵⁶ "The Politics of Reforming Social Security - Princeton University," accessed December 13, 2022, <https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/arnold/files/psq98.pdf>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ "Congressional Budget Office September 20, 2022, Cost Estimate," accessed December 13, 2022, https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2022-09/hr82_0.pdf.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Social Security: Issues Regarding the Coverage of Public Employees," *Social Security: Issues Regarding the Coverage of Public Employees* | U.S. GAO, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-08-248t>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

re-evaluate if benefits are distributed expeditiously and not bogged down by bureaucratic red tape. *See the diagram depicting the various aspects of the WEP and GPO processes.*⁶²

X. Threats

1.) New State and Local Workers Provided Full Social Security Benefits

The focus of much of this paper is the implication of H.R. 82 on the federal budget regarding social security. This section, however, briefly overviews the impacts on state and local employees. A report written by the Congressional Research Service titled *Social Security: Mandatory Coverage of New State and Local Government Employees* found that 27.5% of state and local government officials are considered non-covered; therefore, they receive cuts to their social security benefits.⁶³ The social security coverage rates vary depending on the individual states.⁶⁴ 70% of the total non-covered state workers reside in the following states: California, Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Texas.⁶⁵ This rapid increase of qualified people overburdens the social security system past its tolerable capacity.⁶⁶ *See the graph that shows the amount of non-covered people per state.*⁶⁷

2.) Continuing Extending of Life Expectancy

A major development that jeopardized the solvency of the social security fund is that people are growing older, thus requiring continued benefits. Life expectancy, while it decreased from last year's 76.1 years old, purports to be 77 years old.⁶⁸ H.R. 82 results in an increase in spending for

⁶² L&H CPAs, "Will You Avoid the Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision?," L&H CPA, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.lhcpafirm.com/flowcharts/will-you-avoid-the-social-security-windfall-elimination-provision>.

⁶³ "CRS Reports - Congress," accessed December 14, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Falling under the consideration of non-covered forces state and local employees to refuse half the full benefits with which they deserve.

⁶⁷ "Congress," accessed December 14, 2022, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46961/2>.

⁶⁸ "Life Expectancy in the U.S. Dropped for the Second Year in a Row in 2021," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, August 31, 2022), https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/20220831.htm.

social safety net programs. As such, amendments to the social security programs, like H.R. 82, are effective in other aspects; a reality for policymakers is that regardless of how thoughtful a certain policy reform is, so long as more people keep adding to the fold while at the same time sustaining the people already serviced add more burden to an already precarious program. In effect, H.R. 82 benefits the current retirees. However, the mixture of the newly eligible retirees, the incoming retirees, and the current one poses a threat to the long-term benefits of H.R. 82. *See CDC estimates on the longevity of Americans in the Appendix.*⁶⁹

XI. Policy Proposal

In using the "Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)" analysis, this paper provides an exhaustive caricature of the components of the "Social Security Fairness Act of 2021."

This paper endorses the passage of H.R. 82, the "Social Security Fairness Act of 2021." The support provided by this paper is due to three reasons: it avails more funds, expedites pension distribution, and ensures equitable dispersion. As discussed in previous sections, H.R. 82 grants much-needed relief to retirees considered middle class or those living within or below the poverty line. In voting for H.R. 82, leaders ensure that budgeted retirees receive leeway in their spending. A vote for H.R. 82 means lesser government maze-like agencies. In voting to repeal the *WEP and GPO* provisions, seniors are no longer forced to make difficult calculations and wait to see if their hard-earned money will suffer reductions. Finally, in supporting H.R. 82., policymakers achieve equitable means of distributing pension and spousal benefits. As mentioned previously, spousal benefits proceeds go to women. As such, these provisions disproportionately affect the financial security of women retirees. This bill supposes that by eliminating *the WEP and GPO*, retirees of all sexuality no longer receive arbitrary cuts to their pension benefits.

⁶⁹ "Vital Statistics Rapid Release - Cdc.gov," accessed December 14, 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr024.pdf>.

It is prudent, however, to point out changes that could be made that could positively affect H.R. 82 overall. The biggest concern that should be addressed is the lack of a concrete revenue-raising mechanism. The social security fund must avoid continuing to run a deficit. As such, the proceeding legislation ought to provide re-structured means to raise revenue.

Appendix 1: Life Expectancy breakdown for Different Ethnic Groups

Vital Statistics Surveillance Report

Table. Provisional life expectancy, by age, race and Hispanic origin, and sex: United States, 2021

Age (years)	All races and origins			Hispanic			Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native			Non-Hispanic Asian			Non-Hispanic Black			Non-Hispanic White		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
0.....	76.1	73.2	79.1	77.7	74.4	81.0	65.2	61.5	69.2	83.5	81.2	85.6	70.8	66.7	74.8	76.4	73.7	79.2
1.....	75.6	72.6	78.5	77.1	73.8	80.4	64.7	61.0	68.7	82.7	80.4	84.8	70.6	66.5	74.5	75.7	73.0	78.5
5.....	71.6	68.7	74.6	73.1	69.8	76.4	60.9	57.1	64.8	78.8	76.5	80.8	66.7	62.6	70.7	71.8	69.1	74.6
10.....	66.7	63.8	69.7	68.2	64.9	71.5	55.9	52.2	59.9	73.8	71.5	75.9	61.8	57.7	65.7	66.8	64.1	69.6
15.....	61.7	58.8	64.7	63.2	59.9	66.5	51.0	47.3	55.0	68.8	66.6	70.9	56.9	52.8	60.8	61.9	59.2	64.7
20.....	56.9	54.1	59.8	58.4	55.1	61.6	46.4	42.7	50.3	63.9	61.7	65.9	52.2	48.3	56.0	57.0	54.4	59.8
25.....	52.2	49.5	55.0	53.7	50.6	56.8	42.1	38.6	45.8	59.1	56.9	61.0	47.8	44.2	51.3	52.3	49.8	54.9
30.....	47.6	45.1	50.2	49.1	46.1	52.0	38.0	34.7	41.5	54.3	52.1	56.1	43.5	40.0	46.7	47.7	45.3	50.2
35.....	43.1	40.7	45.5	44.5	41.7	47.2	34.3	31.2	37.4	49.4	47.3	51.2	39.1	35.9	42.1	43.1	40.9	45.5
40.....	38.6	36.4	40.9	39.9	37.3	42.5	30.8	28.0	33.8	44.6	42.5	46.3	35.0	32.0	37.7	38.7	36.5	40.8
45.....	34.2	32.1	36.4	35.5	33.0	37.8	27.4	24.8	30.0	39.9	37.9	41.5	30.9	28.1	33.4	34.3	32.3	36.3
50.....	30.0	28.0	31.9	31.1	28.8	33.3	24.4	22.1	26.7	35.2	33.3	36.7	26.9	24.4	29.2	30.0	28.1	31.9
55.....	25.9	24.0	27.6	26.9	24.8	28.8	21.5	19.5	23.5	30.6	28.9	32.0	23.2	20.9	25.2	25.9	24.1	27.6
60.....	22.0	20.4	23.5	23.0	21.1	24.6	18.9	17.2	20.4	26.1	24.6	27.4	19.7	17.6	21.5	21.9	20.4	23.4
65.....	18.3	16.9	19.6	19.3	17.6	20.6	16.3	15.1	17.4	21.9	20.5	22.9	16.5	14.8	18.0	18.3	16.9	19.5
70.....	14.8	13.7	15.8	15.7	14.4	16.7	13.7	12.7	14.5	17.8	16.7	18.6	13.6	12.2	14.7	14.7	13.6	15.7
75.....	11.5	10.6	12.3	12.4	11.3	13.1	11.2	10.5	11.8	14.0	13.1	14.5	10.9	9.7	11.7	11.4	10.5	12.1
80.....	8.6	7.9	9.1	9.3	8.5	9.7	9.1	8.6	9.3	10.4	9.8	10.7	8.4	7.5	8.9	8.4	7.8	8.9
85.....	6.1	5.6	6.4	6.7	6.1	6.9	7.2	6.9	7.2	7.3	6.9	7.4	6.2	5.6	6.5	5.9	5.5	6.2
90.....	4.1	3.9	4.3	4.6	4.3	4.6	5.6	5.5	5.4	4.8	4.7	4.8	4.5	4.1	4.6	4.0	3.7	4.1
95.....	2.8	2.7	2.9	3.2	3.0	3.1	4.4	4.4	4.1	3.1	3.1	3.0	3.2	3.0	3.3	2.7	2.6	2.7
100.....	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.3	2.2	2.1	3.5	3.6	3.3	2.1	2.2	2.0	2.4	2.3	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.9

NOTES: Life tables by race and Hispanic origin have been adjusted for race and ethnicity misclassification on death certificates; see Technical Notes in this report. Estimates are based on provisional data for 2021. Provisional data are subject to change as additional data are received.

SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality.

Citation:

“NVSS - National Vital Statistics System Homepage,” 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/index.htm>.

Appendix 2: Budget Predictions if H.R. 82 Passes



CBO Cost Estimate
H.R. 82, as ordered reported by the House Committee on Ways and Means

Page 3

**Table 1.
Estimated Budgetary Effects of H.R. 82**


	By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars											2022-2027	2022-2032
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032		
Increases or Decreases (-) in Direct Spending													
Eliminate the Windfall Elimination Provision (Off-budget)													
Estimated Budget Authority	0	11,840	9,270	8,130	8,250	8,350	8,420	8,470	8,490	8,440	8,380	45,840	88,040
Estimated Outlays	0	11,840	9,270	8,130	8,250	8,350	8,420	8,470	8,490	8,440	8,380	45,840	88,040
Eliminate the Government Pension Offset (Off-budget)													
Estimated Budget Authority	0	11,680	9,690	9,110	9,700	10,140	10,540	10,930	11,310	11,680	12,010	50,320	106,790
Estimated Outlays	0	11,680	9,690	9,110	9,700	10,140	10,540	10,930	11,310	11,680	12,010	50,320	106,790
Interaction Among Social Security Provisions (Off-budget)													
Estimated Budget Authority	0	-1,350	-1,060	-920	-940	-950	-960	-960	-960	-960	-950	-5,220	-10,010
Estimated Outlays	0	-1,350	-1,060	-920	-940	-950	-960	-960	-960	-960	-950	-5,220	-10,010
Total Off-Budget Direct Spending													
Estimated Budget Authority	0	22,170	17,900	16,310	17,010	17,540	18,010	18,440	18,840	19,160	19,440	90,930	184,820
Estimated Outlays	0	22,170	17,900	16,310	17,010	17,540	18,010	18,440	18,840	19,160	19,440	90,930	184,820
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (On-budget)													
Estimated Budget Authority	0	-80	-225	-225	-220	-215	-215	-210	-205	-205	-200	-965	-2,000
Estimated Outlays	0	-80	-225	-225	-220	-215	-215	-210	-205	-205	-200	-965	-2,000
Total Changes in Direct Spending													
Estimated Budget Authority	0	22,090	17,675	16,085	16,790	17,325	17,795	18,230	18,635	18,955	19,240	89,965	182,820
Estimated Outlays	0	22,090	17,675	16,085	16,790	17,325	17,795	18,230	18,635	18,955	19,240	89,965	182,820

Components may not sum to totals because of rounding; SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The outlays of the Social Security trust funds are classified as off-budget. SNAP outlays are classified as on-budget.

Citation:

“Congressional Budget Office September 20, 2022, Cost Estimate.” Accessed December 13, 2022. https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2022-09/hr82_0.pdf

Appendix 3: Congressional Budget Office Predictions though F.Y. 2022


September 20, 2022

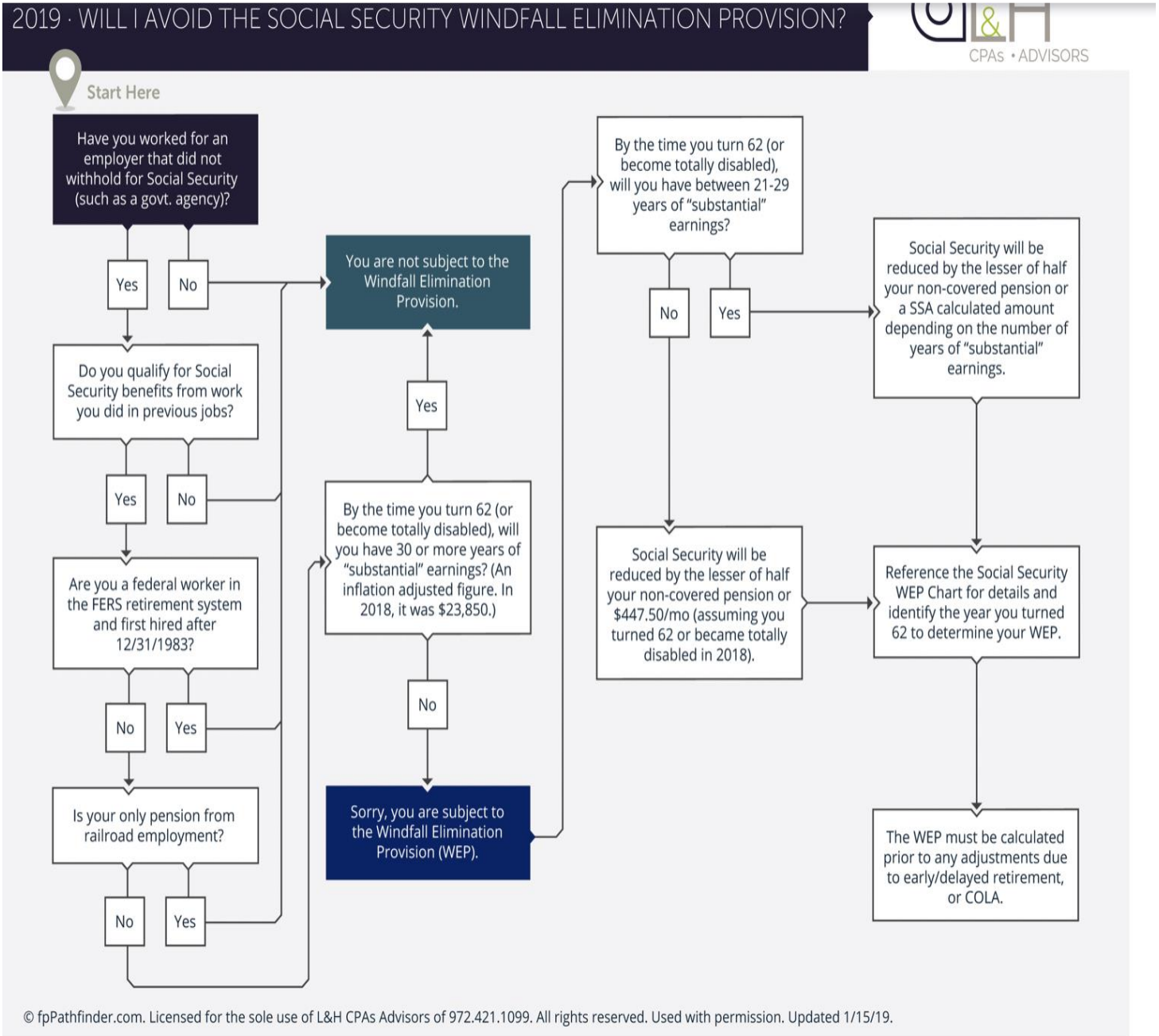
At a Glance			
H.R. 82, Social Security Fairness Act of 2021			
As ordered reported by the House Committee on Ways and Means on September 20, 2022			
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2022	2022-2027	2022-2032
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	89,965	182,820
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	89,965	182,820
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	0	0	0
Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply?	Yes	Mandate Effects	
Increases on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2033?	No	Contains intergovernmental mandate?	Excluded from UMRA
		Contains private-sector mandate?	Excluded from UMRA
<p>The bill would</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), which reduces Social Security benefits for certain retired and disabled workers who receive pensions for work that is not covered by the Social Security system Eliminate the Government Pension Offset (GPO), which reduces Social Security benefits for certain spouses and surviving spouses who receive pensions for work that is not covered by the Social Security system <p>Estimated budgetary effects would stem from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paying larger Social Security benefits to people who are subject to the WEP and the GPO under current law Reducing benefits paid through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in response to the larger Social Security benefits paid to some people who receive benefits through both programs <p>Areas of significant uncertainty include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Predicting how many people will be subject to the WEP and the GPO under current law Projecting the size of benefit reductions attributable to the WEP and the GPO under current law 			
Detailed estimate begins on the next page.			

See also CBO's *Cost Estimates Explained*, www.cbo.gov/publication/54437;
How CBO Prepares Cost Estimates, www.cbo.gov/publication/53519; and *Glossary*, www.cbo.gov/publication/42904.

Citation:

“Congressional Budget Office September 20, 2022, Cost Estimate.” Accessed December 13, 2022. https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2022-09/hr82_0.pdf

Appendix 4: Requirements that Exempts an Individual from WEP cuts



Citation:

Tom Gartner, “Will I Avoid The Social Security Windfall Elimination Provision?,” ISC Financial Advisors, March 21, 2019, <https://www.iscfinancialadvisors.com/blog/will-i-avoid-the-social-security-windfall-elimination-provision>

Appendix 5: Breakdown of the Number of People without Social Security Coverage per state

Part I

Table I. Social Security Coverage of State and Local Government Employees, by State, in 2018

State	State and Local Government Employees	Covered Workers: State and Local Government Employees With Social Security Coverage		Noncovered Workers: State and Local Government Employees Without Social Security Coverage	
	Number	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Alabama	360,900	331,700	91.9%	29,200	8.0%
Alaska	83,300	39,900	47.8%	43,400	52.1%
Arizona	344,600	327,000	94.8%	17,600	5.1%
Arkansas	194,900	176,100	90.3%	18,800	9.6%
California	2,442,300	1,090,000	44.6%	1,352,300	55.3%
Colorado	465,200	134,200	28.8%	331,000	71.1%
Connecticut	268,200	191,200	71.2%	77,000	28.7%
Delaware	67,800	64,100	94.5%	3,700	5.4%
District of Columbia	78,300	65,000	83.0%	13,300	16.9%
Florida	1,107,900	967,700	87.3%	140,200	12.6%
Georgia	671,100	474,500	70.7%	196,600	29.2%
Hawaii	114,700	83,500	72.7%	31,200	27.2%
Idaho	142,700	134,200	94.0%	8,500	5.9%
Illinois	927,200	523,600	56.4%	403,600	43.5%
Indiana	480,300	424,500	88.3%	55,800	11.6%
Iowa	300,100	270,300	90.0%	29,800	9.9%
Kansas	298,200	271,500	91.0%	26,700	8.9%
Kentucky	343,900	256,500	74.5%	87,400	25.4%
Louisiana	304,900	80,000	26.2%	224,900	73.7%
Maine	103,900	55,700	53.6%	48,200	46.3%
Maryland	468,900	426,000	90.8%	42,900	9.1%
Massachusetts	497,600	13,700	2.7%	483,900	97.2%
Michigan	775,200	632,500	81.5%	142,700	18.4%
Minnesota	474,200	438,100	92.3%	36,100	7.6%
Mississippi	258,800	239,500	92.5%	19,300	7.4%
Missouri	459,400	344,300	74.9%	115,100	25.0%
Montana	97,700	89,300	91.4%	8,400	8.5%
Nebraska	152,200	145,300	95.4%	6,900	4.5%
Nevada	158,000	23,200	14.6%	134,800	85.3%
New Hampshire	105,600	93,800	88.8%	11,800	11.1%
New Jersey	650,200	597,300	91.8%	52,900	8.1%
New Mexico	194,300	175,600	90.3%	18,700	9.6%

Part 2

State	State and Local Government Employees	Covered Workers: State and Local Government Employees With Social Security Coverage		Noncovered Workers: State and Local Government Employees Without Social Security Coverage	
	Number	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
New York	1,746,900	1,658,100	94.9%	88,800	5.0%
North Carolina	660,600	607,700	91.9%	52,900	8.0%
North Dakota	83,300	74,400	89.3%	8,900	10.6%
Ohio	808,900	22,200	2.7%	786,700	97.2%
Oklahoma	240,300	227,300	94.5%	13,000	5.4%
Oregon	281,100	271,200	96.4%	9,900	3.5%
Pennsylvania	749,900	689,200	91.9%	60,700	8.0%
Puerto Rico	187,300	157,600	84.1%	29,700	15.8%
Rhode Island	52,800	44,000	83.3%	8,800	16.6%
South Carolina	314,800	290,200	92.1%	24,600	7.8%
South Dakota	80,800	75,100	92.9%	5,700	7.0%
Tennessee	485,000	440,900	90.9%	44,100	9.0%
Texas	1,978,800	912,800	46.1%	1,066,000	53.8%
Utah	256,700	233,000	90.7%	23,700	9.2%
Vermont	54,400	52,900	97.2%	1,500	2.7%
Virginia	688,800	639,600	92.8%	49,200	7.1%
Washington	548,800	494,500	90.1%	54,300	9.8%
West Virginia	114,800	106,400	92.6%	8,400	7.3%
Wisconsin	438,700	377,800	86.1%	60,900	13.8%
Wyoming	74,500	70,900	95.1%	3,600	4.8%
Other ^a	7,400	500	6.7%	6,900	93.2%
Total	23,247,100	16,626,100	71.5%	6,621,000	28.4%

Source: Data from the Social Security Administration obtained by CRS in January 2021.

Notes: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

a. Includes people employed by American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and U.S. Virgin Islands.

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Delta Airlines – A Carbon Neutrality Pact to 2050 and Beyond a Public Policy White Paper— *Drew P. Lemon, Gettysburg College*

I

Introduction

As part of a new global climate initiative, Delta Airlines has recently announced to the world they will be embarking on an initiative to provide a never-before-seen technique of air travel. This included completely carbon-neutral air transport and a transition towards net-zero carbon emissions across all operational sectors of their fleet by 2050. Delta Airlines has now become the first official United States-based airline to promise net-zero carbon flying to the entire public within the next few decades, and the airline is set on being the catalyst in generating positive change for the United States aviation industry and its impact on the environment, domestically and beyond.

In pursuit of this major climate policy, Delta airlines has showcased its goal to provide carbon-neutral flying as a revolutionary change that has been much needed for many decades. As the airline has decided to set its fiscal and corporate efforts into addressing many of the world's increasingly unregulated climate emissions, Delta believes that this step in pursuing clean flying is just one way the airline can help to do its part in helping to reduce the transportation sectors global carbon footprint. Moving with speed and efficiency, Delta airlines has since implemented a cohesive and theoretically sound policy objective in pursuing net-zero carbon emissions in all finite areas of operations for their set deadline of 2050. The airline's blueprint and infrastructural overhaul are deeply highlighted in many policies analysis papers released by their corporate headquarters, as the allocation of investment, the altering of operational changes, and all worldwide airport operations and employees alike will be affected by this new airline climate policy.

As Delta moves to implement net-zero carbon practices in all functionalities by 2050, the airline certainly has a long road ahead, as many logistical challenges pertaining to employment and operational changes, coupled with millions upon millions of dollars of investment have been deemed essential for this operational visionary to become a reality. Delta airlines believe that with the right mindset and drive from employees across all levels of the company, along with the appropriate, timely, and strategic investment of funds with corporate partners, that the airline will become a sweeping leader in making sustainable air travel the future of the aviation industry.

This white paper will concisely analyze all aspects of Delta's carbon neutrality mission while analyzing all necessary tools that are essential in making the airline's policy goal a feasible reality by the publicly promised deadline of 2050. Prior to any analysis sections of Delta's carbon neutrality policy, the *preliminary* section of this paper will focus heavily on what catalysts spurred Delta's policy to pursue its climate initiative, while also discussing the evolution of its climate ambitions that have occurred to make the policy what it is today. In the analysis portion of Delta's exceptionally large climate policy summit for change, this paper will concisely explore the 1) Strengths, 2) Weaknesses, 3) Opportunities and 4) Threats (a formal SWOT analysis) that Delta will face as the airline moves forward in the coming months and years in pursuing their climate policy.

As further contained within the specific SWOT analysis sections of this white paper, this policy exploration will take a key interest in exploring the relevant 1) *stakeholders* involved in the policy that is essential for Delta to operationalize carbon neutrality. Similarly, the subsections of this SWOT analysis will also contain pertinent evaluations and analyses pertaining to the airlines 2) *implementation* of the policy, as well as their 3) *required outputs, outcomes, and impacts* on all areas of public and private sectors of society and the environment. These sections of analysis will also include a policy recommendations section moving forward, critiquing how the policy can be

improved while observing potential shortcomings that may arise as the airline move to implement carbon neutrality across all areas of its fleet.

In all, this policy white paper seeks to provide the structural framework for Delta's net-zero carbon neutrality policy for its 2050 goals, while also providing all relevant insights into its workings and implications once enacted into all sectors of the airline's operations. Delta's mission to reduce the negative externalities of any carbon emissions while flying is changing the eras definition of the modern jet age while showing that the airline's massive undertakings to save the climate and its health are nothing short of revolutionary.

II

Delta's Carbon Neutrality – A Policy Background

As Delta airlines move to push goals of achieving sustainable flying, the company's decision to become a carbon-neutral operator by 2050 has only come to fruition and knowledge of the general public within recent months. However, Delta and other major US-based airlines alike have been carefully examining the possibility of how and when to implement new forms of clean energy flying for the past several years. Since the beginning of various climate activist movements in the early 1970s, many progressive Americans began to show our nation and the world all of the negative impacts that human activities, like transportation and manufacturing, have on the environment through global carbon and fossil fuel emissions. However, it wasn't until the past decade that many climate scientists began to closely monitor the rising of global air temperatures, and pinpoint one of the largest contributors of increased global heat and emissions to the air-transportation sector.

As a result of these scientific developments, the international airline industry has recently become determined in pushing ambitious climate goals in aiding to reduce the overall level of Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions released during mass times of worldwide air travel. Climate

activists and sustainable energy advocates across the world are sounding the alarm on all sectors of the aviation industry and other forms of mass transportation and energy production, like gas automobile cars, and fossil fuel burning, citing that these inefficiently continued behaviors are the reasoning for increased pollutant levels, the irradiation of the many of the world's ecosystems and the overall depletion of air quality across many corners of the world with excessive heating. As one of the largest used and non-excludible industries to society, airlines like Delta and others across the world have heard and seen the warnings from climate scientists and experts concerning the negative externalities of their jet operations and have now decided to act on what they believe is essential to saving the sustainable future of our planet.

The main catalyst that initiated Delta's ambition to push for cleaner air travel in the wake of new climate science came during the height of the COVID-19 virus. As the pandemic swept across the world, its peak times of infection caused many international governments to pursue national lockdowns that forced airlines to halt operations on an international scale. With the Center for Disease Control (CDC) suggesting no-international air travel during the height of the pandemic in 2020, coupled with nations prohibiting infected states across the globe from allowing passengers to travel in and out of their own countries, Delta was forced to halt over 70% of its international and domestic operations with a 64% cut in operating revenue during the pandemic (CBS News, 2021). As a result of passenger demand loss for travel over lockdowns and people's fears of possible COVID-19 contraction by flying, Delta saw a loss of \$12 Billion (CBS News, 2021) forcing the airline to place over 550 of its current operating fleet in storage, as there simply wasn't enough travel demand to operate these aircraft (Delta Airlines, 2021).

However, Delta cleverly used the 2020 pandemic and its time of lost passenger demand to re-invent the environmental efficiency of the company and its fleet. Delta chose to operationalize an opportunity for change during its massive cut in passenger air travel during the pandemic, as the

airline believed that implementing carbon offset and neutrality programs with little operations would streamline the efficient aircraft transition to green travel the airline has been planning for years. Delta cited in a press release that the airline was audacious in its commitment to carbon neutrality from March 2020 onward, as this era of changing passenger demand has “allowed the ideas of carbon neutrality to come to fruition with swift impact through immediate actions, coupled with long-term investments to combat climate change.” (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021).

Concerning this, Delta used the pandemic and its paralyzing of passenger travel in the airline industry to invoke their carbon neutrality mission for 2050 in the short run by retiring older airplanes that were less fuel-efficient and more expensive to maintain. Delta's retirement of these older planes reduced fuel efficiencies and maintenance costs of older planes that could be used as capital to invest in new green travel initiatives. Delta cited that their parking of more than 700 older aircraft during the pandemic “helped reduce fuel expenses and output by over 40% and by reducing costs to \$1.9 billion compared to the same period a year ago. Delta also saw its maintenance expenses down by as much as 90 percent during 2020, according to Delta’s 10-Q filing (CBS News, 2021). The airline also cited in a press release that they used the short-run implications of loss travel demand enabled the airline to embark on its intention to “achieve carbon neutrality by directly reducing emissions through the fleet and operational efficiencies and retirements and addressing remaining emissions through carbon removal and offset project investments.” (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021).

Figure I – The Parking of Delta’s Older, Costly, and less Fuel-Efficient Airplanes during Pandemic

*Image I*

Delta's practice of gradually removing less fuel-efficient airplanes to initiate their move to carbon neutrality operations during the pandemic can be seen above. In the picture, Delta removes a small portion of its total 700 retired planes out of service during COVID-19 and lost passenger demand at one of its hub Airport's unused runways in Salt Lake City, UT. In this image on the left, a series of Boeing 757-200 model planes can be seen parked, with a collection of McDonald Douglas MD-88 and MD-90 rear engine planes in the back right of this image. These planes were said to be some of the most expensive and fuel-inefficient planes in the fleet. All McDonald Douglas planes in this image and many of the 757-200 series model planes and their fleet-maintained airframes over 35 years old and have since been retired to cut down on costs and fuel inefficiencies (Narishkin et al., 2021).

Delta's practice of removing inefficient airplanes from their fleet during COVID-19 enabled the airline to realize how much they were spending to maintain older inefficient planes rather than investing these costs as capital in new carbon neutrality operation projects. Thus, the retirement of

¹ Delta Airlines Aging Fleet in Salt Lake City, UT
<https://www.businessinsider.com/delta-addressing-its-aging-plane-problem-due-to-the-pandemic-2020-10>

older and inefficient planes began to occur, and the funds were invested to enhance their fleet with new efficient travel and move toward their carbon neutrality goal for 2050.

While the COVID-19 virus had many long-enduring and trying implications associated with lost airline funds and passenger profit losses, the pandemic and its externalities were, in many ways, a benefit to the airline industry, all of society, and certainly the environment. The pandemic put Delta's operations on pause and enabled the airline to step back and see the ineffectiveness of their operations while showing the airline that streamlined costs and operational improvements would help Delta immensely in achieving their carbon neutrality pact. Without the pandemic as the catalyst for change, Delta airlines may not have been able to set out on their ambitious climate agenda and improve inefficient operations as recently as the airline has done. It's evident that the pandemic was a catalyst for change from many standpoints, as it built Delta's pursuit of carbon neutrality while placing the environment at a much higher priority across the world. The pandemic made Delta and all other US airlines commit to carbon neutrality in some form or another within the next coming decades.

III

“SWOT” Analysis

Delta’s Carbon Neutrality – *Policy Strengths*

A - Reductions in CO2 Emissions and Consumption of Fossil Fuels

As Delta Airlines introduced its policy to the aviation industry and the traveling public in October earlier this year, it was very clear that there will first exist many strengths pertaining to Delta’s commitment to pursue carbon neutrality. These strengths that will arise as this policy is implemented will mainly be shown in several policy outcomes and impacts that generate positive externalities for the public in the next coming years, should Delta implement carbon neutrality by 2050. Similarly, several of Delta’s stakeholders and corporate partners are an asset to the airline's

new policy, as they will be key players in integrating and pursuing this climate initiative, in the long run, are a critical strength and asset that underlies the fabric of the company's new environmental, policy.

The first notable strength that arises from this policy's implementation is its ability to reduce consumption and emissions by substantial amounts not only across the airline industry but the travel industry itself. This strength of the policy was analyzed in Delta's carbon neutrality analysis in brief 3, which analyzed potential energy outcomes and impacts. See Delta's Policy Brief 3. Within the publication of brief 3, the most observable and quantifiable outcome strengths that will arise from Delta's new carbon-neutral policy will be 1) a massive reduction in consumption of fossil-based fuels and 2) a reduction in CO2 emissions.

As Delta begins to move away from the usage of fossil-based non-renewable fuels, the airline has already seen major improvements in output in the short run with the enactment of its carbon neutrality agenda. In 2020, the company retired more than 200 older aircraft that were not capable of operating on biofuels, but only fossil fuel jet-petroleum. Newer aircraft that will be implemented as a result of this policy has been calculated to be roughly 25 percent more fuel-efficient per seat mile with a decrease in fossil fuel consumption. Due to those fleet decisions and reduced passenger loads amid COVID-19, Delta's fleet was nearly six percent more fuel-efficient per available seat mile in 2020 than in 2019, saving 117 million gallons of fuel over the year. That is equal to the emissions from the annual electricity consumption of almost 200,000 households, or roughly all households in the city of Atlanta (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021).

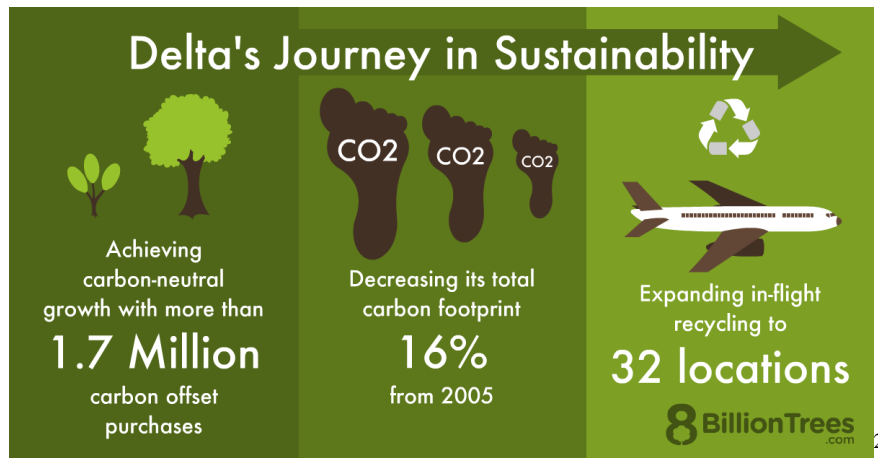
Similarly, Delta can also expect greater strengths in its new proposed policy with reduced fuel usage in the medium and long run. This output reduction in long-term fuel consumption will arise from more of Delta's partnerships with sustainable fuel engineers and investors. While the new fuel technologies set of offset fossil fuels are expensive today, Delta believes that the outputs

of reduced petroleum will have great future potential while being the first step towards zero-impact aviation (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021). Delta's largest output reduction in fossil fuel usage is expected to arise from Sustainable Aviation Fuel, or SAF, which is an alternative to fossil fuels and is projected to reduce Delta's emissions by up to 80 percent during its full lifecycle by 2030. Examples of SAF include biofuels and synthetic fuels (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021).

In relation to this, this policy has enabled Delta to set its medium-term goal as to replace 10 percent of its jet fuel refined from fossil fuel with SAF by the end of 2030. The company has agreed to purchase a future supply of 70 million gallons of sustainable aviation fuel per year. That includes 10 million beginning in 2024 from Gevo and 60 million beginning in 2025 from Northwest Advanced Bio-Fuels, representing a projected 1.7 percent of Delta's total annual fuel consumption, adjusted for 2019 flying levels (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021). These investments, once fully implemented by 2030, are expected to produce an output of over 35-40% reduction in fossil fuel-based petroleum consumption (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021). These reductions in fossil fuel emissions are a clear strength of this new policy.

Delta Airlines is also expected to showcase for of their policy strengths pertaining to major outputs, as the airline is set to reduce CO2 emissions in the short and medium run as the airline transitions to biofuels. In a recent study done by 8 billion trees, a climate strategist group, Delta's current output in biofuels is expected to reduce CO2 emissions by 16% in 2030 compared to 2005. A pictured graphic is included below to illustrate these changes in carbon emissions over the time of Delta's pursuit of carbon neutrality.

Predicted Outputs in CO2 Reduction by 2030 – Delta Net Carbon

*Image III*

While Delta's predicted output reduction of CO₂ emissions by 16% is impressive to other US Airlines, Delta will need to look abroad to see what other Airlines from nations across the world are doing to achieve more viable carbon capture or carbon offset programs. New technologies exist across the world and have been implemented by other airlines that would further reduce emissions that have not yet been explored here in the United States. Delta could also attempt to reduce emissions by more than 16% with new carbon offset strategies from the international scale. Delta should consider consulting with corporate strategists from other leading CO₂ emission-reducing airlines outside of the US, like British Airways and Austria's airline Qantas.

B- Leading

Environmental Change with Lasting Impacts

In examining the strengths concerning the impacts of Delta's carbon neutrality agenda on the US public and private sectors, it's apparent that environmental sustainability and environmental leadership are at the forefront of a successful net carbon emissions campaign. If Delta can achieve

² Delta Airlines Journey to Carbon Sustainability, <https://www.delta.com/us/en/about-delta/sustainability>

its climate promises by the end of 2050 like it had promised this previous year, the airline would be showcasing its policy strengths as it will become a leader in clean emissions and the aviation industry, setting the precedent for the future of air travel.

Most evidently, Delta's carbon neutrality pact would impact the environment, providing an overall healthier planet and air traveling environment. In addition to exploring investments in SAF and research and development for new technologies, Delta plans to further extend its impact on helping to create a better eco-friendly air travel industry. The airline had committed to spending more than \$30 million to address 13 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions from March 1 to Dec. 31, 2020, through a carbon offset portfolio (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021). That is equal to the carbon sequestered by 17 million acres of U.S. forests in one year, enough to cover the state of West Virginia (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021). As carbon offset is verified, quantifiable emissions reduction as a result of an investment in a project would be designed to avoid, reduce or remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. If Delta continues to divulge investments into projects of this size and magnitude, in the long run, this airline itself would singlehandedly avoid the releasing of an average of 5 million metric tons of carbon to the atmosphere per year (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021).

Concerning this, Delta's creation of a total carbon-neutral airline would showcase environmental leadership at a never before achieved level, impressing and impacting society in being the first-ever airline in the history of the aviation industry to pursue environmental leadership at the forefront of corporate operations. However, Delta and its policy initiatives have already generated impacts on the public as an environmental leader has already thus far been recognized as an achievement by many industry professionals. From being the first and only U.S. airline to "voluntarily cap greenhouse gas emissions at 2012 levels to last year's commitment to be the first carbon-neutral airline globally, Delta has a longstanding commitment to sustainable air travel

(Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021). Delta was the No. 1 airline named among America's Most Sustainable Companies by Barron's in 2020, the only U.S. airline included in the 2021 S&P Global Sustainability Yearbook while receiving the Vision for America Award by Keep America Beautiful and Captain Planet Foundation's Superhero Corporate Award. Delta has also earned a spot on the FTSE4Good Index for six consecutive years and the Dow Jones Sustainability North America Index for ten consecutive years (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2021).

While Delta's sustainability impacts on the environment and the industries in the US economy are paramount, the airline should be cautious about how their policy will impact their workers in different fuel sectors of the company. It's clear that changes to sustainable biofuels, and eventually electric plane operations, will change the workforce of Delta in some way. It is recommended that Delta pursue a professional corporate employment analysis to better understand how their change to carbon neutrality will affect the patterns of job opportunities and employment of their labor force working in the current fuel operations of the airline.

C- Airbus as a Stakeholder

The last and most noticeable strength according to Delta's carbon neutrality policy comes from the Occitanic, France-based Airbus Aerospace Engineering Group. Airbus has long withstood a positive reputation among the airline industry as a reliable and financially sound company for which to invest in new airplanes among airlines worldwide. In recent months, Delta has been working closely alongside Airbus as it pertains to engineering new planes to run off sustainable fuels, and it's clear that Airbus and its advanced technology in aerospace development and clean energy flying makes its partnership with Delta a major asset, as the airline moves through its pursuit of implementing sustainable fuels.

According to Delta, Airbus now supplies more than 44% of the airline's current fleet composition, with 361 aircraft of different sizes in service across the world. As many of Delta's

Airbus aircraft are aging in technology and performance (with some more than 20 years old), Airbus is now looking for ways to re-enhance the performance of newly designed aircraft to produce a more efficient, conscientious, and streamlined level of air transportation. As Airbus is developing and testing new technologies to implement across aircraft designs, the organization's superb leadership and financial standing, coupled with innovative advanced science in the aerospace forecast a promising level of growth for Delta's carbon neutrality goals.

In recent months, Airbus has been spearheading the lead on alternative jet power usage and development as the company has just inaugurated a facility in Filton, UK, for testing categorized propulsion jet systems and fuels for European air travel (Hepher, 2021). In this facility, airbus has performed tests and studies on current levels of airplane CO₂ emissions over each new jet generation, and thus became the first plane maker to categorize and publish "Scope 3 Emissions" when designing new aircraft. Scope 3 emissions are pollutants from activities of a firm not controlled by the reporting organization, but that the organization indirectly impacts its value chain (EPA Center for Corporate Climate Leadership, 2020). These pollutants can range from waste generated in company operations, employee commuting, and other operational fuel and energy-related activities and are not required to be disclosed by a firm (EPA Center for Corporate Climate Leadership, 2020). However, Airbus is one of a few companies that is finally reporting levels of scope 3 emissions to lessen their environmental footprint when testing alternative renewable jet technologies. It is conclusive that Airbus's extra commitment to providing corporate transparency in their emission testing practices would aid in Delta's adoption of new, sustainable Airbus planes.

Concerning this, Airbus is now implementing two new forms of alternative jet power that have not yet been utilized by any other firm in the industry. The company has now publicized 1) hydrogen as the preferred energy source for future airplanes, pledging to introduce the first fully hydrogen-powered commercial plane in 2035, and 2) Hybrid-electric alternatives to power larger

aircraft that cannot yet be powered solely by hydrogen (Hepher, 2021). Airbus is pledging to have both large and small size completely hydrogen-powered airplanes in the long run but cannot achieve these measures without utilizing an existing short-run hybrid-electric propulsion technology (Hepher, 2021). When a spokesperson for Airbus was asked how these new hybrid technologies will help United and Delta Airlines reach carbon neutrality, Airbus claimed “only a combination of new technologies, including hydrogen, will enable us to achieve zero emissions for our airline’s deadlines (Hepher, 2021).”

With this, Airbus may even possess such advanced technology to be able to implement hydrogen-powered planes in the near future. In the image below is an example of three types of planes developed by Airbus as part of the company's ZERO (E) or ZERO Emissions hybrid fuel program. The prototypes of these planes were released by airbus with the chart below, as these are the models of smaller-medium size hydrogen-powered plane prototypes Airbus is currently pursuing (The Airbus Group, 2021).

Image III – Hydrogen-Powered Prototypes of Airbus Planes



Image III

³ The Airbus Aviation Group Commitment to Hydrogen Powered Planes, <https://www.airbus.com/en/innovation/zero-emission-journey/hydrogen/zeroe>

At Airbus, the company has the ambition to develop the world's first zero-emission commercial aircraft by 2035 (The Airbus Group, 2021). Hydrogen propulsion will help airlines to deliver on their ambitions of reduced emissions to Delts. Airbuses ZERO-E concept aircraft enables the company to explore a variety of configurations and hydrogen technologies that will shape the development of our future zero-emission aircraft for their partner airlines (The Airbus Group, 2021).

Engineering experts at Airbus claim that their strategy to produce zero-emission airplanes will only be achieved if they can first get hydrogen to power relatively small planes to start, and then galvanize green investments for full hydrogen technologies (Hepher, 2021). However, this strategy poses an issue as full hydrogen power jet planes will be required at a massive volume for many airlines that will take years to develop, coupled with completely new infrastructure to manage hydrogen model planes. Other airbus engineers have proposed exploring "open rotor engines" with visible blades using a mixture of traditional turbines and electric propulsions for future replacements of Delta's fleet and other airlines alike (Hepher, 2021). Delta currently has 240 Airbus a320 equipment, with many quickly reaching their airframe age limits. These newly proposed ideas of hybrid-electric propulsions from the innovative Airbus could soon be future replacements to Delta's older Airbus planes, like the a320.

It is conclusive that Airbus as a stakeholder is a significant stakeholder strength for Delta, as the company pursues continuous dedication to ensuring airlines like Delta can meet their carbon neutrality goals with sustainable equipment. Airbuses' proposal to lay the groundwork for their future concept of zero-emission aircraft travel with hybrid-electric propulsion technologies can be justifiable. Airbus has decided that a combination of existing technologies must be used in the short run to inevitably meet its goal of completing hydrogen-powered aircraft in the long run. It is important to note that the Seattle, WA based airplane manufacture Boeing also comprises much of

Delta's fleet. While this airplane engineer isn't as technologically advanced as Airbus, the company still offers useful technologies that serve as strengths for Delta pursuing its policy. See Delta Policy Brief 2 Boeing as a stakeholder.

Above all, Airbus has a strong financial future with much support from its airlines and investors. Financial experts claim that airbus continuously has far better performance than that its counterparts regarding performance and sales. Likewise, Airbus continuously has airlines placing substantially higher frequencies and quantities of aircraft orders than its counterparts, which often only deliver a fraction of the number of planes to airlines as Airbus (Hepher, 2021). These reoccurring patterns of high airplane orders show an elevated level of airline trust in airbus manufacturing and technologies, showing that airbus production would be desirable for Delta's new fleet of sustainable aircraft.

IV

“SWOT” Analysis

Delta's Carbon Neutrality – Policy Weaknesses

While Delta Airlines does possess much strength pertaining to different aspects of the implementation of its carbon neutrality policy, the airline's new proposition does also seem to maintain several weaknesses that may hinder the company from offering its zero-emissions travel by 2050. Several logistical concerns regarding Delta's policy, such as its 1) *massive, pandemic hit fiscal investments* into fuel and airplanes, coupled with 2) *the inability to build sustainable fuel accessibility infrastructure for reliable operations* will be debilities in the medium and long run for Delta's climate policy being achieved within the next few foreseeable decades.

\$1 Billion Investment to Clean Flying

Delta's first notable weakness in achieving clean flying comes from its commitment to invest a total of \$1 billion within the next 10-year interval to directly improve partnerships, build

new technology and implement operational changes to all areas of their fleet. These investments plan to be implemented throughout the company within the immediate future in building a global business going forward that mitigates all emissions, as Delta will allocate \$1 Billion of output funds to achieve the desired emissions goal in the categories of sustainable fuel development and new aerospace technologies. (Delta Airlines, 2020).

In relation to this, Delta claims that these allocated funds will go towards building increased output investment strategies in driving innovation, advancing clean air travel technologies, accelerating the reduction of carbon emissions and waste, and establishing new projects to mitigate the balance of emissions (Delta Airlines, 2020). These large sum financial investments are set to be the foundational catalyst for change throughout the corporation that will stimulate the airline's ambitious commitment to a viable green future, however, many financial analysts are skeptical as to Delta's purpose and capability in investing this much money after the airline took such massive financial losses after the COVID-19 pandemic. The problem with this section of the policy aligns not with *where* the capital is being invested, but simply *how much* of it given recent fiscal losses.

A \$1 billion investment into a new project after the airline has just faced massive financial losses reduced by the pandemic generates a major weakness in this policy. The problem with this large investment has recently come to light after Delta's shareholders were directly affected by the 2020 pandemic significant cut in passenger demand across all of Delta's travel markets, taking the airline to a fiscal loss of over \$12 billion in 2020 (US News – AP, 2021). Additionally, Delta's revenue plunged to \$3.97 billion from \$11.44 billion during the quarter of the year when the pandemic was just beginning to affect U.S. travel. The figure was \$30 million more than expected in the FactSet survey. Service between the U.S. and both Asia and Europe was particularly hard hit, down nearly 90% (US News – AP, 2021). Due to these losses, financial experts are forecasting

that Delta's \$1 billion investment into its carbon pact may not be the best idea for now, as this deficit is the largest annual loss in the history of the airline, capping it as the worst year ever (US News – AP, 2021).

Concerning this deficit, experts cite that Delta “will face difficult months ahead but is eyeing a recovery in 2021 as recovery will take time and Covid vaccines are administered around the country, the airline must remain careful at balancing its losses and watching its cash burns” (CBS News, 2021). These experts are forecasting that Delta’s large fiscal investment into its sustainable fuel project may hurt partners and investors, as the airline is still hoping to soon return to predictable levels of returned revenue growth (Baccardax, 2021). It’s recommended that Delta re-evaluate the magnitude and extent of its capital investment, as investing smaller amounts over time may set to offset profit losses from last year, turn greater revenues in 2022 quarters, and maintain shareholder satisfaction.

B - Building Reliable Infrastructure for Sustainable Fuel Accessibility

As Delta continues to partner with some of its largest aircraft production companies to develop clean jet fuels, the airline may have proven that clean fuels are possible, but the airline will face challenges in receiving regular supply stocks of these new biofuels in the future from petroleum suppliers. This potential setback possesses a major weakness for Delta’s implementation and operationalization of its clean travel initiative in providing relatively supply, availability, costs, permit retention, storage, and employee operation for their new biofuels. The weakness from this section of the policy arises as Delta has not yet *publicly* assessed the relative consistency, availability, or cost of these clean fuels, the permits required to store such fuels, the operation, construction, location of fuel storage facilities, or the appropriate employee training of operations with new biofuels to achieve further carbon offsets (Bogaisky, 2020). For these reasons, it’s clear

that the use of advanced biofuels is a likely short-term solution for the airline and poses a weakness for the airline's implementation of sustainable biofuels (Dichter et al, 2020).

Delta's access to sustainable fuel components is scattered, and the airline will have trouble obtaining substances that are mixed with the fuel to make it "sustainable." For example, the technical feasibility of fuels made from vegetable or waste oils is proven, and some airlines like Delta use the fuel in daily operations (Dichter et al, 2020). However, it's clear that getting the "appropriate feedstock and supply chain in place to access the bio-materials contain within these clean fuels is difficult, as building production facilities and fuel refineries are costly to airlines" (Dichter et al, 2020). Similarly, access to these bio-goods is often scarce, as airlines will scramble to consistently receive recycled sources to mix with their fuels (Dichter et al, 2020).

Concerning additional bio-fuel material scarcities, this concept can also be seen with cooking oil, which will be a popular ingredient for future biofuels in airplanes, which has fragmented availability and is expensive to collect. Other vegetable oils used in biofuels have high costs of production, collection, transportation, and conversion to fuel in fuel facilities (Dichter et al, 2020). Following this, many biofuels run on Feedstock resources, which also involve other environmental risks, such as deforestation and the creation of monocultures with other negative externalities during the process of feedstock extraction (Dichter et al, 2020). These indicators show that Delta may have supply chain logistical issues in obtaining biofuels and their components, as well as lacking knowledge on appropriate procession and utilization of such fuels within the logistic of their company.

While its clear Delta was able to develop new forms of biofuels that enable their airplanes with Boeing to combustion clean energy while airborne, it's evident Delta has not yet considered the accessibility and routine feasibility of obtaining and storing large scale new biofuel components to implement in their operations fleetwide, which is a major component of

implementation with this policy. Given these implementation concerns, Delta must pursue corporate consulting in preparing a) feasibility studies and 2) grant applications of receiving fuels (Les Enterprises, 2020), which is the airline's conjoined obstacle to retaining the fuels for their airplanes. Without consulting, Delta will be unable to effectively manage their new biofuels which will be dangerous to daily operations with passengers, aircraft, and employees.

In relation to this, consultants of energy resources follow the renewable diesel market and have experience with the current state of supply, demand, and pricing. Consultants of this specific industry know many of the key players in the sector and are willing to perform a peer review of the design, prepare cost opinions, and assist with Delta's permit applications to receiving and storing the biofuels at airline facilities (Les Enterprises, 2020). Additionally, consultants can provide insight into the construction of biofuel storage and treatment facilities. During construction, the renewable diesel expert can also assist with specific construction oversight of the renewable diesel facility and provide commissioning reports, and training to employees on aircraft operations with newly developed biofuels. (Les Enterprises, 2020). To ensure proper implementation and ensure biofuel accessibility and operational use do not become a policy weakness, Delta must utilize private energy resource consulting groups to further investigate the growing logistical neglect of maintaining and operating biofuels in the airline's fleet. Consideration of these potential issues moving toward new efficient air travel measures is essential for Delta to ensure proper company practices in the operation of complex combustibles.

V

“SWOT” Analysis

Delta’s Carbon Neutrality – Policy Opportunities

As Delta moves to implement its carbon neutrality goals by 2050, the airline will have many opportunities to engage, develop and implement new technologies and practices to be used in the future of the airline that has never before been used in the practice of the aviation industry. Delta's new policy commitment will force the airline to galvanize on tech technologies, like new planes, biofuels, and recycle-based sustainability efforts that will help the airline reduce all levels of emissions. These new investments in technology to build a sustainable airline will provide opportunities for improvement across the entire aviation industry.

A- The Opportunity for Clean Biofuel Development

The first step in pledging to be carbon neutral has required Delta to originate new, clean, and alternative jet fuel that will enable the airline of a 1,030+ fleet to operate by clean, carbon-free standards. The reason that developing a new clean fuel substance is preliminary to *all other measures* is that aircraft manufactures, such as Airbus and Boeing, will have to engineer new combustion engines for their new airplanes or make existing changes to current aircraft engines to accommodate and operate off newly designed, clean biofuels. In other words, Delta has the opportunity to develop clean biofuels to enable aviation engineers to design new planes that utilize clean fuel. This reasoning will require Delta to pursue new opportunities in alternative biofuel developments.

Today, Delta and its partnership with Boeing for developing sustainable aviation fuel have proven that new biofuels can be developed and used on aircraft designs, an opportunity that has never been seen before. Since 2008, Boeing has developed 5 new sustainable jet fuels that Delta began using in 2016, as the airline began to have preliminary, unofficial ideas about pursuing

carbon-reduced travel in the future (Boeing Aviation, 2021). These 5 fuels are 1) FT-SPK (Fischer-Tropsch Synthetic Paraffinic Kerosene), which Converts syngas into jet fuel and was approved by ASTM (D7566) and UK MOD DefStan (91-91), which Can be blended up to 50 percent with fossil jet fuel. 2) HEFA (Hydro processed Fatty Acid Esters and Free Fatty Acid), which is a pathway that was approved in 2011 to be blended at a 50 percent rate with jet fuel (Fregnamiet et al, 2021).

However, some of Delta’s competitor airlines have begun to explore alternative options, such as turning to investments in “garbage-fuel reusability,” as many airline executives see a future of sustainable biofuels that come right from the United States own landfills. Many view this creation of biofuels from an old land waste plant as a more efficient means of generating biofuels compared to chemical or synthetic mixing.

Image 1 – Rubbish to Biofuel Processing Plant, Fulcrum BioEnergy - *Sierra, CA*



⁴Image 1

In the image above, trash is moving up a conveyor belt at Fulcrum Bioenergy’s Sierra, CA plant in the company’s garbage-to-fuels facility, ready to be processed into jet fuel to be used by participating airlines internationally, such as Cathay Pacific Airways and Japan Airlines (Boerner, 2021). Fulcrum plans to start producing biofuel in the last quarter of this year at this plant just east

⁴ Biofuel Processing Plant in Sierra, CA,
<https://www.fulcrum-bioenergy.com/sierra-biofuels>

of Reno, and the company has plans for eight more plants across the nation to meet growing demands by more international airlines (Boerner, 2021). Although Biofuels made from existing rubbish at US landfills are not currently being used by domestic US airlines, Delta, United, and Jetblue have expressed future interest in exploring the use of trash-based biofuel usage by the end of 2023 (Boerner 2021).

Interestingly, Delta's competitor airline, United, spoke on behalf of the airline's Senior Manager of Environmental Strategies and Sustainability Aaron Robinson, who claimed "you could power all of United using just 20% of US landfill waste" (Boerner, 2021). Presumably, Delta being an airline of almost identical size as United would be able to achieve the same objective. These opportunities for trash-based biofuel developments would not have been made possible without airline pledges to pursue carbon-neutral flying.

However, climate scientists and other experts have shown that if Delta and other airlines had not taken advantage of the opportunity to develop new and improved biofuels, emission numbers would remain sky-high for many years to come. In the data table and corresponding chart below, the projected CO₂ emissions output by each transportation industry and their pollutants emitted can be seen respectively, without the use of clean biofuels. As seen in the charts, aviation's total emissions can be seen as "centered" to the other polluting industries, compared to low outputting maritime emissions, and expected high road emissions. Below, Boeing graphically models the levels of CO₂ emissions that would be released by the continuation of regular, non-bio-developed jet and transportation fuel by 2050 if these new fuels proposed above are not immediately implemented across transportation sectors. (Fregamiet et al, 2021).

Table 1A and 1B – Projected CO2 Emissions Share by Models Unit, 2050



Figure 1

As illustrated in the chart above, Boeing predicts that if airlines such as Delta do not utilize the opportunity to develop sustainable, alternative fuels, their overall CO2 emissions by 2050 would reach 2.30 Gigatonnes (GT), which would be about 19.5% of the total produced CO2 in the world. For context, the current level of airline CO2 emissions per year during *regular* travel patterns before the pandemic are 0.80 Gigatonnes, about 12% of the world’s current CO2 emissions (Air Transportation Action Group, 2021).

The units of measurement for the numbers presented in the left column of the chart are to be measured in “Gigatonnes,” a unit of measurement used by environmentalists to express large quantities of emissions over certain geographic regions (Delta Airlines, 2021). Specifically, a Gigaton can be described in terms of A tonne (t), which is the mass of 1000 kilograms (kg) – which for water, occupies 1 cubic meter (a cube of 1m x 1m x 1m). However, a Gigatonne (GT) is 1 billion tonnes, which is 1 trillion kilograms – for water, this occupies 1 cubic kilometer (1km x 1km x 1km) (Nicholson, 2020). To put context behind the magnitude and size of a Gigatonne, environmentalists use the model below to visually represent how much emissions of CO2 are

⁵ Aviation Emissions Predicted by the Boeing Aviation Group, <https://www.boeing.com/features/2020/12/boeing-reaches-net-zero-carbon-emissions-from-manufacturing-and-worksites.page>

released in three Gigatonnes of measurement concerning the size of current-day New York City (Nicholson, 2020).

Image 2 – Conceptual Gigatonne Pollution Measurement Size, *New York City, USA*

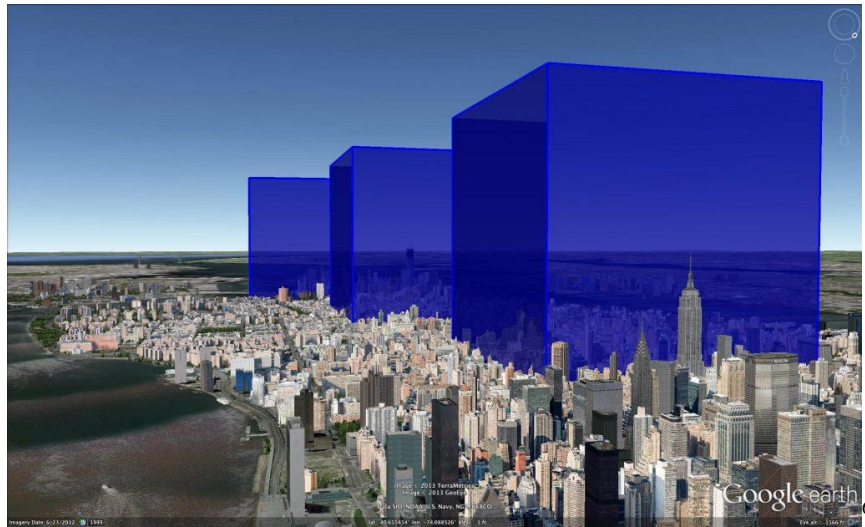


Image II

In the image above, the size of three Gigatonnes in relation to the size of modern-day New York City provides real-life visuals for the magnitude of emissions released by air travel alone. As Delta progresses the implementation of their carbon neutrality goals, Boeing warned that if the airline doesn't utilize its opportunity to develop sustainable fuels and set a goal to implement them into their new fleet, the size and quantity of these pollution "boxes" seen above will double across the world by almost a billion by 2050 (Nicholson, 2020).

B- The Opportunity to Design Clean, Fuel-Efficient Airplanes

With this, Delta's new sustainability policy has enabled the airline the opportunity to partner with airplane engineers to develop new, ecofriendly airplanes that have never been used before in the aviation market. These new airplanes have the capabilities to revolutionize the air

⁶ Gigatonnes emission sizes relative to New York City USA,
<https://lindseynicholson.org/2017/02/whats-a-gigatonne/>

travel industry, providing new and efficient flying that is better for our skies. Without Delta's commitment to carbon neutrality, these new plans would have not been able to come to fruition.

Including all the financial outputs provided by Delta throughout the 10-year interval to achieve the overarching goal of clean flying, the airline focuses most of the funding, roughly over 50% of the \$1 billion figure (Delta Airlines, 2020) in collaboration efforts and new projects with aircraft designers and engineers in building and outputting a more efficient fleet that is more fuel-conscious and economically viable. In designing new planes to replace older models, Delta claims to be focusing on building the current fleet to have “the longest, most sustainable life possible to make the most of the planet’s resources” (Delta Airlines, 2020). Similarly, over the past year, Delta has invested to retire more than 200 aircraft and replace them with new planes that are 25 percent more fuel-efficient than the older models being replaced (Air BP Biojet, 2019).

Pictured below is an example of one of Delta’s newly delivered aircraft that was designed as a result of the airline's investment into clean air travel, and its partnership with aircraft engineers. The Airbus A220, a newly engineered model and refreshed design of an older Airbus model of similar size can be seen at the inaugural ceremony in Mirabel, Quebec, where Delta became the first North American operator of the new fuel-efficient and modern A220 back in late 2018 at the start of clean flying investments (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2018).

Inaugural Delivery of Newly Designed Airbus A220 to Delta

*Image 1*

Delta's A220 is the latest example of output and investment in a fleet modernization program that aims to replace 20 percent of older, less-efficient aircraft by 2020. Powered by Pratt & Whitney's latest geared turbofan PW1500G engine, the A220 takes advantage of advanced technology and composite materials designed to deliver an expected *20 percent* improvement in fuel efficiency over older, similar-sized aircraft when it enters service with Delta (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2018). The airline claims that the A220 will bring an elevated customer experience to top business routes with features that customers will look forward to every time they fly while being friendly to the skies as well (Delta Airlines News Hub, 2018). Delta is confident operationalizing mass funds into this airplane and the acquiring of other fuel-efficient models like it will continue the airline's effort to transform the travel experience for their customers and the environment.

According to Delta's mission to carbon reduction and removal, the airline is also heavily pursuing opportunities in reducing emissions through investments in carbon offsets. Carbon offsets broadly refer to a reduction in CO₂ emissions or an increase in CO₂ storage, that is issued to

⁷ Inaugural Delivery of Delta Airlines new Airbus A220, Atlanta GA
<https://thepointsguy.com/news/delta-a220-inaugural-begins-flight-service/>

compensate for emissions elsewhere (Carbon Offsets INC., 2020). Delta believes that Carbon offsets reduce the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere, which in turn lower greenhouse gas levels – the primary culprit for global warming and climate change. To ensure that the airline is fully carbon neutral since the commitment was announced, Delta is addressing 13 million metric tons of its carbon dioxide emissions from March 1 to Dec. 31, 2020, through investments in verified offset practices (Delta Airlines, 2020) that would not have been made possible without policies towards carbon neutrality.

Delta appears to have a strong commitment to generating sustainable fuel is clear with its large fiscal output in new aviation technology and development to reduce carbon emissions in the current short and medium, However, Delta will need to develop a larger fiscal blueprint for other funds that will be invested to the developing new plane technologies *after* the current allotment of the decade long \$1 billion allocations to account for new airplane developments in the long run. Delta must generate several decades-long worth of financial planning to secure investment strategies for the newer generations of jet-age developments after the 10-year mark, to tailor their carbon neutral strategy with new and developing aerospace technology past a decade.

C- The Opportunity to Pursue New and Innovative Recycling Efforts

Delta is also continuing to explore opportunities in allotting funds to improve other areas of their company operations that create a better impact on their travel emissions and the environment as a whole. Currently, Delta is outputting investments in “single-use plastics,” in which the airline uses compostable stirrers onboard and removed wrappers from cutlery and amenity kits, eliminating 30K lbs. of waste annually in the US Landfills. Delta is continuing to evaluate changes to more single-use plastics through lifecycle output analysis to better reduce their plastic consumption (Delta Airlines, 2020).

Concerning this, Delta is also making the most of recyclable materials to improve its emissions footprint in other areas of operations. Since its carbon neutrality pact, the airline has invested in corporate-wide recycling campaigns, in which the air has recycled more than 3 million pounds of aluminum onboard and, with the rebates, have funded the construction of 12 homes through Habitat for Humanity (Delta Airlines, 2020). Likewise, Delta is also outputting other sectors of the \$1 Billion in clothing and febrific recyclable facilities to re-use employee uniform material and old aircraft interior fabrics to reduce their make of wastes in the environment. In 2020, 50,000 pounds of uniform apparel were sent for waste-to-energy recovery, avoiding the landfill (Delta Airlines, 2020).

In 2018, Delta also embarked on one of the largest single company textile diversion programs in U.S. history (Delta Airlines, 2020). To accomplish this, the airline donated clothing articles to those in need and invested in upcycled fabrics practices and retired seat leather recycling's into a special product line, and down-cycled remaining materials into products like home insulation and pet bed stuffing. These recycling innovations were made possible by Delta's funding towards its carbon neutrality and environmental sustainability mission projects.

In the image below is an example of one of the products that were manufactured as a result of Delta's outputs to clean recycling initiatives. In a 2019 campaign to enhance the airline's environmental footprint, Delta embarked on a mission to recycle retired uniforms from their current employees and transform these used goods into travel bags and passport covers. The airline was highly successful in its initiative, and these recycled goods are now the sole make-up of all of their new releases in employee travel bags and suitcases (Delta Airlines, 2020).

Delta's New Employee Bags – Made from Investments in 100% Recyclable Material



8

Image II

The travel bag shown above is one product that is the result that came out of Delta's opportune time is revolutionizing the airline's commitment to sustaining eco-friendly operations. While these investments into renewable employee products are noble and effective, Delta should consider allocating more of the \$1 billion funds into improving their "Zero-Waste Sky Clubs" and the landfill pollution that is generated from these airport lounges across the world. Delta is currently planning to allocate slightly more funds within the next 5 years to explore the usage of eco-friendly packaging for to-go foods in sky lounges worldwide, but more money is needed faster. Delta has currently found that in all Delta Sky Clubs located in Hub cities such as Minneapolis St. Paul, Seattle, and San Francisco and Detroit clubs are zero-waste, as in 90% landfill diversion as a result of their partial outputs in advancing recycling. These clubs recycle, compost, and provide eco-friendly food service items (Delta Airlines, 2020). Delta should consider advancing the outputs in timing and funding to exploring these landfill diversions in other major hubs Sky Clubs in cities such as Atlanta and Salt Lake City, that have a greater environmental footprint due to larger passenger operations.

⁸ Delta Airlines new sustainable Crew Equipment, <https://www.delta.com/us/en/about-delta/sustainability>

VI

“SWOT” Analysis

Delta’s Carbon Neutrality – Policy Threats

A- The Federal Aviation Administration

The final section of analysis for Delta’s carbon neutrality pact examines the potential threats or possible hindrances that may prohibit Delta from enacting its carbon neutrality policy. These potential threats for a delayed or possible refusal of policy implementation stem solely from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and their regulations that enable certain forms of new air travel based on code and existing technology. As Delta moves to implement new forms of biofuel technologies and airplanes into their fleet, it's evident that the FAA will be one of the only sole threats to building an efficient, airline wide carbon-neutral airline by 2050 as the regulation limits for altering existing air operations and air travel are very stringent. This section seeks to examine the FAA as a potential threat to Delta’s carbon neutrality policy.

In the United States, that means that Delta and other similar airlines will have to receive permission to test and fly an electric airplane from the FAA and their corresponding regulators (Narishkin et al., 2021). This means that Delta will have to ensure the organization that every inch of the new aircraft is safe for passenger transport, as many extensive and rigorous tests are required on behalf of the FAA. In examining the FAA as a stakeholder, it's clear that the regulatory stringency is very high, and this stakeholder is a threat to the airline's policy implementation. The FAA's requirements for reliability, redundancy, and consistency are much more elevated for air travel than any other sector of transportation, particularly because passenger air transport contains a high-risk threshold (Narishkin et al., 2021). As a new style airplane is being tested, the FAA realizes that the operators and passengers simply cannot “stop” while airborne if something goes wrong, leading them to ensure every possible component of the new machine is functioning

correctly. Delta will be required to submit extensive reports, tests, simulations, and testimonials from experts on all platforms of the new sustainable aircraft production to the FAA to secure even a test flight approval.

To pass certifiable air travel certifications, Delta will be required to have its fleet undergo the following tests to ensure the safety of new airplane designs and passenger safety for all new environmentally friendly airplane models. The certification processes pursued by the FAA in the following conducted tests are well established and have consistently assured safe flight for new aircraft design.

- A review of any proposed designs and the methods that will be used to show that these designs and the overall airplane comply with FAA regulations.
- Ground tests and flight tests to demonstrate that the airplane operates safely.
- An evaluation of the airplane's required maintenance and operational suitability for the introduction of the airplane into service; and
- Collaboration with other civil aviation authorities on their approval of the aircraft for import (The Federal Aviation Administration, 2021).

Pursuant to the FAA's regulatory compliance of new aircraft models, Delta and its aircraft manufactures may have a chance to face challenges and setbacks in receiving the FAA's final approval for new airplane models. Interestingly, the FAA recently amended its rules in 2016 to allow for "electric propulsion systems in airplanes built for up to 19 passengers to be flown" (Narishkin et al., 2021). However, a problem with the regulatory component of the FAA arises during these small passenger flights and the aircraft for which they are flown. Even if an airline receives various certifications and amendments, it takes years to complete and compile tests on new model aircraft compared to older, existing aircraft.

Consequently, airlines now retrofit old planes with new technology to receive a quicker certification from the FAA, jeopardizing passenger safety and aircraft reliability. Experts claim that airlines are essentially “taking out the entire old, gas-guzzling, emission-creating engine and its fuel system, and replacing that space and weight with an electric propulsion system (Narishkin et al., 2021). to avoid older model airplane modifications to optimize passenger safety, Delta should simply invest in the lease of new plane models. In relation to the airline's setbacks from the FAA, it's clear that Delta would want to consider *additional funding* within its carbon neutrality project to ensure advocacy from clean energy scientists and lobbying groups to help persuade Congress to work with different levels of the FAA's regulators and policymakers to ensure that new aircraft regulations are safely and properly met to help with airline implement its green policy.

VII

Conclusion

As Delta Airlines moves forward with the implementation of its companywide carbon neutrality policy, it's clear that the airline's *strengths and opportunities* will far outweigh the *weaknesses and threats* examined in this SWOT analysis of this policy whitepaper. Delta has remained a committed aviation leader in being the first airline to embark on a journey to better the world through their own climate initiatives will engage stakeholders and corporate partners to increase awareness and follow in their goals to provide suitability. It's clear Delta is both a 21st-century corporate world innovator and leader at striving to better society and our planet. Delta and its employees deserve immense credit from the public as a trailblazer, figurehead, and powerhouse for promoting clean energy. Delta's culture believes that travelers shouldn't have to choose between seeing the world...and saving it.

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Does Child Care Works Work? An Exploration of Pennsylvania's Child Care Subsidy Program – *Samantha J. Martin, Gettysburg College*

Introduction

Childcare is a necessity for hundreds of thousands of families across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2021 that there are 678,078 children under the age of 5 in the Commonwealth, making up approximately 5.2% of the state's population.¹ These children are too young to go to school, so they need someone to care for them while their parents or guardians are working. For these families, having access to affordable childcare is important in helping maintain their income, and by extension, a lifestyle where children have access to everything they need to grow.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services recommends that no more than 7 percent of a family's income go to childcare.² Unfortunately, access to what would truly be considered "affordable childcare," at least by these standards, is not available outright for many families in Pennsylvania. A study conducted by the Institute of State and Regional Affairs at Pennsylvania State University in Harrisburg found that the median cost of childcare per child per week in the state is \$290- with the weekly cost per child ranging from \$148 to \$627 across all Pennsylvania providers-, approximately \$15,080 per year.³ With a state median family income of \$85,806, this means that around 17.6% of a family's income would go to childcare for a singular child.⁴ Families relying on a singular breadwinner working full-time for minimum wage are even worse off, with the median weekly cost of childcare being roughly equivalent to their weekly

¹ See Figure 1.

² Department of Health and Human Services. "Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program." *Federal Register* 81, no. 190 (30 September 2016): 67438. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-09-30/pdf/2016-22986.pdf>.

³ Philip M. Sirinides & Gregory J. Collins. "The Cost of Child Care in Pennsylvania," *Penn State Harrisburg's Institute of State and Regional Affairs* (August 2020).

⁴ See Figure 2.

income in its entirety.⁵ Families need to purchase food, pay mortgage or rent, maintain utilities, and potentially maintain savings in case of an emergency; thus, paying this much money for childcare simply is not doable. In some families, the cost of childcare may even cancel out the benefits of a second stream of income and force one parent to quit their job to take care of their children. Families need a solution to this crisis, and in Pennsylvania, this part comes in the form of the Child Care Works Child Care Subsidy Program.

The Child Care Works program is Pennsylvania's childcare subsidy program, managed by the Early Learning Resource Center under the jurisdiction of the Department of Human Services. The program, which is designed to help families access higher quality childcare at a more affordable price, has the parents of the child pay an amount determined by the Early Learning Resource Center in their area to be affordable for them, and then the subsidy program pays the rest of the cost of childcare.⁶ Child Care Works has historically served many families in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: over 118,000 children per month were enrolled in childcare using funds from the program during the 2019-20 fiscal year.⁷ In recent years, however, the number of children enrolled in the program has gone down significantly; in 2022, an estimated 74,000 children per month received childcare subsidies.⁸ This drop was likely caused by several factors, all related to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment doubled between 2019 and 2021, rendering childcare services no longer necessary to some families- and financially out of reach, even with subsidies, to others.⁹ Those who could not afford to pay for childcare had to make other

⁵ U.S. Department of Labor. "State Minimum Wage Laws." Wage and Hour Division, (1 January 2023). <<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/minimum-wage/state.>>

⁶ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services. "Child Care Works: Subsidized Child Care Program". *Pennsylvania Department of Human Services*, (2023). <<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Children/Pages/Child-Care-Works-Program.aspx>>

⁷ "Executive Summary for the CCDBG State Plan for Plan Cycle FFYs 2019 – 2021", *Pennsylvania Department of Human Services*, (2019). https://www.dhs.pa.gov/docs/Documents/OCDEL/c_273303.pdf.

⁸ "Executive Summary for the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) State Plan for Plan Cycle FFY 2022-2024", *Pennsylvania Department of Human Services*, (2022). <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Children/Pages/CCDF-Executive-Summary.aspx>.

⁹ See Figure 3

arrangements, which often resulted in a parent who could have been working staying home with the children. Additionally, access to childcare is not as abundant in the state as it was prior to the pandemic: there are around 200 fewer childcare facilities in the state than there were prior to the pandemic, and the number of childcare workers in the state dropped from 48,100 in October 2019 to 44,000 in October 2021.¹⁰

Funding childcare was a major priority of Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf in the years following the start of the pandemic: \$220 million in CARES Act funding was distributed to childcare facilities across the state between 2020 and 2021. Wolf's administration argued that increases in funding to the program were crucial to the recovery of the state economy post COVID-19, noting that parents who are unable to obtain affordable childcare are prevented from getting jobs and that increasing funding to the program was important in creating a more equitable post COVID-19 pandemic world for families from all economic backgrounds.¹¹

It is important for policies to be evaluated on multiple grounds prior to calls for changes in their funding, whether they be to increase or decrease said funding. This is especially the case for policies like Child Care Works that are expensive and meant to make access more equitable, and particularly so during times when the economy is struggling. Using the Three Es of policy analysis- effectiveness, efficiency, and equity- to further delve into policies is important to realizing a program's sustainability in its current state. Analyzing Child Care Works through this framework includes evaluating three key criteria: the program's effectiveness in providing families with opportunities to access affordable, high-quality childcare; the program's efficiency in achieving said goal and its economic outcomes; and how equitable the program is in providing opportunities to children of a range of economic standing. It will then discuss potential solutions to

¹⁰ Ed Mahon. "Pennsylvania's child care and staffing crisis, by the numbers." *WITF*, (26 November 2021). <<https://www.witf.org/2021/11/26/pennsylvanias-child-care-and-staffing-crisis-by-the-numbers>.

¹¹ Department of Health and Human Services, "Department of Human Services 2021-2022 Budget Update."

problems that arise within the program and evaluate if the program should be maintained as-is or if changes should be made.

Implementation of Current Policy

Qualifications. Recipients of a childcare subsidy through the Child Care Works program must meet all the requirements set by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to receive benefits for the program. Since Child Care Works is a state program, the family receiving the benefits must live in the state of Pennsylvania, and there must be proof of identification available for every caretaker residing in the home. The child whose care the subsidy will pay for must be under the age of thirteen unless they have a disability, in which case the age limit is raised to eighteen and must be either a citizen or legal permanent resident of the United States.¹² Families are only eligible to receive subsidies if their income meets, or is below, 200 percent of the federal poverty level for their family size; for example, a family of four must have a total income of \$55,500 or less to qualify for the program.¹³ Families who are presently receiving benefits through either the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, the United States' supplemental income program; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which provides families with assistance in purchasing food; or those who recently left the TANF program are considered the priority for the program, with lower-income applicants outside of these programs being the next concern.¹⁴ Lastly, families receiving the benefits from the subsidy program must meet the basic work requirements for the program: parents must either work 20 or more hours a week or work 10 hours while attending school or training for future work for the

¹² Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, "Child Care Works".

¹³ See Figure 4.

¹⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Moving to Independence", (2023), < <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/TANF.asp>.>; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "A Quick Guide to SNAP Eligibility and Benefits", (3 March 2023). <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-quick-guide-to-snap-eligibility-and-benefits>.; Independent Fiscal Office, "Child Care and Early Education Funding in Pennsylvania," Research Brief 2017-4. (September 2017). <<http://www.ifo.state.pa.us/download.cfm?file=Resources/Documents/RB-2017-4.pdf>>

other 10 hours.¹⁵ Those who are eligible for the program can apply to receive a subsidy through their local Early Learning Resource Center, or by submitting an online application via COMPASS, Pennsylvania's online benefits application service. Those who apply to the program will be required to submit documents proving the information provided on the application, including proof of identity and proof of income.¹⁶

Enrollment. The Child Care Works program is managed by the Early Learning Resource Centers located around the state.¹⁷ These offices, whose clients are divided among them by county of residence, are considered the “hub” of information and resources regarding childcare within a region, and assist families in accessing quality childcare, and help families access personalized referrals to childcare providers in addition to administration of Child Care Works.¹⁸ The Early Learning Resource Center in the client’s region processes a family’s application into the program. If the Center recognizes the family as eligible and has enough funds to pay what the family cannot afford, they will be accepted into the program.¹⁹ Once the family enrolls, the Center pays a fixed amount for childcare per family, based on the size of the family and the range of income that they land in, directly to the family’s childcare provider.²⁰

Maintaining Access. If accepted into the program, there are several requirements families must follow to remain in the program. The child’s guardian or guardians must select an eligible childcare provider for their child, whether it be a care center, small family day care home, group day care home, or placing the child in the care of a relative.²¹ Relatives who are being paid through the Child Care Works program are required to complete an agreement with the Early Learning

¹⁵ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, “Child Care Works.”

¹⁶ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, “Early Learning Resource Centers,” (2023).
<<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Assistance/Pages/ELRCs.aspx..>>

¹⁷ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, “Child Care Works”.

¹⁸ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, “Early Learning Resource Centers”.

¹⁹ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, “Child Care Works.”

²⁰ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, “Child Care Works”.

²¹ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, “Child Care Works.”

Resource Center that will be managing the funds, and are required to participate in CareCheck, the background clearance program run by the PA Department of Human Services.²² Child Care Works is a subsidy program, not a free childcare program; thus, guardians are also required to pay a co-pay to the facility they are receiving services from.²³ Co-payments on childcare are decided based on the family's size and income; families well under the poverty line may have to pay as little as \$5.00 for childcare.²⁴

Funding

Funding for the Child Care Works Child Care Subsidy Program is operated through the Department of Human Services in Pennsylvania's budgeting office. The program is funded using both federal and state grants and appropriations, its funding shifting particularly so during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Federal Funding. Around 60 percent of Child Care Works' funding is provided by the federal government.²⁵ The 2020-2021 Fiscal Year budget for the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services contains \$271.21 million budgeted for Child Care Works, under childcare assistance from federal funds.²⁶ This is approximately \$72.039 million more than the federal funds used on the program in the 2019-2020 Fiscal Year, when \$139.885 million from federal programs was used.²⁷ The largest portion of this funding comes from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant, or TANFBG, which also provides cash assistance to families with children who are in poverty. \$230.306 million was allotted from the TANFBG for Child Care Works during the 2020-21 Fiscal Year.²⁸ \$38.710 million in funding for the program was also allotted from the Child Care and Development Block Grant, a grant administered by the U.S. Department of Health

²² Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, "Child Care Works."

²³ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, "2020-2021 Budget Hearing Book, Department of Human Services," (2018).

²⁴ Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services, "Child Care Works."

²⁵ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, "2020-2021 Budget Hearing Book".

²⁶ Independent Fiscal Office, "Child Care and Early Education".

²⁷ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, "2020-2021 Budget Hearing Book."

²⁸ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "Policy Basics: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families," (1 March 2022).

and Human Services that funds efforts done by the states to provide childcare services to working families.²⁹ The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which primarily provides benefits to families so that they can purchase food, also provides \$2.194 million in federal funding for the program.³⁰

State Funding and Other Sources. Most of the remaining 40 percent of funding for the Child Care Works program is provided by the state government.³¹ A specialized line item in the state budget, “Child Care Services,” provides funding for subsidies given to people who qualify based on income; this line item also provides funding for other childcare services paid for by the state, including Keystone STARS, T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships, and Professional Development.³² During the 2022-2023 fiscal year, approximately \$181.5 million was allocated to “Child Care Services”.³³ A separate line item, titled “Child Care Assistance,” provides funding for families who qualified via their use of TANF or SNAP benefits, as well as families who just recently came off TANF; \$109.9 million was allocated to “Child Care Assistance” in the 2022-2023 fiscal year.³⁴ Child Care Works also utilizes \$1.705 million in funds from “Early Childhood Education Revenue,” a funding outlet not specified further within the Department of Human Services’ budget book.³⁵

Effectiveness

The main goal of the Child Care Works subsidy program is to provide Pennsylvania families with access to partial funding or childcare services they may not have been able to afford

²⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Care. “Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)”. *U.S. Department of Education* (28 August 2019).

³⁰ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. “A Quick Guide to SNAP Eligibility and Benefits”

³¹ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, “2020-2021 Budget Hearing Book.”

³² Independent Fiscal Office, “Child Care and Early Education.”, Pennsylvania Child Care Association. “FY 2017-2018 Enacted Budget to Governor Wolf’s proposed FY 2018-2019 budget.” (13 March 2018). <https://www.pacca.org/state_policy_budget_issues.php>

³³ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. “Governor’s Executive Budget, 2023-2024”. (April 2023). <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/docs/Publications/Documents/Budget%20Information/2023-2024_DHS-Blue-Book.pdf>

³⁴ Independent Fiscal Office, “Child Care and Early Education.”; Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, “Governor’s Executive Budget 2023-2024”

³⁵ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, “2020-2021 Budget Hearing Book.”

otherwise, allowing family members to work and the children themselves to receive quality care. Thus, the most important metrics to use to analyze the effectiveness of the program are the program's ability to serve most Pennsylvania families, its ability to increase the quality of childcare that is affordable for said families, and its ability to create economic growth by allowing more people in the state to work.

Access to Childcare and Economic Prospects. As stated above, the goal of the Child Care Works program is to help low-income families in the state of Pennsylvania pay for childcare. Any family with children under thirteen who receive TANF or SNAP benefits are eligible to receive a subsidy from the program, as are families whose income is less than 200 percent over the poverty line.³⁶ Child Care Works provides funding for a large percentage of eligible families who apply to the program. The Independent Fiscal Office reported that around 117,700 children in Pennsylvania, or around 6 percent of children in the state under the age of 12, received some sort of subsidy from the program each month during the 2015-2016 Fiscal Year.³⁷ This portion of the population is entirely made up of families that may not have been able to afford quality childcare prior to receiving the subsidy but can now access childcare and thus be more active in the workforce. The program does not have enough funds to serve every family that technically qualifies for Child Care Works, however, and there is a waitlist of families waiting to receive their benefits. In 2017, there were nearly 14,000 children on the waitlist for Child Care Works due to the program running out of funding for the year, meaning that thousands of families had to find alternatives to ensure their children were cared for, with some even sacrificing necessary incomes by having one parent stay home to care for the child.³⁸

³⁶ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services."Child Care Works".

³⁷ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, "2020-2021 Budget Hearing Book."

³⁸ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services."Child Care Works".

Quality of Childcare The use of childcare subsidies such as those from Child Care Works seems to correlate to families having access to better care. A 2012 analysis of child care subsidy usage of the Child Care and Development Fund found that while families who used subsidies to pay for part of their childcare services generally selected higher quality care facilities than those who did not have subsidies; however, the evidence suggested that this was because families that were able to access subsidies were more likely to select center-based care, which generally has higher quality ratings than “kith or kin care”.³⁹ Families receiving subsidies are also more likely to select child care providers that are licensed and approved by the state, for a variety of reasons; namely, because many state subsidy programs, including Child Care Works, require families to select a child care provider, whether it be a home-based or center-based provider, that adhere to the standards for childcare set by the Department of Human Services, as well as undergo the state’s background clearance program.⁴⁰ The program is not effective in equalizing early childhood education among all children. A 2004 study found that early education programs that did not serve children receiving subsidies were more likely to score higher on activities testing knowledge of language and reasoning, as well as on those rating social interaction, than those attending subsidized childcare programs. This is likely because childcare facilities that do not primarily serve those receiving childcare subsidies are often able to pay their teachers more than those that do, and higher pay for teachers have been found to contribute to higher scores on said activities.⁴¹ Although the program does not put recipients on the same achievement level as more affluent

³⁹ Rebecca M. Ryan, Anna Johnson, Elizabeth Rigby, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. “The Impact of Child Care Subsidy Use on Child Care Quality.” *Early Child Care Research Quarterly*, 26(3), 320-331. (2012). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3160790/>.

⁴⁰ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, “Child Care Works.”

⁴¹ Julie A. Jones-Branch, Julia C. Torquati, Helen Raikes, and Carolyn Pope Edwards. “Child Care Subsidy and Quality [Abstract].” *Early Education and Development*, 15(3), 327-342. (2004). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1207/s15566935eed1503_5?scroll=top&needAccess=true.>

children, it does help the recipients receive higher quality care than those in their same income bracket.⁴²

Impact of Program Expansion Analysis of the Child Care Works program in Pennsylvania, as well as similar subsidy programs nationwide, has found that the program would likely be more effective if their national funding was expanded. In 2019, the Urban Institute found that increasing the amount of federal grant money given to Pennsylvania for the Child Care Works program enough that every family with an income totaling under 150 percent of the poverty line would be highly beneficial to the state.⁴³ The Urban Institute claimed that the state would be able to assist around 20,100 families in the state who did not previously receive subsidies and would allow for 5,200 parents currently outside the workforce to care for their children to re-enter it.⁴⁴ It is estimated that around 6,600 children currently living in the state would be lifted out of poverty because of this increase, including around 2,000 infants and toddlers; with around 432,580 children under 3 residing in Pennsylvania, this means that around 0.04% of children in that age group would benefit.⁴⁵ Thus, increasing the budget for the Child Care Works program so that it could accommodate every family eligible and requesting a subsidy would increase the effectiveness of the program in achieving its main goal: providing affordable childcare so that parents can contribute more to the workforce than they previously had, and potentially even lift themselves into a higher income bracket.

Efficiency and Economic Contribution

With a budget of over \$302 million during the 2018-2019 Fiscal Year, Child Care Works is the most expensive childcare program operated by the state of Pennsylvania: Head Start had an

⁴² Ryan, R., Johnson, A., Rigby, E., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2012).

⁴³ Linda Giannarelli, Gina Adams, Sarah Minton, and Kelly Dwyer. "What if we Expanded Child Care Subsidies in Pennsylvania?" The Urban Institute, (June 2019). <<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2019/06/12/what-if-we-expanded-child-care-subsidies-in-pa.pdf>>

⁴⁴ Giannarelli, L., Adams, G., Minton, S., & Dwyer, K., 2019.

⁴⁵ The Pennsylvania Key. "2018-19 OCDEL Budget Overview". (2018). <<https://www.pakeys.org/2018-19-pennsylvanias-early-learning-and-supports-budget>>

appropriation of \$59.2 million, while PA Pre-K Counts, the pre-kindergarten program, had a budget of \$192.3 million.⁴⁶ Child Care Works is also the most widely utilized program, however: the state reported that during the 2018-2019 Fiscal Year, 30,320 children attended programming through Head Start, while 42,867 children participated in the state's pre-kindergarten program.⁴⁷ If the costs of each program were divided by the number of children served in each, Child Care Works is the middling program in terms of cost: the program spent around \$2,565.84 per child per year in 2019, while Head Start spent \$1,952.50 and Pre-K Counts spent \$4,485.96.⁴⁸ Child Care Works was the program able to make childcare affordable to the most people and was able to do so while keeping costs per child relatively low; this is a solid mark in its favor for its ability to contribute to the Pennsylvania state economy, as well as its ability to run efficiently.

Economic Contribution As stated in the *Effectiveness* section, the Urban Institute found that expanding childcare programs in Pennsylvania, especially Child Care Works, could potentially add 5,200 parents to the workforce who were not a part of it previously, and would lift over 6,000 children living in the state out of poverty.⁴⁹ This would also be a major boost for the Pennsylvania state economy, however; the Economic Policy Institute estimated that an increase in childcare subsidies could contribute as much as \$6.1 billion in new economic activity.⁵⁰ This would partly be due to the increased number of workers in the state, as well as through freeing up money families previously spent on childcare: the Institute noted that programs such as Child Care Works bringing down the cost of child care could save Pennsylvania families around \$6,812 per year on childcare, which they could then spend in other areas, further expanding industry and good-consumption in the state.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, "FY 2018-2019", The Pennsylvania Key, "2018-19 OCDEL Budget Overview"; Giannarrel et al, 2019.

⁴⁷ Child Care Technical Assistance, "State/Territory Profile-Pennsylvania."

⁴⁸ The Pennsylvania Key, "2018-19 OCDEL Budget Overview."

⁴⁹ Giannarrel et al, 2019.

⁵⁰ Economic Policy Institute, 2020.

⁵¹ "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Moving to Independence"

Equity

The question of equity regarding the Child Care Works program is based on the incomes of the families that partake in it; namely, that families across the income spectrum have equitable access to childcare resources.

Other Benefit Programs Income requirements for both the TANF and SNAP programs are stricter than those set in place for the Child Care Works subsidy program. A family's financial resources, including bank accounts, bonds, and property outside the main residence, must be worth less than \$1,000 to qualify for TANF benefits, and members of the family who are of working age must either look for a job or take part in an employment training program.⁵² The gross monthly income for families receiving SNAP benefits is higher than that for TANF but lower than the income maximum set for the Child Care Works program; a family's income can only equal up to 130 percent above the poverty line to receive benefits.⁵³ On the other hand, families can still qualify for childcare subsidies and be considered "low income," with annual incomes of up to 200 percent above the federal poverty line.⁵⁴ Children whose families receive TANF or SNAP benefits, or who are currently transitioning off using TANF benefits, do not have to go on a waitlist for subsidies from Child Care Works, while those whose families are designated "low income" but are not receiving said benefits may land on a wait list.⁵⁵

The fairness of this specific rule for Child Care Works is questionable, as families who qualify to receive TANF or SNAP benefits have access to other programs for affordable childcare; namely, through the Head Start and Early Head Start programs. All families whose incomes are below the poverty line, and who have children between the ages of 0 and 5, are eligible to enroll in either Head Start or Early Head Start; however, some programs are allowed to serve up to 35

⁵² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2020.

⁵³ Independent Fiscal Office, 2017.

⁵⁴ Independent Fiscal Office, 2017.

⁵⁵ Pennsylvania Head Start. (9 December 2020). <<https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/1936>>.

percent of families whose incomes are between 100 and 135 percent of the poverty line.⁵⁶ Children whose families are between 130 and 200 percent above the poverty line are also considered “low income”, and their families are also struggling to afford childcare; however, they have fewer options than both families with enough money to have childcare without a subsidy or families below the poverty line, who have both other resources open to them, and are more likely to receive Child Care Works’ benefits.⁵⁷ These families would have to apply for private scholarships to childcare centers, which they may not have the resources to know how to investigate; rely on being employed by a business that has employer-based childcare, which not every family has the privilege to wait for; or utilize care options that are of lower quality, but higher affordability.

There is another childcare program run by the state government that those in this income bracket can utilize; however, the age limit on this program makes it less useful than the options offered to families who have lower incomes. Pre-K Counts, Pennsylvania’s preschool program, offers no-cost preschool in locations across the state to families whose income is below 300 percent of the poverty line, and who have children between the ages of 3 and 5.⁵⁸ This program is a worthy option for families in that income bracket who have children that age; however, the program does not offer an alternative for families whose children are under the age of 3. Families in this income bracket whose children are too young to be enrolled in pre-kindergarten programming, but who did not gain access to a subsidy, have fewer options than other families, which means that they are more likely to spend a devastating sum of money on childcare or lose out on a stream of income that could potentially help their family become more well-off.

Solutions

⁵⁶ Independent Fiscal Office, 2017.

⁵⁷ ChildCare.gov., “Get Help Paying For Child Care”. (n.d.). <https://www.childcare.gov/index.php/consumer-education/get-help-paying-for-child-care>

⁵⁸ Pre-K Counts Grants. (2020). Retrieved December 09, 2020, from <https://www.education.pa.gov/Early%20Learning/Pages/Pre-KCountsAwardees.aspx>

It is important to address the problems brought about by the current iteration of Child Care Works, as is it important to discuss solutions to the problems put into place. The program seems generally functional and is providing great results for the people it can serve in its current form; however, it is not able to serve every person that it is designed to help, making it less effective than it could be in achieving its goals, as well as far less equitable. The main solution to fix the issue of the program not being able to help every person it is designed for is to increase the funding for the program, an idea supported by many. As stated above, the Urban Institute and Economic Policy Institute both have argued for the state of Pennsylvania to increase the childcare subsidy program to accommodate every family with an income lower than 150 percent of the poverty line.

The Pennsylvania government did indeed increase the amount of money put into the program: as detailed in the Funding section, during the 2017-2018 Fiscal Year the program had a budget of around \$321.1 million, while in the 2020-2021 year, the budget equaled around \$382.9 million.⁵⁹ This was partially due to a request by Governor Tom Wolf to increase funding to the program in 2017, which allowed the budget to significantly expand. Wolf's proposed budget increase was expected to increase the effectiveness and equitability of the program, allowing 11,000 children to leave the program's wait list.⁶⁰

There is still much work to do if the program is to reach its goal: to provide a subsidy to every child in Pennsylvania who is eligible and will utilize it. Under Wolf's plan, 3,000 children would remain on the waiting list for the program; based on the numbers from earlier, an estimated \$7.69 million would be needed to pay for all 3,000 children left to enter the program.⁶¹ There are a variety of ways this funding could be found: money from the Pre-K Counts program, the least efficient of Pennsylvania's three main state government providers of child care, could receive a

⁵⁹ Giannarelli et al., 2019.

⁶⁰ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, "2020-2021 Budget Hearing Book".

⁶¹ Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, "2020-2021 Budget Hearing Book."; Pennsylvania Child Care Association, "Governor Wolf's FY 2020-2021 Child Care Proposal Once Again Relies on Federal Funding"

budget cut in favor of Child Care Works, The program would have to reduce their spending per child by \$179 per year, but some of the children benefiting from the program would likely also benefit from Child Care Works, which could help to cut costs for Pre-K Counts.⁶² The Head Start program could also receive some cuts regarding its state level funding; however, Head Start already spends the least per child of any of the three programs administered by the state, and reducing the amount spent would likely do more damage to the quality of care at Head Start than it would for Pre-K Counts.⁶³ Therefore, recommending budget cuts to Pre-K Counts, and having said money go to Child Care Works instead, may be one of the best ways to fix the Child Care Works program's issues.

Conclusions

Child Care Works is a program that helps provide thousands of Pennsylvanian families with childcare they can afford so that guardians can contribute to the state labor force and provide for their children. The program seems to be effective in completing its mission for those it can provide for, at least somewhat efficiently regarding its spending habits, and generally creates more financial benefits for the state than it does costs. Its system for paying part, but not all, childcare expenses for its qualifying families helps them help themselves: Child Care Works allows for families to contribute to both their income and the state's economy more than they would have without access to affordable childcare. Ultimately, it is a strong program that should be maintained by the state; however, the program does require boosts to its funding in order to maximize its potential to augment the Pennsylvania state economy and improve the lives of its residents.

⁶² Giannarelli et al., 2019.

⁶³ Pennsylvania Child Care Association, "Governor Wolf's FY 2020-2021 Child Care Proposal Once Again Relies on Federal Funding"

Appendix

Figure 1: American Community Survey 2021 Demographic and Housing Estimates for Pennsylvania, by Age.

	Population Estimate	Margin of Error	% of State Population
< 5 years	678,078	±2,801	5.2%
5 to 9 years	723,022	±12,228	5.6%
10 to 14 years	796,302	±11,858	6.1%
15 to 19 years	819,892	±5,228	6.3%
20 to 24 years	784,817	±5,120	6.1%
25 to 34 years	1,694,898	±5,847	13.1%
35 to 44 years	1,613,651	±5,077	12.4%
45 to 54 years	1,574,763	±5,395	12.1%
55 to 59 years	874,553	±12,741	6.7%
60 to 64 years	939,177	±12,812	7.2%
65 to 74 years	1,467,788	±3,333	11.3%
75 to 84 years	704,675	±8,357	5.4%
> 85 years	292,440	±7,731	2.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; “American Community Survey, 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates”, Table DP05; generated by Samantha J. Martin; using <<https://data.census.gov>> (26 April 2023).

Figure 2: American Community Survey 2021 Population Estimates, by Family Income

	Population Estimate	Margin of Error	% of State Population
Families	82,464,986	±105,035	82,464,986
Less than \$10,000	3,056,415	±34,054	3.7%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1,667,928	±23,724	2.0%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	4,086,661	±35,639	5.0%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	5,117,957	±45,807	6.2%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	8,245,080	±43,426	10.0%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	13,648,681	±59,244	16.6%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	11,644,350	±56,801	14.1%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	16,152,982	±68,324	19.6%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	8,285,960	±49,368	10.0%
\$200,000 or more	10,558,972	±52,249	12.8%
Median family income (dollars)	85,806	±198	(X)
Mean family income (dollars)	115,522	±243	(X)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey, 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates”, Table DP05; generated by Samantha J. Martin; using <<https://data.census.gov>> (26 April 2023);

Figure 3: American Community Survey Employment Estimates, 2019 vs. 2021.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	2019 %	2021 %
Population 16 years and over	10,474,419	267,057,693
In labor force	62.9%	63.0%
Civilian labor force	62.8%	62.5%
Employed	60.0%	58.6%
Unemployed	2.8%	3.9%
Armed Forces	0.1%	0.5%
Not in labor force	37.1%	37.0%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey, 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates”, Table DP05; generated by Samantha J. Martin; using <<https://data.census.gov>> (26 April 2023); U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates”, Table DP03, generated by Samantha J. Martin; using <<https://data.census.gov>>.

Figure 4: Maximum Yearly Family Income to Qualify for Child Care Works Subsidies, May 2022.

Family Size	Maximum Yearly Family Income (May 2022)
2	\$36,620
3	\$46,060
4	\$55,500
5	\$64,940
6	\$74,380
7	\$83,820
8	\$93,260

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More Money Fewer Problems: Increasing the Minimum Wage — *Eleanor I. Leonard, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Executive Summary

This policy brief examines the minimum wage in North Carolina, its effect, and ways to increase the wage for the betterment of citizens. The minimum wage at its current level of \$7.25 is not enough money for citizens to pay for all their basic needs such as clothing, rent, food, and healthcare. Additionally, with increased inflation in almost all aspects of life, this minimum wage has not increased since 2008 making it even more difficult for individuals to survive. While a wage increase to \$15 seems to be the most talked about in the media it can be costly for the deficit and risks layoffs which in the long run is not beneficial for citizens. Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 is one option and possibly some states' final goal. However, another option that makes sure citizens are not caught in their current situation of no wage increase in fourteen years, would be increasing the minimum wage to \$12. One last solution is to pass a state-by-state regulated wage increase based on inflation during the year. Currently, 13 states have legislation in place to deal with inflation and the minimum wage, showing that this type of legislation can work and be beneficial for citizens while making sure companies can pay the stated wage. Therefore, my final solution is to increase the wage to \$12 paired with a year-to-year wage increase based on inflation.

Introduction

The minimum wage in North Carolina has not been increased from its current level of \$7.25 since 2008. The fact that the minimum wage has not been increased in 14 years is detrimental to citizens because the cost of living has increased due to inflation meaning citizens are forced to rely on a minimum wage that is out of date. This is important for public well-being because low pay paired with an increased cost of living leads to poverty. According to the Census Bureau, as of 2021 12.9% of North Carolina citizens currently are impoverished (U.S Census Bureau, 2021). Research also shows that in 2010, nationally 28% of families earn less than 200% of the federal poverty level, a number that is expected to be more substantial given inflation (Annie E Casey Foundation et al., 2010). The poverty rate could be significantly decreased with an increase in the wage for both North Carolina and national citizens, as both the national and state hourly wages are \$7.25.

The issue of increasing the minimum wage above \$7.25 has been tackled by twenty-nine states showing legislation and change are possible for the betterment of citizens. When some citizens are not able to pay for basic needs because of the hourly wage it is detrimental to society as the quality of life is lowered. The lower quality of life leads to citizens having to rely on government programs that aid with paying for basic needs, which increases governmental spending. Additionally, 75% of North Carolinians support a minimum wage increase (Hawes and Dreir, 2021).

Policy Problem

The low minimum wage in North Carolina drastically affects its citizens. According to Ana Pardo of the North Carolina Justice Center, with the current minimum wage of \$7.25 a North Carolina citizen will make \$15,080 a year which is almost \$1,000 less than the federal poverty level for an adult with one child (Pardo, 2021). Additionally, 1.3 million North Carolinian workers would benefit from a minimum wage increase (Pardo, 2021). These statistics show the urgency and severity of the minimum wage problem in North Carolina. When a regular working-class citizen makes less than the poverty level it creates a systemic cycle of poverty for generations.

In addition to the low wage, inflation has made the issue worse for North Carolina citizens. In 2008 the average house in North Carolina cost roughly \$155,423 however in 2020 that number is \$251,859 (Fiscal Research Division, 2021). This data shows an increase of almost 100,000 dollars, meanwhile, the hourly wage has stayed stagnant. Additionally, the day-to-day costs of goods such as food and childcare have also increased since 2008. In terms of wage inflation when adjusted, the minimum wage of \$7.25 is around 40% lower than the minimum. Although the minimum wage in 1970 was only \$1.60, when adjusted to today's standards it would be \$12.04 (Statista, 2022). When comparing the wage from when it was first set in January 2008 to October 2022 the wage should be \$10.24 when adjusted for inflation ("CPI Inflation Calculator, 2022).

According to MIT's Living Wage Calculator, a single person with no children living in North Carolina's "living wage" is \$17.14. Furthermore, an annual income after taxes of \$28,809 is needed to pay for basic needs (MIT, 2021). These statistics on the day-to-day cost of living in North Carolina show the severity of the problem. Currently, a North Carolina citizen who is paid

minimum wage makes more than \$10,000 less than what is needed to pay for everyday needs.

This data raises the question: if the minimum wage in North Carolina does not support the average citizen how is one supposed to live?

Now, one may be wondering how did this problem progress? For starters, one factor that has contributed to the problem is inflation, as the cost of living rose, wages did not. While bills have been introduced to increase the minimum wage in North Carolina over the past fourteen years little progress has been made. While there is no real clear reason why action has not been taken on increasing the minimum wage it may be due to companies not wanting to spend money on increasing the wage, lobbying efforts, political opinions, and the fear of increasing the deficit. According to Kelly Smith of Forbes Magazine, some argue that raising the minimum wage would increase the price of food, be too expensive for companies, and “kill jobs” (Smith, 2021). An additional reason may be a disconnect between representatives and constituents. According to a report released by the Congressional Research Service, the base salary of a United States representative is \$174,000 (Brudnick, 2019), meaning a congressional representative makes roughly 145,000 more dollars than a North Carolina citizen who is paid minimum wage.

While federal poverty programs exist and have reduced the number of citizens living in poverty, there are still inequalities. Most of the inequalities are due to systemic bias in the systems due to biased governmental policies and lack of resources and funding. For example, regarding affordable housing due to funding, only 1 in 4 families who are eligible for housing receive it (Saenz and Trisi, 2021). Regarding access to food, 1 in 5 families who are eligible receive food stamps. Additionally, only half of the families who need public health insurance receive it (Annie E Casey Foundation et al., 2010). Even when a family is eligible for federal aid the application for such programs can be lengthy and confusing additionally, there is a stigma around receiving help meaning not as many families will apply.

Policy options

The first solution to fix the low minimum wage is to increase the hourly wage to \$12 paired with the expansion of federal poverty programs. Poverty rates are lower for those who make ten to twelve dollars an hour, however “near poverty” levels are higher. Building on this notion is the fact that to benefit workers the most a large increase to the minimum wage is needed. Substantially increasing the wage increases the wages of workers who previously earned less than the new minimum wage while also helping workers with moderately higher wages (Lopresti and Mumford, 2016). While raising the minimum wage to \$12 ensures that earnings alone will lift workers and their families out of poverty it does not guarantee that they will stay out of poverty or not be on the edge of being impoverished, therefore an expansion of poverty programs is needed (Romich and Hill, 2018). The federal poverty programs that need to be expanded are the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the Child Tax Credit, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

According to research, a ten percent increase in the minimum wage leads to a 1.5% reduction in the poverty rate nationally (Romich and Hill, 2018). This increase from \$7.25 to \$12 will be done over a two-year period providing flexibility for companies to decide how and when they want to increase the wage as long as it is at or above \$12 by the time two years are over. These two years are to account for companies having to adjust to the increased payroll and decide how much they want to raise the wage by. The legislation to increase the minimum wage could be done at the federal or state level because the hourly wage can be changed at either level. Based on Romich and Hill’s research, increasing the wage to \$12 will result in a possible reduction of employment, however, this is not reflective of how companies will react just an estimate. Additionally, increasing the minimum wage to \$12 an hour will also reduce poverty by an estimated 16.1%.

Paired with the increase in minimum wage will be the expansion of federal poverty programs. The first federal poverty program that would be expanded is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Citizens may claim this program if their income is low to moderate. The program will either reduce the amount of taxes one owes or increase the tax refund putting more money in the pockets of citizens (Internal Revenue Service, 2022). As of right now, the EITC provides \$5,600 for a single earner with two children and \$6,300 for joint filers with two children; however, a citizen can still apply if they do not have children however the return will be lower.

The next federal program is The Child Tax credit which was increased by the Biden Administration in 2021. This program provides \$3,000 per child if they are six to seventeen years old and \$3,600 per child if they are under six years old (The White House, 2021). A family will receive the full benefits from the program if they make up to \$150,000 for a couple or \$112,500 for a family with a single parent (The White House, 2021). However, the expansion of The Child Tax Credit was only passed for a single year meaning it could go back to its previous levels of \$2,000 per child with an age cap of sixteen. Overall, this program is beneficial for citizens as it lessens the financial worries and burdens of having children.

The final federal program that would be expanded is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) which provides the greatest number of benefits of these three programs \$6,000 or more for a family of three (Romich and Hill, 2018). While this program might currently provide the greatest number of benefits to families it is outdated and does not reflect inflation as the program was last revised in 2006. While SNAP does provide benefits for food it does not ensure an adequate and healthy diet. Citizens who use SNAP benefits report that they need roughly ten to twelve more dollars per person each week to meet their needs.

Similarly, researchers estimate that SNAP benefits fall about \$11 short per person of the weekly cost of a nutritious meal plan (Carlson et al., 2021). Additionally, most families run out of SNAP benefits within the first or second week of receiving them making the rest of the month difficult, therefore the SNAP benefits should account for individuals buying items in bulk.

All these programs together total above \$10,000 meaning families will have a better cushion to lean on not only relying on pay, however, there is still work that needs to be done as there are downfalls with each program. Expanding these programs would be done on the federal level because they are federally run. One way they could be expanded would be to change the income level these programs operate at to reflect the change in income associated with increasing the wage. Additionally, more money and time could be spent to streamline the application process so all families eligible will be able to apply, as successfully filling out the application is a large barrier for most families. In addition to streamlining the application process, more money could be invested in these programs so the aid each family receives would increase.

There are some barriers when it comes to increasing poverty programs, the largest one is the deficit. As a result of an increase in federal investment more money will have to be spent leading to a large amount of debt. Some technical complexities are where to cap who gets aid from the government and how long and continuous the expansion will be. A political complexity is how the politicians and constituents feel about the national debt and assisting those in need.

A second solution is discussed regularly, increasing the minimum wage to \$15. Increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour would lift the pay of 25 million workers in America and reduce the number of people living in poverty by 2.7 million while ensuring an annual pay increase of \$3,000 (Cooper et al., 2021). Currently, California is the only state with a minimum wage of \$15 requiring this wage for companies with twenty-six or more employees

(Jacquinot, 2022). This option of \$15 would also be the closest to the living wage estimates for North Carolina, and well above the poverty rate of \$6.18 an hour (MIT, 2021). This increase could be done on the federal or state-wide level. Current bills being introduced recommend a gradual increase in the wage until you reach \$15 in 2027 to give companies and the government time to adjust appropriately. The proposed legislation states that the minimum wage would be \$9.50 in 2023, \$11.00 in 2024, \$12.50 in 2025, \$14.00 in 2026, and \$15.00 in 2027 (Alsalam et al., 2021). Multiple states have passed legislation for a gradual increase to \$15 including Florida, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey, among others (Jacquinot, 2022). There are some downfalls to increasing the wage. The deficit would increase by \$54 billion due to the reduction in unemployment leading to an increase in government spending on unemployment programs. And research estimates that employment would be reduced by 1.4 million workers or 0.9 percent. Additionally adding to the deficit would be Social Security because spending would rise as a result of the average salary rising (Alsalam et al., 2021). However, the actual reaction of companies to this increase is just a prediction. Some argue that the price increase would lead to people not buying goods however research shows that Americans continue to pay for the items. The top 5% of Americans buy more goods and continue to purchase them regardless of the price (MaCurdy, 2015).

While increasing the minimum wage and investments in federal poverty programs are important, making sure the minimum wage does not stay stagnant over the years should be a priority. The third solution is to develop a cost-of-living adjustment for inflation. This legislation would be done on a state-by-state basis with every state setting the parameters for increasing the minimum wage due to differing inflation levels per state. There are currently thirteen states who have this legislation in place and most use the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in a variety of ways to determine the wage. The CPI is “a measure of the average change over time in the prices paid

by urban consumers for a market basket of consumer goods and services” (“Consumer Price Index”, 2022). Some examples of how states use this information are: South Dakota, Vermont and Washington use the CPI’s August-August information. With this information the states chose to round to five cents, enact a 5% increase, or conduct no rounding. On the other hand, Washington D.C uses the previous year’s CPI rounding by five cents. There are some issues such as when to cap the increase, as some states have capped it near \$15 (Kamper and Hickey, 2022). Historically, the wage should be higher, in 1968 a minimum wage worker earned \$10.59 per hour when adjusted for inflation roughly 46% higher than today’s wage (Cooper et al., 2021).

Recommendation and Conclusion

The final proposal is a mix of solutions one and two, increasing the minimum wage to \$12 with an adjustment for inflation while also extending state and federal poverty programs. I chose these because while \$15 will bring 2.7 million citizens out of poverty many political and technical complexities get in the way of achieving that goal. A \$15 minimum wage would increase the deficit by 54 billion dollars, something that many politicians and citizens are wary of. It would also increase the amount of money spent on social security whose future is already questioned given the amount of money allotted and the growing population above 65. For the nation and state to eventually reach \$15 smaller steps need to be taken first. While increasing the minimum wage and expanding access to poverty programs will still increase government spending, the betterment of the nation outweighs the downfalls of the policy as it will help ensure every citizen can have a good and comfortable living. Reexamining and adjusting the hourly wage each year based on inflation means the nation will hopefully not be stuck in the current situation of no change in fourteen years. Adjusting the minimum wage for inflation would have to be done on a state-by-state basis meaning the state and companies would take on the burden of debt. However, each state can cap how much they want the wage to raise, meaning

the wage won't rise indefinitely.

Overall, raising the minimum wage is a complex issue. On one hand increasing the wage will lead to less poverty for citizens but it will also increase the deficit leading to political and technical complexities. However, the good outweighs the bad in this scenario. As inflation continues to rise, the cost of living becomes higher for citizens making a comfortable and safe living scenario difficult. All citizens should be able to earn a wage that can support them to the point where they can pay for basic needs. The fact that citizens are in poverty and struggling to survive should be a concern for the leaders of America. A representative must defend not only the constitution but the people's beliefs, wants, and needs, therefore when a citizen is struggling action should be taken.

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The Application of Policy Theory to COVID-19 Stimulus Checks— *Michael McHenry, Gettysburg College*

Introduction

Policy is not formulated and established in a vacuum. It is the result of clashing opinions, struggling power dynamics, and differing values. The formation of policy is undoubtedly complex, even at times when it is seemingly at its most simple. If the policy process is vastly complicated even in normal times, then consider the layers of complication added when policymakers are operating in a crisis. A crisis is one of the worst times to make policy and simultaneously one of the times when policy is most desperately needed. Thus, policy is frequently generated, debated, and implemented in these severe situations; and the result is usually sloppy, rushed, and inadequate. To improve the effectiveness of our policy response to crisis, it is essential to first understand the frameworks and theories of how policy is generated and implemented in such a stressful and high-stakes scenario.

Our most recent crisis, the coronavirus pandemic, provides a perfect scenario in which to apply the prevailing policy theories to any variety of the government actions taken to ensure public health and provide economic relief. Multiple aspects of the CARES Act serve as excellent case studies for the application of public policy theory. At the time of its passing, this stimulus bill was the most comprehensive and expensive relief package that had ever been passed in the U.S. (Boccia, 2020). A key part of the stimulus involved sending \$1,200 Economic Impact Payments to all Americans who were below a certain income threshold. This aspect of the package was lauded by many politicians, economists, and American citizens as providing needed relief and a jumpstart to the economy (Bhutta et. al, 2020). However, some are beginning to argue that the stimulus checks were not as helpful to boosting the economy as initially considered (Chetty et. al, 2020). Many analysts have not succeeded in evaluating this policy due to a failure in appropriately identifying the political, economic, and social factors that drove its creation.

To truly understand the effectiveness of the initial round of stimulus checks, an understanding of how policy is created is necessary. The theories of punctuated equilibrium and narrativization apply to the creation of crisis policy, while the effectiveness of the policy must be viewed through both a rational choice and critical policy lens. The onset of a global pandemic took most Americans by surprise and as fear of infection and economic collapse began to spread, there was increasing demand for swift policy action. This led to the narrativization of the policy process, which took the form of “the more money, the better for the economy”. While stimulus checks appear to be a rational policy in the face of financial collapse, the fear that defined the early stages of the pandemic provides support for analyzing the creation of this policy from a critical policy perspective. Policymaking in the face of crisis rarely goes as planned; exploring the theories behind policymaking may provide insight into how the process can be adjusted to improve policy generated in future crises, or better yet, create policy that prepares for crisis. The rest of the paper follows the structure of investigating each theory, first providing a theory description and then an application of the theory to the stimulus check policy. The final section concludes and discusses how each of these theories overlap.

Show Me the Money: The CARES Act and Stimulus Checks

The CARES Act was passed on March 27th, 2020 and included \$2 trillion worth of stimulus. The bill allocated nearly \$900 billion to new small business loans and the expansion of existing loans for businesses and local governments (Amadeo, 2020). Additional funding went toward the purchase of ventilators and unemployment insurance. \$290 billion was earmarked as direct fiscal relief in the form of \$1,200 stimulus checks for eligible Americans (Nygaard et. al, 2020). Americans who made under \$75,000 a year and married couples who file their taxes jointly and make under \$150,000 a year were eligible for up to the maximum amount, with the amount slowly decreasing for those who made beyond the threshold. Concerns arose regarding the lack of targeting seen in the stimulus check policy, with fears that the checks would be sent to

individuals who did not need them, and that not enough would go to families that did need them (Nygaard et. al, 2020). The checks themselves began to arrive in mid-April.

At the onset of the crisis, many individuals called for direct transfer payments as a means of relieving financial hardship from job loss brought on by the pandemic (Amadeo, 2020). President Trump supported these direct transfers early on and advocated for their inclusion in a stimulus package. Previous fiscal stimulus packages provided direct transfers to Americans, albeit oftentimes this took the form of a tax rebate and occurred on a much smaller scale (Parrot et. al, 2020). However, the coronavirus crisis induced a much deeper recession than previously seen in the United States, leading policymakers to advocate for widespread aid, with little consideration given to the implementation of such a policy. Implementation was indeed difficult, as Congress left that aspect of the process in the hands of the Treasury, who struggled to send out so many checks in such a short period (Parrot et. al, 2020). Regardless, when the checks did arrive, they were spent quickly, with many claiming they were used to purchase necessities, while others believed them to be spent on goods of a more luxurious nature.

The Household Pulse Survey, created and administered by the US Census Bureau to measure the US response to COVID-19, provides additional insight into the distribution and use of the stimulus checks. By June 16th of 2020, 84% of households surveyed responded that they had either received or were expecting to receive a stimulus check (Garner et. al, 2020). Nearly 60% of all those surveyed used stimulus checks for actual expenses, while a little more than 20% of those surveyed saved their check or used it to pay off debt (Garner et. al, 2020). Of those who did receive a check, 66% reported spending at least a portion of it on food (Garner et. al, 2020). The responses to this survey provide more information on the necessity of stimulus checks and the type of people who received them. The survey also provides information about how these checks were used.

Well, That Escalated Quickly: Punctuated Equilibrium Theory

The Theory

Understanding punctuated equilibrium theory is a key component to understanding the creation of stimulus check policy, and to understanding crisis policy in general. Introduced by Baumgartner and Jones in 1993, this theory holds that while most public policy is characterized by gridlock and little progress, large-scale events can break this stasis and lead to sudden and sweeping policy reform (Sabatier, 2019). This is contrasted by the theory of incrementalism, which argues that policy advances via small and gradual changes to eventually reach a larger end goal (Larimer and Smith, 2018). While incrementalism has defined much of the history of public policy in America, some of the most memorable changes in politics and the policy arena have been the direct result of punctuating events that have deeply resonated with the public. For instance, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was a direct response to the secession of the South and the ensuing Civil War. In more recent history, 9/11 led to the implementation of the TSA and stringent airport security regulations. While the punctuating events that precede policy may sometimes be for the better, such as the decision for *Brown v. Board of Education*, it is not necessarily commonplace. It is more often the case that crises and various other negative events serve as the call to action and a precursor to change. *Figure 1* provides a simplified chart of the basics of punctuated equilibrium theory.

A crisis often succeeds in influencing policy images and policy venues in a way that leads to either the strengthening or breakdown of various political subsystems. The pluralist environment that exists in America has led to the creation of these subsystems that address specific policies. The subsystems are frequently concerned with maintaining the status quo due to the number of individuals who benefit from them (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). The policy image directly relates to how the policy is framed and relies on the public's interpretation of how well the subsystem is performing (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). This is why negative events

tend to be those that are punctuating; because the public will begin to argue that the status quo is not doing well enough to address an issue and the current subsystem must be abolished in favor of a new one. Policy venues also play a role in this theory and are defined as “The institutional locations where authoritative decisions are made concerning a given issue (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993)”. It is the role of the agents for change to frame their policy to different audiences of different policy venues to inspire reform. The more members of the venue that are convinced, often by a punctuating event that changes the policy image, the more likely the odds for reform.

Application to Policy

Policy created amid the coronavirus pandemic as a response to the ongoing crisis is an excellent application of punctuated equilibrium theory. With headline economic indicators such as unemployment and inflation at historic lows prior to the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, it is likely that economic subsystems that exist to keep the real economy and financial sectors running smoothly were stable in early 2020. Wage increases in 2019 that many felt were a long-time-coming also helped to cement the legitimacy of the current subsystems. However, the start of the pandemic led unemployment to skyrocket and created fears of a deflationary spiral, coupled with financial collapse. The public and policymakers alike quickly became aware of the inability of the current subsystems to handle such a deep recession, at least with the tools currently at their disposal. The relative calm, at least economically, that the country had felt since 2015 led only to minor adjustments in economic policy and had not prepared the US for the swiftness nor the magnitude of the current economic decline.

The crisis entirely shifted the real and, more importantly, perceived state of the US economy and led to instant calls for action. The policy image of a buzzing economy at full employment had left the minds of the public and was quickly replaced by the reality of unemployment and the fear of absolute financial collapse. This shift resulted in the major policy venues that control economic policy to take action. The key policy venues that have responded in

the face of this crisis are the Federal Reserve, Congress, the Treasury, and the Executive Branch. The Federal Reserve and the Treasury were motivated to take immediate action by their mandates of maintaining maximum employment and stable prices. On the other hand, policymakers in Congress and the President were inspired to take action due in part to political palatability.

While initial lending programs implemented by the Federal Reserve and Treasury helped businesses from declaring bankruptcy, more was needed to provide relief to everyday citizens and jumpstart the economy. Direct transfer payments were quickly determined to be the solution, with guidance on how to implement this program coming from similar transfers made in the recessions of 2001 and 2008 (Parker et. al, 2013). However, this program would be much larger than previous programs and would be different because these transfers were delivered directly as checks, and not tax rebates, as had previously been the case (Parker et. al, 2013). The urgency of the pandemic left little time for deliberation, and the decision to mail stimulus checks was hurriedly made and supported by both Congress and the President. The immediate need for relief demonstrates how powerful a negative and sudden economic shock can be, and how it became a punctuating event that led to a quickly passed policy that promised quick access to cash for all Americans. While policies in a similar vein had previously existed, none of them were the same as direct stimulus checks. Only the breakdown of political subsystems due to a change in political imaging and pressure on policy venues could have resulted in this sort of policy action.

He Who Controls the Media, Controls the Mind: Narrative Policy Framework

The Theory

Controlling the narrative is perhaps the most important component of politics and public policy. According to Smith and Larimer, “Narrative Policy Framework posits that stories, symbols, and images – the basic components of any good narrative – can be studied in an empirical and quantifiable fashion to offer insight into how and why policy change occurs (2018)”. This revolves around the idea that the narrative itself can not only lead to the completion

of policy but can inform policy as well. There are considered to be four components to every narrative, the plot, setting, characters, and moral (Smith and Larimer, 2018). If these four components are combined to form a compelling story, that can result in legitimate policy action, regardless of the details of the policy. In fact, a policy may not be any good at all, as long as it has a compelling story to justify the action presented in the bill, it may pass. This provides reasoning as to why popular policies may fail upon their implementation.

Application to Policy

Crises help to generate emotional and meaningful stories that may make passing policy in a time of crisis easier than passing policy in normal times. The COVID-19 crisis has been framed in a multitude of ways, which story is more attractive to a person is largely dependent on their political affiliation. Speculation about the start of the virus was rampant, with stories ranging from bats sold at a wet market to the purposeful creation of the virus in Chinese labs.

While these narratives succeeded in shifting blame, they did little to advance actual policy discussions surrounding economic relief. While competing narratives regarding the appropriate economic policy to address the crisis did exist, one narrative cemented itself as the most compelling, largely because the four main aspects of this narrative appealed to the emotion of fear and feelings of sympathy felt by many Americans during this time.

The setting of the narrative was provided by the backdrop of a raging pandemic that was wreaking havoc on the economy and causing financial stress to households across America. Members of Congress, the President, and the American people played the main characters in the various narratives that grew out of the economic relief debate. The sides were not necessarily as divided along partisan lines as one would think, many Republicans and Democrats both saw the need for stimulus checks, it was the more fiscally conservative Republicans who were against the checks. Turning against some of his Congressional supporters, President Trump stood with some Republicans and many Democrats in advocating for the stimulus checks.

While the story itself was largely about the desires of the lawmakers to include stimulus checks, the policymakers set to frame the American public as the sympathetic character of the story. The narrative created by advocates of the stimulus checks painted a picture of recently unemployed Americans struggling to scrape by each week with no paycheck. The narrative avoided centering its focus on the impoverished, perhaps because of preconceived attitudes toward this group, and instead focused on the financial burden faced by middle-class families. This helped advocates of the cause reach a wider audience and allowed people to relate better to the story being told. This narrative conveniently leaves out the fact that many of the stimulus checks to be mailed out would still target individuals who made more than \$75,000 a year and would not necessarily be immediate spenders of this stimulus.

The opposing narrative crafted by the more conservative actors jumped at the opportunity to exploit the left-out-fact that many individuals who were considered “upper-middle-class” would also be receiving stimulus checks. This allowed the narrative to be framed as some sort of “socialist” policy, which has historically been a buzzword that has initiated mobilization amongst conservatives. Discussion of how stimulus checks would impact the national debt added to the debate, as advocates against the policy framed the checks as a quick fix for the current generation, but a damning policy for the next generation. The moral of this story revolved around the already massive amount of national debt already incurred, and how by adding more debt via “free money” parents are leaving their children to deal with a looming financial crisis.

Are We Rational When We're Scared?: Rational Choice vs. Critical Policy Analysis

The Theory

As the brain-child of political science and economics, policy analysis has seen rationalism serve as its foundation since the beginning of public policy as an area of study. Stemming from Laswell's positive approach to studying policy, rationalists attempt to apply a scientific approach to policy analysis and rely heavily on quantitative analysis to measure the

effectiveness of policy, with an emphasis on factual evidence, rather than emotional values (Smith and Larimer, 2018). Rationalists do recognize the subjectivity in ranking specific criteria in policy evaluation and, in an attempt to reduce this subjectivity, often use efficiency as their preferred policy measure (Smith and Larimer, 2018). This concept is rooted in welfare economics and efficiency is often thought of as the Pareto optimal policy bundle, or the point in which one person cannot be made better off without making someone else worse off (Smith and Larimer, 2018). The rationalist approach employs this measure of efficiency, although whether they apply this measure to specific subgroups or general populations remains up to the researcher. Policy that may be rational for one group may be irrational for another group, which is a shortcoming of the rationalist approach that critical policy theorists attempt to address.

Critical policy analysis is a critique of the general nature of the social welfare theory that underlies the rational choice method of policy analysis. Critical policy theorists, as well as post-positivists, argue that all policy analysis inherently has a normative and emotional aspect to it due to its introduction to the political sphere (Smith and Larimer, 2018). Subscribers of this ideology also believe that the rationalist approach fails to address power dynamics and how policies will affect different groups (Diem et. al, 2018). Critical policy analysis addresses how different groups are affected by policy and works to find a policy that does not create drastic disparities between policy “winners” and “losers” by emphasizing policy equity (Diem et. al, 2018). This recognition that not all humans are the same and therefore policy analysis cannot be conducted so generally is essential to critical policy theory. This acknowledgment of differences helps to provide a systematic understanding of what is deemed “irrational” behavior in rational choice theory. Thus, critical policy analysis helps to address the shortcomings of rational analyses that portray a general picture of policy success, but do not discuss the failure of the policy among different groups.

Application to Policy

In the face of a global pandemic that led to an unprecedented economic shock, it was clear to members of the federal government that some sort of policy had to be enacted to combat rising unemployment and increasing financial stress. Remember, a crisis does not often breed rational policy. On the surface, however, the provision of \$1,200 Economic Impact Payments appears to be a relatively rational policy. Many businesses were forced to shut down and some of those businesses were declaring bankruptcy due to a huge decrease in consumption. Meanwhile, many families were under financial duress themselves and were in desperate need of cash. The rational option was to provide cash payments to alleviate individual financial pressure while also boosting consumption.

Despite sacrificing some efficiency for equitable distribution among the population, the stimulus policy was largely seen as a success and on a macro level, played out exactly how rationalists expected. According to the BLS report on the Household Pulse Survey mentioned earlier, 81% of all those who experienced income losses over the previous month used their stimulus checks for monthly expenses (Garner et. al, 2020). This statistic implies that the stimulus check did indeed boost consumption and was received and used by those who most needed it. *Figures 2 and 3* also show the positive impact of the policy on disposable income and consumption. A cost-benefit analysis outlines the policy as Pareto optimal by explaining that any increase in the federal deficit due to increased spending is more than offset by the positive effect on consumption and therefore GDP (Bhutta et. al, 2020). Using these numbers as subjective measures of policy effectiveness indicates that the stimulus check portion of the CARES Act was indeed a rational policy. Although analyzing the policy effects using a critical policy framework tells a slightly different story.

Raj Chetty's 2020 work provides an excellent quantitative analysis of stimulus checks through a critical policy lens. Chetty argues that while stimulus checks had a major impact on consumer spending, this spending did not translate to increased revenues for the businesses hit hardest, as only 18% of stimulus check consumption occurred in the in-person service sector (2020). The authors also point out that these checks should have been more targeted, as lower-income workers in high-income areas are struggling significantly more in this recession than any other group (Chetty et. al, 2020). There is a clear difference between a food truck employee in an affluent metro and the financial analyst who frequents the stand. While the food truck employee has likely lost their job with little prospect of regaining it soon, the software engineer continues to work from home and is largely insulated from the economic effects of the pandemic. When comparing the differences between low and high-income workers in this recession, it becomes clear that this policy is not as rational as it originally seemed. A critical policy analysis of the original policy would have helped policymakers to realize a much more targeted approach to the distribution of stimulus checks was necessary.

That's All Folks: Conclusion and the Overlap of Theory

Each of the theories discussed above are not independent of one another. In fact, each of these theories overlap to create the complex relationships and mechanisms that define the study of public policy. The three sections can be thought of as acting in a sort of feedback loop. Narratives play a key role in defining and publicizing punctuating moments that lead to policy changes. As such, narratives constantly shape the perception of what policy is considered the "rational" approach to the problem, as well as inform how a policy's effectiveness should be measured. Punctuating events are often at odds with the concept of rational choice theory, due to frequent overreactions by policymakers in the face of drastic downturns. To address this

shortcoming, critical policy analysis has become more popular in recent years, although this framework feeds heavily into the creation of narrative, which restarts the loop and pushes for new policy that addresses shortcomings of the previous policy.

The COVID-19 crisis provides a prime example of this loop in action. The widespread introduction of the novel coronavirus into the U.S. in early March of 2020 instantly became the center of discussion and policy debate. This punctuating event saw a tremendous decrease in employment and caused consumption to crater. Competing narratives were constructed from this event in an attempt to persuade policymakers to take a certain course of action. The most successful economic narrative, discussed above, emphasized the burden the coronavirus had taken on lower and middle-class families, as well as the owners of small businesses due to the decrease in consumption. This narrative found success because it fed into the early hopelessness and fear brought on by the coronavirus. The narrative's effectiveness at appealing to emotional distress in the face of a punctuating event allowed this story to grip the nation.

The prevailing narrative not only succeeded in detailing the problem facing the United States but in doing so, also framed what responses to the problem would be considered "rational". Had the economic problems brought on by the coronavirus been framed as a function of the public health crisis itself, stimulus checks would likely not have been seen as a valid policy because policymakers would have recognized that consumption would not return to normal unless the public health problems were resolved. However, at its base, the economic problem was narrativized as a shortage in consumption, which implied that the rational government action would be to stimulate consumption. Stimulus checks were a quick way to do just that. And once the policy had been implemented, the narrative informed the measurements of success used to evaluate the policy. If the policy solely sought to get money into the hands of

Americans and increase consumption, post-policy measures of disposable income and consumption alone would champion this policy as a success story. Despite the success of this rational policy according to these measurements, it is important to recognize that the narrative that informed the policy provided incomplete information. A more successful policy may deviate from the rational response to the narrative and take a more holistic approach to the problem.

A critical analysis of the effectiveness of the original, rational policy would include an examination of how different groups have been affected by the coronavirus and how the stimulus check policy benefitted them. As mentioned previously, many of the groups hit hardest by the pandemic were not adequately compensated by the stimulus checks (Chetty et. al, 2020). This sort of critical policy analysis has the effect of changing the narrative, which we have in fact seen as the pandemic has continued. The narrative has shifted to now emphasize the disparate impact the coronavirus has had on lower-income individuals and minority communities. This, in turn, has influenced the discussion over what the rational approach to this new problem is. There is now a push for larger stimulus checks to provide better compensation for those who have lost their jobs or businesses, as well as for additional legislation with an emphasis on workers in the service industries. Since critical policy analysis is not widely accepted in the policymaking process yet, this retroactive critical policy analysis will likely continue to point out shortcomings of the next policies passed and therefore will continue to influence the narrative and actual policy discussion.

This feedback loop is not unique to the coronavirus pandemic. A variety of policy theories fit well together and feed into one another in a wide array of policy settings. Punctuated equilibrium theory, narrativization, rationalism, and critical policy analysis are individually applicable to the current crisis and very interactive with one another. The COVID-19 crisis and the policy response, specifically the provision of stimulus checks, provides an excellent example of the individual application of, and interaction between, policy theories.

Appendix

Figure 1

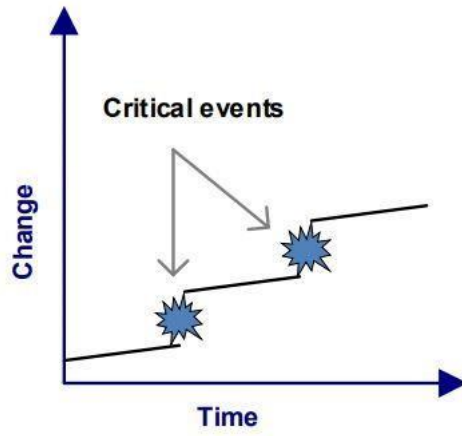


Figure 1: Graphic representation of punctuated equilibrium

Chart from: Jolicouer (2018)

Figure 2

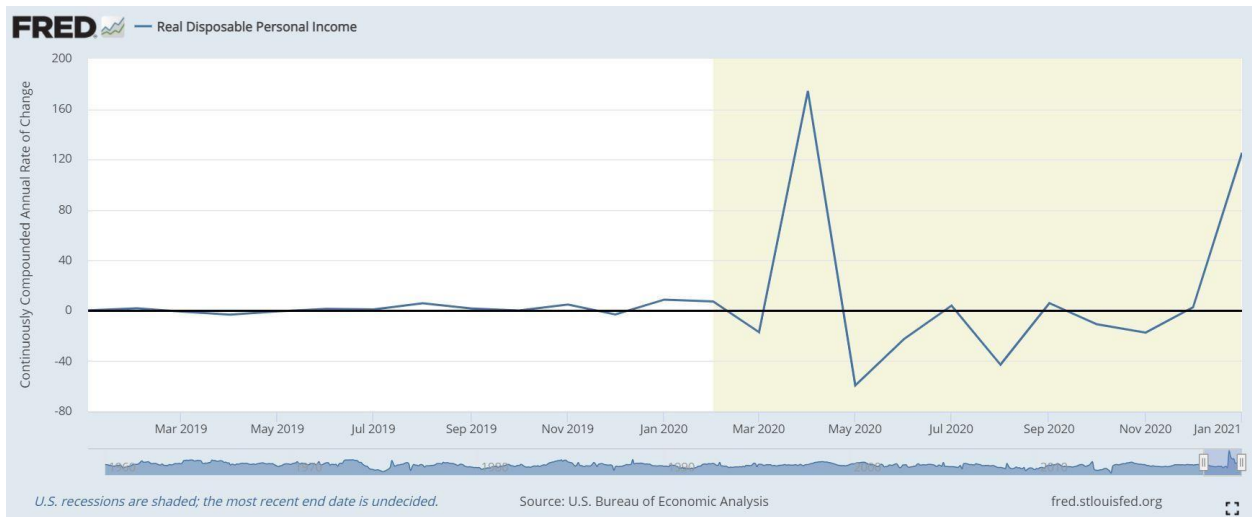


Chart from: FRED Website. Data courtesy of the US Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Figure 3

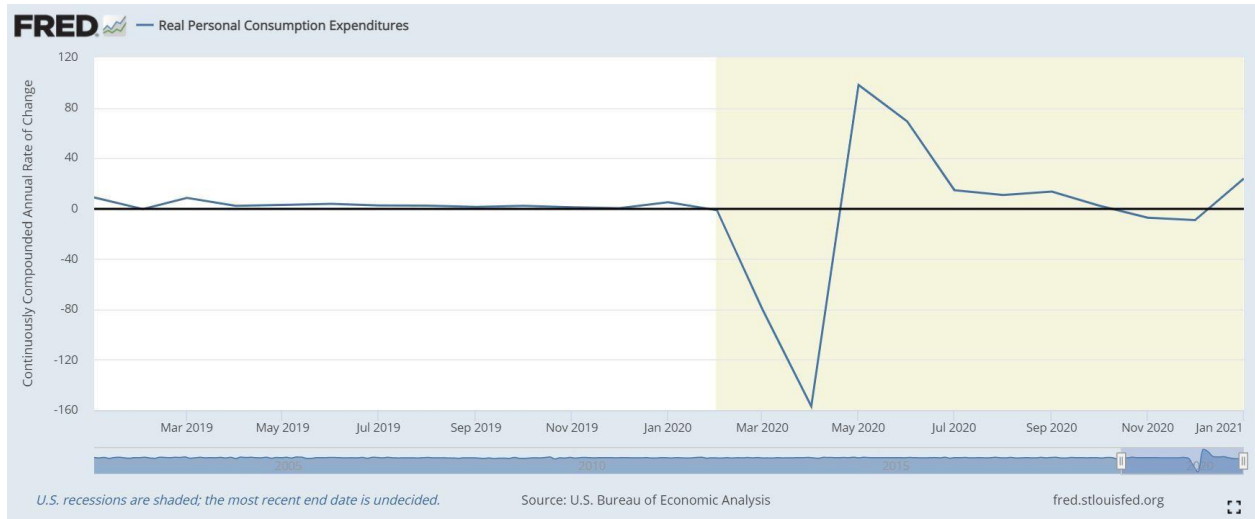


Chart from: FRED Website. Data courtesy of the US Bureau of Economic Analysis.

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Creating a Strong Group Culture – *Tianyi He, Gettysburg College*

Can we make two plus two greater than four? In a competition of building the highest structure by using materials such as spaghetti, a marshmallow, strings, and tapes, a team consisting of kindergarteners provides one of the best answers. Two major groups were got involved in this competition: groups encompassing business school students and groups encompassing kindergarteners. As compared to rational and professional business students, kindergarten kids were less organized. However, the interactions among kindergarteners were more frequent. Children helped each other and attempted to figure out problems together. Building higher structures than that of business school students, the kindergarteners won the game in the end. Under this condition, a four-person team has achieved something beyond merely the sum of four individuals. This effective result is what we called a successful group culture.

Teamwork is never an outdated topic. As social animals, we have been looking for recipes to create successful groups since ancient times. After spending four years interviewing eight highly successful groups such as the San Antonio Spurs, U.S. navy's SEAL Team Six, and Pixar, Daniel Coyle—New York Times bestselling author—uncovers this secret in his latest book *The Culture Code*. As opposed to my predictions, experience and intelligence have never been the key elements to success. Instead, it is all related to a strong culture, something that is socially constructed. Writing in simple and concise language, Coyle made the book easy to read and accessible to almost all of the public. Two themes emerge in the book: multiple approaches and cultural considerations.

The Culture Code is divided into three parts to explain three significant skills that help us to create a successful group culture: building safety, sharing vulnerability, and establishing

purpose. In each part, Coyle states the importance of one of the skills at first and then applies it to the real world. At the end of each section, Coyle further discusses his tips for action.

The first part talks about building safety. As the foundation of creating a group culture, building safety explains the skill from a social psychological perspective. It sends a supportive message to its group members that, “This is a safe place to connect” (Coyle 2018:23). In other words, no matter whether people succeed or not, the groups would always serve as spaces for communication. Due to the sense of belonging, people are more willing to communicate with each other. They share happiness and sadness as they know they are a part of the team. Therefore, group culture is initially shaped when people’s interactions produce chemistry. To further support the concept of building safety, Coyle uses the Spurs as a real-world example. As the coach of the most successful team in the National Basketball Association (NBA), Gregg Popovich knows how to cultivate unselfish behaviors in his players. To build a sense of “us”, the Spurs usually eat dinner together, creating personal connections face to face. The frequent communication between coaches and players, then, forms a concept of “family” where they can share the happiness of success as well as the bitterness of failure. Thus, building safety leads to a strong culture by facilitating interaction and creating a sense of belonging.

After the establishment of safety, it is time for the group to share vulnerability—an opportunity for people to expose their shortcomings. Under this condition, people no longer manage their impressions. Instead, they demonstrate the real selves which contribute to constructing a sense of trust. In the navy SEAL team, soldiers know each other and are not ashamed of exposing their weaknesses. Building on safety, they understand that they can overcome challenges based on the support of group members. That is, they share vulnerability and trust each other. Thus, cooperation among soldiers makes teamwork more efficient, creating

a strong group culture. More specifically, to facilitate cooperation, it is significant for individuals to listen to others, which shows their willingness to help. For groups, looking at a bigger picture or setting a shared goal can improve communication among group members.

As the last skill to involved in creating a strong culture, establishing purpose helps to connect the present and the future. In other words, it explains the purpose of what are doing in the present and how they can build on this to move toward the next goal. To encourage the engagement of group members, the ways in which leaders narrate goals become significant. Through a storying-telling process, the groups look at big pictures and consider potential challenges together. The link between the present and the future facilitates the cohesion of the group. According to Coyle, there are two approaches to establishing purpose: proficiency and creativity. Leading for proficiency, the group focuses more on the task itself. Under this condition, the leader uses a “lighthouse method” of setting clear goals and organizing work. In contrast, the leader using creativity is described as an “engineer of a ship” who provides more autonomy to group members. While holding different concentrations, both approaches—proficiency and creativity—can create strong cultures, helping the group to succeed.

In summation, *The Culture Code* conveys two pieces of significant information for its audience. First, there is no single and perfect model to create a strong group culture. Although the groups following the instructions mentioned above—building safety, sharing vulnerability, and establishing purpose—are more likely to be successful, they are encouraged to use multiple approaches to master these three skills. In other words, the ways in which we build safety, share vulnerability, and establish purpose are not standardized. Therefore, the culture we construct on the basis of these three elements is also diverse, varying by different contexts. Take the two ways of establishing purpose as an example. As Coyle explains, either creativity or proficiency is an

effective channel for establishing the purpose. Proficiency may be more appropriate for Union Square Café, a top-ranked restaurant that must survive in a competitive New York City restaurant scene, whereas creativity may be more suitable for Pixar, an animation studio which requires more imagination and innovation. In the real world, many successful groups take the third option: combining both creativity and proficiency. Thus, the approaches to establishing successful purposes are multiple, as well as the approaches to mastering the other two skills.

Second, context matters. Looking beneath the surface, we may find that the most basic unit of the culture in the book is the human itself. That is, frequent human interaction is the premise of creating a successful group culture. Similarly, in terms of public policy, the policy is made for the people. During the policymaking process, it is significant to consider the implications within all different contexts, which may vary by local conditions such as population, financial capability, values, etc. Concerning culture diversity, the policies become multiple. In other words, from a sociological perspective, there is no right policy, but rather an appropriate policy.

Writing from a micro level, *The Culture Code* explains three pieces of a recipe—building safety, sharing vulnerability, and establishing purpose—to creating strong group cultures. It talks about how people can efficiently communicate with each other. In country that is more polarized than ever, it increasingly more difficult to have conversations with those holding different values. Therefore, the book presents itself as heuristic and meaningful by telling stories from micro levels and conveying how cultures can be different even among groups, let alone different societies and nations. Indeed, the world not only consists of “us” but also “others”. Since they both are parts of society, we need to give more tolerance to disagreements that are based on

different contexts. To have better conversations with others, it is the time to form a cohesive and motivated culture. By doing so, social interaction can be more effective and inclusive.

