Government Structure, Economic Inequality, and Social Safety Net Provision in US Counties

by

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between economic inequality and social safety net spending at the county level between 1996 and 2010. Three key questions are explored. What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and government structures have on the way county governments structure social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the content of social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the way governments fund social safety net programs? To answer these questions, this study analyzes two social welfare programs, LIHEAP and Head Start. Three key features of these programs are evaluated—program content, program funding, and program structure. Using secondary county-level data for 243 counties and qualitative data for nine counties, this study employs a mixed methods approach. The quantitative analysis employs time-series cross-sectional analysis. The qualitative analysis combines content analysis with in-depth interviews conducted with county-level program administrators who represent specific categories of county governance arrangements. The quantitative analysis reveals that county government structures that are considered professional tend to increase funding for social safety net programs and also eliminate or reduce program access restrictions. The qualitative analysis suggests that the location of social service providers has significant impact on program participation rates and transportation is the most common barrier for participation. These findings imply that professionalism improves social safety net design and implementation. These findings also

suggest that disinvestments in public transportation negatively impact the safety net.

Dedication

In Loving Memory of

My mother, Mildred Moorer, who was my first teacher, my best teacher, my motivator, my cheerleader, and my role model

My grandfather, Milton Moorer, who always believed in hard work and fairness

My sister, Te-Ata Moorer, who was my first example of friendship and tenacity

Dedicated to

My sisters, my nieces, and little Black girls everywhere who have ever dared to dream and embrace their Black Girl Magic!

"…no matter where you're from, your dreams are valid."
~ Lupita Nyong'o, 2014 Oscar winner

"…just because we're magic, does not mean we're not real."
~Jesse Williams, 2016 BET Humanitarian Award recipient

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AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
ARRA	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
GED	General Equivalency Diploma
FPG	Federal Poverty Guideline
LIHEAP	Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
NACo	National Association of Counties
NCCP	National Center for Children in Poverty
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act
RUCC	Rural-Urban Continuum Codes
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TSCS	Time-series cross-sectional analysis
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

VIF	Variance Inflation Factor
WIC	Women, Infants, and Children

"We must make our choice. We may have democracy in this country, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both." ~ Justice Louis D. Brandeis

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Generally I eat about one meal a day, sometimes two. I only heat the bedroom because I can't afford to heat the whole house." This quote, taken from the Montana Food Bank Network's *Hungry in Montana 2014* report, encapsulates the struggle of many low-income families in the United States. The "heat-or-eat dilemma" refers to the choice that people often have to make in the bitter cold of winter, when extremely low temperatures mean tremendously high energy costs. Previous scholarship supports the existence of a heat-or-eat tradeoff for low-income households within the United States (Bhattacharya et al 2003, Cullen et al. 2005). According to the 2014 *Hunger in America* report, an estimated 69 percent of food bank clients across the United States deal with some level of energy insecurity and have to choose between paying for heating and cooling or paying for food (Feeding America 2014).

Depending on the region of the United States, the brutally cold winters and the scorching hot summers can impose serious financial burdens on low-income, energy insecure families. Energy insecurity refers to a family's inability to adequately meet the basic heating, cooling, and energy needs for their household. Energy insecure families often have to make difficult decisions about where to place their limited financial resources. This tradeoff is a common and often overlooked aspect of the social safety net. Many families, realizing that they could freeze to death more quickly than they could starve to death, decrease food purchases in order to free up money to pay for heat. These families also often rely on ovens and space heaters as a source for heat. However, these measures are a safety risk and all too often result in fires and tragic loss of life and property and significantly increase the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Families who face energy insecurity often qualify for participation in government social safety net programs like the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP, like many social safety net programs, is meant to help low-income families improve their economic status by reducing poverty and improving prosperity. Safety nets also help facilitate access to health and education services. There is also significant evidence that the safety net increases economic mobility for children from low-income families (Garces et al. 2000). For example, research has found that participating in the early education social safety net program, Head Start, makes children more likely to complete high school and attend college (Garces et al. 2000). Michael Robinson, of Silver Spring, Md., is on the verge of graduating from Yale University. According to the Office of Head Start, Michael credits participation in the Fairfax County, VA with helping to prepare him for success in college. "My Head Start education is one of those things that made going from a low-income household to one of the best academic institutions in the world possible," said Michael. Head Start is a national program that promotes school readiness of children ages birth to 5 from low-income families.

In spite of the extensive historical and empirical evidence that social safety net initiatives can drastically reduce poverty and inequality, public policies that address poverty and inequality are often viewed as contentious (Danziger and Danziger 2005). No systematic investigation has considered how local government structure impacts the design and implementation of social safety net programs. County government structures are designed to build the county's capacity to respond to an increasing array of service demands of their residents in a professional and efficient manner. Structure is defined in terms of dynamics of authority, leadership, and decision making (Menzel 1996). More specifically, county government structure is the formal decision-making process such as the separation of powers and elected versus professional management.

Considering this definition of county government structure, this dissertation is motivated by three research questions: What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and government structures have on the way county governments structure social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the content of social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the way governments fund social safety net programs?

Rising Inequality and the Safety Net

Despite the documented successes of the social safety net, poverty and inequality remain important public policy issues. Over the past forty years, America has become increasingly unequal in terms of the distribution of economic resources. According to Thomas Piketty, a professor at the Paris School of Economics, in America, the share of national income going to the top one percent has followed a great U-shaped arc. Real wages for most workers in the United States have increased little if at all since the early 1970s, but wages for the top one percent of earners have risen 165 percent (Piketty 2014). In 2003, Piketty, along with economist Emmanuel Saez, published research showing that the top one percent of income earners in the United States is receiving 15% of all of the income. This rise in income for the one-percenters, according to Piketty and Saez, is almost twice as large a share as they had 30 years earlier (2003).The Gini coefficient is the most commonly used measure of the amount of economic inequality in a society. Since 1947, the Census Bureau has used the Gini coefficient to measure family income inequality. According to Census Bureau data, since 1967, income inequality for families, measured by the Gini coefficient, has been increasing. Since 1967, U.S. household income inequality has grown 18 percent (Bee 2012). As shown in Figure 1.1, a lot of that growth occurred during the 1980s.

[Insert Figure 1.1 about here]

The unequal distribution of income has reached heights not seen since the Great Depression. Many observers fear that the rise in inequality might pose significant threats to American democracy (Freeland 2012; Gilens 2012; Stiglitz 2012). Some even argue that we are living in a "New Gilded Age". Piketty characterizes this Gilded Age, or a second *Bella Époque,* as the incredible rise of the "one percent" (2014).

Though citizens in every society live with a degree of inequality, democratic societies are generally thought to engender substantial degrees of equality (Roemer 2005). However, recent events in the United States—the Bush era tax cuts in 2001 and 2003, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Great Recession in 2007, and the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011—have helped to refocus our attention on extreme economic inequality in America. While in previous years, very little substantive political attention was given to this issue, it has become increasingly problematic to ignore the impact that the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and other resources has on virtually every facet of American life. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) suggest that economic inequality of developed countries has an effect on the level of trust of citizens, rates of mental illness, life expectancy, infant mortality, obesity, educational performance, teenage births, homicides, imprisonment rates, and overall social mobility.

While we have increased our knowledge about inequality, there are some aspects of inequality about which we have insufficient knowledge. We have produced considerably less research to inform policy and practice about interventions to reduce it. A number of researchers advocate active local government responses to inequality and poverty (Blank 2005; Nizalov and Schmid 2008; Partridge and Rickamn 2005, 2006; Weber et al. 2005). For example, local initiatives like transportation and childcare programs aimed at improving the community workforce can also build human capital, promote family well-being, increase community cohesion, and reduce poverty (Blank 2005).

This position, however, suggests another question: can local governments influence economic inequality and poverty? More specifically, does the interaction between economic inequality and local government structure impact the public policies that dictate how particular social safety net programs are administered at the local level? The rise in economic inequality may be having significant effects that are complex and subtle enough to defy detection at the national level or even at the state level. The answer to this question requires that scholars develop a deeper understanding of how inequality operates at the sub-state, or local level.

This dissertation advances the current discussion about public policy and the improvement of social safety net provision. The major assumption of the study is that the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures impacts the structure, funding, and content of social safety net programs at the county level. In testing this assumption, the study contributes to literature in several ways. First, it contributes to an understanding of how economic inequality impacts the local decision making process and furthers our understanding of the theoretical influence of economic inequality on government decision making. Second, it contributes to our understanding of how different structures of government exacerbate existing or generate new inequalities. Third, this study attempts to explicate how economic inequality impacts local public policy choices as opposed to explaining the factors that contribute to the inequality. This first chapter of the dissertation provides a brief background of the study, specifies the research questions, addresses the study's significance and relevance to current policy discussion and presents a very brief overview of the study's mixed-methods design.

Research Questions and Significance

To understand the relationship between economic inequality, government structure, and social safety net programs, this study examines how political, economic, regional, and demographic factors affect county-level inequalities, thereby impacting the level of social safety net spending. The specific questions which motivate this study are:

1. What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and government structures have on the way county governments structure social safety net programs?
2. What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the content of social safety net programs?
3. What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the way governments fund social safety net programs?

Understanding local responses to social issues like poverty and inequality is important. The role of government in determining the distribution of wealth is integral to understanding the rise of economic inequality and the impact that this rise has had on traditionally marginalized communities. Attention to county governments offers a unique contribution to public policy literature because county government structures and policies are less explored than are those of the federal government and the states.

By concentrating on county-level inequality and government structures, research may reveal more about the particular pathways through which inequality contributes to specific outcomes. County governments have become the main provider of many public and social services. Counties have relatively fixed geographic boundaries and there is extensive secondary data available at the county level (Isserman et al. 2009; Peters 2009). Furthermore, counties cover both rural and urban spaces, allowing for a more complete national view of fast and slow growth areas (Desmet and Fafchamps 2005). Counties are also the fastest growing general-purpose governments, in part due to devolution that resulted from 1996 welfare reform (Lobao and Kraybill 2005). Many state and federal intergovernmental programs are administered through county government. Though important in policy implementation and administration, counties have been overlooked by researchers. Sheingate (2010) refers to this oversight as the issue of invisibility of local government. The major objective of this dissertation is to study role of county governments in social welfare policy design and implementation.

A number of researchers highlight why the county is a preferred unit of analysis for social science research. While the content of government policies, cultural and social norms, and varying demographics all affect the way social safety net programs are structured, particular attention is also paid to the regional factors that may play a role as well.

This dissertation explores LIHEAP and Head Start, two particular federal safety net programs which are also understudied at the local level. The few scholarly articles that examine LIHEAP focus on the allocation formula problems derived by Congress instead of discussing the effectiveness of the program in reducing poverty or removing energy insecurity (Kaiser and Pulsipher 2003a, Kaiser and Pulsipher 2003b). Theisen (1993) examines a single county from Iowa to determine if the additional funds allocated to these low-income households encourages them to use more energy, a potential flaw in the execution of the program. His results show that

LIHEAP funding does not cause low-income income households within the county to increase their use of electricity, but none of the analysis examines the energy security of the study households. With energy costs increasingly on the rise, low-income families are often left to make hard choices about whether to spend their money on food or energy. Low-income families tend to live in less energy-efficient homes; therefore, they allocate a greater percentage of their household income to energy expenses. However, the limited nature of the data prevents a broader analysis of LIHEAP as locally-administered anti-poverty social safety net program.

Similarly, the Head Start program is understudied in this context as an anti-poverty program. Because Head Start programs are required to serve low-income families (with the exception of 10% of their annual enrollment), its participants are likely to be eligible for multiple social safety net programs. According to existing literature, as well as administrative data from targeted programs, families with children enrolled in Head Start are not necessarily participating in all of the programs for which they are eligible (Aikens et al. 2010; Tarullo et al. 2008). Nationally, it has been estimated that approximately 20% of Head Start families receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), 55-60% receive Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and approximately 50% receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Aikens et al. 2010; Tarullo et al. 2008). Head Start families are likely to be eligible to participate in other public anti-poverty programs at rates higher than these. It is also important to consider the fact that Head Start itself is such a program. Therefore, it is important to understand the structures of LIHEAP and Head Start, and how those may influence program design and implementation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to further explore the dynamics that impact social welfare spending at the county level. This dissertation seeks to further our understanding of how the interaction between economic inequality and county government structure impacts local government decisions regarding three aspects of social safety net programs—structure, funding, and content. The next section provides the historical background on the national efforts to address poverty and inequality.

Background

In order for social safety net programs to be effective, they must take a holistic approach to address the complex and often overlapping factors that contribute to poverty and inequality. Patterns of poverty and inequality in the United States have complex origins in political and social structures and are influenced by shifting trends in the financial sector, the labor market, and the healthcare and housing systems.

Although closely related, poverty and income inequality are not exactly synonymous. Poverty, in its basic definition, is having a low income. Put differently, poverty is the proportion of the population below a particular income line. Income inequality, on the other hand, is the variation in income among different people or households in a geographically defined area (DeNavas-Walt and Proctor 2014). Income inequality is typically measured by the Census Bureau as an index of income concentration, a statistical measure ranging from 0 to 1.

Political initiatives to address poverty are not new in America, although we have not seen a major national partisan political agenda to address income inequality. In his first presidential inaugural address on March 4, 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt laid the framework for his public policy agenda aimed at curtailing the effects of the Great Depression of 1929 to 1940.

Roosevelt's New Deal drastically restructured the American economy in order to end the spike in poverty during the crisis. The New Deal programs employed and gave financial security to millions of Americans. The government's role in the everyday lives of Americans grew more during this time than in any era before, as millions of people became enrolled in major direct relief programs such as social security, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration jobs initiatives.

Between the 1960s and 1990s, every U.S. president other than Gerald Ford had a highly publicized plan for reforming welfare. Lyndon Baines Johnson's War on Poverty initiatives also placed the federal government squarely in the fight against poverty. On January 8, 1964, in his first State of the Union address, President Johnson asserted that "this administration, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty." Leveraging his power as president, Johnson marshaled the resources of the federal government to extend prosperity and democracy to America's less fortunate citizens when he signed into law the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. President Johnson cautioned, "The war on poverty is not fought on any single, simple battlefield and it will not be won in a generation. There are too many enemies: lack of jobs, bad housing, poor schools, lack of skills, discrimination; each intensifies the other." With the War on Poverty initiatives, the Office of Economic Opportunity spearheaded a remarkable period of institutional capacity building with programs strategically designed to enhance localized involvement in social policy implementation.

During the decade from 1965 to 1975, a number of federal government policies were planned and undertaken as a part of the War on Poverty. These programs include initiatives such as Medicaid, Head Start, Child Nutrition Programs, Job Corps, and Food Stamps. As a result, the poverty rate in America dropped from 18.1 percent in 1960 to 8.8 percent in 1973. During this same period, there was also a significant reduction in the number of families living near poverty. The percentage of families living below 125 percent of the poverty level dropped from 25 percent to 12.8 percent. Unfortunately, the gains made under the War on Poverty initiatives did not extend into the next decade. By 1980, the poverty had risen to 10.3 percent and continued to rise in the subsequent decades, reaching as high as 15.1 percent in 2010.

A similar trend occurred with the level of inequality in America. Economic inequality has been increasing in the United States since the late 1970s (Piketty and Saez 2003; Smeeding 2004). Incomes at the very top of the income distribution have continued to grow, while income growth for the middle and lower parts of the distribution have stagnated (Stone, Trisi, and Sherman 2012). Disparities of income, wealth, and access to opportunity are growing more sharply in the United States than in many other nations, and gaps between races and ethnic groups persist.

The New Deal and Great Society welfare initiatives were directed at helping individuals and families improve their socioeconomic status. At the core of these initiatives was the idea that government could and should play some role in helping families overcome the obstacles of poverty. However, the most sweeping welfare reforms came with the Clinton Administration's concept of "personal responsibility" and accountability. Beginning in the early-1990s, welfare reform was debated within Congress, within the Clinton Administration, and between the two. The resulting legislation, signed by President Clinton after vetoing two prior Congressional packages, abolished AFDC and in its place, established Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The structure of the social safety net underwent its first major overhaul with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996. PRWORA transformed AFDC from an entitlement program that provided cash benefits to those households that satisfied state and federal eligibility standards into a work-based block-grant program, TANF, which is nearly entirely controlled by the states.

Statement of the Problem

Economic disparities and poverty across American localities have long concerned researchers and policymakers. Researchers have examined the effects of economic inequality on everything from health to education, social mobility, and, of course, public policy. This large multidisciplinary literature spans political science (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Kelly and Enns 2010; Kenworthy and Pontusson 2005; Page and Jacobs 2009), regional economics (Blank 2005; Isserman et al. 2009; Partridge and Rickman 2006; Weber et al. 2005), geography (Chakravorty 2006; Glasmeier 2002) and sociology (Lobao et al. 2008). However, gaps remain in determining the impact that inequality and poverty have on policy choices. There are also gaps in the literature with regards to understanding why some localities prosper but others languish in poverty.

What we currently know about economic inequality is largely based upon empirical studies that attempt to illustrate what causes gaps in wealth. So far, however, there have been few scholarly accounts that explore how inequality impacts the design and structure of public policy at the subnational, local level. In fact, to date there has been very little agreement on the whether the wealth gap even impacts the public policy process, and if so, to what extent. Furthermore, there has been very little attention paid to local government structures and their role in policies that are designed to strengthen the social safety net. Government can influence the distribution of income in a number of ways; redistribution via social safety nets is one of the most obvious ways. As such, researchers have called for place-sensitive policies and active local government responses to inequality and poverty (Blank 2005; Nizalov and Schmid 2008; Partridge and Rickamn 2005, 2006; Weber et al. 2005).

This study focuses on federally-funded and locally-administered programs and examines county-level governments for a number of reasons. There are 3,143 counties and county-equivalents in the United States. Even though social scientists often invoke a role for local governments and place-based polices in addressing poverty and inequality, little is known about whether local governments actually affect the distribution of income. Counties were created as local governing entities to implement state goals and service programs. County governments are also instrumental in providing general government services, particularly in rural areas.

Counties also have a rich history of being viewed as the most localized provider of a number of public services to the community. As noted by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835 in his seminal work, *Democracy in America*, other than in New England, the county in the 1830s was "the center of administration and the intermediate power between the government and the citizen" (2004). Tocqueville further noted that "the state governs, but does not execute the laws" (2004). These characteristics of the state-county government relationship still hold true today.

Federal and state governments have increased their reliance on county governments as the avenue for implementing federal and state programs. The academic literature traces the beginning of this trend to the late 1980s to mid-1990s when the role for county governments in policy implementation and service delivery expanded in essential policy areas such as health services, educations, transportation, and human services (Ferrell 1989, Menzel 1996). Street-level bureaucrats at the county level are responsible for the administration of many pivotal services that have significant impacts on the lives of citizens. According to Michael Lipsky, (1980)

> "Most citizens encounter government (if they encounter it at all) not through letters to congressmen or by attendance at school board meetings but through their teachers and their children's teachers and through the policeman on the corner or in the patrol car. Each encounter of this kind represents an instance of policy delivery."

Public administration at the county level is delivered in large part by these street-level bureaucrats who exercise a great deal of influence and discretion in delivering public services.

History of Income Support Measures

How government responds to the needs of the most disadvantaged citizens during times of economic hardship speaks volumes about a country's values and priorities. Even though poverty and inequality in America have been on the rise, many Americans see social and economic inequity as something quite different from the simple need for income assistance. Increased pressures and demands on the safety net made calls for welfare reform a recurring political theme. Welfare reform efforts had a significant influence on the ways in which states structured their programs. In response to the flexibility provided through waivers and then under TANF, state programs vary widely as governments have been given the autonomy to make their own decisions about eligibility and benefits, time limits, work participation requirements, and other aspects of "personal responsibility." Most states have responsibility for policymaking, funding, and administration for TANF in the state government, some states have devolved complete responsibility for TANF to local counties and communities[1].

Welfare reforms modified the nation's cash welfare system and may have had both direct and indirect effects on the way that other federal assistance programs are viewed and administered by local governments. As such, this research explores the impact that various

[1] The following states partner with counties to operate TANF programs: California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Virginia and Wisconsin.

political, institutional, social, and demographic factors have on social safety net spending at the county level.

It is important to understand how American social and political processes affect the way that governments address poverty and inequality. Government has the capacity to influence the socioeconomic status of citizens in a number of ways. Most obviously, though, government can redistribute money through taxation and transfer programs, with the redistributive impact being either downward or upward. Americans continue to believe the federal government should create policies aimed at reducing the gap between wealthy and less well-off Americans. According to a 2015 New York Times/CBS News poll, 57% of Americans think that the government should do more to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. However, this same public opinion poll shows that even among those that agree that the government should play a role in addressing inequality, citizens still disagree about the specific role that government should play. Regulations, tax policy, and social programs, for example, can be used to cushion the effects of the rising economic inequalities (Freeman 1994). Most often, government entities not only choose the type of services to provide communities, but government actors are also involved in the decision-making process about the way in which those services are delivered to citizens (Stein 1990).

Although the decisions made in Washington, D.C. have a profound impact on the daily lives of individuals, the decisions made at the local level are in many ways closer to ordinary citizens. At the county level, the structure of the local government can have significant influence on the way that citizens gain access to social safety net benefits. The service role of county governments has expanded significantly in recent years (Benton 2002; Streib et al. 2007). At the local level, governments can use their limited fiscal resources, their political leadership, and administrative capabilities to enhance the safety net. By building strong local public bureaucracies to administer social safety net programs and by supporting outreach, local governments can influence the quality and reach of the safety net, thereby ensuring high take-up rates for federal benefits. On the other hand, local governments can make the safety net hard to access with unresponsive bureaucracies and discouraging rules.

Relevance to Current Policy Discussions

Income inequality in the United States has increased over the last forty to fifty years, across times of economic prosperity as well as in times of economic downturn. The socio-political significance of this widening gap between those at the top of the income bracket and the majority at the lower end of the income spectrum is still unclear in many ways. The Great Recession of 2007 and the persistent high unemployment that followed has further exacerbated these inequalities and has drawn greater attention to the trend of marked concentration of wealth at the top of the income distribution. The problem of inequality is now at the center of many domestic policy debates.

Questions remain about whether technological change is the main driver of inequality or whether policy changes that end up steering more income growth towards those at the top of the pay gradient should be the main point of concern. Arguing in 2012 that income inequality hurts economic growth, President Obama said, “What drags down our entire economy is when there is an ultra-wide chasm between the ultra-wealthy and everyone else” (Thompson 2012). As the country continues to recover from the Great Recession, understanding the role that county governments may play in this process is important.

Timeframe of the Study

The timeframe of the study is 1996-2010. This period provides important data relevant to the ongoing policy discussion about government's role in providing social safety nets in the context of American federalism. By examining this timeframe, this study captures two major events in federal-state relations with respect to social safety net programs. Important for the project, this period facilitates illustration and analysis of local government decisions about how to implement federal programs in a new context of greater flexibility and competing objectives.

The period includes the most recent major overhaul of social safety net programs. The 1996 welfare reforms highlight the significance of subnational governments through one of its key provisions: devolution of authority for program formation and administration to state and local governments. Devolution also placed the responsibility for welfare reform with local governments and agencies that possessed varying capacities and resources for this task. The period also includes the most recent era of severe economic downturn in the United States, the Great Recession of 2007, and federal response through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. The ARRA, an economic stimulus package signed into law by President Obama, provided an economic boost to the US economy in the wake of the economic downturn. The ARRA provided federal tax relief, expanded unemployment benefits and other social welfare provisions and increased domestic spending in areas such as education, health care, infrastructure, and energy. One of the most important responsibilities of American counties is providing redistributive services. The Great Recession, however, presented a set of contradictory pressures for local governments with regards to social safety net provision. The combination of despair and new resources from the ARRA prompted many local governments to experiment with service delivery. The recession also prompted some governments to adopt more restrictive program requirements to allegedly “weed out” applicants who do not “really” need assistance.

Methodology

The study uses a mixed-methods design to explore the relationship between economic inequality, government structure, and social safety net program features. The county is the unit of analysis. For the quantitative section, time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) analysis is employed. The dependent variables are program structure, program content, and program funding. The key explanatory variables are grouped into three broader categories: economic factors, demographic factors, and political factors. . The qualitative section consists of in-depth general interviews of counties selected based on various characteristics including government structure, the program administered, program structure, degree of ruralness, and census region. There are various forms of interview design that can be developed to obtain thick, rich data utilizing a qualitative investigational perspective (Creswell 2007). The main benefit of the qualitative interview is that this approach gives the researcher the ability “…to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee…but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the interviewee” (McNamara 2009). Interviews are conducted with program administrators in nine counties. The counties and agencies included in the sample represent key aspects of program service delivery. Of the nine counties, there are three from each of the county government structures (i.e. three commission, three administrator, and three executive). Additionally, three of the agencies administer only Head Start, and three agencies administer only LIHEAP. The final three agencies administer both of the programs. The counties sampled also represent a mix of the RUCC and census region locations.

Delimitations and Definitions

The timeframe for the study, 1996-2010, while chosen with care, is not used without placing certain limits on the work. Many time series methods require at least thirty time points and some techniques require even more. The TSCS approach allows data to be analyzed cross-sectionally and over time and increases the number of observations. Expanding the timeframe was considered but data for some variables are not as readily available outside of this timeframe. However, this time frame includes the era following welfare reform and the beginning and presumed ending of the Great Recession of 2007. During the period of this study the role of local governments in social safety net provision became more prominent and local governments are expected to either innovate or restrict access to the limited and decreasing social safety net benefits.

This study uses the Gini coefficient as the measure of economic inequality. The Gini is a summary measure of income inequality in a given society. Values of the Gini range between zero in the case of perfect equality where each person has the same income, and one in the case of perfect inequality where all income goes to the share of the population with the highest income. The greater the Gini coefficient, the greater the concentration of income and the more unequal the distribution of income. The Gini index remains the most popular measure of income inequality. The main weakness of using the Gini as a measure of income distribution, however, is that it makes cross-country comparisons particularly difficult.

This study focuses primarily on income inequality, as measured through gaps in poverty and income in the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey and American Community

Survey. The Census Bureau's Gini Index—a measure of income inequality across households—is useful because it is available over long periods of time and is therefore useful for time series. However, it is limited to pretax income and does not include noncash benefits, government transfers, and tax benefits or payments that can affect a household's disposable income. Social science researchers are looking at alternative measures of inequality that can provide a slightly different picture of disparities and change over time. Despite this limitation, the Gini index has been applied to topics other than income and wealth and is used extensively in the Political Science literature. Furthermore, since this study uses only Census Bureau figures to measure inequality, the method for calculating the Gini is comparable across the counties analyzed in this research. Therefore, this research does not suffer the same problems as cross-country comparisons of the Gini.

Overview of the Remaining Chapters

The overall organization of this study takes the form of six chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter Two begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research and provides a review of the economic inequality literature. The changing role of county government is discussed in the context of inequality. Next, the literature on county government structures is presented. The various government structures that exist across the counties are then discussed. There are three primary forms of county government structure: county commission, county manager (administrator), and county executive (Municipal Year Book, 1975 and 2003; Cigler 2002). There is also a brief discussion on what inequality looks like in a federalist system. Then, an overview of the two social safety net programs used in this study is presented. Following this, the social safety net literature is culled and various explanations for the program features—structure, funding, and content—are developed. The literature on the key explanatory variables is also presented. The explanatory variables are grouped into three broader categories. The economic factors are the annual poverty rate, unemployment rate, median household income, and economic inequality. The demographic factors include the youth population, elderly population, African American population, Hispanic population, educational attainment, and percent of female-headed households. The final category is the county partisanship.

Chapter Three is concerned with the methodology used for the study. The study's specific hypotheses are presented here. This chapter includes a detailed explanation of the variables and methods of analysis used in the study. Coding of the dependent and independent variables is explained. The theories behind, and the coding and sources for, the explanatory variables are identified. The sampling strategy is outlined and the factors which informed selection of the quantitative model are described. The county selections for the qualitative model are explained and the data sources and evaluation tools are specified. Finally, an overview of the interview protocol is presented.

Chapter Four presents the findings from the quantitative section of the study and focuses on the key themes identified in the analysis. The findings suggest that counties across all urban and rural spaces tend to rely on community action agencies as the main source of service delivery for both programs. Furthermore, the quantitative data analysis suggests that administrator and executive counties tend to spend more on both programs than the commission counties. In addition, by government structure, the administrator and executive counties have the fewest or no program restrictions.

Chapter Five analyzes the results of the qualitative interviews conducted during the course of this research. The interviews reveal that while the two programs studied in this dissertation are different, the program administrators face similar challenges. Program funding and participant access are two of the main areas of concern for program administrators. Interviewees acknowledged that the lack of personal and public transportation is often the biggest barrier for participants trying to gain access to the programs.

Finally, Chapter Six draws upon the entire dissertation, tying up the various theoretical and empirical strands. The conclusion gives a brief summary and critique of the findings and includes a discussion of the implication of the findings to future research into this area. The scholarly literature will benefit greatly from analyses of inequality that move beyond the discussions of the causes and consequences of economic inequality to research that can be effectively translated to advance public understanding, promote civic dialogue and engagement, and inform social policy.

Understanding the impact that government structures have on social safety net program design and administration is important. This dissertation attempts to explain how local-level decision making can impact who has access to social services. This next chapter lays out the theoretical framework guiding this research. This literature sets the framework for discussing what each level of government is good at doing. This research is used to build the theories and hypotheses about the factors that impact social welfare program content, funding, and structure at the county level.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The United States has higher economic inequality than almost all other developed countries. Economic inequality refers to the unequal distribution of economic resources, opportunities to build human capital, and social resources. Despite economic growth in the late twentieth century, the gap between poor Americans and wealthy Americans has widened precipitously, with potentially substantial negative consequences for those at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy. There has been extensive scholarly attention given to the rise in economic inequality. This research crosses the boundaries of several branches of the literature; that research is synthesized in this chapter.

Addressing poverty and inequality at the county level is heavily influenced by political, institutional, and economic factors (Farmer 2011). Generalizable research on how counties, mainly in rural areas, implement social safety net programs and the degree to which they provide vital social safety nets is scant (Goetz and Freshwater 1997). This chapter presents a synthesis of the available literature that guides this research study. First, the conceptual framework is outlined. Next, the changing role of county governments is discussed, followed by a discussion of the main county government structures. Then the extensive body of literature that seeks to explain the growth in economic inequality is presented. In particular, the various schools of thought about the cause and effect of inequality are discussed. A burgeoning literature on economic inequality in a federalist context is also presented. The review of the literature then shifts to social safety nets in order to highlight the role of county governments in social service provision. This chapter also covers the historical backgrounds and programmatic design elements of the two programs covered in this study. Finally, the operationalization of the dependent variables and the key explanatory variables is discussed.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical literature on the influence of county governments on the distribution of income is limited. Researchers have analyzed the role that local governments can play in policies to address inequality and poverty. However, it is unclear whether intervention into social safety net policy by local governments is helpful or even necessary. To explain the relationship between government structure, social safety net program features, and economic inequality, four theoretical dimensions are explored: 1) political economy; 2) neoliberal policy; 3) institutional capacity; and 4) social equity.

The political economy position derives from the political economy literature. According to that literature, the state plays an important role in social welfare policy. However, this view also emphasizes the limitation of local governments in inequality and poverty elimination. This theoretical frame suggests that local governments prefer policies that stress growth and development over equity (Peterson 1981). When pursing economic development projects, local governments are more inclined to create policies that cater to businesses and high-income individuals rather than those that cater to disadvantaged individuals. Competition among local governments also creates a climate that detracts from the incentive for localities to target low-income groups (Oates 1972). Additionally, the political economy literature contends that local governments are often poorer in quality (Tanzi 1996) and are more vulnerable to pressure from elite groups (Logan and Molotch 1987). Lastly, this theoretical view holds that economic development programs that rely heavily on tax incentive packages to recruit business may be ineffective in creating jobs that could aid in the reduction of inequality and poverty (LeRoy 2005).

The second theoretical dimension, the neoliberal policy framework, also referred to as the limited government view, sees government as distorting market processes (Pratt 1997). Based on this framework, government interventions are viewed as unproductive or prejudicial. Increases in the size and power of governments lead to more market regulations, which in turn reduce economic efficiency (Okun 1975; Buchanan 1986). From a neoliberal perspective, public agencies and programs are considered wasteful, and social services, particularly those for the poor, weaken long-term growth (Mitchell and Simmons 1994).

The third theoretical position is based on an institutional capacity framework. Institutional capacity refers to government's ability to create, execute and improve rules. Institutional capacity development theorists suggest that local government authorities have ceded power to other actors and institutions involved in economic development and regeneration policy, and that the success of local and regional economic development is closely related to the strength of 'institutional capacity' within an area. Institutional capacity theories suggest that institutions such as values, norms, rules, procedures, and structures play a role in determining particular political outcomes. The institutional capacity theorists situated in the poverty and place literature contend that larger governments with greater institutional capacity are better positioned to support policies related to growth and equity (Lobao and Hooks 2003; Partridge and Rickman 2006; Volscho and Fullerton 2005).

The fourth and final theoretical frame guiding this research is the social equity dimension which suggests that government can improve local conditions by strengthening the social safety net (Lobao and Hooks 2003; Volscho and Fullerton 2005). However, as local governments expand to take on more social equity functions, they may attract residents desiring access to social safety net benefits (Murray 1984). When the sociodemographic makeup of the community changes and poverty and inequality become more obvious, three theoretical strands explain how economic inequality impacts social safety net spending. Social capital theorists argue that inequality undermines group cohesiveness and reduces popular support for expenditures on public goods and social programs (Kaplan et al. 1996, Kawachi et al. 1997, Knack and Keefer 1997, Putnam 2000, and Wilkinson 1996). Median voter theorists, on the other hand, claim that increased inequality may yield a median voter that is more supportive of government spending (Meltzer and Richard 1981, 1983). Alternatively, if public policy is driven by elite preferences, increased inequality may be associated with pressure to shrink the size and scope of government. Political power theory suggests that inequality increases the control of the wealthy over the political process (Bartels 2002). Furthermore, this view of political power suggests that wealthy individuals care less about providing goods and services that mainly benefit minority and poor individuals (Gilens 1999; Katz 1989; Stein, Post, and Rinden 2000; Wilson 1996).

Changing Role of Counties

One of the most enduring debates among political reformers, scholars, and practitioners has focused on the hypothesized impact that government structure has on local government policy decisions. Over the past few decades, local governments have expanded the range of their activities to address changes in social, economic, and political conditions. County government in America represents the most comprehensive level of local government with the ability to broadly address local issues and needs. Although the theoretical literature certainly provides insight into the conceptual frames guiding this research, understanding the origin and role of county governments as administrative arms of the state is also important.

The historical development of county government can be traced to 603 AD in what is now England. During the Middle Ages, England was divided into cities and counties known as boroughs and shires, respectively. The monarchy controlled the shires by appointing the governing officials. These early counties were seen as the administrative arm of the national government as well as the citizens' local government. The Founding Fathers, in forming the national government, did not provide for city or county governments in the Constitution. The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, also known as the reserved powers amendment, states that "all powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it" shall be reserved for the states The Constitution makes no mention of local governments. Local governing authority exists only in as much as is granted by state governments. Many early state constitutions regarded county governments as an arm of the state.

The government reform movement, a response to the population growth and suburban development that occurred after World War I, strengthened the role of local governments. Those developments provided the basis for post-World War II urbanization. Changes in government structure and stronger political accountability coupled with greater autonomy from states ushered in a new era for county government. Counties began providing an increased number of services to residents. As such, county governments began to face a number of changes in terms of the political and economic environment. Economic restructuring and shifts in institutional arrangements affected the way that county governments actually governed. Beginning with the War on Poverty initiatives, local governments increased their functional responsibilities as a result of a broader, national trend in the direction of decentralization (Kodras 1997; Razin 2000). Local governments became active in public services, economic development activities, and infrastructure functions (Razin 2000). Counties also took on new roles as a result of the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which was responsible for the development and oversight of the Great Society programs. The OEO was established by the Economic

Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA), the centerpiece of the War on Poverty. The EOA led to the creation of thousands of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) at the local level to implement Great Society programs. CAAs varied greatly, with some being non-profit organizations, some being local government agencies, and some being community-controlled groups. Locally elected officials were required to designate an organization as the official CAA for the area before the latter could collect federal funds allocated for anti-poverty programs. The CAA boards had to have broad representation that included one-third government officials or representatives appointed by them; one-third members of the private sector, including nonprofits; and one-third representatives from low-income communities.

Another key mechanism that reduced federal involvement in the social safety net was President Nixon's consolidation of programs into block grants in the 1970s. In 1971, President Nixon proposed consolidating 129 different programs into six block grants. However, Congress rejected Nixon's original consolidation proposal. This program consolidation continued with President Ford's administration. By 1977, Congress had created three large new block grants. In 1981, President Reagan proposed consolidating 85 existing grants into seven block grants. However, Congress, as part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, consolidated 77 categorical grants into nine block grants. Unlike the Nixon block grants, the Reagan block grants provided about 25 percent less funding than the programs they replaced (Conlan 1998). The block grants of the 1970s provided more money than the programs they replaced.

Federal involvement in many programs declined because of the War on Poverty and block grant program consolidation. As a result, states and localities began assuming greater programmatic authority in some areas. However, most research on decentralization is at the national and municipal levels, with relatively little attention given to counties (Reese 1994).

With regard to local governments, decentralization gave county governments the freedom to innovate and better meet the needs of their particular clients (Fording, Soss, and Schram, 2007: 286). Because counties vary widely in population and sociodemographic characteristics, it is likely that counties vary in their design and delivery of public services.

County Government Structure

As a result of the localization of some public services and the federal and state decentralization brought about devolution in the 1980s and by the 1996 welfare reform legislation, county governments have grown in size. In recent years, counties have become major players in the provision of public services (Benton 2002, 2003; Duncombe 1977). On the one hand, counties operate as the administrative arm of the state government. On the other hand, counties act as the direct provider of services, reflecting the needs of their citizens (Berman 1993; Berman and Salant 1996; Benton 2002; Chapman 2003; Choi et al. 2010; and Ostrom and Ostrom 1988). Forty-eight states have some form of a county government. Alaska and Louisiana have functioning county governments and county boundaries referred to as boroughs and parishes, respectively. The counties in Connecticut and Rhode Island serve only as administrative subdivisions of the state; although Connecticut and Rhode Island are divided geographically into regions referred to as counties, they do not have functioning governments, as defined by the Census Bureau. As such, Connecticut and Rhode Island are not included in this study. In addition, there are 40 city-county consolidated governments distributed across 14 states[2].

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[2]Alaska, California, Colorado, Georgia, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Montana, New York, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee have at least one city-county consolidated government.

The powers delegated to local governments are determined by each state. The degree of local autonomy is predicated on the system of governance granted by states to localities. While there is great diversity in state-local relations, the political power of local governments can be classified based on two government structures: Dillion's rule or home rule. Dillion's rule has origins in a court decision issued by Judge John F. Dillion of Iowa in 1868. In an Iowa State Court decision, and later upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court, the decision in *City of Clinton v. Cedar Rapids and the Missouri River Railroad* (24 Iowa 455; 1868) codified Dillion's rule and allows state legislatures to control local government structure. Dillion's rule also requires that local officials spend a considerable amount of time lobbying the state legislature to approve bills granting local authority and disapprove bills imposing restrictions on them. The inflexibility of Dillion's rule led many states to adopt an alternative government structure—home rule. Under home rule, states delegate governing power to the local governments. This power creates a degree of local autonomy and limits the extent to which states can interfere in local affairs.

Commission

There are three primary forms of county government structure: commission, administrator, and executive. The commission government is the traditional form of government at the county level. As illustrated in Table 2.1, most counties continue to function under the commission form.

[Insert Table 2.1 about here]

Originally this government was put forward by a reform movement that sought to bring accountability and business principles to government. The distinguishing feature of the commission type of government is the fact that legislative authority (power to enact ordinances and adopt budgets) and executive powers (power to administer policies and appoint county employees) are exercised jointly by an elected commission or board of supervisors. DeSantis (2002) states that a major characteristic of the commission government structure is that the smaller and more rural counties (with small population) often choose to remain under this form of government. One of the disadvantages associated with the commission structure stem from the absence of a chief administrator to provide a greater degree of professionalism, executive leadership, and accountability (DeSantis 2002; Duncombe 1966). Therefore, counties with the commission structure are often viewed as less capable of responding to the challenges of metropolitan growth and service delivery (DeGrove and Lawrence 1977; Duncombe 1977). Schneider and Park argue that this has led to the creation of new government structures—county administrators and county executives—as a means of responding to the expanding service role of counties (1989).

Regional characteristics also impact how county governments operate. Table 2.2 shows the regional variation with regards to government structure type.

[Insert Table 2.2 about here]

In urban counties, the commissioner may be more of a legislator than an administrator; a rural commissioner may assume an active role in administering county functions (Marando and Thomas 1977). The administrative and legislative combination both concentrates and diffuses power. It is concentrated because fewer people hold more power; it is diffused because the lack of clearly defined roles or titles for the individuals creates a lack of transparency. This diffusion may also contribute to people’s general lack of awareness about county government. Counties with large populations are more likely to modernize the traditional commissioner form to some type of reformed governmental structure (MacManus 1996).

Administrator

These reformed county governments typically take one of two forms—administrator or executive. A number of counties govern with a county administrator/manager structure. County administrators/managers are highly organized, as professional associations such as the International City/County Managers Association (ICMA) and the National Association of Counties (NACo) indicate. Contracting is a primary recommendation of the reinventing government movement that has been positively received among county administrators. As a result, governments with county administrator/manager structures are more likely to implement social safety net programs in a manner that allows for contracting with other local actors involved in public service provision.

Executive

The other reform approach to county structure is the executive. The county executive may be elected or appointed and serves as the chief administrative officer for the county. When elected, the executive typically serves either as a voting member of the elected county government or may have veto power. In addition to having the power to veto ordinances enacted by the county governing body, executives may also hire and fire department heads.

The manager and executive forms of government are perceived as reformed government (Snider 1957; DeSantis and Renner 1994), and thus more professional. An early definition of professionalism in bureaucracy stems from sociologist Max Weber's (1946) writing in which he states that a professionally trained administrator is recruited on the basis of individual merit instead of a traditional system where officials gain and retain their positions by virtue of birth or political sponsorship. According to Hale (2011), "professionalism is desirable because it provides a basis for the neutral administrative competence that is considered the hallmark of contemporary public administration (p. 133). Professionalism matters because it can be an indicator of "knowledge and standards of behavior (Hale, Montjoy, and Brown 2015).

In addition to government structure, one of the other key considerations for this research is that inequality impacts policy creation and implementation. The next section highlights why economic inequality is considered in this study.

Economic Inequality

While poverty has been on the political agenda for some time, until recently, inequality has been a code word in American political discourse for the unique problems of marginalized communities left behind by the great middle-class boom of the early postwar decades (Dadush, et al. 2012). Even among those who view inequality as a natural by-product of market performance, most agree that some of the features that accompany it are undesirable. Among these are reduced opportunity, low social mobility, increased prevalence of poverty, and the stagnation of median household income. Increasing economic inequality in the United States has been of growing interest to scholars over the past decade (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Kelly and Enns 2010; Kenworthy and Pontusson 2005; Page and Jacobs 2009), and there is substantial disagreement about the degree to which inequality should be viewed as a problem.

While a number of scholars agree that inequality has become more pronounced in recent years, they have various explanations about the cause of the inequality. Social science researchers across a number of disciplines such as political science, economics, and sociology have offered theories about the growing inequality. Tyson (1998) indicated that inflation erodes real minimum wages and reduces the income of the poor. Furthermore, inflation is claimed to increase income inequality in this sense. Scholars have also argued that federalism may allow for policy experimentation that leads to the development of policies that lessen inequality (Finegold 2005). Research has shown that economic restructuring processes that have been unfolding in the United States since the 1970s contributed to the rise in economic inequality (Morris and Western 1999; Sassen 1990). Another body of research claims that a number of socio-demographic changes such as changes in the racial and ethnic makeup of society, changes in average household incomes, changes in family structure, and changes in education requirements for employment are the key contributors to increased inequality (Chevan and Stokes 2000).

Research also suggests that inequality affects the policy process because political representatives are more attentive to the views of their wealthy constituents (Bartels 2002). There are many ways in which individuals can influence political outcomes; yet, research shows that some individuals participate more than others (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Income, age, education, and race are just a few of the factors that affect the likelihood that a person will participate in the political process. Those who are highly participatory tend to get more of what they want from the government (Hill and Leighley 1992; Martin 2003). This wouldn't matter if political preferences across issue areas were homogeneous. However, those who participate tend to have different policy preferences from those who do not participate (Verba, Brady, and Schlozman 2004; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Soroka and Wlezien (2008) contend that social welfare policy is one of the main areas of divergent views for the wealthy and the poor. Wealthy Americans tend to express substantially greater opposition to social safety net spending than poor Americans (Soroka and Wlezien 2008). Therefore, the gap in income and participation has serious implications for the policy process and for the democratic ideals that are supposed to undergird that process. Growing income inequality leads to lower trust in the political process and, therefore, depresses political participation (Uslaner and Brown 2005).

While most Americans think income inequality is too high, most also distrust the government (Claibourn and Martin 2000, Uslaner and Brown 2005). An important feature of American political culture, though, is generalized distrust of centralized authority (Skocpol 1995). However, if citizens lose faith in democratic government as a result of rising inequality, the disproportionate citizenship could change the landscape of American politics for a long time to come.

In spite of the wealth of literature on the causes of inequality, we know very little about how inequality affects actual political outcomes (Jencks 2009, 115). Government action is assumed to have an impact on the distribution of income (Bartels 2008; Bradley et al. 2003; Hibbs and Dennis 1988; Huber et al. 2006; Kelly 2005; 2009). Though political scientists study the effect of the national (Bartels 2008; Kelly 2005; 2009) or state governments on economic inequality (Barrileaux and Davis 2003; Freund and Morris 2005; Langer 2001), few studies focus on local governments. The purpose of this study is to fill this gap in knowledge.

Economic Inequality and Economic Downturns

Severe economic downturns such as the Great Recession are associated with substantial increases in poverty and economic inequality. The way that government chooses to address the needs of marginalized individuals during such times matters. However, the federal government and the states, not local government, provide most of the funds for social safety net policies. As federal and state funds become sparse, downturns like the recession can strain local government budgets at the same time that poverty rates are soaring. When state governments are under fiscal pressure they tend to allow more discretion in spending but also impose unfunded mandates on local governments (Krane et al. 2004). County officials have no choice but to find more efficient and effective ways to provide services (Cigler 1994; Benton 2002).

During the Great Recession, local governments responded in different ways to this conflicting set of pressures. Between 2009 and 2011, federal stimulus funds protected local governments from the full impact of the recession. The Great Recession made substantial new resources temporarily available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. These funds offered opportunities to launch new programs and collaborations and also engendered new efforts at experimentation. So while the Great Recession has led to some changes in the way that local governments provide social safety nets, some scholars contend that the changes are not permanent. Instead, Ammons, Smith, and Stenberg (2012) argue that the Recession is a result of years of gradual changes in the U.S. local government system and that the reductions in spending and employment and changes in government structure and services will not be permanent. An interesting question is whether the gradual changes in local government compounded with the rise in inequality have made a difference in local government social safety net spending.

Federalism, Devolution, and Inequality

While many American immediately equate government action and bureaucracy to the federal government and Washington, D.C., in a federalist system, each level of government plays some crucial role in our daily lives. Federalism is defined as “a system in which some matters are exclusively within the competence of certain local units — cantons, states, provinces — and are constitutionally beyond the scope of the national government; and where certain other matters are constitutionally outside the scope of the authority of the smaller units" (Dahl 1986). O'Toole (2006) also defines federalism as "a system of authority constitutionally apportioned between central and regional governments." Since 1995, however, the states have played a more prominent role in influencing inequality. Proponents of decentralization argue that by giving states the authority to make decisions concerning programs, states can innovate and create programs that better address the needs of citizens. In the process of taking on more responsibilities, states have looked for ways to increase the role of counties in social service delivery.

Over the years the relationship between the states and counties has evolved. Decentralization has become a hallmark of American government. Since the 1970s, there have been three major trends or phases in devolution in the United States. The first trend in decentralization reflected a belief that the federal government should play a role in targeting support to people and places that were not prospering. The idea of "New Federalism" characterizes the second trend of American devolution. Unfunded mandates, or devolution of responsibility without funds, typify New Federalism. However, by the 1990s, local governments struggled to meet the challenges of devolution and began demanding relief from unfunded mandates. In response, a third trend in decentralization and devolution began. State and local governments began organizing with businesses to push for a federal statue to prevent federal legislation and regulations that imposed obligations on sub-national actors that resulted in higher program costs and inefficiencies. The Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 (UMRA) represented years of effort by state and local governments and business interests to control, if not eliminate, the imposition of unfunded federal mandates. As a result, states and localities were given more discretion and some direct federal programs were cut back and converted into block grants; welfare reform represents the most sweeping of these reforms.

Social Safety Nets

The infrastructure for delivering safety net benefits has been referred to as called a policy field that varies based on policy and location, depending on governmental arrangements and non-profit network (Krauskopf and Chen 2010; Sandifort 2010; Smith 2010). The classic Tiebout model remains the standard framework for thinking about the optimal provision of public goods in a federal system (Tiebout 1956). One of the key aspects of the model is the belief that residents can, and often do, vote with their feet. As a result, local jurisdictions compete for "desirable" residents. Other literature highlights the spillover effects of one jurisdiction's spending on its neighbors, particularly in the context of welfare reform and among states with the greatest interstate migration, consistent with models of mobility-induced competition (Brueckner 1998; Hoyt 1993; Wildasin 1988). However, local governments rarely administer safety net programs by themselves. In most cases, they are one actor among many, including nonprofit organizations and other governments. Within this diverse array of actors, local governments often play a pivotal role. This next section highlights the two programs analyzed in this dissertation. Particular attention is given to the local-level actors involved in the program implementation. This goal of this dissertation is to explain the role that local governments play in the design and implementation of these programs.

Head Start

Head Start is an early childhood education, health, and parenting intervention started in

1965 as part of the War on Poverty by the OEO. It remains one of the federal government's primary tools aimed at reducing disparities in children's outcomes before they enroll in K-12 education. Head Start was established to provide preschool, health and other social services to low-income children ages 3 or 4. It represents one of the federal government's primary means for addressing the large disparities in cognitive and non-cognitive skills observed along race and class lines well before children start school.

Head Start is one of the early initiatives in the War on Poverty, but it was not an explicit part of the EOA. Head Start began, in part, because of the difficulty that OEO had with spending the allocations for its Community Action Programs (CAP) fund, which was intended to encourage "the maximum feasible participation" of poor families in the local organizations that were funded. CAPs were a drastic change from how government had traditionally run social welfare programs. Poor people had to be included in determining what would be most beneficial for them. Because of this new approach to social welfare, the OEO faced some challenges setting up the programs. The search for alternative ways to spend CAP funds led to the idea of an intervention targeted at low-income, preschool-aged children (Zigler and Muenchow 1992).

Head Start continues to be one of the more popular and enduring elements of the War on Poverty, currently serving around 900,000 mostly low-income children per year with total federal spending of over seven billion dollars (Haskins and Barnett 2010). Public opinion polls in 2003 suggest that the vast majority of Americans (92 percent) support the existence of a program like Head Start, and among those knowledgeable about Head Start specifically, many (80 percent) have favorable feelings about the program (Allen and Okamoto 2004, ORC International 2003).

The Head Start Program is federally funded and locally administered. Head Start grants are awarded directly to public or private non-profit organizations, including community-based and faith-based organizations, or for-profit agencies within a community that wish to compete for funds. Head Start provides comprehensive services to enrolled children and their families. The services include a health component, nutrition component, family partnerships component and an education component. Head Start programs are governed by what is known as The Head Start Performance Standards which are a set of rules and regulations that all Head Start programs are required to base their program structures on. Although Head Start programs offer a variety of service models which are based on the needs of the local community served, they must each meet the goals of all four component areas as these are the basis of the Head Start Performance Standards. The goals that must be met by every Head Start program are:

- Health Component Goal: To ensure that each child has a source of continuous, accessible, coordinated care that serves as a medical home;
- Nutrition Component Goal: To provide education in nutrition principles toward improved child development and improvement of adult habits;
- Education Component Goal: To ensure children possess the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later in life; and
- Family Partnerships Goal: To support families by working collaboratively with all participating parents to identify and continually access services and resources that are responsive to each families' needs, interests, and goals.

Every Head Start center may take a different approach in obtaining the goals of each component area, as long as the program is structured to meet them (Office of Head Start 2010). Head Start programs can be delivered in a center, in a school, in the home, or through some combination of these, although today most Head Start programs are delivered in a center.

Children's age at entry, hours per week in class, student-teacher ratios, and the number of months per year that the program is in operation are additional program variables that can be determined by the programs themselves. The Head Start Act does not specify curriculum but does require that programs use a research-based curriculum that promotes school readiness and is aligned with the following development domains: language development, literacy, mathematics, science, creative arts, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, and physical health and development.

Head Start programs also can determine the types of services they provide, including mental health services, immunizations, meals, and parent literacy training. To that end, Head Start has traditionally functioned as a funding mechanism for organizations to provide Head Start services as long as they meet broad performance standards, rather than a standardized national program provided by a single service provider.

Such variation in program content at the local level makes studies of Head Start's effectiveness difficult to interpret. Even the most robust studies conducted at the local level among a particular population are impossible to generalize to all Head Start programs and populations served. Those studies done at the national level mask the dramatic variation across programs and have not yet provided associated information on the contribution of differential program characteristics to one of the programs most notable desired outcomes—poverty and inequality reduction. Research into the effectiveness of individual components of Head Start would be particularly valuable going forward.

Head Start also confronts equity issues in quality. Historically, the program adopted a flexible approach so that grantees could deliver services based on their assessments of community needs. This flexibility has led to a variation in the mix, intensity, and delivery of services from community to community. There are benefits to Head Start's flexible approach as it allows programs to tailor and adapt services to the children they serve. At the same time, because this flexibility gives programs significant leeway in their design, it may also result in some programs providing higher quality services to children than others. For example, a 2002 study of Head Start curricula found that relative to Head Start classrooms using Creative Curriculum or High/Scope curriculum, classrooms that used some other type of curricula had lower average classroom quality scores and served a higher proportion of urban, poor and nonwhite children (Hohmann and Weikart 2002).

A critical issue underpinning the difficulties that researchers face in evaluating Head Start is that local Head Start programs can vary dramatically in program structure. This variation is actually part of the original Head Start program philosophy, which valued programs' independent determination of what is best for their students in the context of their own communities.

There are some limitations with using Head Start data. Some of the local programs may have been restructured and reorganized during the time frame for the study. Program restructuring may mean that some grantees are not funded for a program year. Program reorganization may also affect which county-level grantees operated a Head Start facility for a given year. The federal regulations require local Head Start grantees to match 20% of the federal funds they receive. Without this match, many local-level programs struggle to qualify for federal Head Start funds. Local communities then have to determine ways to qualify for federal funding, often choosing to collaborate across localities. Every effort has been made to trace these reorganizations and related factors and to make the data as accurate and reflective as possible. Some funding data reflects the dollar amounts reported for the county where the central office is housed, in the case of one agency servicing multiple counties.

Federal Head Start regulations stipulate that a bus route cannot exceed one hour. However, one of the main goals of the Head Start program is to serve low-income and vulnerable children. Many poor families often lack reliable personal transportation and often live in communities where reliable public transportation options are often limited. This is especially characteristic of many rural communities. Rural areas are often also high-poverty areas. As such, providing transportation service for Head Start children in rural areas is often costly due to the greater distances between homes and pick-up locations. Waivers granted under the 2006 Head Start Appropriations Bill gives local communities, rural areas especially, some flexibility in addressing transportation barriers. A number of Head Start programs partner with the local school districts to provide transportation. Many school buses do not have the specific safety restraints or paraprofessional aides riding on the buses, both key requirements outlined in the federal Head Start guidelines. To better accommodate rural access needs, Head Start's strict safety regulations for student transport were relaxed to some degree in the 2006 Head Start Appropriations Bill. This bill gives Head Start grantees in rural areas the ability to apply for waivers if they can demonstrate that Head Start's federal transportation requirements will serve as an access barrier for the children they are attempting to serve. Because of this flexibility allowed at the federal level, transportation is included as an operational characteristic for Head Start because the lack of transportation can be a major access barrier for rural Head Start programs.

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

The low-income home energy assistance program (LIHEAP) is also federally-funded, locally-administered. LIHEAP is a block grant program under which the federal government gives annual grants to states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories and commonwealths, and Indian tribal organizations to operate multi-component home energy assistance programs for needy households. In 1981, the United State Congress funded LIHEAP block grants to alleviate energy burdens on low-income households through the Low-Income Home Energy Act, Title XXVI of the 1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. Energy needs of low-income households have changed since 1981. LIHEAP funded households have adjusted their heating and cooling habits due to technological changes. Approximately 33 percent of these households used electricity to heat their homes in 2005 compared to only 15 percent in 1981, while use of fuel oil for heating has fallen to roughly eight percent from almost 18 percent in 1981 (Division of Energy Assistance 2009). With over 60 percent of all households using natural gas throughout the time period, it remains the primary source of heat for low-income households. Perhaps most importantly, air conditioning use has drastically increased as a household amenity since LIHEAP first began. Approximately 45 percent of low-income households use central air conditioning in 2005 compared to only 15 percent in 1981 (Division of Energy Assistance 2009).

Currently, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is responsible for the management of LIHEAP at the federal level, and for the distribution of LIHEAP funding to grantees. The grantees include the fifty states, the District of Columbia, five territories and 140 tribal governments. These grantees independently manage LIHEAP at a local level. After funds are dispersed to the states, local entities within the state then apply for funding.

As a non-entitlement program, eligible households are not guaranteed LIHEAP funds. Unlike entitlement programs, such SNAP, where funding rises and falls with eligibility, LIHEAP is a discretionary program for which Congress must appropriate funds each fiscal year.

The LIHEAP statute establishes 150 percent of the federal poverty level as the maximum income level allowed in determining LIHEAP income eligibility. Income eligibility criteria for LIHEAP may not be set lower than 110 percent of the poverty level. Under the law, local LIHEAP grantees have the flexibility of serving households having at least one member who also receives assistance under any of the following Federal programs:

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

These households are considered as "categorically" eligible or "automatically" eligible, and some states allow an expedited application process for these applicants. The expedited process, too, varies. Regrettably, being eligible does not necessarily guarantee the household benefits.

Households must apply for LIHEAP benefits and the available funds may not be sufficient to meet the needs of all eligible households. LIHEAP grantees also have the flexibility of serving only those income eligible households that meet additional eligibility criteria, such as meeting an assets limit. These additional requirements are not standard across all states and localities. Federal law does not place asset restrictions on LIHEAP eligibility, but grantees opt to impose these restrictions. Currently, 11 states, as illustrated in Figure 2.1, have LIHEAP asset limits in place.

[Insert Figure 2.1 about here]

The asset limits vary by state; however, most states have limits which are at or below $5,000. Table 2.3 lists the states and asset limits imposed in those states.

[Insert Table 2.3 about here]

Public assistance programs such as LIHEAP do a lot to mitigate hardship. However, restrictive asset limits can make it difficult, if not impossible, for families to get the help they need when they fall on hard times. Asset limits serve as a barrier to economic security and mobility by actively discouraging families from attempting to save and build the resources they need to get ahead. They can also prevent middle-income families from accessing needed assistance in the event of an unexpected economic shock.

The sections that follow highlight the specific aspects of social safety net program features that are central to this study and briefly summarize the literature on the key explanatory variables relevant to these programs.

Dependent Variables

The two programs analyzed in this study differ slightly in terms of target audience although there is considerable overlap. There are several features of both programs that could potentially be influenced by county government structure. Those features—structure, content, and funding—are described below.

Structure

The arrangement of the county government can have an impact on social safety net program structure. Organizational capacity is one aspect of the local government structure that can affect the structure of social safety net programs. Organizational capacity is the ability to complete necessary tasks with the resources available (Eisinger 2002).

One way that agencies often attempt to overcome organizational and outreach constraints has been by increasing online access to local services. For example, many social service agencies are moving applications and services online. However, research shows that the digital divide becomes even more pronounced when geographic and socioeconomic factors are considered. Despite the many technological advances over the past few decades, Internet resources are still distributed unevenly across many counties. Geographical and spatial inequalities impact who has access to online applications. There is an Internet access digital divide that separates urban and rural America. A digital divide even exists within the rural counties as the type of Internet access differs based on whether or not residents live in the county seat. Since the county seat is typically the area where most of the county business is conducted, residents living near the county seat tend to have better Internet access.

African-Americans and Latinos are also less likely to have Internet access and skills, even after accounting for other measures such as income and education (Mossberger, Tolbert and Stansbury 2003). Furthermore, living in a low-income community reduces an individual's likelihood of having access to high-speed Internet at home (Mossberger Tolbert, and Franko 2012). So while ideally online applications should make accessing the programs easier, the success of such a move means that potential participants must be able to pay for Internet access and must also know how to use a device with Internet capabilities. However, even if the residents do not have personal access, they can still get information about social programs and services through public access means such as the library or another social service agency. Practically every public library in the United States offers free Internet access; 70.3% of rural libraries are the only free Internet and computer terminal access providers in their service communities (Smith 2010).

Organizational constraints such as limited resources create fiscal imperatives that leave counties with two options: either cut or eliminate services or find low cost ways deliver the services. Contracting with other entities provides a viable avenue for responding to constituent demand. Contracting with larger nearby governments is a very common strategy among small governments (Stein 1990).

Collaboration is another common strategy. Collaborative networks for provision of public service are sometimes imposed by statue. According to O'Toole (1997: 45), "Networks are structures of interdependence involving multiple organizations or parts thereof, where one unit is not merely the formal subordinate of others in some hierarchical arrangement." Collaborative service delivery networks often include several, autonomous organizations working together toward a goal. According to Hale (2011), "modern public administrators now operate…in an environment filled with networks" (p. 10). There is an extensive body of literature on network governance and management (Agranoff 2007; Agranoff 2012; Hale 2011; O'Toole 1997). Small rural governments often rely on network governance and engage in collaboration to address capacity deficiencies (Radin, et al. 1996).

This dissertation focuses on the type of governing networks that are a result of the increase in intergovernmental programs. These networks form because of the belief that networks, as compared to traditional bureaucracies, can do something that individual organizations cannot do alone. The increased demand for social services has meant that individual organizations have had to rethink how they provide services to the community. As such, an important part of this research is the examination of the ways in which collaborative networks impact social safety net policy design and implementation.

While government arrangements can impact program structure, existing empirical work has not established a definitive relationship between economic inequality and program features such as content, funding, and structure. One hypothesis suggests that greater inequality reduces common tastes and preferences for government goods and services (Benabou 1996; 2000). In such instances, rich households tend to rely on private alternatives to public goods and the poor may prioritize personal consumption over public contributions, generating dissent between the ends and the middle of the income distribution (Epple and Romano 1996).

Content

For the purposes of this study, program content is defined as restrictive or non-restrictive. Restrictive programs are those that incorporate sanction-based or punitive program guidelines. The restrictive, sanction-based guidelines have been one of the most commonly studied facets of the 1996 welfare reform (Pavetti et al. 2003). These restrictive policies can have lasting consequences for poor families and, in some states, these sanctions appear to have been used with enough regularity to shrink the size of caseloads (Pavetti et al. 2003). Thus, researchers and policymakers are concerned about the frequency, distribution, and consequences of sanctions (Goldberg and Schott 2000). The impact of restrictive program policies can be measured in a number of ways, all of which suggest that sanctioning has impacted both the size and characteristics of the social safety net since welfare reform was enacted in 1996. This study considers the barriers to program access and/or participation as a restrictive or punitive program guideline. Generally, these restrictions include having an assets test/asset limit, not having an online application, or having some other program requirement that is not specified in the federal program guidelines.

Funding

There are many studies on the relationship between governmental structure and social safety net funding (Benton 2002; DeSantis and Renner, 1996; Duncombe, Duncombe, and Kinney 1992; Lineberry and Fowler 1967; Morgan and Kickham 1999; Park 1996; Schneider and Park 1989). State-level research shows greater welfare spending in states with more liberal publics and political elites (Erikson, Wright and McIver 1993; Hill, Leighly, and Hinton-Andersson 1995). Traditionally, counties that are granted home rule have been found to have higher expenditures for services (Benton 2002, 2003; Choi et al. 2010). However, as home rule allows county governments to broaden and expand service provision, this same authority also gives localities the freedom to focus more resources on services that can provide more revenue options (Benton 2002; Benton and Menzel 1991; Choi et al. 2010). Counties with charters have also been found to increase spending in redistributive areas (Choi et al. 2010). This indicates that not only will counties seek to expand revenue sources, but when charged with the obligation to do so, they will also make the proper investments to adequately provide redistribution.

The sections that follow highlight the significant explanatory variables relevant to this study and briefly summarize the literature that connects these variables to the broader discussion of economic inequality.

Key Explanatory Variables

The explanatory variables are grouped into three broad categories—economic factors, demographic factors, and political factors. In the following subsections, particular attention is paid to the variables in these categories that are related to both economic inequality and social safety net spending.

Economic Factors

Annual Poverty Rate

According to the official Census Bureau definition, a family is considered poor if its annual before-tax income (excluding noncash benefits, such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps) is less than its poverty threshold. Poverty thresholds were developed in the 1960s by estimating the cost of a minimum adequate diet for families of different size and age structures multiplied by three to allow for other necessities. The thresholds vary according to a number of factors such as family size, number of children in the family, and, for small households, whether the householder is elderly. The poverty thresholds are adjusted for inflation each year. However, apart from minor adjustments the thresholds have remained unchanged over the decades.

High and persistent poverty in America is distributed regionally and geographically. High-poverty counties are geographically concentrated. Regions like the Black Belt and Mississippi Delta in the South have poverty rates of 20 percent or more. County-level poverty rates also vary across the rural-urban continuum. Poverty rates tend to be lowest in the suburbs and highest in remote rural counties that are not adjacent to large metropolitan areas. Persistent poverty is disproportionately found in rural areas. Roughly 16 percent of counties had poverty rates of 20 percent or higher in 1999. However, only four percent of metropolitan counties had such high rates, whereas 22 percent of remote rural counties did so.

Unemployment Rate

Increases in the unemployment rate are related to a number of changes in the economy and have a number of direct consequences for the distribution of income in an area. Changes in the unemployment rate can also affect inflation which can also influence the distribution of income. Furthermore, increases in unemployment also strain existing social safety nets. During times of recessions and economic downturn, local governments may be forced to cut safety net expenditures. In such instances, a high unemployment rate can set off a traumatic chain of events and the impact may not only be felt in the household, but in the entire community.

Median Household Income

The median household income is also relevant to studies of inequality and social safety nets. When median income levels in an area are low because high proportions of the households in an area live in poverty or have low incomes, inequality levels tend to be very high (Albrecht et al. 2005; Snyder and McLaughlin 2004). The Census calculates the median household income based on the income distribution of all households, including those with no income. According the Census Bureau, median household income in the United States fell between 2010 and 2011, decreasing by 1.3 percent from $51,144 to $50,502.

Demographic Factors

Given that many social safety net programs are directed toward children or seniors, this study also considers the percentage of the youth and elderly population, referred to as the age-dependency ratio. Many state and federal social service agencies use the age dependency ratio to express the relationship between three age groups within a population: ages 0-15, 16-64 and 65-plus. The 16-64 age group is typically referred to as the working age population. The other two groups are considered dependent because it is unlikely that persons in those age categories are working. For the purposes of this study, dependent population is operationalized as the percent of the population ages 0-18 and 65 and older.

Population 18 and under

According to 2012 Census data, the poverty rate in 2011 for children under age 18 was 21.9 percent, while the rate for people aged 65 and older was 8.7 percent. Considering the high child poverty rate, the 18 and under population is relevant to the study of social safety net provision.

Population 65 and older

Along similar lines, the proportion of the elderly population is also expected to impact the local safety net. The poverty rate for the elderly has declined dramatically because of the safety net that was developed for them in aftermath of the War on Poverty. As a result, the economic status of the elderly has increased compared to that of children and non-elderly adults.

The aging Baby Boom generation has had and will continue to have major implications for many aspects of American society, including poverty and social safety net spending. Over the next few decades, the number of elderly and the proportion of the population that is elderly will continue to increase. Poverty may become a problem for older Americans. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that Social Security kept 44 percent of elderly Americans out of poverty in 2012. Public opinion surveys also continuously indicate that respondents support social safety net assistance for the elderly and children (Reuters/Ipsos 2012). Therefore, this study assumes that social safety policy funding will favor programs for children and the elderly.

Minority Concentration

The racial makeup of the county also matters. Race has a tremendous impact on social organization in America and continues to influence the nature and extent of state-sanctioned control practices. There is a great deal of evidence in the literature to suggest that the racial composition of a polity impacts the racial attitudes of the residents, especially with regards to the attitudes that majority group members have towards minority group members. Blalock’s (1967) racial threat thesis is probably one of the most frequently examined explanations for racial disparity with regards to a number of socioeconomic outcomes. Blalock’s (1967) racial threat thesis suggests that increased minority presence implies increased threat. The racial threat theory contends that public policies become racialized when Whites use their disproportionate power as majority group members to implement state-control over minority group members. This threat is exacerbated by economic conditions. In light of the growing minority population, the idea a racial threat encourages majority group members to support more rigorous, racialized practices in order to protect their existing positions of power and privilege. The minority concentration of the counties is believed to impact the level of social safety net policy design. As the economic climate worsens and poverty increases, the racial majority group grows less supportive of the policies impacting the financial security of the minority group (Oliver and Mendelberg 2000).

The Census Bureau estimates the America will become a majority-minority country by 2043. The number of minority residents in the United States has increased dramatically in recent decades. This is especially true of Hispanic populations. Accordingly, larger minority populations often mean greater degrees of poverty and inequality. For some time now, the percentage of minority residents living in poverty, attending poorly funded schools, or experiencing other forms of disadvantage has far exceeded the percentage of whites experiencing these same conditions (Murray 1984; Rank and Hirschl 2001). Critical to our understanding of local level inequality is an understanding of the impact that minority residential concentration may have on local government social safety net policies. While there has been extensive research on this important topic, most research has been conducted on African-American populations in metropolitan communities. This study looks at African-American and Hispanic populations in metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties.

Educational attainment

Another important dimension of the structure of the local social safety net is level of education within a geographical area. Educational attainment has long been considered a way for people to enhance employability and improve income. Because the level of education also impacts a number of other socioeconomic factors like median income and unemployment, this study assumes that the measured aggregate educational attainment level is likely to be an intermediary factor on the causal path connecting economic inequality and social welfare program funding. The literature also shows that one of the factors contributing to growing levels of inequality is the widening gap between the incomes of those with a college degree and those without a degree (Elman and O'Rand 2004; McCall 2000). The number of high-quality service jobs has grown and, as such, the average incomes for individuals with college degrees have also increased (Morris and Western 1999). Obtaining a college degree significantly improves an individual's average lifetime earnings. Since 1980, the percentage difference in earnings between those with and without a college degree has more than doubled (Kane 2001). Individuals with a bachelor's degree earn about $2.27 million over their lifetime (Carnevale et al. 2011). This amount is considerably more than the $1.30 million in lifetime earnings of individuals with only a high school diploma (Carnevale et al. 2011).

Female-headed households

The structure of the American family also has profound implications for economic inequality and social safety net programs. The number of female-headed households increased from about five million in 1965 to 13.8 million in 2003 (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2004). Because married couple households have substantially more income than female-headed households, higher rates of female-headed households are likely to be related to higher levels of poverty and inequality.

As highlighted in this chapter, there are a number of factors that suggest a need for social safety net programs. It has been nearly twenty years since the repeal of what was the nation's primary cash welfare program benefiting low-income families with children, the AFDC program. AFDC was replaced with a block grant, TANF. Female-headed households are the main group affected by the replacement of AFDC with TANF. Female-headed households and their children face disproportional rates of poverty. In 2013, the poverty rate for female-headed households in the U.S. was 39.6%. This rate is about five times greater than the poverty rate for married-households (Entmacher et al. 2014). The economic status of the head of the household also impacts the children raised in the home. According to the 2010 Census, 70% of the children from female-headed households are poor or low-income (Mather 2010). However, the post-welfare reform policy debates tend to focus on reducing the dependency on social welfare programs as opposed to reducing the poverty that contributes to the need. The available evidence seems to suggest that an increase in female-headed households may be associated with a decrease in the level of social welfare spending. As such, female-headed households and youth population are also key explanatory variables examined in this study.

County Partisanship

Political ideology is also a key consideration in this research. The two major political parties in the United States tend to base their policy positions and voter outreach efforts on demographic characteristics like economic status. Democrats traditionally receive more support from lower income citizens while more affluent citizens tend to give their support to the Republican Party (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Bartels 2008). The rise in economic inequality in recent decades has heightened the gap in economic interests between Democrats and Republicans (Gelman, Kentworthy and Su 2010). As previously noted, economic inequality in America has been increasing since the 1970s. However, the 1970s were also transformative in terms of political culture and ideology. As a result of the civil rights gains made under the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, the 1970s represented a political party realignment in the Southern states. Furthermore, there has been increased polarization between the policy positions of Democrats and Republicans. Wealthy Americans are more likely than low-income Americans to identify as Republican. Additionally, the Democratic and Republican parties have become more ideologically divided on economic issues (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Because of this ideological chasm, and the fact that, as previously noted, there is greater social safety net spending among states with more liberal publics (Erikson, Wright, McIver 1993; Hill, Leighly, and Hinton-Andersson 1995), this study assumes that the partisan make-up of the county will also have an impact on the decisions made with regards to social safety net programs.

This chapter has provided a scholarly examination of the literature to provide insight into how and to what degree the interaction between economic inequality and county government structure influences social safety net program implementation at the local level. The main goal of this research is to test the theory that local government structures matter, and particularly, that local forces also influence the various elements of social safety net programs. Because it is also my goal to show that local factors such as government structure influence county-level social welfare program design, it is important to control for any effects driven by changes in economic well-being. The literature on these factors has also been reviewed in this chapter. The next chapter outlines the methodological approaches used in this research. This dissertation employs a mixed methods research approach that involves collecting, analyzing and integrating quantitative data with qualitative in-depth interviews. By mixing both quantitative and qualitative research, the data analysis covers various aspects of local government decision making more accurately by approaching the phenomenon from different vantage points using different methods and techniques.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study examines the impact that the interaction between government structure and economic inequality has on three aspects of social safety net programs: structure, funding, and content. This chapter outlines the methodological approaches used to answer the three research questions of interest: What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and government structures have on the way county governments structure social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the content of social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the way governments fund social safety net programs? This chapter also explains the variables used to examine the key elements of local-level social safety programs: program funding, program structure, and program content. For specific details about coding for each of the program features, see Appendix D.

This study examines whether the interaction between economic inequality and government structure impacts the way particular social safety net programs are provided. The timeframe for this study covers 1996-2010 for a number of reasons. This timeframe covers the period immediately following the passage of PRWORA welfare reform. The research on PRWORA continues to indicate that poverty, namely child poverty and extreme poverty, has grown in the wake of welfare reform as the social safety net has shredded (Smeeding 2005; 2006). This timeframe also covers the period leading up to and following the Great Recession. The passage of welfare reform devolved significant governing authority for welfare provision from the federal government to state and local governments. Proponents of devolution point to drastic caseload declines as evidence that locally-administered programs are decreasing dependency among families. However, welfare rolls in many states have remained stagnant or have decreased since the start of the recession in late 2007. The uneven responsiveness of the welfare system to growing economic needs prompts the question of whether the safety net is functioning as intended. The central questions in this dissertation ask how the social safety net functions at the county level.

The study population is all counties. There are 3142 counties and county-equivalents in the United States. There are 243 counties sampled in the quantitative section of this study. The data collection utilizes a complex sampling procedure. The sampling strategy is a proportionate stratified systematic design. The sampling technique involves splitting the counties into strata subgroups before sampling. Counties are first stratified based on the nine RUCC classifications as presented below in Table 3.1 and shown graphically in Figure 3.1.

[Insert Table 3.1 about here]

The RUCC classifications form an ordering scheme that distinguishes metropolitan counties by the population size of their metro area, and nonmetropolitan counties by degree of urbanization and proximity to a metropolitan area.

[Insert Figure 3.1 about here]

Counties are further stratified based on the nine Census Division categories as presented in Figure 3.2.

[Insert Figure 3.2 about here]

The Census Divisions are regional groupings that subdivide the United States into categories: North, South, East, and West. Each of the four Census Regions is further divided into two or more regional divisions.

The county coding mechanism and stratification yields nine RUCC categories and nine

Census divisions from which counties are randomly selected. Sampling is done separately within each stratum. The systematic sampling interval is 13[3]. If a state is not represented in the final sample, one county from that state will be randomly selected. Three counties are selected from each RUCC/Census Region category combination, resulting in 243 counties. After the counties are selected, the county Government Structure codes are assigned based on classifications listed on the National Association of Counties (NACo) website. The following codes are assigned:

0	Other (non-commission; Township)
1	Commission
2	County Administrator
3	County Executive
4	Abolished

The most common form for the other type of government structures is the township. The division of responsibilities between townships and counties are unique to each state and is usually based on the style of government that was most familiar to the state's settlers. There are two counties in the sample with abolished governments, Franklin and Berkshire Counties. Both counties are in the state of Massachusetts. Originally, there were 14 functioning county governments in Massachusetts. However, over the past few years, a little more than half of those counties have used a provision in Massachusetts General Law 34B, which gives counties the capacity to abolish or dissolve themselves. The commission of Franklin County voted to abolish in 1997; the residents of Berkshire County voted to dissolve in 1998.

Data Collection

After generating a sample based on the above criteria, data are collected on the dependent

[3] k=N/n, where N=3,142 and n=243; where n is the sample size, and N is the population size.

variables and the key explanatory variables. Secondary source and archival data are collected for all of the counties. The data for the continuous dependent and independent variables are collected from U.S. Census Bureau databases. The data for the categorical dependent variables are collected by conducting content analysis of archival materials found on the county's website. The structure variable is coded based on the method of program delivery.

The qualitative section consists of in-depth general interviews. Qualitative in-depth interviews are a research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to investigate their viewpoint on a specific situation, idea, or program. The counties selected for the in-depth interviews are chosen based on very specific features such as government structure, the program administered, program structure, degree of ruralness, and census region.

This study differs from the existing literature in that it attempts to explain how economic inequality impacts local public policy choices as opposed to explaining the factors that contribute to the inequality. This study assumes that the structure, funding, and content of county-level social safety net programs are impacted by the interaction between economic inequality and the local government structures. County government structures and policies are less explored than those of municipalities and states. Therefore, this study offers a unique contribution to public policy literature. The chief focus of the study is quantitative; however, the need for qualitative analysis is also warranted. Quantitative and qualitative research designs are adopted to provide descriptive, interpretive, and empirical data. This study aims to address the following questions and hypotheses:

Question 1: What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and government structures have on the way county governments structure social safety net programs?

Governments choose what services to provide to citizens and the mechanisms by which those services will be delivered (Stein 1990). The structure of the county government has the potential to influence how the local social safety net programs are structured. DeSantis (2002) asserts that small, rural counties are more likely to operate under the commission style of government. The literature also suggests that commissions are less likely to innovate (DeSantis 2002), and therefore, face a number of service delivery limitations (Duncombe 1977; DeGrove and Lawrence 1977). However, returning to an earlier point, counties with administrator and executive style governments tend to be more professional and are more to collaborate for service delivery. Additionally, metropolitan counties usually collaborate to offer more services and to provide those services above the legal minimum standards (Marando and Baker 1993). Governments in non-metropolitan counties are believed to provide a lot less for social services as they are more likely to allocate their locally-generated revenues to business development initiatives. This spatial disparity in social welfare spending is usually attributed to population density, economic capacity, and local government capacity, with the disadvantage being most pronounced in the non-metropolitan counties (Brady et al. 2002; Goetz and Freshwater 1997; Lichter and Jensen 2002) Based on this research question and the extant literature, the following hypotheses are tested:

H_1 Counties with county administrator governments are less likely to engage in single county service delivery than the county governments that have the county commission structure.

H_2 Counties with the executive governance system are less likely to engage single county service delivery than the commission government structures.

H_3 Counties with commission government structures are more likely to engage in direct single agency service provision.

H_4 Completely rural counties adjacent to a metropolitan statistical area are likely to collaborate with other governments or not-for-profit organizations for program service delivery.

H_5 Completely rural counties, not adjacent to a metropolitan area are likely to engage in single county agency program service delivery.

H_6 Greater service needs in metropolitan areas will likely have a positive association with collaboration for local service provision.

Question 2: What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the way governments fund social safety net programs?

The level of program funding is another key consideration for this research. The issue of how much local government structure impacts social safety net policy is clouded by the fact that there are limited studies that focus on the county level. According to Lineberry and Fowler (1967), reformed governments behave differently from their unreformed counterparts, "even if the socioeconomic composition of their population may be similar" (Lineberry and Fowler 1967, 703). Reformed governments, by Lineberry and Fowler's definition, are localities that have either the commission or the council-manager form of government. Brown and Halaby (1984) found reforming government structure tends to lead to increased general expenditures. As such, counties that are larger and stronger bureaucratically and fiscally should have greater capacity to address economic inequality and reduce poverty. Research also suggests that counties with local government autonomy, or home rule, tend to spend more on social services (Choi et al. 2010; Benton 2002, 2003). Additionally, reformed governments are also more likely to increase spending in redistributive areas (Choi et al. 2010). The current literature that does exist reports mixed results on the impact of government structure on public expenditure levels. Morgan and Kickham (1999) studied whether changing county government structure from traditional commission to a commission-mayor or a commission-manager had any effects on revenue and expenditures. They found that government structure has no effect on fiscal behavior. Campbell and Turnbull (2003) also found that government structure for counties had no significant effect on the level of public spending. Schneider and Park also found higher spending levels of program spending among elected executive governments. Their research also found that administrator governments tend to spend more than the commissions. However, the level of inequality complicates the local community's ability to fund social welfare programs. When inequality is high, local communities generate less revenue and provide fewer public goods and services (Galor, Moav and Vollrath 2009; Goldin and Katz 1999; Ramcharan 2009; Zolt 2009).

H_7 Counties with county administrator governments are likely to spend more on each program than the county governments that have the county commission structure.

H_8 Counties with the executive governance system are likely to spend more on each program than the commission government structures.

H_9 Counties with commission government structures are likely to spend less on each program.

Question 3: What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the content of social safety net programs?

The content of social welfare programs impacts who has access to the services. Since the federal government has devolved responsibility for developing welfare policy to the states and localities, many social welfare programs vary tremendously in their applications of restrictions and sanctions. Program restrictions limit the opportunities that qualifying recipients may have for accessing program benefits. Research on the policy effects of county government structure offer contradictory findings but seem to suggest that reformed government structures are more active in policy making, taxing, and spending more and offering a broader range of services than unreformed government structures (Benton 2002; DeSantis and Renner 1994; Farmer 2011). The administrator and executive structures are considered reformed or professionalized. The commission is the more traditional, unreformed structure. According to DeSantis (2002), the commission-style government is often found in counties that are small and rural. Therefore, commission-style county governments are likely in areas that are poorer and do not have the financial resources to adequately support social safety net programs. These counties are, therefore, more likely to restrict access to their already limited resources. As such, this research assumes that reformed governments will have less restrictive program content than the unreformed governments.

H_{10} Counties with county administrator governments are less likely to restrictive content than the county governments that have the county commission structure.

H_{11} Counties with the executive governance system are less likely to restrictive content than the commission government structures.

H_{12} Counties with commission government structures are more likely to have programs with restrictive content than the administrator or executive forms of government.

Quantitative Design

To test the previously outlined hypotheses, this study employs a mixed methods approach utilizing county-level data. Mixed methods research can be understood as a quantitative mini-study and a qualitative mini-study melded into one larger design (Johnson 2005). The quantitative study consists of statistical analysis of data relevant to the relationship between economic inequality, government structure, and social safety net programs. The goal of the quantitative analysis is to determine the statistically significant relationships between economic inequality and government structure and funding for particular social safety net programs, specifically LIHEAP and Head Start. The quantitative analysis employs time-series—cross-section (TSCS) analysis which a combines observations both cross-sectionally and over time.

The TSCS data model is regarded as one of the best designs for the study of causation next to a purely random experiment because it allows for a large number of observations, thereby increasing degrees of freedom.

Program structure is operationalized differently for the two programs. Table 3.2 below outlines how the program structure categories are operationalized and coded for the Head Start Program.

[Insert Table 3.2 about here]

This variable indicates how the particular counties have decided to administer their Head Start programs. Although there are federal guidelines and regulations that dictate certain aspects of Head Start program structure, there is still substantial variation between local programs. The coding categories are based on the reported data on the Head Start Program Information Report (PIR). The categories are as follows: Does not have a Head Start program, Community Action Agency, School System, Tribal Government or Consortium, Private/Public Non-Profit, Private/Public For-Profit, Charter School, Government Agency, and Multiple Grantees. The Head Start program funding structure, as illustrated in Figure 3.3, allows variation in the local level entities that can become program grantees.

[Insert Figure 3.3 about here]

The diversity of the county-level grantees is investigated. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between county government structure and the choice of local-level program authority.

Program structure for LIHEAP is also operationalized in a manner that considered the ways in which the program is administered locally. As indicated in Table 3.3, LIHEAP administration also varies across localities.

[Insert Table 3.3 about here]

The grantees can include any of the following: Single County Agency, Multi-County Agency, Nonprofit/CAA, State Agency, or County/Nonprofit Collaboration. The LIHEAP statute allows states to apply for federal funding. The states then disburse funding to recipients by way of local grantees. Figure 3.4 presents the funding structure for LIHEAP.

[Insert Figure 3.4 about here]

Program content data is measured using quantitative content analysis. Content analysis is described as the scientific study of content of communication. Content analysis considers the study of the content with reference to the meanings, contexts and intentions contained in messages. Content analysis is defined as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context (Krippendorff 1980). Weber (1985) states that content analysis is a research methodology that utilizes a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. Kerlinger (1986) defined content analysis as “a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables.” The specific content analysis techniques used in this study are categorized as website observation and document analysis. The websites for the local grantee for both LIHEAP and Head Start are inspected. Particular attention is paid to potential recipient accessibility for each of the programs. Specifically, the websites are inspected regarding very particular aspects of the programs that can either promote or prohibit access. While the content categories for the two programs vary slightly, both programs are assessed based on access restrictiveness.

[Insert Table 3.4 about here]

As shown in Table 3.4, LIHEAP program content is considered to be restrictive if the grantee has an assets test/asset limit, does not have expedited or automatic eligibility, does not have an online application, or has some other program requirement. In addition, LIHEAP clearinghouse data is used to gather information about asset limits and expedited/automatic eligibility.

[Insert Table 3.5 about here]

Table 3.5 shows that Head Start programs are coded as restrictive if the provider does not have an online application, does not meet five days a week for at least 50% of enrollees, does not use high-quality, center-based curriculum, or does not provide transportation. These data are collected by conducting content analysis of the grantees' website. Additionally, Head Start PIR data are also used to gather information about the number of days students participate, transportation, and curriculum choices. The grantee websites are mainly used to determine if the programs have online applications. Having an online application is considered because potential recipients can apply for program access or benefits in a number of ways. When the applications are available online, recipients can apply for program participation without having to physically go to the grantee's office.

Program funding for both programs is operationalized as the total level of federal funding per county as well as the per capita level of funding per county. A number of key explanatory variables can impact the level of program funding. Those variables are also considered. The main explanatory variables are grouped into three broad categories—economic factors, demographic factors, and county partisanship. The explanatory variables are operationalized as follows:

Economic Factors

The annual poverty rate (ANPOV) is measured as the percent of people in each county who are in poverty in a calendar year. The unemployment rate (UNEM) is measured as the percent of the labor force in the county that is unemployed in a calendar year. The median household income (MEDINC), as calculated by the Census, divides the county's income distribution into two equal groups, half having income above that amount, and half having income below that amount. The final economic variable is the economic inequality (ECINEQ) operationalized as the county-level Gini coefficient. The economic factors are potentially important to this research because they are all indicators of economic wellbeing and stability. Both of the programs analyzed in this research use one or more of these measures as indicators for program qualification. By controlling for these factors, the data analysis should show whether there are any differences in the program features based on the county government structure.

Demographic Factors

The youth population (POP18) is measured as the percent of the county population 18 and under for years 2000-2010 and 17 and under for years 1996-1999. The elderly population is similarly measured—the Percent of population 65 years old and over (POP65). These two measures are potentially relevant to this research because these age groups represent segments of the population that typically do not work. As such, these age groups are probably more likely to rely on some part of the social safety net. So while these factors are related to the dependent variables, controlling for these factors removes their effects from the data analysis. This research also controls for the size of the population (POP) for the county.

Other population measures included the proportion of the African American population (AFAMPOP), and the proportion of the Hispanic (HISPPOP) in each county. The minority racial group variables are important for two reasons. Racial differences continue to result in socio-economic disadvantages. Residents of predominately black or Hispanic communities have access to about half as many social service programs as residents in predominately white neighborhoods (Lin and Harris 2009). Furthermore, states with more blacks and Hispanics on welfare are more likely to impose lifetime limits, family caps on benefits, and stricter sanctions for noncompliance (Soss and Schram 2011). The majority of white welfare recipients experience the most generous social welfare programs and a majority of black recipients experience the most restrictive program guidelines (Soss and Schram 2011).

Two other demographic measures include educational attainment, measured as the percent of the population age 25 and over with a bachelor's degree or higher (EDUC), and the percent of female-headed households (FEMHH). Educational attainment is used as a proxy for socioeconomic status. Higher education is one way that individual's enhance their employability and improve income. A female-headed household, on the other hand, is potentially important to this study because this measure is usually an indicator of poverty. More than four in ten female-headed families with children are poor, and more than half of all poor children live in families headed by women (National Women's Law Center 2013). As such, female-headed households are likely to qualify for and participate in both of the programs analyzed in this study. While these variables are not necessarily analyzed in this dissertation, they are related to the program features of interest to this study.

County Partisanship

The final explanatory variable, county partisanship (CTYPART), is operationalized as the ideological lean of the county during a presidential election year. The effects of partisanship are controlled for because, as indicated by the literature, liberal communities tend to spend more on social safety net programs ((Erikson, Wright, McIver 1993; Hill, Leighly, and Hinton-Andersson 1995).

Table 3.6 below lists the dates for which each variable is captured in the data set. This table also outlines the data sources.

[Insert Table 3.6 about here]

As with all data-gathering practices, there are some limitations when using Census data. In some instances, the way that the Census Bureau decides to word questions can be a limitation (Neuman 2003). The bureau changes the wording of certain questions for various reasons; among these are changes to reflect added questions and changes due to legislative requirements or demographic shifts. For example, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) allowed respondents to select two or more racial categories on their census form. This change, while meant to allow for more inclusiveness and a more accurate depiction of racial landscape of the United States, made it difficult to accurately calculate racial/ethnic trends. This change is particularly relevant to the Hispanic population data used in this research. The race category on the census form was changed in order to reduce item non-response for the Hispanic origin item, and to reduce over reporting of "Other race" by Hispanics in the race item. As a result, the proportion of the Hispanic population appears to increase dramatically after the 2000 census. However, this increase could also be the result of the wording change.

Due to practical constraints, this paper measures the youth population differently for years 1996-1999 and 2000-2010. Prior to 2000, the Census measure the youth population based on age categories up to 17 years old. As such, the 18 year old counts are missing for 1996-1999. While this is definitely a limitation, the age group most immediately impacted by the youth program under consideration in this dissertation—ages three to five—is captured in all years.

There are also limitations with using the county-level presidential election year results as a measure of county ideology. A number of researcher have used presidential election results as a surrogate operationalization of local-level ideology (Fleisher 1993; Glazer and Robbins 1985; Johannes 1984; LeoGrande and Jeydel 1997; Nice and Cohen 1983). One of the caveats with this measure of local-level ideology is that not all presidential elections are equally ideological in nature. Some scholars have found that some presidential elections are highly partisan and ideological and the results for such elections many not accurately capture the ideological preferences of the constituency (LeoGrande and Jeydel 1997). However, many voters make their decisions in presidential elections by comparing their own ideological positions with those of the competing candidates. Therefore, presidential election results should still reflect the ideological positions of those voting in the election during that cycle. As such, county-level presidential election results will still serve as a valid measure of local-level ideology.

Qualitative Design

The next stage of the analysis consists of qualitative in-depth interviews. Interview participants are selected based on a number of features including government structure, program administered, program structure, RUCC, and census region. Table 3.7 shows the variation between the counties selected for interviews.

[Insert Table 3.7 about here]

Invitations to participate are sent out to the counties via email. Follow-up emails are sent out to non-respondents two weeks after the date of the original email. No further follow-up attempts are made. Once the respondent agrees to participate, the letter of informed consent is then emailed. The interviews lasted 45 minutes to one hour. The interviews are conducted with the executive director of each of the organizations. All participants are advised about identity and confidentially, and while none of the respondents explicitly requested anonymity, all identifiers have been removed from the data. Responses are reported based on systematically assigned county codes. Counties are grouped base on the program type.

Once the interviewees are selected, in-depth interviews are conducted to elicit explanatory information on a range of topics. For example, the ways in which service providers interpret federal and state laws and regulations, and how caseworkers enact those regulations will likely have an impact on the way aid is disbursed. (Please refer to Appendix A for a draft of the interview protocol.) Also, the in-depth interviews also provided information on the community's views on social welfare policies. Furthermore, the in-depth interview also revealed the factors which may have prompted changes in the way that government officials and services providers viewed social welfare programs. Understanding experiences from the local leader's perspectives is crucial in this qualitative inquiry.

The analysis of the qualitative interviews is approached from a hermeneutic perspective, taking into account both the narratives of the respondents and their broader context. Rather than predetermining a particular coding mechanism, the analysis "takes place and unfolds as an integral part of the interview process" (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). The qualitative data are coded and then analyzed. According to Saldaña (2009), coding in qualitative research is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a collective, significant, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based data. After the interview responses are coded, data are analyzed for patterns and themes. Analysis consists of considering responses for each question as a group, and drawing interpretive conclusions about commonly held beliefs, attitudes, or opinions regarding social welfare spending. Analysis began with the identification of the themes emerging from the raw data, a process sometimes referred to as "open coding" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Responses are classified by themes. Also during the open coding process, conceptual categories are identified and classified based on the phenomena observed. The goal is to create descriptive, multi-dimensional groupings to form a preliminary framework for data analysis. Words, phrases or events that appear to be similar are grouped into the same category. These categories are gradually modified or replaced during the subsequent stages of analysis. The following explanatory factors emerged from the interviews: pressing needs, service provision challenges, funding sources and needs, partnerships and collaborations, public and political support, community characteristics, and social capital.

Data Analysis

This dissertation seeks to answer three questions: What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and government structures have on the way county governments structure social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the content of social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the way governments fund social safety net programs? To answer these questions, various statistical methods are used to examine how the dependent variables and the explanatory variable interact. The approach to empirical research adopted for the study is a mixed-methods design. The data in this study are grouped or clustered based on a number of factors (RUCC geographical units, Census regions, program structure, etc.). For statistical analysis, this clustering of the data can make it difficult to treat the random component of observed outcomes independently. Because the data exhibits some dependency between observations in the same cluster, improper analysis of these dependences can greatly underestimate the true standard errors for parameters of interest when the data clustering structure is related to the independent variable (Moulton, 1986, 1990). In order to address the clustered structure of the dataset, the original Huber-White estimators for robust standard errors are used to allow for dependence between observations inside of the clusters.

For the quantitative section, time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) analysis is used. One of the key assumptions of this dissertation is that the interaction between government structure and inequality impacts the three dependent variables. Two of the dependent variables are categorical. The program structure variable is a nominal categorical variable. For this reason, cross-tabulations and the Fisher's exact test for independence are used to analyze the relationship between the government structure and the program content and program structure. The Fisher's exact test is appropriate when analyzing two nominal variables.

This dissertation also tests the impact that geographical location has on program structure. The geographical location measure is nominal categorical. Therefore, cross-tabulations and the Fisher's exact test for independence are also conducted to explain these relationships.

The third dependent variable, program funding, is continuous. An Independent Samples *t* Test is conducted to compares the means between the unrelated county government structure groups on the same continuous, dependent variable. More specifically, this test will show whether the difference in program funding between the government structures is statistically significant.

The final assumption tested in this dissertation is that the interaction between government structure and inequality impacts the three dependent variables. Three different analyses are performed based on the type of variable. Program structure is nominal categorical. In order to test the how the interaction between government structure and inequality impacts program structure, binomial regression is used to predict program structure given the government structure and accounting for economic inequality.

Program funding is continuous. Therefore, in order to assess the impact that economic inequality has on program funding, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) is used to investigate this interaction. The ANCOVA is used to determine whether there are any significant differences between the means for the government structure categories after statistically controlling for the economic inequality confounding variable.

The final dependent variable, program content, is also a categorical variable. However, the categories are ordinal, and there are four program content categories for each program. As such, ordinal regression analysis is used to investigate assumption that the interaction between government structure and inequality impacts program content. Ordinal regression is used to determine which of the variables (if any) have a statistically significant effect on the program content categories. Again, this analysis controls for economic inequality as the confounding variable.

Before performing the multivariate analyses, the data are examined for collinearity. Auxiliary regressions are run by regressing one of the right hand side variables on all the other independent variables. There is collinearity among some of demographic variables; these issues are addressed in Chapter 4. The multivariate models are developed and analyzed

The multivariate models employ first generation panel root tests that are designed for cross-sectionally independent panels. The first generation of panel unit root tests is based on the cross-sectional independency hypothesis (Maddala and Wu 1999). Since all of the cross-sections are independent, the Fisher (1932) type of panel unit root test notably used by Choi (2001) and Maddala and Wu (1999) is also used in the multivariate analyses when more than 20% of the cells have an expected count less than five. In such cases, the Chi-square is inappropriate. In those instances, Fisher’s exact test will be used. Additionally, year effects, or year dummies, for each of the years in the dataset are used to capture the influence of the aggregate time-series trends. The year effects variable helps with the analysis of the longitudinal data since there are repeated measures on the independent and dependent variables.

For the multivariate analysis, some of the program structure categories are combined. However, each category is analyzed separately during the hypothesis testing. Fifty-one percent of the counties use the CAA model for Head Start program delivery and almost 30% use the Private/Public Non-profit model. In the multivariate analysis, these categories are combined. All other categories are grouped and measured as “Other”. Sixty-three percent of the counties use the Non-Profit/CAA model for LIHEAP service delivery. As such, this category is kept in the multivariate analysis; all other categories are grouped and measured as “Other”.

The findings from the quantitative data analysis and the qualitative data analysis are presented in the next chapters. Two fundamental goals drive the collection of the data and the subsequent data analysis. Those goals are to develop a base of knowledge about the design and implementation of social safety net programs at the county level, and to determine how local decision making processes impact the safety net. These objectives are accomplished. The findings presented in the next two chapters demonstrate the potential for emerging theory and practice.

Chapter 4: Research Findings (Quantitative)

In this chapter the results of the data analysis are presented. The data have been collected and processed in response to the problem statement presented in Chapter One of this dissertation. The collection of the data and the subsequent analysis are driven by three fundamental goals. The first goal is to develop a base of knowledge about the ways in which government structure impacts social safety net program design and implementation. The second goal is to determine if the interaction between government structure and economic inequality also impacts the features of social safety net programs. The third and final goal of this dissertation is to create a causal model that shows the key explanatory variables that also influence the major aspects of the social safety net programs. This chapter explains the findings of the quantitative analysis and presents the statistical models that are used to test the hypotheses. Statistical analyses are conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 22 and 23. This chapter is followed by the qualitative findings from the in-depth interviews conducted with county officials involved in the administration of the two programs analyzed in this study.

Summary of Descriptive Statistics

This statistical analysis begins with basic descriptive statistics to summarize the variables of interest. The distribution of the government structure styles across the study sample are shown in Table 4.1.

[Insert Table 4.1 about here]

The results show that the majority of the counties operate under either the commission or administrator style of government. Roughly 40% (n=96) of the counties have the administrator style of government. Thirty-eight percent (n=92) are commission, and 9.9% (n=24) are executive style of governments. While the commission, administrator, and executive are the main government structures of interest, the sample does include other government structures. Less than one percent of the counties have an abolished county government (.8%; n=2) and 11.9% (n=29) operate under some other type of government structure. The other government structures include townships and non-commission type governments.

Descriptive statistics are also conducted to show the regional distribution of the county government structures represented in the study sample. The stratification and sampling process used in this study yielded a relatively equal representation of counties based on RUCC category. Table 4.2 shows the distribution of counties based on the RUCC code.

[Insert Table 4.2 about here]

As previously shown in Table 3.1, RUCC categories 1-3 are metropolitan counties and categories 4-9 are non-metropolitan counties. Table 4.2 shows that the executive form of government is most common among counties in metropolitan areas. 20-25% of the metropolitan counties in the sample operate under the executive form of government. However, none of the urban population counties adjacent to a metro, RUCC code 4, operated under the executive form of government. Approximately four percent of the completely rural counties adjacent to a metro, RUCC code 8, operate under the executive form of government. The other two forms of county government are almost distributed evenly across the RUCC categories, with the exception of the completely rural counties. These counties, category 9, are more likely to operate under the commission form of government.

In addition to stratifying the counties based on the RUCC categories, counties are also stratified and sampled based on the census region categories. Table 4.3 shows the descriptive statistics regarding the representation of the government structures across the census region.

[Insert Table 4.3 about here]

As shown in Table 4.3, the counties are exactly evenly distributed across the census regions, with about 11% per category. As previously noted, Figure 3.2 shows the coding categories for the Census regions. The Census Bureau groups all of the state into regional categories: North, South, East, and West. The states are further divided into two or more regional divisions. Table 4.3 shows that, as a collective, the commission and administrator governing styles are most common across all of the Census regions. However, Table 4.3 also shows that counties in the South, South Atlantic region are more likely to operate under the administrator governing style, with about 22% of the sample having this form of government.

Hypothesis Testing

After the analyzing some basic descriptive statistics, the hypotheses are tested. Each hypothesis is reiterated followed by an explanation of the statistical tests used to examine the hypothesis. The program structure hypotheses are tested first. Program structure is operationalized as the method of service delivery. Tables 3.2 and 3.3 list the program structure variables. Program structure is measured differently for each program. As such, each hypothesis is tested for LIHEAP and tested for Head Start.

H_1 Counties with county administrator governments are less likely to engage in single county service delivery than the county governments that have the county commission structure.

H_2 Counties with the executive governance system are less likely to engage single county service delivery than the commission government structures.

H_3 Counties with commission government structures are more likely to engage in direct single agency service provision.

The two variables of interest in these hypotheses are government structure and program structure. Government structure and program structure are nominal categorical variables. Cross-tabulations and the Fisher's exact test for independence are used to illustrate the relationship between the government structure variable and the program structure variables. There is a statistically significant relationship between county government structure and LIHEAP program structure (p=.003, Fisher's exact test). As shown in Table 4.4, all counties are more like to use the Non-Profit/CAA model for LIHEAP service delivery. More than 50% of the counties from each government structure use this method of LIHEAP service delivery.

[Insert Table 4.4 about here]

Cross-tabulations and the Fisher's exact test for independence are also used to demonstrate the relationship between the government structure variable and the Head Start program structure variable. Single county service delivery for Head Start is typically conducted via the local county school system. The relationship between these variables is not significant (p=.206, Fisher's exact test).

[Insert Table 4.5 about here]

Table 4.5 shows that all counties are more likely to provide Head Start services through the CAA model; roughly 50% of the counties from each government structure use this model. The Private/Public Non-profit is the next most common model for Head Start service delivery.

The next group of hypotheses tested examines the impact that geographical location has on program structure. Geographical location is measured by the USDA RUCC category assigned to each county. Table 3.1 provides an explanation of how the USDA ranks counties based on population and adjacency to metropolitan statistical areas. Counties coded 1-3 are metropolitan; counties coded 4-9 are non-metropolitan.

H_4 Completely rural counties adjacent to a metropolitan statistical area are likely to collaborate with other governments or not-for-profit organizations for program service delivery.

H_5 Completely rural counties, not adjacent to a metropolitan area are likely to engage in single county agency program service delivery.

H_6 Greater service needs in metropolitan areas will likely have a positive association with collaboration for local service provision.

The geographical coding measure is a nominal categorical variable based on the 2003 RUCC categories. Cross-tabulations and the Fisher's exact test for independence are conducted to explain the variable relationships. The relationship between county geographical location and LIHEAP program structure is not statistically significant (*p*=.211, Fisher's exact test). Table 4.6 shows that governments in completely rural counties adjacent to a metropolitan statistical area, RUCC category 8, are more likely to rely on CAAs for LIHEAP service delivery.

[Insert Table 4.6 about here]

However, governments in completely rural counties, not adjacent to a metropolitan, RUCC category 9, are more likely provide LIHEAP services via a single county agency as hypothesized. 48% of RUCC category 9 counties structured LIHEAP based on a single county service delivery model.

Cross-tabulations and the Fisher's exact test for independence are again performed to examine the relationship between geographical location and Head Start Program structure. The relationship between county geographical location and Head Start program structure is not statistically significant (*p*=.166, Fisher's exact test). As shown in Table 4.7, counties across almost all RUCC categories are more likely to rely on CAAs for Head Start program delivery. RUCC category 7 counties are more likely to use the Private/Public Non-Profits model for Head Start service delivery. RUCC 7 counties are non-metropolitan urban counties that are not adjacent to a metropolitan area. The population in these counties range from 2,500 to 19,999.

[Insert Table 4.7 about here]

The completely rural counties adjacent to a metropolitan statistical area, RUCC 8 counties, are more likely to use CAAs for both programs. The completely rural counties, not adjacent to a metropolitan area, RUCC 9 counties, are more likely to use single county service delivery for LIHEAP program delivery and CAAs for Head Start program delivery.

The sixth hypothesis examines the program structure preferences in the most populated counties. RUCC categories 1-3 are the metropolitan counties. Because the need for social services is likely greater in these counties, it is hypothesized that county governments will have to collaborate with other agencies to meet service demands. Table 4.6 shows that LIHEAP programs across all metropolitan counties tend to utilize the Nonprofit/CAA service delivery model. Head Start programs across all metropolitan counties tend to use the CAA program structure (See Table 4.7).

The next group of hypotheses examined the impact government structure has on program funding. The literature suggests that reformed government structures spend more on public services (Brown and Halaby 1984). Research also suggests that counties with local government autonomy, or home rule, tend to spend more on social services (Choi et al. 2010; Benton 2002, 2003). Additionally, reformed governments are also more likely to increase spending in redistributive areas (Choi et al. 2010). The administrator and the executive governments are reformed county governments.

H_7 Counties with county administrator governments are likely to spend more on each program than the county governments that have the county commission structure.

H_8 Counties with the executive governance system are likely to spend more on each program than the commission government structures.

H_9 Counties with commission government structures are likely to spend less on each program.

The two variables tested in these hypotheses are program funding and government structure. Program funding is continuous and government structure is categorical. Therefore, an Independent Samples *t* Test is conducted to compare the mean program funding for reformed and unreformed county governments. As shown in Table 4.8, there is a significant difference in the level of Head Start program funding for administrator and commission style governments for 2004 and 2002 ($p<.10$). In 2004, there is a significant difference in the level of Head Start funding for administrator (M=7.26, SD=13.24) and commission (M=4.53, SD=6.45) counties; $t(100)=1.68$, $p=0.09$. In 2002, there is also a significant difference in the level of Head Start funding for administrator (M=7.25, SD=12.92) and commission (M=4.57, SD=7.25) counties; $t(100)=1.64$, $p=0.10$. These results suggest that difference in administrator and commission style government structure may have some impact on Head Start funding.

[Insert Table 4.8 about here]

As shown in Table 4.9, there is not a significant difference in the level of LIHEAP funding for administrator and commission style governments. Table 4.9 suggests that while administrator style governments generally spend more on LIHEAP than commissions, the difference in government structure does not have a statistically significant impact on program funding. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 4.9.

[Insert Table 4.9 about here]

Executive governments are hypothesized to spend more on social welfare programs than the commission governments. Table 4.10 shows the means and standard deviations for Head Start funding for the executive and commission governments. The difference is statistically significant for two years. In 2008, there is a significant difference in the level of Head Start funding for executive (M=6.12, SD=6.51) and commission (M=3.40, SD=3.79) counties; $t(100)=1.95$, $p=0.05$. In 1998, there is also a significant difference in the level of Head Start funding for executive (M=5.14, SD=4.68) and commission (M=2.93, SD=4.45) counties; $t(100)=2.03$, $p=0.04$. The results for 2008 and 1998 suggest that the difference in the executive and commission government structure did have some effect on Head Start funding. Specifically, the results suggest that when the government structure is executive, Head Start funding increases.

[Insert Table 4.10 about here]

Table 4.11 shows the differences in LIHEAP program funding for executive and commission style county governments. The results suggest that there is a significant difference in LIHEAP funding for executive and commission counties. The differences are significant for every year covered in this research. These results suggest that when the government structure is executive, LIHEAP funding increases.

[Insert Table 4.11 about here]

These findings indicate there is very strong evidence for the hypothesis that counties with the executive governance system are likely to spend more on LIHEAP than the commission government structures.

The ninth hypothesis states that commission government structures are likely to spend less on each program. As the tests of hypotheses eight and nine show and as Tables 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, and 4.11 indicate, commission governments do tend to spend less on Head Start and LIHEAP. However, there is very limited support from the Head Start funding data for the assumption that the differences between commissions and administrator style government are significant. There is also limited support for differences between executive and commission governments when it comes to Head Start funding. There is no support for the argument that administrator governments spend more than commission government for LIHEAP. However, there appears to be strong support for LIHEAP funding differences between executive and commission governments. For every year covered in the study, the mean program funding for LIHEAP is statistically significant at the .001 level.

The final group of hypotheses examines the impact government structure has on the content of the programs.

H_{10} Counties with county administrator governments are less likely to have restrictive content than the county governments that have the county commission structure.

H_{11} Counties with the executive governance system are less likely to have restrictive content than the commission government structures.

H_{12} Counties with commission government structures are more likely to have programs with restrictive content.

The two variables of interest in these hypotheses are government structure and program content. Government structure and program content are nominal categorical variables. Program content is operationalized based on the number of program access restrictions. Access restrictions are program qualification requirements that are not specified in the federal regulations for each program. Because the two programs are different, the program content variables are also different. Table 3.4 lists the content variables for LIHEAP, and Table 3.5 lists the content variables for Head Start.

Cross-tabulations and Fisher's tests for independence are used to examine the relationship between the government structure variable and the program content variables. Table 4.12 shows that there is no significant relationship between LIHEAP program content and county government structure (p =.126, Fisher's exact test).

[Insert Table 4.12 about here]

However, the relationship between the government structure variable and the Head Start program content variable is statistically significant (p=.005, Fisher's exact test). Table 4.13 shows that, by government structure, the administrator and executive counties have the fewest or no program restrictions (administrator 11.5% and executive 29.2%). Commissions are likely to have two or more program restrictions. Forty-seven percent of commission counties have two restrictions, and 33.3% of administrator counties have two restrictions. Twenty-five percent of executive counties have two program restrictions. A little more than five percent of the commission and administrator counties have all three Head Start program restrictions.

[Insert Table 4.13 about here]

This dissertation also assumes that the interaction between government structure and inequality impacts the three dependent variables. In regression analysis, interaction effects represent the combined impact of multiple variables on the dependent variable (Aiken and West 1991). When an interaction effect is present, the influence of one variable depends on the presence and impact of the other variable. In order to test the assumption that the interaction between government structure and inequality impacts program structure, binomial regression is used to predict program structure given the government structure and accounting for economic inequality. Table 3.2 lists the observed categories for Head Start program structure and Table 3.3 lists the observed categories for LIHEAP program structure. Some of these categories are combined for this analysis. Since most of the counties use the CAA or Private/Public Non-profit model for Head Start service delivery, those categories are combined as one. All of the other categories have been combined and modeled as "Other". The combined CAA or Private/Public Non-profit is used as the reference category. For LIHEAP, the Non-Profit/CAA category is kept; all other categories are combined. The Non-Profit/CAA category is used as the reference category.

There are data limitations with conducting this analysis. The economic inequality data are only available for decennial census data collection years (2000 and 2010). Furthermore, because the program structure categories are not evenly distributed across the sample, each category is not assessed individually. However, in spite of these limitations, this analysis provides valuable insight for understanding how government structure and economic inequality may impact local policy decisions.

Table 4.14 shows that, when modeled by government structure only, the commission and executive government structure did not significantly predict Head Start program structure. However, the administrator county structure did statistically significant predict Head Start program structure (β= -1.026, p<.05). Compared to those counties that chose the CAA/Nonprofit model for Head Start, administrator counties have a .36 times decreased odds of choosing one of the other methods of service delivery. When economic inequality is added to the model, there is a statistically significant interaction between the effects of the administrator government structure and economic inequality on Head Start program structure (β= -2.682, $p<.05$). The interaction with economic inequality shows that, compared to the counties that chose the CAA/Nonprofit model, the counties with the administrator government structure have a .068 times decreased odds of choosing one of the other methods for Head Start service delivery. The addition of the economic inequality interaction has very little impact on the odds of either government structure choosing the CAA or Private/Public Non-profit model.

[Insert Table 4.14 about here]

For the LIHEAP program, Table 4.15 indicates that when modeled by government structure only, the commission and executive government structure did not significantly predict LIHEAP program structure. However, the administrator county structure did significantly predict LIHEAP program structure (β= 1.023, $p<.05$). The counties with the administrator government structure have a 2.782 times increased odds of choosing the Non-Profit/CAA model for LIHEAP service delivery. The addition of the economic inequality interaction variable to the model shows that there is a statistically significant interaction between the effects of the commission (β= -12.038, $p<.01$) and administrator (β= 3.388, $p<.01$) government structures and economic inequality. The addition of the economic inequality interaction appears to have some impact on the odds of the government structures choosing the Non-Profit/CAA model for LIHEAP service delivery.

[Insert Table 4.15 about here]

Next, to assess the impact that economic inequality has on program funding, an analysis of covariance is used to investigate this interaction. In this analysis, program funding is the dependent variable, government structure is the independent variable, and economic inequality is the confounding covariate. These analyses suffer the same data limitations. The economic inequality data are only available years 2000 and 2010. As such, the analysis is run for using the data are available.

The analysis of covariance is used to investigate the assumption that the observed difference in county-level Head Start program funding is caused by the interaction between government structure and level of economic inequality. Table 4.16 shows that, when analyzed by government structure only, each government structure has a statistically significant relationship to Head Start program funding ($p<.001$). After accounting for economic inequality, the commission and administrator government structures remained statistically significant at the .001 level of statistical significance. After the addition of the economic inequality interaction, Head Start program funding increased in the commission and administrator counties.

[Insert Table 4.16 about here]

The analysis of covariance is also used to investigate the assumption that the observed difference in county-level LIHEAP program funding is caused by the interaction between government structure and level of economic inequality. As shown in Table 4.17, the administrator and executive structures have a statistically significant relationship to LIHEAP program funding when analyzed by government structure only. Each is significant at the .001 level of statistical significance.

[Insert Table 4.17 about here]

However, after accounting for economic inequality, only the executive structure remains statistically significant (p<.01). LIHEAP funding increases in the executive government structure counties when accounting for the interaction between government structure and economic inequality.

Finally, the assumption that the interaction between government structure and inequality impacts program content is tested. There are four program content categories for each program (See Tables 3.4 and 3.5). All counties fall into one of the four categories for each program. The data for Head Start are analyzed first. Again, there are data limitations with conducting this analysis for every year covered in this study since the economic inequality data are only available for decennial census data collection years. To test these assumptions, the analyses are run for each program using zero program restrictions as the reference category.

Table 4.18 shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between Head Start program content and the executive government structure. The executive counties have 4.549 times higher odds of having no program restrictions than the commission and administrator counties. Table 4.13 also shows that when comparing the commission, administrator, and executive counties, the executive counties are more likely to have no program restrictions. This relationship remains the only statistically significant predictor of Head Start program content after the addition of the economic inequality interaction. As shown in Table 4.18, the executive counties have 29.462 times higher odds of having no program restrictions than the commission and administrator counties. After adding the inequality interaction, the administrator county structure is also significant. The administrator counties have a 6.111 times higher odds of having no program restrictions.

[Insert Table 4.18 about here]

For LIHEAP, the commission and the administrator government structures have statistically significant relationship to program content (p<.10). As shown in Table 4.19, the commission counties have 1.965 times higher odds of having no program restrictions, and administrator counties have 2.023 times higher odds of having no program restrictions. After accounting for the interaction with economic inequality, the commission structure remained statistically significant. However, for each unit reduction in commission counties, the odds of having no program restrictions decrease by a factor .001. The administrator counties, though, have 8.568 times higher odds of having no program restrictions than the executive and commission counties.

[Insert Table 4.19 about here]

Multivariate Analysis

After testing the hypothesis, a series of auxiliary regressions are run to detect any collinearity that may impact the multivariate models. Collinearity describes the situation where two or more predictor variables in a statistical model are linearly related (Alin 2010). The statistical literature offers several quantifications of collinearity, but this research uses the variance inflation factor (VIF) from the regression collinearity statistics. There is no formal criterion for determining collinearity based on the VIF. Typically, a VIF greater than 10 roughly indicates significant multicollinearity (Gujarati 1995). Neter et al. (1989: 409) state "A maximum VIF value in excess of 10 is often taken as an indication that multi-collinearity may be unduly influencing the least square estimates."

Auxiliary regressions are run of one of the right hand side variables on all the other independent variables. Next, auxiliary regressions are run for all of the variables in two of the explanatory categories—economic factors and demographic factors. Since there is only one variable in category three, partisanship is run in the models with all independent variables. For regressions, collinearity is observed when two variables are correlated at 1.0 or -1.0 with each other (Pedhazur 1997). There is no collinearity detected among the models with all of the variables. However, there is collinearity among the demographic factors. The R-squared from these regressions ranges at 0.90 and above when all of the population variables are modeled together. Even after dropping the total population (POP) variable from the model, the R^2 continued to range at 0.80 and above with a statistically significant F statistic. However, when only one of the age group variables, POP65 or POP18, is included, there are no problems with collinearity. Since the two programs target one age group or the other, the population by age variables will not be included in the same models.

Multivariate analysis is conducted controlling for the effects of other factors that may influence the findings. The key explanatory variables are grouped into three categories: economic factors, demographic factors, and county partisanship. Multivariate analyses are conducted with the relevant non-collinear predictors for each of the explanatory variable categories. The Huber-White robust standard errors are used to allow for dependence between clustered observations. When necessary, a Fisher exact test is also used to examine the cross-sectional independence of the panels.

LIHEAP Program Structure

Program structure is operationalized as the method of service delivery. Hypothesis testing reveals that there is a statistically significant relationship between county government structure and LIHEAP program structure. However, the relationship between county geographical location and LIHEAP program structure is not statistically significant; the interaction between government structure and economic inequality also did not significantly impact LIHEAP program structure. Binomial logistic regression is used to predict the other key explanatory factors that impact LIHEAP program structure. Table 3.3 lists the observed categories for LIHEAP program structure. Some of these categories are combined for the multivariate analysis. Since most of the counties use the Nonprofit/CAA service delivery model, this category is kept. All of the other categories have been combined and modeled as “Other”.

A binomial logistic regression is performed to ascertain the likelihood that counties will choose Nonprofit/CAA as the method of service delivery. Of the predictor variables, only three are statistically significant: administrator government structure, Black population, and female-headed households (as shown in Table 4.20).

[Insert Table 4.20 about here]

The administrator government structure is associated with an increased likelihood of choosing the Nonprofit/CAA program structure. This finding is consistent with the analysis presented in Table 4.4 and Table 4.15. While the Black population variable is statistically significant, the marginal effects are negligible. Furthermore, analysis shows that there is a decreased odds that LIHEAP will be administered via a nonprofit/CAA for an increase in one unit of female-headed households. However, for each unit reduction in the percent of female-headed households, the odds of administering LIHEAP via a nonprofit/CAA increases by a factor of 1.48.

Head Start Program Structure

Hypothesis testing shows that the relationship between county government structure and

Head Start program structure is not statistically significant. However, government structure is a key aspect of this research and is, therefore, included in the multivariate model. Table 3.2 lists the observed categories for Head Start program structure. Some of these categories are combined for the multivariate analysis. Since most of the counties use the CAA service delivery model or the Private/Public Non-Profit model, these categories are combined because of their organizational similarities. All of the other categories have been combined and modeled as "Other".

Binomial logistic regression is performed to ascertain the effects of government structure, annual poverty rate, median household income, unemployment rate, youth population, minority concentration, economic inequality, educational attainment, female-headed households, and partisanship on the likelihood that counties will choose CAA or Private/Public Non-profit model as the method of service delivery. As shown in Table 4.21, only three of the predictor variables are statistically significant: administrator government structure, unemployment rate, and educational attainment.

[Insert Table 4.21 about here]

Administrator governments have a .244 times higher odds of selecting the CAA or Private/Public Non-Profit model for Head Start program structure than the commission and executive governments. For each unit increase in the unemployment rate, the odds of providing Head Start services via a CAA or Private/Public Non-Profit increase by a factor of 1.269. For each unit increase in the level of educational attainment, the odds of providing Head Start services via a CAA or Private/Public Non-Profit increases by a factor of 1.071.

LIHEAP Program Funding

Hypothesis testing reveals that there is not a significant difference in the level of LIHEAP funding for administrator and commission style governments. However, there is a significant difference in LIHEAP funding for executive and commission counties. The differences are significant for every year covered in this research. As such, government structure is included in the multivariate analysis. Furthermore, economic inequality also has a significant effect on LIHEAP funding. Annual poverty rate, median income, unemployment rate, elderly population, minority concentration, economic inequality, educational attainment, female-headed households, and partisanship are also included. A multiple regression is run to predict LIHEAP program funding. Regression coefficients and standard errors can be found in Table 4.22.

[Insert Table 4.22 about here]

The model explains 70.5% of the variability in LIHEAP program funding. Three variables are statistically significant: elderly population, educational attainment, and partisanship. There is a predicted increase in LIHEAP funding of about $104 for every unit increase in the elderly population. There is a predicted decrease in LIHEAP funding of almost $19,000 for every unit increase in educational attainment. In other words, as the percent of county residents with who have at least a Bachelors degree increases, LIHEAP funding to the county decreases by about $19,000. Furthermore, when the ideology of the county is Democrat, LIHEAP program funding increases by over $281,000.

Head Start Program Funding

A multiple regression is also run to predict Head Start Program funding from the relevant explanatory variable. The model explains 22.8% of the variability in Head Start program funding. Table 4.23 shows that the commission and administrator structures are significant at the $p<.10$ level of statistical significance. When the government structure is commission, there is a predicted increase in Head Start program funding of about $1.5 million. When the government structure is administrator, there is a predicted increase in Head Start program funding of about $1.8 million.

[Insert Table 4.23 about here]

The female-headed household variable is also statistically significant, $p < .05$. There is a predicted increase in Head Start program funding of about $1.3 million for every unit increase in female-headed households.

LIHEAP Program Content

Table 3.4 shows the observed categories for LIHEAP program content. Program content is operationalized based on the number of program restrictions. An ordinal logistic regression is run to determine the effect of the key explanatory variables on LIHEAP program content. The results are presented in Table 4.24.

[Insert Table 4.24 about here]

Of the variables of interest, the commission and administrator government structures are statistically significant at the $p<.05$ level. This finding is consistent with the results presented in Table 4.19 showing a statistically significant relationship between the commission and administrator government structures and LIHEAP program content. This analysis also shows that the Hispanic population and female-headed households are statistically significant. These results indicate that while the Hispanic population is statistically significant, the marginal effects are negligible. For each unit reduction in female-headed households, the odds of having no LIHEAP program restrictions increases by a factor of 1.21.

Head Start Program Content

The program content categories for Head Start are listed in Table 3.5. Like the LIHEAP content categories, the Head Start content categories are an indication of the number of observed program qualification/access restrictions. Table 4.25 shows the results of the ordinal logistic regression testing the effect of the key explanatory variables on Head Start program content.

[Insert Table 4.25 about here]

The administrator and the executive government structures are statistically significant. This finding is also consistent with the results presented in Table 4.18. The female-headed household measure is also significant at the $p < .05$ level. An increase in the percent of female-headed households is associated with a 1.219 increased odds of the Head Start program having no qualification/access restrictions.

Conclusion

The major objective of this study is to explore the relationship between social safety net program features and government structure. Social safety net programs are intended to protect people from the harms associated with poverty. Typically, a social safety net comprises a set of benefits, programs, and supports designed to make sure that people do not lack the basic necessities of life. The study has attempted to explain the mechanisms that potentially influence program design.

The findings presented in this chapter indicate that government structure does have some impact on program structure. For both programs analyzed in this study, the administrator government structures are more likely to choose a mix of Non-profit and CAA structure for program implementation. Data analysis suggests that government structure also impacts Head Start program funding. When the government structure is commission or administrator, there is an increase in Head Start program funding. For program content, the commission and administrator government structures impact LIHEAP content. These two government structures are more likely to have no program restrictions. The analysis of Head Start content indicates that the administrator and the executive government structures have the fewest program restrictions. The executive form of government, common among counties in metropolitan areas, is also associated with funding increases for the programs considered in this study.

These findings highlight the role and importance of non-governmental actors in the delivery of social services. By relying on entities outside the county government, the administrator counties are choosing the deliver these programs in settings that are not directly impacted by political and electoral constraints. The non-profits and CAAs are usually not run by elected officials. In addition, the federal regulatory guidelines for Head Start and LIHEAP have provisions that give non-governmental agencies the opportunity to serve as direct grantees. This means that these agencies can bypass the county government when seeking grantee status. However, Head Start does require a non-Federal local match of 20 percent of the total costs of the program. LIHEAP does not require grantees to match the federal funds that they receive

Overall, the data analysis shows that administrator and executive forms of government are consistently significant in the models. These counties are more likely to use a non-government agency for program implementation, more likely to fund the programs at higher levels, and are also more likely eliminate the barriers or restrictions for program participation. The literature already indicates that administrator and executive county government structures tend to be more professional. These findings suggest that professionalization also improves the design of the safety net and also increases the likelihood that potential recipients will have access to the social service programs.

The findings on the commission form of government represent a departure from the extant literature. Commission government structures are common in the smaller and more rural counties. These counties are typically considered to be less capable of responding to the challenges associated with social service delivery. However, the commission government structure is still the most common of the three structures. The results of this study indicate that commissions are likely to increase Head Start program funding and are likely to have no or few program restrictions for LIHEAP. It is possible that the increase in Head Start funding stems from the idea that investments in quality early-childhood education can protect low-income children from the long-term effects of poverty. Research on the cradle-to-prison and school-to-prison pipelines indicates that early investments in programs for at-risk children can avert later strains on social services and the justice system (Wald and Losen 2007). It is also possible that the commission counties defer to the federal guidelines for LIHEAP program content. The federal guidelines already stipulate the household requirements for program qualification; the commission counties do not appear to go beyond the federal requirements. Taken together, these findings also suggest that commission governments may be responsive to needs of the community because of electoral pressure. Commissioners are elected officials and need the support of their constituents to remain in office.

While these findings provide insight into the processes that impact social safety net program design and implementation, interviews with front-line administrators can potentially reveal other factors that may improve or restrict access to social safety net programs. Therefore, interviews are conducted with the executive directors of the agencies or agency heads. The purpose of these interviews is to hear the perspectives of the front-line administrators regarding the various aspects of social welfare policy design and implementation. The next chapter presents the findings of these interviews.

Chapter 5: Research Findings (Qualitative)

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative data analysis of county-level officials involved with Head Start and LIHEAP program administration. The qualitative data are collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with administrators who run these programs. Qualitative interviews are a good way to obtain understanding through detailed examples and rich narratives. According to Kvale (1996), qualitative research interviews are "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (1). The purpose of the interviews is to gain an understanding of the perspectives that front-line administrators hold about various aspects of social welfare policy design and implementation. In particular, the interviews are intended to gather data about the challenges and constraints that administrators face in the design and delivery of these programs, and the resources and supports that they perceive are available to them.

The sample counties from which the interviews are drawn are selected based on a most-different strategy to obtain data from as many different combinations of factors of interest as possible. Nine counties are sampled, three from each government structure (commissioner, administrator, and executive). Also, the counties are selected based on a number of characteristics in addition to government structure, including the program administered (Head Start only, LIHEAP only, or both Head Start and LIHEAP), program structure, degree of ruralness, and census region. The interviews are conducted with the executive directors of the agencies or agency heads. The directors have many years of experience with their respective agencies. The years of experience ranged from five to 30 years.

The qualitative data are analyzed based using thematic content analysis. Bogdan and

Biklen (1982) define qualitative data analysis as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145). Thematic content analysis is a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data (Braun and Clarke 2006). In order to create a structure for the themes that may emerge from the data, a thorough reading of the interview transcripts is conducted to fully understand the meaning of an interview or the ideas which the interviewee is trying to convey (Bryman 2008). Themes are clustered based on categories that convey similar meanings. The interviews revealed several interrelated factors that may impact decision making and program implementation. This chapter explains the findings of the in-depth qualitative interviews.

Findings

The interview protocol (Appendix A) focuses on several key concepts: county pressing needs, service provision challenges, funding sources and needs, partnerships and collaborations, public and political support, community characteristics, and social capital. These are all areas that can influence the way that local governments make decisions about social safety net programs. Appendix C shows the responses to the questions about the program design and implementation questions. Those responses are summarized in the remaining sections and highlighted in Figure 5.1.

[Insert Figure 5.1 about here]

County Pressing Needs

One of the goals of the qualitative interviews is to understand the factors that can both influence the local level decision making processes and impact program participation. Although the counties varied in their county government structures, social safety net program content, and spatial and regional characteristics, transportation is consistently mentioned as a pressing need and an access barrier. For the all of the rural counties, public transportation is also mentioned as a pressing need. As reported by one participant, the lack of a public transportation infrastructure not only affects access to social welfare programs, but also impacts access to employment and childcare opportunities. According to participant CO6, “We are a rural, high-poverty county. Job opportunities and transportation are the most common barriers. Childcare is also a need. We do not have many licensed childcare facilities. So a parent may work on one side of the county, but travel across the county to a childcare facility.” The lack of personal or public transportation is an access barrier because the social safety net has become one of the primary approaches to alleviating poverty; ensuring that low-income residents have access to the services is of primary importance.

In addition to transportation, employment and housing are also mentioned as pressing needs. To address the employment needs of their families, many Head Start programs offer assistance to parents interested in obtaining a high school General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or participating in other adult education programs. Staff members also refer families to employment specialists in the community. Other than relying on a referral network, Head Start staff report that they cannot offer much housing assistance to their families. Like the staff for Head Start, the LIHEAP program relies on referrals as a means of connecting their clients with employment and housing opportunities. One of the LIHEAP administrators, as highlighted on Table C.1, states that employable recipients are required to look for work and attend local employment centers to work on job readiness skills. However, the lack of “good paying jobs” is also often cited by the respondents. Furthermore, the lack of transportation can also impact the clients' ability to obtain employment.

Healthcare, poverty, recreational activities, and childcare are other pressing needs that are also mentioned by the respondents. Both of the programs examined in this study are anti-poverty initiatives and each of these concepts has significant impacts on the economic status and well-being of the audiences served by the two programs evaluated in this research.

Service Provision Challenges

The responses regarding challenges to service provision are listed on Table C.2. Since 1996, when the Clinton Administration passed major welfare policy reform, even recently-arrived legal immigrants have been denied access to social safety net programs. The limitations on immigrant welfare use included in PRWORA are consistent with a long line of restrictions meant to minimize the costs to the safety net imposed immigration. PRWORA explicitly limited to ability of state and local governments to provide any social safety nets to undocumented immigrants. State governments, then, have to declare that they are making a choice to provide undocumented immigrants with benefits. While all 50 states decided to extend access to TANF benefits to legal noncitizens who arrived before the 1996 Act took effect, the current political climate around deportation keeps some clients from applying for benefits. According to CO3, "Some potential clients are undocumented and may resist accessing services because of fears of deportation."

Transportation is cited as both a pressing need as well as a service provision challenge. Head Start programs in rural counties often deal the challenges posed by the lack of public transportation and a lack of personal transportation for the families served. Federal Head Start regulations stipulate that in order for a child to be eligible to participate, the family's income must be equal to or below the poverty line, or the family must be potentially eligible for public assistance. Furthermore, Head Start regulations limit the amount of time children can spend on bus rides to and from school. To overcome the challenges posed in rural counties, some of the Head Start providers indicate that they have community bus stops.

Transportation is also cited as a challenge for LIHEAP administrators. For example, eligible households in some states must apply for LIHEAP benefits in person and they only have a limited window of opportunity to do so. The rigid timeframes and travel to a LIHEAP office might reduce household participation. Respondents indicated that they have to be innovative in there service delivery approaches. One LIHEAP administrator reports that satellite sites throughout the county have been one way of overcoming this service provision challenge. The multiple offices have been a mechanism for getting the services closer to the recipients and overcoming transportation obstacles. Another respondent indicated that they conduct program eligibility determination and program enrollment at the senior citizens centers throughout the county. By taking the program applications to the centers, senior citizens who may not have transportation can still participate.

Online applications are also a way to overcome the service provision challenges associated with transportation. One of the hopes of the digital age has been that government services would be more accessible to citizens. However, as pointed out by the interview respondents, the lack of technology is another service provision challenge. While access to the Internet is increasingly important, that access is not evenly distributed across America (Mossberger, Tolbert and Stansbury 2003; Mossberger, Tolbert, and Franko 2012). Residents living in rural areas continue to lag behind the national average in computer ownership and

Internet access. The transportation challenges coupled with the digital divide illustrate the need for policy makers and public administrators to design and implement social safety net programs in a manner that considers participation challenges and barriers while also promoting improved program and service access.

Funding Sources and Needs

As previously referenced, economic inequality and persistent poverty have threatened the economic well-being of Americans for years. However, the recent Great Recession and prolonged recovery have exposed the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the U.S. social safety net. Even during times of economic prosperity, the nation's public social programs fail to serve all poor and low-income families equally. To assess how the funding structure may affect program implementation, participants are also asked questions about their funding sources and needs. The responses are listed on Table C.3. For all of the interview participants, program funding is either all or mostly federal dollars (45% to 100% federal funding). As illustrated on Figures 3.3 and 3.4, both programs are federally-funded and locally-administered in all locations. Even though some respondents report a mix of state and local funds as well, all of the program administrators indicate that the current level of funding falls short of meeting the needs of the communities. States and localities contribute very little toward the administration of the programs assessed in this study. As such, two of the Head Start programs report having waiting lists of 90-100 qualifying children. CO1, for example, has a total funded enrollment of about 200 children, but nearly 100 children cannot even get in to the program.

The LIHEAP program administrators also indicate that their current level of funding is insufficient to meet the need. LIHEAP is the nation's largest federally-funded energy assistance program available to poor households. With LIHEAP benefits, eligible households can receive aid to help pay their utility bills during the critically cold or hot months of the year. Even though LIHEAP is considered to be an efficient and effective program, funding often falls short of the need. Program administrators are only able to provide assistance to a small portion of those who qualify. LIHEAP program administrators indicate that they have to make difficult decisions about how to maximize their limited resources. According to CO4, the "current funding level does not serve all eligible households. With the lowered funding levels, we have adjusted our maximum benefit levels down." To help address the needs created by these shortfalls in funding, the administrators often rely on partnerships and collaborations with other organizations and agencies. Those collaborations are explained in the next section.

Partnerships and Collaborations

Public partnerships and collaborations can be defined as agreements between governmental entities and another entity such as another government, public agency, or non-profit organization meant to achieve a specific goal or set of objectives. These partnerships have become increasingly important as the need for social safety nets have increased and funding has not necessarily kept up with the need (Agranoff 2007; Agranoff 2012; Hale 2011). The importance of these partnerships is summarized in one participant's response: "It would be silly to say but collaboration is like our middle name." In fact, all of the interview respondents report having some type of collaborative agreement with other local entities (See Table C.4). These partnerships include agreements with non-profits, public agencies, and corporate partners. One of the participants encapsulated the comments made by several participants by stating:

Our agency collaborates with a number of entities for Head Start. We have a partnership

> with the University of Oregon. Their student-teachers work with our Head Start programs. We also work with doctors and dentists; they go into our schools to see our students. With LIHEAP, we partner with the local agencies to provide referrals. We send our clients to agencies and the agencies send their clients to us as well. There is also a lot of local support for our programs like the parent GED program, the master gardener program. The Catholic high schools also provide tutors for our students.

Generally, the Head Start programs are more likely to partner with health care facilities. Implementing programs and strategies to address the healthcare needs of the children served is one of the performance goals of the Head Start program. As such, the Head Start administrators report collaborations with medical and dental clinics. One interesting partnership is the North Carolina Pre-K initiative. The North Carolina Pre-K Program is designed to ensure access to a high-quality pre-kindergarten classroom for eligible four-year-old children. The children qualifying for North Carolina Pre-K tend to come from households that exceed the income threshold for Head Start. However, children participating in the pre-K program are often placed in Head Start classrooms. The state contributes the pre-K dollars to the Head Start programs. The number of state-run pre-K programs has increased, and as of 2010, forty states operated some kind of pre-K program. The emergence of these state-run programs represents an interesting line of future inquiry: what impact does this shifting of state resources from traditional and/or existing social service programs have on poorer constituents?

Partnership and collaborations are also an integral aspect of LIHEAP implementation. The LIHEAP programs are more likely to partner with non-profit agencies to assist with the application process. The partnerships with the non-profits typically serve two purposes:

1) The staff at local organizations assist families with application for LIHEAP benefits; and

2) Residents can apply for LIHEAP benefits through a universal application. Universal applications are designed to be a one-stop shop for anyone applying for social welfare benefits. These applications are usually web-based and applicants can apply for health and human services benefits any time from any location with Internet access. These applications reduce the need to go to multiple offices to apply for public benefits. Since the applications are available online, staff at non-profit organizations can assist families who do not have personal access to the Internet. Both of these efforts likely increase the probability that qualifying families know about and apply for benefits.

Coordination and collaboration across multiple agencies has a significant impact on the communities served. The need for social services is not declining alongside the decreasing government funding. As state and local governments face the ongoing challenge of balancing their budgets, these collaborations can also serve as means to overcome the previously mentioned service and access barriers. Although it is common to assume that public agencies and non-profit organizations are located in areas easily accessible to low-income residents, many social service agencies choose their locations based on a number of obligations and needs. Some agencies may choose to locate in communities with high concentrations of low-income individuals in order to provide services more efficiently. Others may decide to locate in an area with many private donors or communities with resources dedicated to social service provision. Organizations in rural and urban counties, though, are strained in different ways and cope with this strain in different ways. Further research on the impact that social service collaboration has on low-income residents in rural, transportation deficient areas can also have important implications for public policy.

Public and Political Support

Collaborations between non-profit organizations and public agencies are important for successful program implementation. The support of the local community and local elected officials is also important. Though most of the respondents indicate that they have great public and political support, there are two notable exceptions (See Table C.5). According to one respondent,

> "Many local governments want to deny there is a problem in their community. They don't want programs to help with things like homelessness because it looks bad in their community. It is easier to deny the problem exists."

Problem acknowledgement and definition has a substantial effect on the nature of public policy design. The policy making process starts with a problem definition. A good problem definition should include a description of the conditions influencing the problem and a history of prior governmental action or inaction. To create those components, though, there must be an acknowledgement of the problem. Denying that a problem exists means that families and individuals may not be getting the resources that they need.

The other notable response to the questions about public and political support came for an interview participant in Arizona. The respondent, a Head Start administrator, states that while the public is generally supportive of early childhood education, the Arizona state legislature is not. The respondent also states that the state legislature "…is notorious for slashing critical prevention services that decrease future expenditures…" According to the 2010 Census, the annual poverty rate in Arizona is 17.4% compared to 15.3% for the United States. Additionally, the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) reports that 51% (793,298) of children in Arizona live in low-income families compared to 44% nationally. The main service area for the respondent, Tucson, is the 6th poorest city in the country. The need for services is vital for communities like this Arizona community. However, problem acknowledgement and political support are critical for the implementation and success of any social safety net interventions.

Community Characteristics

Though it is obvious to assume that explanatory factors like poverty and inequality influence economic well-being and need for social services, this dissertation also assumes that geography can also impact economic status. The social welfare policies created in the aftermath of decentralization, devolution, and welfare reform have altered the nature of local governance and poverty amelioration in urban and rural areas. According to Weber et al. (2005), poverty in America has several distinguishing features. It tends to be spatially concentrated (Voss et al. 2006). Rural communities are often disadvantaged relative to their urban counterparts and poverty rates increase as rural areas become increasingly remote. As such, interview participants are asked about the geographical characteristics of their service areas. All of the responses are recorded on Table C.6. Two of the respondents state that there is a local connection to state and national labor/union organizations. However, the administrators in the rural counties indicate that the lack of employment and retail opportunities negatively impact their service areas. One administrator also indicated how national trends and policies impact the local economy and, eventually, impacts the local safety net. As stated by respondent CO4:

> Wyoming is also rich in minerals, oil and gas. This creates a boom/bust economy in some areas of the state. The current dropping gas and oil prices are having a negative impact on Wyoming. A large portion of State revenue comes from mineral and oil and gas taxes. So, budget cuts loom large right now. And, companies are laying employees

off which affects local economies, social services, housing markets, etc.

One other notable response to the community characteristics question highlighted the affordable housing challenges many areas contend with. According to the respondent, "The housing stock in both counties is old, with a median age of 60+ years. This has implications for housing quality and energy usage." The largest component of LIHEAP has traditionally been the heating and cooling payment assistance program. Like most federal social safety net programs, LIHEAP targets two very specific household types: vulnerable household and high burden households. Vulnerable households are low-income households that have young children, elderly, or disabled individuals and high burden households have high energy costs but low-income levels. Neighborhoods with concentrated poverty tend to isolate their residents from the resources and networks they need to lift themselves out of poverty. This combination of barriers creates communities with serious crime, health, and education problems that, in turn, further restrict the opportunities of those growing up and living in them. Understanding how existing social safety nets operate in a high-poverty, low-quality housing areas is important for the development of strategies and partnerships that help promote opportunity in these neighborhoods.

Social Capital

The final set of questions focused on the social cohesion in the area. According to Putnam, social capital is defined as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (1963, p. 167). By definition, social capital refers to all of factors that promote social relations and social cohesion. Putnam (2000) also characterizes the aspects of social capital in the following manner:

> Social capital has both an individual and a collective aspect—a private face and a public face. First, individuals form connections that benefit our own interests…However, social capital also can have 'externalities' that affect the wider community, so that not all the costs and benefits of social connections accrue to the person making the contact…Social connections are also important for the rules of conduct that they sustain. Networks involve (almost by definition) mutual obligations; they are not interested as mere 'contacts.' Networks of community engagement foster sturdy norms of reciprocity: I will do this for you now, in the expectation that you (or perhaps someone else) will return the favor (p. 20).

There are three key components of social capital: the network, norms, and sanctions (Halpern 2005). Sanctions may be punishments for acting in way contrary to the norms or may manifest as rewards for complying with expectations. All three of these aspects of social capital are examined in the research.

Communities with a large presence of social networks and civic associations tend to be in a better position to address poverty and vulnerability. The collective efficacy, defined by measures of social capital and cohesion and trust can help shield communities from the negative effects of concentrated poverty. The social and cultural aspects of the local areas can impact service delivery. According to one respondent, the racial and ethnic makeup of the service area can impact "the need for bilingual staff members…and acknowledgment of cultural family traditions."

In addition to culture, churches and religious institutions are the most commonly cited sources of community and social cohesion (See Table C.7). Putnam (2000) argues that, as churches have traditionally played a vital role in American civic life, the process of secularization has significantly contributed to the erosion of community activism. Putnam (200) further contends that "Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America." Many religious and faith-based organizations provide some type of social service to the local area. However, in the context of this research, religion as a manifestation of social capital has a potentially significant policy implication. There is a correlation between religion and political ideology, with most Americans who have no religious affiliation tending to lean Democratic. Those with strong ties to a religious affiliation, namely Mormons and Protestants, tend to lean Republican. The literature review section has already shown that Democrats and Republicans tend to have divergent views on social safety net spending. While all of the respondents report having positive relationships with the local religious institutions, this relationship does imply that future research is needed to better examine the connection between religion and perceptions about government funded social safety nets. Future research should explore the impact that a community's relationship and affiliation with a centralized religion have on the public opinion of individuals regarding government funded social safety nets.

Other Factors

In addition to the findings outlined above, several other themes emerged from the interviews. Table 5.1 shows the other factors that may impact the social safety net and local wellbeing.

[Insert Table 5.1 about here]

However, one of the most noteworthy themes is the emerging trend of grandparents and primary caregivers for their grandchildren. According the Pew Research, more than 2.7 million grandparents o serve as the primary caregiver to that child (Livingston 2013). This trend impacts the social safety net because recent research underscores the challenges these grandparents often face in attempting to access the state and local resources they desperately need to take care of their grandchildren. Social welfare resources are typically available to parents but are often inaccessible for grandparent, and public assistance aimed at seniors is insufficient to cover the costs of childrearing (Pittman 2015). One of the Head Start providers stated that they have changed their eligibility criteria to serve children who are being raised by grandparents. This, however, underscores the need for more social welfare policies and resources designed to help the millions of grandparents struggling to raise their grandchildren.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter highlight the challenges and barriers that face service providers in administering social safety nets at the local level. The purpose of the interviews is to understand the decisions and processes that impact county-level social safety net provision. The interviews reveal that in addition to funding, other factors influence who actually participates in these programs. The location of social service providers has tremendous impact on participation rates. Social service provision varies by place, and transportation is often the main impediment to participation. The administration of social safety net programs is significantly impacted by the location of service providers for a very simple and intuitive reason – qualified individuals cannot benefit readily from service providers or programs that are not close by and easily accessible. To that extent, spatial inequality in the safety net can potentially advantage certain neighborhoods and individuals over others. Transportation, therefore, matters in social safety net provision.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, Discussion, and Suggestions for Future Research

This dissertation explores the factors that impact social safety provision at the county level. This research attempts to explain how local decisions can impact the social safety net. The previous chapters outline the hypotheses that address the three main research questions: What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and government structure have on the way counties structure social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the content of social safety net programs? What effect does the interaction between economic inequality and county government structures have on the way governments fund social safety net programs? The research addresses these questions by focusing on three major aspects of social safety net programs: 1) program funding, 2) program content, and 3) program structure. The research also considers the three main structures for county government structures: commission, executive, and administrator. Additionally, this research considers the impact that economic inequality has on the local decision making processes affecting the key aspects of social safety net program design and implementation.

The main findings in this dissertation show that reformed, professional government structures spend more on social safety net programs. These government structures also make accessing social services easier by eliminating program access restrictions. Furthermore, these counties tend to provide social services outside of the traditional governmental settings.

The in-depth interviews reveal other factors impact who actually participates in these programs. Geography and transportation are often the biggest impediments to social service program participation. This finding implies that social safety net programs are not always readily accessible to the populations most in need. This mismatched social safety net may actually be working to reinforce some of the structural and individual-level barriers that low-income families experience. This finding has a number of implications for scholarship into poverty, place, and race as well as for practice and policy. Of primary importance to social welfare policy design should be ensuring that the target population has adequate access to social service programs and providers. Oftentimes, social safety net providers will require participants to make regular visits to an agency or office to apply for and receive program benefits. Therefore, where a person lives has huge implications for what programs are needed, which programs are accessible, and which programs are likely to be utilized. Making sure that low-income populations have adequate spatial access to social service providers is critical. Access and participation barriers to social service programs are tantamount to de facto denial of benefits.

Connecting where a person lives to the delivery of social service programs is also relevant to discussions about race. A number of social safety net programs have a legacy of discrimination when it comes to the treatment of racial minorities. Furthermore, there continues to be evidence that governments with higher percentages of black constituents are less generous in providing social welfare assistance to low-income blacks as compared to low-income whites (Lieberman 1998; Schram, Soss, and Fording 2003; Soss et al. 2001). Therefore, it is possible that access to social safety net programs is further complicated by race and place.

This research also highlights the differences in the way that some social safety net programs are implemented. Both of the programs are more likely to be administered through the CAA/Non-profit model. However, when examining the program content factors, LIHEAP program content tends to have some requirements that seem to be more of an access restriction than a participation barrier. Participation barriers would be impediments such as the lack of transportation that often affects Head Start participation. However, LIHEAP has more restrictive program content such as assets limits. There are some possible explanations for these differences in program content. Research shows that many Americans hold racial attitudes about welfare recipients and, as such, believe that welfare recipients are the undeserving poor (Blalock 1967; Gilens 1999). For clarity, undeserving poor are those who are considered to be poor by “choice” or because of some other personal problem. Children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly tend to be considered deserving because they are poor through no fault of their own. It is possible that perceptions about who is deserving of public assistance may have an impact on the design and implementation of these programs. Head Start is one of the most often cited successes of the Great Society Era. Because Head Start is an early education initiative targeting low-income children, the public tends to support the program. This public support likely translates into program design features that encourage participation. One such design feature is the ability of grantees to apply directly to the federal government for funding. Having the ability to bypass the state government means that the local communities have the autonomy to set up their programs in ways that best fit the needs of the service population.

LIHEAP, on the other hand, targets low-income households. Therefore, many adults are included in the qualification categories for this program. LIHEAP eligible households must meet certain criteria. Specifically, they must have an income of less than 150 percent of the poverty line. The relatively high incidence of poverty among minorities makes African American and Hispanics more likely to need and qualify for LIHEAP assistance. However, as shown in this study, a number of LIHEAP grantees impose restrictions such as asset tests that can make it very difficult to qualify for assistance. This kind of program qualification requirement is counterproductive because it discourages economic security. It is also possible that asset limits will discourage program participation as well. Unlike Head Start, the LIHEAP program does not always get the same level of public or political support. In 2011, for example, former senator, Rick Santorum, is quoted as saying about federal LIHEAP assistance, “Just because these people need help doesn’t mean the federal government needs to help.” That same year, the Obama administration also proposed federal funding cuts for the heating assistance program. President Obama’s budget request for fiscal year 2012 cut LIHEAP to $2.6 billion, down from $5.1 billion. The lack of support for the program may be the impetus for some of the access restrictions. It is also possible that this lack of support is reflected in the LIHEAP funding structure. Federal funds are allocated by state. Local grantees have to apply to the states for funding. This funding structure means that even the best intentions at the federal level are still subject to the influence of state actors who may show preference for some communities over others. The differences in the program features for the Head Start program and the LIHEAP program highlight many of the reasons why public policy choices matter. These differences also illustrate the complexity and variability of the social safety net across space. As such, spatial inequality research benefits from analyses that compare prosperous regions to poor regions and also examines the challenges that rural areas experience because of the devolution of federal responsibilities to lower governmental.

Implications for Policy Design

Based on the in-depth interviews, transportation and location of social services agencies have major impacts on who is able to access the service. There is often little or no public transportation in rural communities and the geography and spatial distribution of the population makes walking to a service agency unrealistic. Personal transportation, therefore, is even more valuable in rural communities than in urban communities. However, there is likely a higher concentration or poverty in rural counties. As a result, many of the residents may not even have personal transportation. Furthermore, social service provision in rural counties is usually done across large multi-county regions. Families in rural communities may have to travel great distances to neighboring cities and counties in order to receive services or assistance. These issues associated with transportation and service accessibility must be addressed in social safety net program design. Otherwise, the people most in need of social service assistance may never actually gain access to the available resources.

There are some possible ways to overcome the challenges posed by location and transportation. It is no longer necessary to have program participants travel to an office in order to apply for benefits. The advances in technology can help to improve social service provision. Despite the advances in technology, access and use across all sociodemographic and socioeconomic groups remains unequal. A technology gap persists with individuals from higher-income households and individuals with higher education have greater access to the Internet. In spite of this technology gap, online information posting can still potentially improve safety net access in a number of ways. Online information can provide valuable information such as program descriptions or a list of agency addresses. The most valuable aspect of online information posting, though, is the application for program qualification. One of the program content characteristics considered in this research is whether the agency has an online application. By providing the program application online, participants can complete and file the application themselves, or they can complete the application with the assistance of a family member or with the assistance of a staff member for another agency or non-profit. Providing multiple pathways for program qualification eliminates some of the barriers posed by a lack of transportation.

Future Research

This dissertation focuses on evaluating policies and interventions designed to improve life chances for those at the bottom end of the inequality distribution. While this research does advance our understanding of poverty and economic inequality, multidimensional such as these require multidimensional approaches to research. It is important to point out that some social services cannot be mailed or electronically transferred to an individual. Instead, participants must visit a social service agency to receive assistance. While the utilization of technology is mentioned as a way to improve access to social services, future research should also explore how disinvestments in public transportation have impacted low-income communities. Public transportation systems traditionally served as a key strand in the social safety net; this was often the only mode of transportation for those with no other means of getting around. Do local government disinvestments in public transportation have a disparate impact on routes serving low-income communities? Are the neighborhoods that are more likely to be cut off from quality public transportation disproportionately low-income communities of color? Rural communities have always lagged behind urban areas when it comes to public transportation. Analyzing the disinvestments in public transportation is likely more relevant to discussions of social safety net access in urban areas. This strand of research is important because public transit is a mechanism to connect people to opportunities such as jobs, schools, and community resources. The goal of the safety net is to help individuals improve their socioeconomic station in life. For this reason, future research and future social policies should consider access to public transportation as an extension of the safety net. Investments in public transportation are an investment in a more economically stable community.

All of the in-depth interview respondents also report having some type of relationship with the local religious institutions. Future research is needed to better examine the connection between religion and perceptions about government funded social safety nets. Future research should also explore the impact that a community's relationship and affiliation with a centralized religion have on the public opinion of individuals regarding government funded social safety nets. Over the last decade or so, elected officials have increasingly supported policies and initiatives that give public funds to religious institutions for the provision of social services. The most notable push of this kind at the federal level came when President George W. Bush made the "faith-based" initiative a top priority of his domestic policy. Faith-based organizations and religious institutions are often more visible and accessible than secular non-profit organizations or county agencies. It is not uncommon for non-profits and county agencies to be located in the county seat. Churches, on the other hand, are usually found in every neighborhood. This increased social service activity by faith-based organizations raises some important concerns and questions. Future research will benefit from an exploration of the following questions: What impact, if any, does religion have on public perceptions of poor people? What impact does a community's relationship and affiliation with a centralized religion have on the public opinion of individuals regarding social safety nets? Does religious affiliation make individuals more sympathetic for the economic conditions of poor people? Does the presence of religious institutions increase support for social safety net programs?

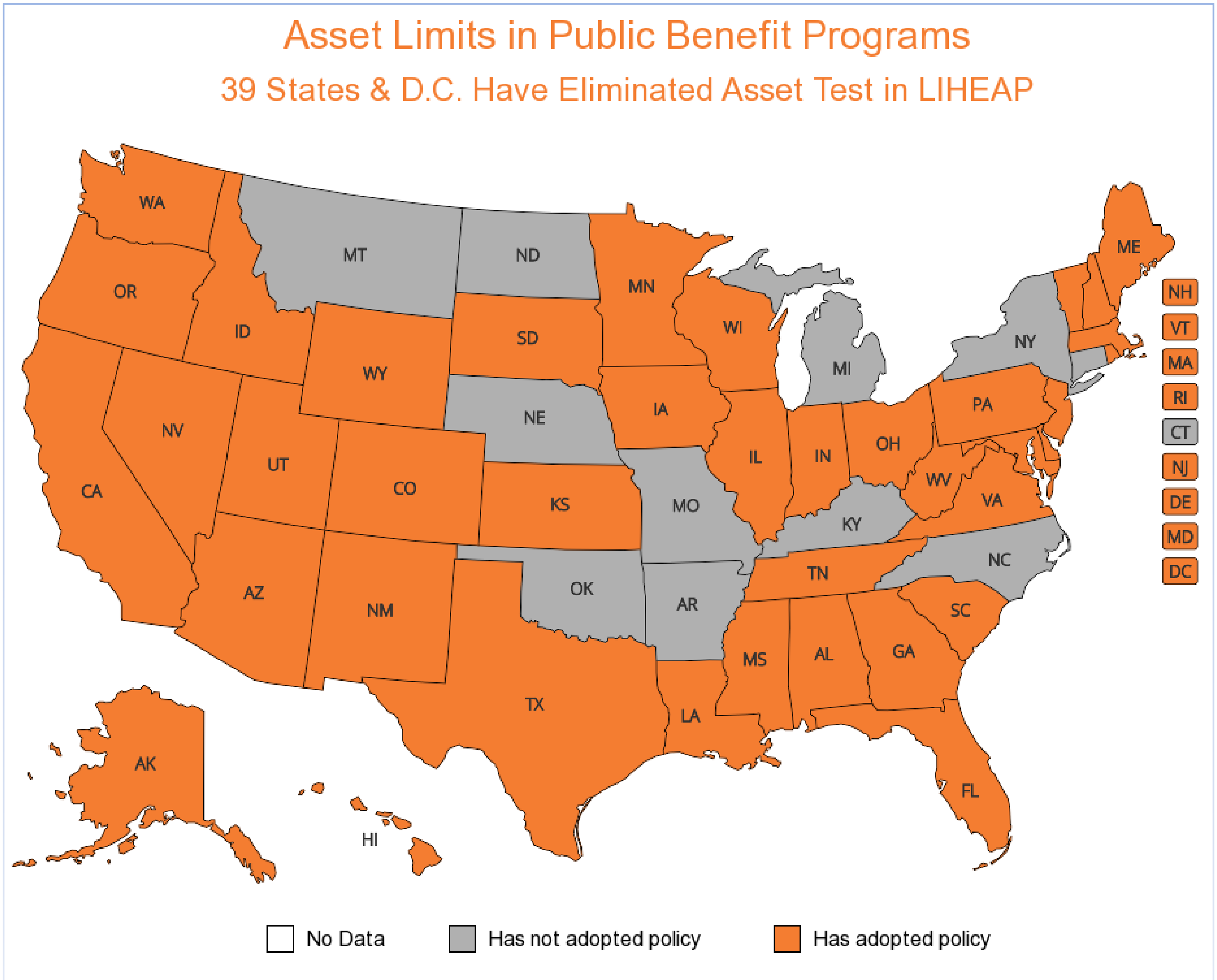
Conclusion

This dissertation is motivated by the ideas of fairness and equity. This study, like other research on strategies for reducing inequality, focuses on evaluating policies and interventions designed to improve life chances for those at the bottom end of the inequality distribution. However, the main goal of this dissertation is to move the conversation about poverty and inequality away from discussions about the causes of inequality. The purpose of this study is shift the narrative toward a more comprehensive investigation of the impact of inequality on socioeconomic wellbeing. This dissertation highlights some of the often invisible social mechanisms such as transportation that shape individuals' lived experiences. By focusing on the barriers to program participation, this chapter of the dissertation lays out some new ways of thinking about social service provision. The strategies proposed in this chapter are designed to improve access to the programs and also improve the overall economic status of the individuals participating in the programs. The findings presented in this dissertation contribute to the literature on place and poverty. However, this study also calls for more research on the ways that disinvestments in transportation may be making access to safety nets difficult, thereby, further contributing to the increases in poverty and inequality. This study also calls for additional research on the interaction between religious institutions and social service provision. In order to reduce poverty and inequality, the social safety nets must be provided in communities that have public infrastructures that are conducive to social service access.

Figure 1.1 Gini Coefficients for Households, 1967-2010

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

Figure 2.1 States With Assets Limits for LIHEAP



Source: Corporation for Enterprise Development Website 2016

Figure 3.1 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes, 2003

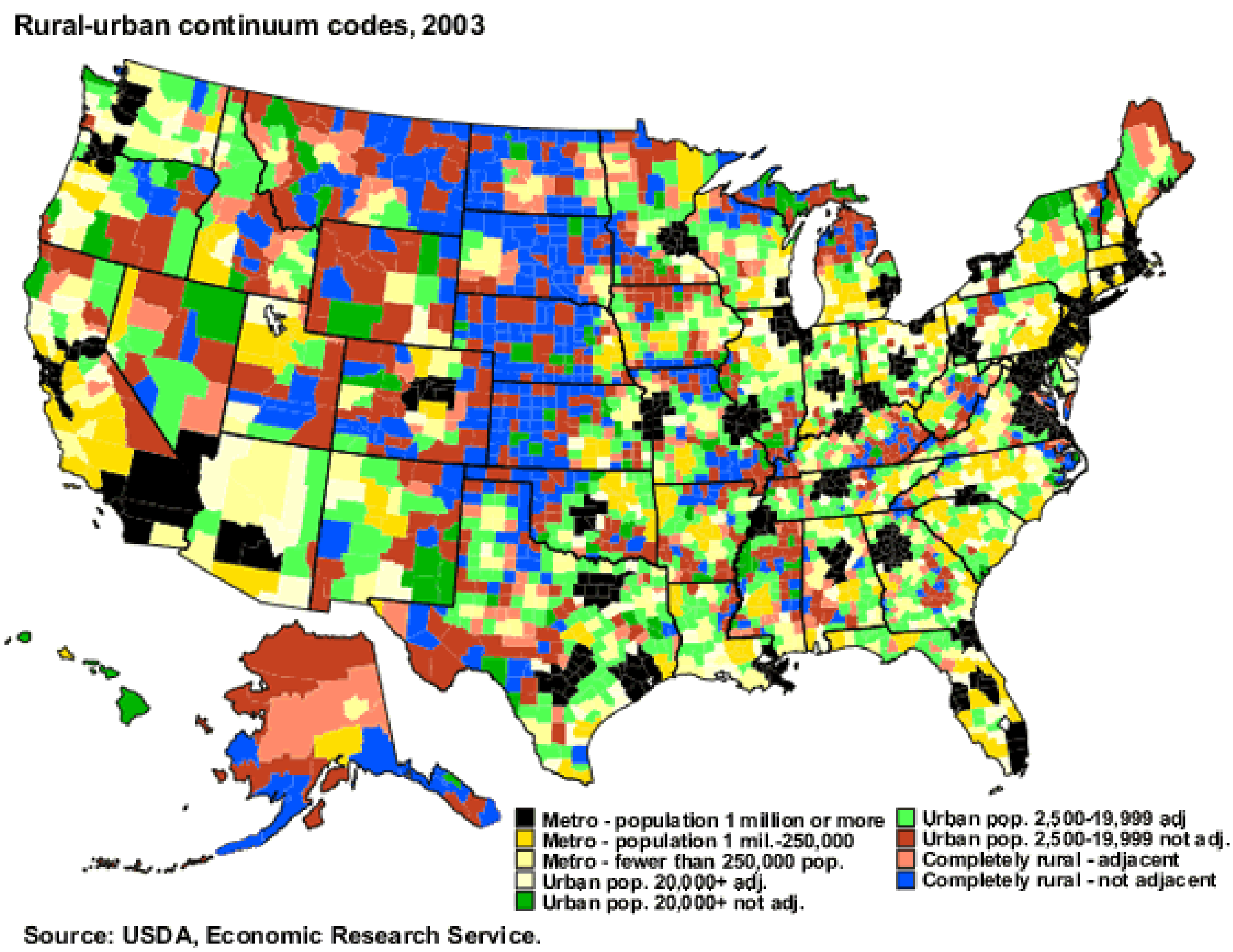
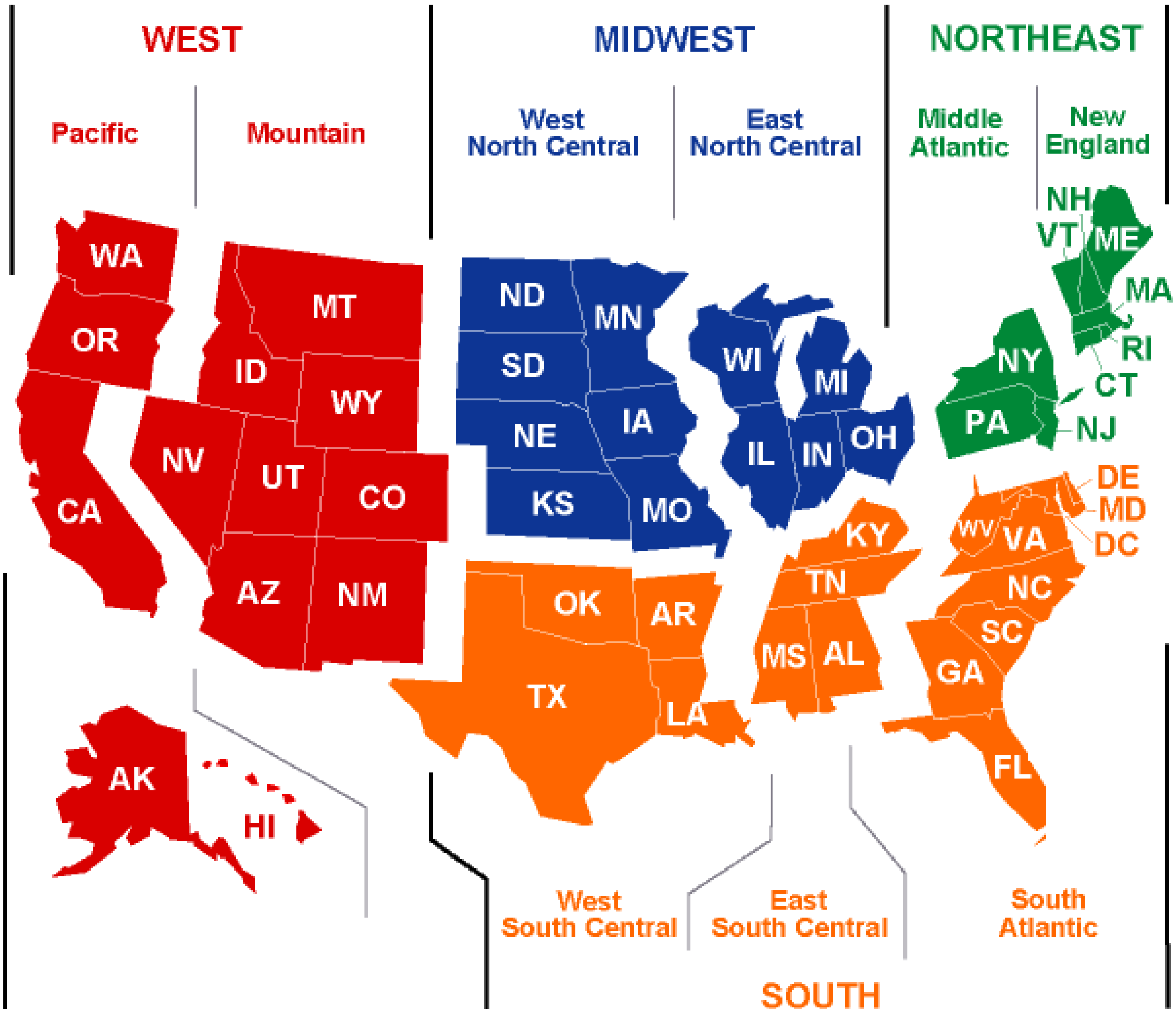


Figure 3.2 Census Region Map With Codes



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The regions were coded as follows:

1. West Pacific
2. West Mountain
3. Midwest West North Central
4. Midwest East North Central
5. Northeast Middle Atlantic
6. Northeast New England
7. South South Atlantic
8. South East South Central
9. South West South Central

Figure 3.3 Funding Structure for Head Start

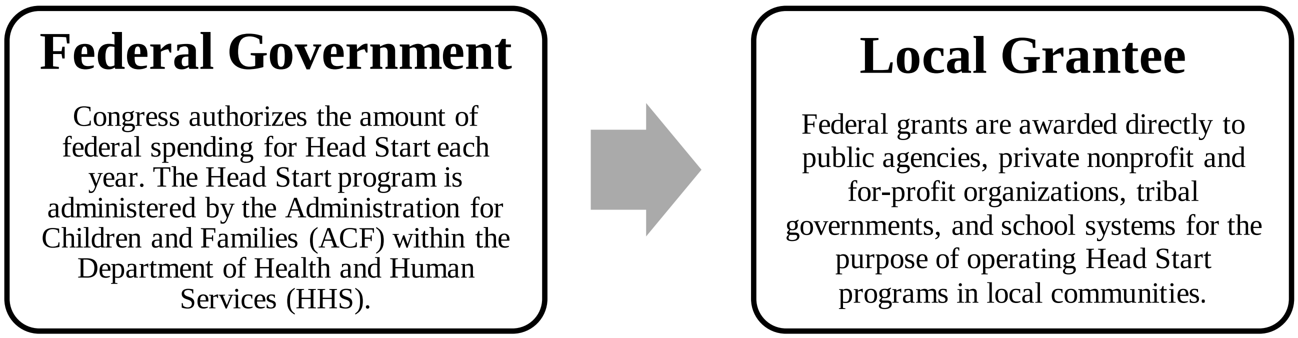


Figure 3.4 Funding Structure LIHEAP

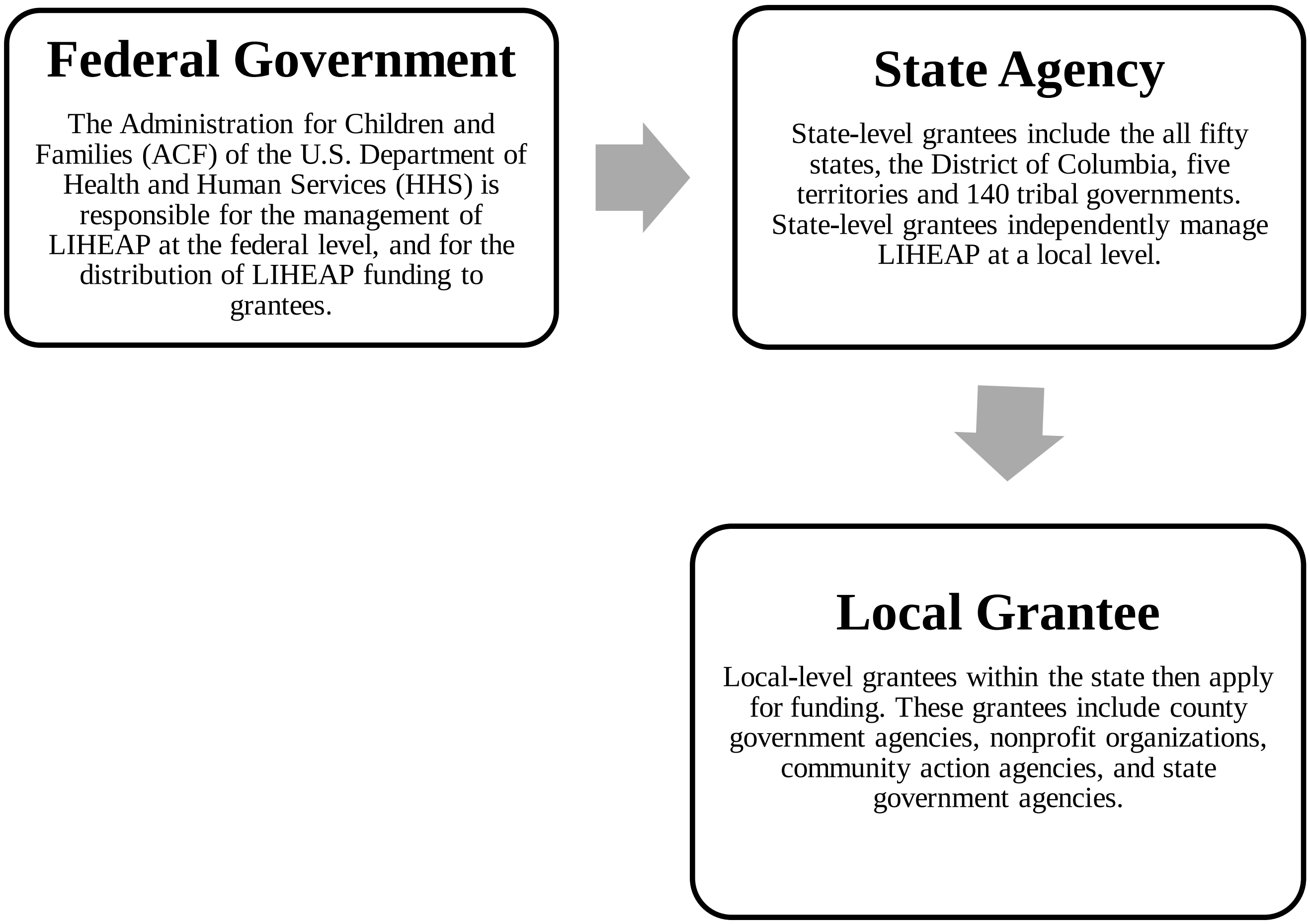


Figure 5.1 Keyword Summary of Interview Responses

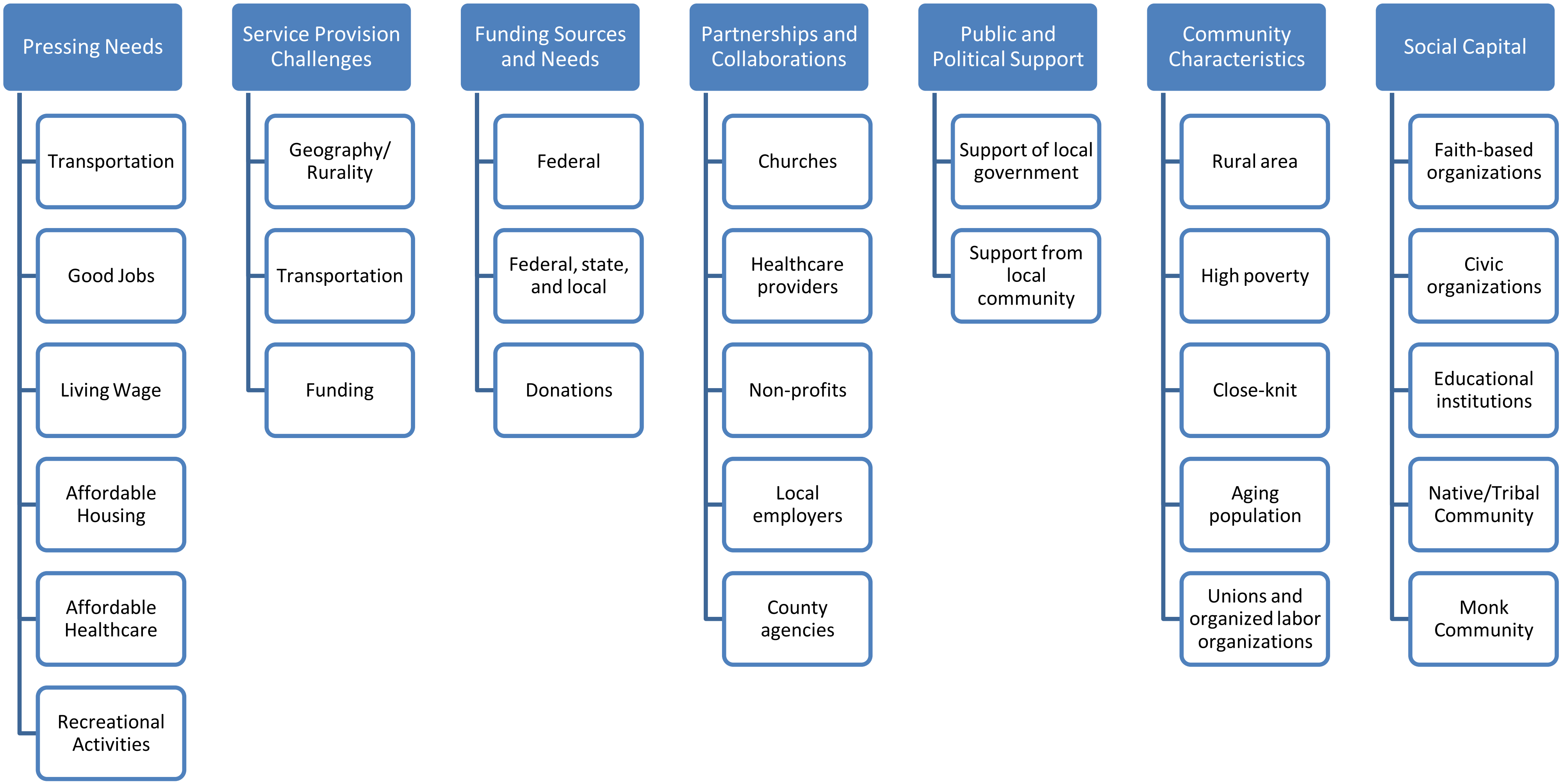


Table 2.1 Forms of County Government by Percentage in the United States, 2002

County manager	County Executive	Commission
12.2	15.7	72.1

Source: The Municipal Year Book, 2003

Table 2.2 Percentage of County Government Forms Within Regions

Region	County Manager	County Executive	Commission	Count
Northeast	10.8%	27.8%	61.3%	194
Midwest	6.4%	11.1%	82.5%	1,054
South	15%	17.3%	67.7%	1,379
West	17.2%	15.7%	67.2%	408

Source: The Municipal Year Book, 2003

Table 2.3 State Asset Limit Descriptions for LIHEAP

State	Asset Limit Description
Arkansas	$3,000 assets limit for all households, regardless of size, if at least one member is 60 years or older. $2,000 limit for all other households, regardless of size.
Connecticut	$10,000 limit in liquid assets for homeowners, $7,000 for others.
Kentucky	$2,000 in liquid resources; $3,000 if the household has a member 60 or older or disabled; $4,000 for a household with a member that has a catastrophic illness if those assets are used for medical and living expenses.
Michigan	Asset test with special exemptions for persons who are deaf, disabled or blind, and qualified disabled veterans.
Missouri	$3,000 in assets per household: $100 medical deduction automatically given to households in which the applicant or spouse is elderly (age 65 or older) or disabled.
Montana	$10,769 for a single person household; $16,157 for a 2 person household; add $1,077 per additional member up to $21,542.
Nebraska	Resource limit is $5,000. Resources that are counted include cash, checking and savings accounts, time certificates, CD's, stocks, bonds and property other than your home.
New York	$2,000 assets limit for crisis assistance; $3,000 if the household has a member over 60 years.
North Carolina	$2,200 assets limit.
North Dakota	$10,000 allowed for assets with an additional $5,000 for each household member 60 years and over.
Oklahoma	$2,000 Assets limit for a one person household or $3,000 for a two person household; add $50 for each additional person in the household.

Source: LIHEAP Clearinghouse, 2015

Table 3.1 2003 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes

Code	Type	Description
1	Metro	Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
2	Metro	Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
3	Metro	Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
4	Non-Metro	Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
5	Non-Metro	Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area
6	Non-Metro	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area
7	Non-Metro	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area
8	Non-Metro	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area
9	Non-Metro	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area

Source: US Department of Agriculture, 2003

Table 3.2 Observed Categories for Head Start Program Structure

Category Code	Category Description
0	Does NOT have a Head Start program
1	Community Action Agency
2	School System
3	Tribal Government or Consortium
4	Private/Public Non-Profit
5	Private/Public For-Profit
6	Charter School
7	Government Agency
8	Multiple Grantees

Table 3.3 Observed Categories for LIHEAP Program Structure

Category Code	Category Description
1	Single County Agency
2	Multi-County Agency
3	Nonprofit/CAA
4	State Agency
5	County/Nonprofit Collaboration

Table 3.4 Observed Categories for LIHEAP Program Content

Category Code	Category Description
0	Does not have any restrictions
1	Has one of the following restrictions: a. An assets test/asset limit b. Does not have expedited or automatic eligibility c. Does not have an online application d. Has some other program requirement
2	Has two of the above restrictions
3	Has three of the above restrictions
4	Has all of the above restrictions

Table 3.5 Observed Categories for Head Start Program Content

Category Code	Category Description
0	Does not have any restrictions
1	Has one of the following restrictions: a. Does not have an online application b. Does not meet five days a week; for at least 50% of enrollees c. Does not use high-quality, center-based curriculum d. Does not provide transportation
2	Has two of the above restrictions
3	Has three of the above restrictions
4	Has all of the above restrictions

Table 3.6 Variable Descriptions and Data Sources

Variable	Description	Data Source	Years
Annual Poverty Rate	Percent of people who were in poverty in a calendar year.	Data from U.S. Census Bureau; Small Area Estimates	1997-2009
Unemployment Rate	Percent of the labor force that is unemployed	Data from Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics	1996-2010
Median Household Income	Median household income per county	Data from U.S. Census Bureau; Small Area Estimates	1997-2009
Economic Inequality	County-level Gini coefficient	Data from U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Figures	1990, 2000, 2010 1996=1990 Reported Data
Population 18 and under	Percent of population 18 years old and under	Data from U.S. Census Bureau	1996-2010
Population 65 years old and over	Percent of population 65 years old and over	Data from U.S. Census Bureau	1996-2010
Size of the population	Population total for the county	Data from U.S. Census Bureau	1996-2010
African American Population	Percent of black residents in each county	Data from U.S. Census Bureau	1996-2010
Hispanic Population	Percent of Hispanic residents in each county	Data from U.S. Census Bureau	1996-2010
Educational Attainment	Percent of the population age 25 and over with a bachelor’s degree or higher	Data from U.S. Census Bureau; Decennial Figures	1990, 2000, 2010 1996=1990 Reported Data
Female-headed households	Percent of Female-headed households	Data from U.S. Census Bureau; Decennial Figures	2000, 2010
County Partisanship	County’s ideological majority during a presidential election year	Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections	1996, 2000, 2004, 2008

Table 3.7 Characteristics of the Counties Selected for In-Depth Interviews

County	Government Structure	Program(s) Administered	Program Structure	RUCC	Census Region
CO1	Administrator	Head Start	School System	1	South Atlantic
CO2	Administrator	Head Start	Private/Public Non-Profit	2	South West South Central
CO3	Executive	Head Start	CAA	3	Northeast Middle Atlantic
CO4	Commission	LIHEAP	State Agency	7	West Mountain
CO5	Administrator	LIHEAP	County Agency	4	Northeast Middle Atlantic
CO6	Commission	LIHEAP	CAA	2	South East South Central South West
CO7	Executive	Both	CAA	7	South Central Northeast
CO8	Executive	Both	CAA	6	Middle Atlantic
CO9	Commission	Both	Tribal Government	4	West Pacific

Table 4.1 Distribution of Government Structures Across Study Sample

Government Structure	Frequency	Percent
Commission	92	37.9
Administrator	96	39.5
Executive	24	9.9
Abolished	2	.8
Other	29	11.9
Total	243	100.0

Table 4.2 Distribution of Government Structures Across Rural-Urban Categories

	Rural-Urban Continuum Code 2003								
Government Structure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Commission	10	7	10	10	7	13	9	14	12
	10.9%	7.6%	10.9%	10.9%	7.6%	14.1%	9.8%	15.2%	13.0%
Administrator	8	12	10	15	14	7	13	11	6
	8.3%	12.5%	10.4%	15.6%	14.6%	7.3%	13.5%	11.5%	6.3%
Executive	6	5	5	0	2	3	1	1	1
	25.0%	20.8%	20.8%	0.0%	8.3%	12.5%	4.2%	4.2%	4.2%
Abolished	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	3	3	3	1	3	5	4	1	6
	10.3%	10.3%	10.3%	3.4%	10.3%	17.2%	13.8%	3.4%	20.7%
Total	27	28	29	26	26	28	27	27	25
	11.1%	11.5%	11.9%	10.7%	10.7%	11.5%	11.1%	11.1%	10.3%

Table 4.3 Distribution of Government Structures Across Census Region Codes

	Census Region Code								
Government Structure	1.0	2.0	3.0	4.0	5.0	6.0	7.0	8.0	9.0
Commission	8	14	21	12	6	5	2	6	18
	8.7%	15.2%	22.8%	13.0%	6.5%	5.4%	2.2%	6.5%	19.6%
Administrator	13	13	5	9	14	10	21	9	2
	13.5%	13.5%	5.2%	9.4%	14.6%	10.4%	21.9%	9.4%	2.1%
Executive	2	0	0	1	7	1	2	4	7
	8.3%	0.0%	0.0%	4.2%	29.2%	4.2%	8.3%	16.7%	29.2%
Abolished	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	4	0	1	5	0	9	2	8	0
	13.8%	0.0%	3.4%	17.2%	0.0%	31.0%	6.9%	27.6%	0.0%
Total	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27
	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%

Table 4.4 Descriptive Statistics for LIHEAP Program Structure by Government Structure

Government Structure	LIHEAP Program Structure				
	Single County	Multi County	Non-Profit/CAA	State	County/ Non-Profit
Commission	26.1% (24)	0% (0)	65.2% (60)	7.6% (7)	1.1% (1)
Administrator	36.5% (35)	6.3% (6)	55.2% (53)	1% (1)	1% (1)
Executive	20.8% (5)	0% (0)	70.8% (17)	0% (0)	8.3% (2)
Abolished	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Other	10.3% (3)	0% (0)	75.9% (22)	13.8% (4)	0% (0)

Row count in parentheses.
*p=.003

Table 4.5 Descriptive Statistics for Head Start Program Structure by Government Structure

Government Structure	Head Start Program Structure						
	CAA	School System	Tribal Government	Private/Public Non-profit	Government Agency	Multiple Grantees	No Head Start Program
Commission	52.2%	7.6%	0%	26.1%	5.4%	6.5%	2.2%
	(48)	(7)	(0)	(24)	(5)	(6)	(2)
Administrator	50%	6.3%	0%	35.4%	4.2%	2.1%	2.1%
	(48)	(6)	(0)	(34)	(4)	(2)	(2)
Executive	50%	8.3%	0%	33.3%	0%	8.3%	0%
	(12)	(2)	(0)	(8)	(0)	(2)	(0)
Abolished	50%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%	0%
	(1)	(0)	(0)	(1)	(0)	(0)	(0)
Other	51.7%	13.8%	10.3%	13.8%	0%	6.9%	3.4%
	(15)	(4)	(3)	(4)	(0)	(2)	(1)

Row count in parentheses.
p=.206

Table 4.6 Descriptive Statistics for LIHEAP Program Structure by RUCC Category

	LIHEAP PROGRAM STRUCTURE				
RUCC Category	Single County	Multi County	Non-Profit/ CAA	State	County/ Non-Profit
1	25.9%	0%	74.1%	0%	0%
	(7)	(0)	(20)	(0)	(0)
2	28.6%	0%	67.9%	3.6%	0%
	(8)	(0)	(19)	(1)	(0)
3	10.3%	3.4%	75.9%	3.4%	6.9%
	(3)	(1)	(22)	(1)	(2)
4	23.1%	0%	76.9%	0%	0%
	(6)	(0)	(20)	(0)	(0)
5	26.9%	7.7%	50%	11.5%	3.8%
	(7)	(2)	(13)	(3)	(1)
6	32.1%	3.6%	57.1%	7.1%	0%
	(9)	(1)	(16)	(2)	(0)
7	33.3%	0%	55.6%	11.1%	0%
	(9)	(0)	(15)	(3)	(0)
8	22.2%	3.7%	66.7%	3.7%	3.7%
	(6)	(1)	(18)	(1)	(1)
9	48%	4%	44%	4%	0%
	(12)	(1)	(11)	(1)	(0)

Row count in parentheses.
p=.211

Table 4.7 Descriptive Statistics for Head Start Program Structure by RUCC Category

	HEAD START PROGRAM STRUCTURE						
RUCC Category	No Head Start Program	CAA	School System	Tribal Government	Private/Public Non-profit	Government Agency	Multiple Grantees
1	3.7%	55.6%	11.1%	0	14.8%	11.1%	3.7%
	(1)	(15)	(3)	(0%)	(4)	(3)	(1)
2	0%	53.6%	14.3%	0	25%	0%	7.1%
	(0)	(15)	(4)	(0%)	(7)	(0)	(2)
3	0%	51.7%	0%	0%	34.5%	6.9%	6.9%
	(0)	(15)	(0)	(0)	(10)	(2)	(2)
4	0%	57.7%	3.8%	0%	34.6%	0%	3.8%
	(0)	(15)	(1)	(0)	(9)	(0)	(1)
5	0%	46.2%	15.4%	3.8%	19.2%	0%	15.4%
	(0)	(12)	(4)	(1)	(5)	(0)	(4)
6	3.6%	50%	3.6%	0%	35.7%	7.1%	0%
	(1)	(14)	(1)	(0)	(10)	(2)	(0)
7	0%	33.3%	14.8%	3.7%	44.4%	0%	3.7%
	(0)	(9)	(4)	(1)	(12)	(0)	(1)
8	3.7%	48.1%	3.7%	0%	37%	3.7%	3.7%
	(1)	(13)	(1)	(0)	(10)	(1)	(1)
9	8%	64%	4%	4%	16%	4%	0%
	(2)	(16)	(1)	(1)	(4)	(1)	(0)

Row count in parentheses.
p=.166

Table 4.8 Changes in mean (SD) Head Start funding for Administrator and Commission Governments

Year	Administrator M (SD)	Commission M (SD)	*t*	*p*
2010	8.64 (20.32)	5.56 (9.64)	1.23	0.22
2009	9.60 (21.25)	6.60 (11.54)	1.11	0.27
2008	8.25 (19.37)	3.40 (3.79)	1.90	0.60
2007	8.02 (17.74)	5.19 (8.90)	1.28	0.20
2006	7.44 (16.30)	4.32 (6.62)	1.60	0.11
2005	7.70 (15.66)	4.87 (8.80)	1.43	0.15
2004	7.26* (13.24)	4.53* (6.45)	1.68	0.09
2003	6.82 (12.40)	4.55 (8.33)	1.39	0.17
2002	7.25* (12.92)	4.57* (7.25)	1.64	0.10
2001	7.30 (15.19)	4.36 (6.28)	1.61	0.11
2000	4.55 (9.48)	2.71 (3.90)	1.62	0.11
1999	4.83 (8.67)	3.19 (4.99)	1.50	0.14
1998	4.49 (8.074)	2.93 (4.45)	1.53	0.13
1997	4.18 (7.70)	2.89 (4.56)	1.30	0.20
1996	3.65 (6.95)	2.49 (4.11)	1.29	0.20

M and SD expressed in millions.
* p < .10
** p < .05
*** p < .01

Table 4.9 Changes in mean (SD) LIHEAP funding for Administrator and Commission Governments

Year	Administrator M (SD)	Commission M (SD)	*t*	*p*
2010	1.88 (2.11)	1.45 (3.37)	1.02	0.31
2009	1.99 (2.31)	1.51 (3.65)	1.04	0.30
2008	1.05 (1.35)	0.82 (2.15)	0.85	0.40
2007	8.57 (1.06)	0.66 (1.61)	0.94	0.35
2006	1.16 (1.32)	8.67 (2.02)	0.87	0.26
2005	8.72 (1.06)	0.66 (1.60)	0.93	0.30
2004	0.74 (0.91)	0.57 (1.40)	0.97	0.35
2003	0.80 (1.00)	0.61 (1.49)	0.89	0.33
2002	0.69 (0.91)	0.52 (1.20)	0.71	0.27
2001	0.72 (0.89)	0.55 (1.34)	0.95	0.34
2000	0.77 (1.00)	0.58 (1.55)	0.84	0.34
1999	0.48 (0.58)	0.37 (0.92)	0.97	0.37
1998	0.42 (0.49)	0.37 (0.92)	0.82	0.28
1997	0.46 (0.59)	0.36 (0.83)	0.89	0.34
1996	0.42 (0.33)	0.52 (0.78)	0.99	0.35

M and SD expressed in millions.
* $p < .10$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$

Table 4.10 Changes in mean (SD) Head Start funding for Executive and Commission Governments

Year	Executive M (SD)	Commission M (SD)	*t*	*p*
2010	6.97 (6.95)	5.56 (9.64)	0.64	0.52
2009	8.27 (8.37)	6.60 (11.54)	0.62	0.54
2008	6.12** (6.51)	3.40** (3.79)	1.95	0.05
2007	6.45 (5.78)	5.19 (8.90)	0.62	0.54
2006	6.16 (5.33)	4.32 (6.62)	1.20	0.23
2005	6.82 (6.21)	4.87 (8.79)	0.97	0.33
2004	7.04 (6.62)	4.53 (6.45)	1.58	0.12
2003	6.81 (7.04)	4.55 (8.33)	1.14	0.26
2002	6.68 (5.76)	4.57 (7.25)	1.23	0.22
2001	6..04 (5.00)	4.36 (6.28)	1.13	0.26
2000	3.96 (2.71)	3.19 (3.89)	1.39	0.17
1999	4.88 (5.00)	3.19 (5.00)	1.41	0.16
1998	5.14** (4.68)	2.93** (4.45)	2.03	0.05
1997	4.49 (2.89)	4.19 (4.56)	1.49	0.14
1996	3.87 (3.74)	2.49 (4.11)	1.41	0.16

M and SD expressed in millions.
* p < .10
** p < .05
*** p < .01

Table 4.11 Changes in mean (SD) LIHEAP funding for Executive and Commission Governments

Year	Executive M (SD)	Commission M (SD)	*t*	*p*
2010	7.06*** (13.52)	1.45*** (3.37)	3.57	0.001
2009	6.99*** (13.42)	1.51*** (3.65)	3.45	0.001
2008	4.26*** (8.70)	0.82*** (2.15)	3.41	0.001
2007	3.28*** (6.44)	0.66*** (1.61)	3.49	0.001
2006	4.34*** (8.74)	0.87*** (2.02)	3.47	0.001
2005	3.38*** (6.81)	0.66*** (1.60)	3.48	0.001
2004	2.99*** (6.00)	0.57*** (1.39)	3.51	0.001
2003	3.17*** (6.39)	0.61*** (1.50)	3.50	0.001
2002	2.75*** (5.66)	0.52*** (1.20)	3.50	0.001
2001	2.90*** (5.83)	0.55*** (1.34)	3.51	0.001
2000	3.16*** (6.47)	0.58*** (1.55)	3.50	0.001
1999	2.00*** (4.08)	0.37*** (0.92)	3.50	0.001
1998	1.55*** (3.00)	0.37*** (0.92)	3.58	0.001
1997	1.81*** (3.64)	0.36*** (0.83)	3.50	0.001
1996	1.69*** (3.35)	0.52*** (0.78)	3.54	0.001

M and SD expressed in millions.

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

*** $p < .01$

Table 4.12 Descriptive Statistics for LIHEAP Program Restrictions by Government Structure

Government Structure	LIHEAP Program Content			
	No Restrictions	One Restriction	Two Restrictions	Three Restrictions
Commission	14.1% (13)	52.2% (48)	32.6% (30)	1.1% (1)
Administrator	10.4% (10)	60.4% (58)	26% (25)	3.1% (3)
Executive	4.2% (1)	41.7% (10)	50% (12)	4.2% (1)
Abolished	0% (0)	100% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Other	0% (0)	51.7% (15)	48.3% (14)	0% (0)

Row count in parentheses.
p=.126

Table 4.13 Descriptive Statistics for Head Start Program Restrictions by Government Structure

Government Structure	Head Start Program Content			
	No Restrictions	One Restriction	Two Restrictions	Three Restrictions
Commission	6.5% (6)	39.1% (36)	46.7% (43)	7.6% (7)
Administrator	11.5% (11)	50% (48)	33.3% (32)	5.2% (5)
Executive	29.2% (7)	45.8% (11)	25% (6)	0% (0)
Abolished	100% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Other	10.3% (3)	27.6% (8)	48.3% (14)	13.8% (4)

Row count in parentheses.
$p=.005$

Table 4.14 Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Head Start Program Structure

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Government Structure								
Commission	-.539	.460	1.374	1	.241	.583	.237	1437
Administrator	-1.026**	.481	4.550	1	.033	.359	.140	.920
Executive	-.868	.669	1.681	1	.195	.420	.113	1.559
Government Structure * Inequality								
Commission	2.469	4.972	.247	1	.620	11.808	.001	201534.528
Administrator	-2.682**	1.165	5.299	1	.021	.068	.007	.671
Executive	-2.202	1.567	1.973	1	.160	.111	.005	2.387

* $p < .10$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$

Table 4.15 Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting LIHEAP Program Structure

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Government Structure								
Commission	.604	.482	1.567	1	.211	1.829	.711	4.704
Administrator	1.023**	.476	4.618	1	.032	2.782	1.094	7.072
Executive	.344	.622	.308	1	.579	1.412	.418	4.772
Government Structure * Inequality								
Commission	-12.038***	3.929	9.390	1	.002	5.912E-6	2.678E-9	.013
Administrator	3.388***	1.282	6.980	1	.008	29.596	2.398	365.304
Executive	1.749	1.621	1.164	1	.281	5.748	.240	137.815

* $p < .10$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$

Table 4.16 Summary Table for the One-Way ANCOVA for Head Start Program Funding

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	95% Wald CI	
						Lower	Upper
Government Structure							
Commission	1406195.201***	226593.112	38.512	1	.000	962080.862	1850309.539
Administrator	3906456.779***	405167.287	92.960	1	.000	3112343.488	4700570.070
Executive	3191227.265***	333885.877	91.352	1	.000	2536822.972	3845631.559
Government Structure * Inequality							
Commission	49202915.347***	14237736.640	11.943	1	.001	21297464.311	77108366.383
Administrator	6808134.804***	2053079.276	10.996	1	.001	2784173.367	10832096.242
Executive	3005855.464*	1772322.769	2.876	1	.090	-467833.331	6479544.259

* p < .10
** p < .05
*** p < .01

Table 4.17 Summary Table for the One-Way ANCOVA for LIHEAP Funding

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	95% Wald CI	
						Lower	Upper
Government Structure							
Commission	-9072.530	65596.183	.019	1	.890	-137638.682	119493.629
Administrator	199214.082***	54656.501	13.285	1	.000	92089.304	306338.851
Executive	2736240.323***	413882.035	43.707	1	.000	1925046.438	3547434.204
Government Structure * Inequality							
Commission	2640333.218	2286883.989	1.333	1	.248	-1841877.038	7122543.474
Administrator	396340.248	355939.538	1.240	1	.265	-301288.427	1093968.922
Executive	7246206.033***	2576171.419	7.912	1	.005	2196996.953	12295415.113

* p < .10
** p < .05
*** p < .01

Table 4.18 Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Head Start Program Content

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Program Content								
Three Restriction	-2.301***	.445	26.733	1	.000	.100	.042	.240
Two Restrictions	.244	.379	.415	1	.520	1.277	.607	2.685
One Restriction	2.511***	.447	31.550	1	.000	12.318	5.129	29.585
Government Structure								
Commission	.064	.427	.023	1	.881	1.066	.462	2.461
Administrator	.646	.430	2.263	1	.133	1.908	.822	4.429
Executive	1.515***	.568	7.112	1	.008	4.549	1.494	13.851
Government Structure * Inequality								
Program Content								
Three Restriction	-1.873	1.329	1.987	1	.159	.154	.011	2.078
Two Restrictions	.740	1.285	.322	1	.564	2.097	.169	25.994
One Restriction	3.049**	1.298	5.517	1	.019	21.093	1.656	268.608
Government Structure								
Commission	1.316	3.030	.189	1	.664	3.729	.010	1415.656
Administrator	1.810*	1.039	3.036	1	.081	6.111	.798	46.815
Executive	3.383**	1.337	6.404	1	.011	29.462	2.144	404.766

* $p < .10$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$

Table 4.19 Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting LIHEAP Program Content

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio Lower	Upper
Program Content								
Three Restriction	-3.428***	.488	49.270	1	.000	.032	.012	.084
Two Restrictions	-.119	.309	.149	1	.700	.888	.484	1.628
One Restriction	2.755***	.339	65.963	1	.000	15.722	8.087	30.568
Government Structure								
Commission	.675*	.368	3.372	1	.066	1.965	.956	4.040
Administrator	.705*	.361	3.803	1	.051	2.023	.996	4.107
Executive	-.294	.494	.353	1	.552	.746	.283	1.964
Government Structure * Inequality								
Program Content								
Three Restriction	-7.365***	1.558	22.340		.000	.001	2.988E-5	.013
Two Restrictions	-4.016***	1.437	7.809		.005	.018	.001	.301
One Restriction	-1.126	1.413	.635		.425	.324	.020	5.171
Government Structure								
Commission	-7.562**	3.411	4.913	1	.027	.001	6490E-7	.417
Administrator	2.148**	.872	6.066	1	.014	8.568	1.551	47.343
Executive	-.116	1.164	.010	1	.920	.890	.091	8.717

* p < .10
** p < .05
*** p < .01

Table 4.20 Logistic Regression Predicting LIHEAP Program Structure Choice

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Government Structure								
Commission	.423	.540	.613	1	.434	1.526	.530	4.398
Administrator	1.365**	.587	5.419	1	.020	3.918	1.241	12.368
Executive	.479	.795	.363	1	.547	1.615	.340	7.672
Annual Poverty Rate	-.064	.062	1.057	1	.304	.938	.831	1.059
Median Income	-2.810E-5	2.9755E-5	.892	1	.345	1.000	1.000	1.000
Unemployment Rate	-.016	.121	.017	1	.898	.985	.776	1.249
Elderly Population	-5.920E-6	.1.1241E-5	.277	1	.598	1.000	1.000	1.000
Black Population	2.681E-5*	1.4194E-5	3.567	1	.059	1.000	1.000	1.000
Hispanic Population	-7.590E-6	5.6950E-6	1.776	1	.183	1.000	1.000	1.000
Inequality	-3.133	5.279	.352	1	.553	.044	1.400E-6	1357.032
Education	-.009	.022	.170	1	.680	.991	.949	1.034
Female-headed Households	-.394***	.118	11.174	1	.001	.674	.535	.850
Partisanship (Democrat)	-.254	.375	.457	1	.499	.776	.372	1.619

* $p < .10$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$

Table 4.21 Logistic Regression Predicting Head Start Program Structure Choice

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Government Structure								
Commission	-.515	.492	1.098	1	.295	.597	.228	1.566
Administrator	-1.409**	.555	6.436	1	.011	.244	.082	.726
Executive	-1.263*	.717	3.101	1	.078	.283	.069	1.153
Annual Poverty Rate	.058	.054	1.148	1	.284	1.059	.953	1.177
Median Income	.1.158E-5	3.413E-5	.115	1	.735	1.000	1.000	1.000
Unemployment Rate	.238*	.128	3.465	1	.063	1.269	.987	1.630
Youth Population	4.057E-6	7.446E-6	.297	1	.586	1.000	1.000	1.000
Black Population	1.679E-6	1.4228E-5	.014	1	.906	1.000	1.000	1.000
Hispanic Population	2.143E-6	6.9125E-6	.096	1	.757	1.000	1.000	1.000
Inequality	-3.462	6.345	.298	1	.585	.031	1.246E-7	7892.949
Education	.068**	.029	5.562	1	.018	1.071	1.012	1.133
Female-headed Households	.091	.113	.647	1	.421	1.095	.878	1.366
Partisanship (Democrat)	-.448	.419	1.142	1	.285	.639	.281	1.452

* $p < .10$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$

Table 4.22 Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting LIHEAP Program Funding

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	95% Wald CI	
						Lower	Upper
Government Structure							
Commission	-37287.607	136869.552	.074	1	.785	-305546.999	230971.784
Administrator	-227030.543	149147.892	2.317	1	.128	-519355.041	65293.954
Executive	-243603.433	403326.961	.365	1	.546	-1034109.745	546902.888
Annual Poverty Rate	-12402.880	20785.489	.356	1	.551	-53141.689	28335.929
Median Income	8.703	15.664	.309	1	.578	-21.998	39.405
Unemployment Rate	-7510.529	37307.153	.041	1	.840	-80631.204	65610.146
Elderly Population	103.960***	23.927	18.878	1	.000	57.064	150.855
Black Population	-13.116	22.879	.329	1	.566	-57.958	31.725
Hispanic Population	-14.422	9.594	2.260	1	.133	-33.225	4.381
Inequality	1052090.647	1982234.493	.282	1	.596	-2833017.569	4937198.863
Education	-18995.458*	10585.386	3.220	1	.073	-39742.433	1751.517
Female-headed Households	78073.754	64500.132	1.465	1	.226	-48344.181	204491.690
Partisanship (Democrat)	281415.925*	162324.040	3.006	1	.083	-36733.347	599565.197

R^2= .705

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

*** $p < .01$

Table 4.23 Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Head Start Program Funding

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	95% Wald CI	
						Lower	Upper
Government Structure							
Commission	1503015.774*	801057.001	3.520	1	.061	-67027.098	3073058.646
Administrator	1872618.171*	1047392.596	3.197	1	.074	-180233.596	3925469.937
Executive	-558429.874	1052383.601	.282	1	.596		
Annual Poverty Rate	99637.855	154996.206	.413	1	.520	-204149.126	403424.836
Median Income	-45.491	66.905	.462	1	.497	-176.622	85.640
Unemployment Rate	-53580.723	219086.789	.060	1	.807	-482982.939	275821.493
Youth Population	-13.588	15.444	.774	1	.379	-43.858	16.681
Black Population	48.390	39.342	1.513	1	.219	-28.719	125.499
Hispanic Population	24.448	18.913	1.671	1	.196	-12.622	61.518
Inequality	7283841.747	10032478.970	.527	1	.468	-12379455.719	26947138.213
Education	44267.773	51158.470	.749	1	.387	-56000.986	144536.532
Female-headed Households	1305845.996**	530231.215	6.065	1	.014	266611.910	2345080.082
Partisanship (Democrat)	-770951.808	932896.856	.683	1	.409	-2599396.047	1057492.431

$R^2 = .228$

* $p < .10$

** $p < .05$

*** $p < .01$

Table 4.24 Results of Ordinal Regression Testing Explanatory Variable Effect on LIHEAP Program Content

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Program Content								
Three Restrictions	-6.037*	2.571	5.516	1	.019	.002	1.549E-5	.368
Two Restrictions	-2.654	2.462	1.162	1	.281	.070	.001	8.711
One Restriction	.407	2.478	.027	1	.870	1.502	.012	
Government Structure								
Commission	.784**	.397	3.904	1	.048	2.191	1.006	193.063
Administrator	.939**	.397	5.590	1	.018	2.558	1.174	4.770
Executive	.097	.552	.031	1	.860	1.102	.373	5.574
Annual Poverty Rate	-.022	.053	.170	1	.680	.978	.883	3.253
Median Income	9.615E-6	2.8337E-5	.115	1	.734	1.000	1.000	1.085
Unemployment Rate	-.028	.099	.081	1	.776	.972	.799	1.182
Elderly Population	-1.869E-5	1.3230E-5	1.996	1	.158	1.000	1.000	1.000
Black Population	1.338E-5	1.1491E-5	1.355	1	.244	1.000	1.000	1.000
Hispanic Population	8.616E-6*	4.9081E-6	3.082	1	.079	1.000	1.000	1.000
Inequality	-4.193	4.6449	.815	1	.367	.015	1.680E-6	135.753
Education	.016	.021	.574	1	.449	1.016	.975	1.058
Female-headed Households	-.187**	.087	4.648	1	.031	.829	.699	.983
Partisanship (Democrat)	.424	.333	1.617	1	.203	1.527	.795	2.934

* $p < .10$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$

Table 4.25 Results of Ordinal Regression Testing Explanatory Variable Effect on Head Start Program Content

Variables	*B*	SE	Wald	*df*	*p*	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Program Content								
Three Restrictions	-2.248	1.977	1.293	1	.256	.106	.002	5.090
Two Restrictions	.434	1.935	.050	1	.823	1.543	.035	68.404
One Restriction	2.801	1.951	2.063	1	.151	16.469	.360	753.163
Government Structure								
Commission	.384	.437	.773	1	.379	1.469	.624	3.459
Administrator	.903**	.436	4.294	1	.038	2.468	1.050	5.800
Executive	1.745***	.633	7.590	1	.006	5.726	1.655	19.816
Annual Poverty Rate	.006	.039	.021	1	.886	1.006	.931	1.086
Median Income	-5.387E-6	2.3717E-5	.052	1	.820	1.000	1.000	1.000
Unemployment Rate	-.055	.096	.334	1	.563	.946	.785	1.141
Elderly Population	-8.769E-6	5.8586E-6	2.240	1	.134	1.000	1.000	1.000
Black Population	7.934E-6	1.0701E-5	.550	1	.458	1.000	1.000	1.000
Hispanic Population	1.057E-6	5.2374E-6	.041	1	.840	1.000	1.000	1.000
Inequality	-1.951	3.868	.255	1	.614	.142	7.248E-5	278.512
Education	.005	.019	.068	1	.794	1.005	.968	1.044
Female-headed Households	.198*	.092	4.689	1	.030	1.219	1.019	1.459
Partisanship (Democrat)	-.058	.338	.029	1	.864	.944	.487	1.830

* $p < .10$
** $p < .05$
*** $p < .01$

Table 5.1 Other Factors Impacting Local Wellbeing

Responses
We have changed our eligibility criteria to accommodate the fact that grandparents now make up a lot of our primary caregivers. We have also started to focus on the needs of kids with incarcerated parents.
Many children and families in Arizona do not have health insurance and medical and dental problems lead to other issues that affect school and work performance.
The legal status is also a challenge. Some potential clients are undocumented and may resist accessing services because of fears of deportation.
Companies are laying employees off which affects local economies, social services, housing markets, etc.
Good paying jobs and homelessness, mental health, drugs and alcohol.
We do not have many licensed childcare facilities. So a parent may work on one side of the county, but travel across the county to a childcare facility.
These are counties with little manufacturing and have a very low tax base for the community. This becomes an issue with some programs that we offer that require a local match.
One of our programs has not had an increase in funding in four-years. We struggle with staff pay increases…
We also have differences with who are constituents see as the government. Some tribe members only recognize the tribe/tribal council as the government.

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Appendix A:

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date: __________________________________

Official/Agency Head Interviewed and County/State: ________________________________

Introductory Comments: I am a doctoral student in the Political Science Department at Auburn University. I would like to thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am conducting research on the factors that influence decision making at the county level. The purpose of this interview is to unfold the story of your role in the decision making process with regards to local social service provision. The interview will last approximately 1 ½ hours to 2 hours. Your participation is voluntary and you may stop the interview at any time. Please elaborate on specific details during the course of the interview. Please be honest, candid, and accurate as you respond to the questions. Are there any questions regarding the conditions of this interview?

Community Characteristics

- **What is the relationship between this county and the state/region?**
    - To what extent do the county residents feel a sense of responsibility and kinship with the county as a whole?
    - Does the county have leaders or institutions that have ties to the larger region (e.g., local unions with ties to regional/national counterparts)?

- **What are the physical characteristics of the county?**
    - What are the features of the local geography that influence the character of the county?
    - How does the physical location of the county limit opportunity for residents?
    - Is the county cut off from the wider region? If so, how?

Social Capital

- What civic or religious organizations or institutions are present in the county?
- What cultural institutions or beliefs are important in the county? What traditions, customs, and cultural resources help to create bonds among residents?

Questions for social service providers

- What is your role at *name of organization?* How long have you worked here?
- What are your major program areas and projects? What communities do you serve?
- How have you gone about identifying the needs of the county? What are the most pressing needs in the county?
- What are the major challenges you face in reaching residents in the county?
- To what extent has the mission of the organization changed in response to changing demographics and economics of the county?

- Where does your funding come from? *[Prompt: Does your current level of funding meet your programmatic needs? Would you be able to expand if you had access to more financial resources? What would you do differently? How would you expand?]*
- Do you partner with other organizations or participate in any collaborative services in the county? *[Prompt: Is there collaboration across public, corporate, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors in your* county*? Can you describe these efforts and their effectiveness? What limits or encourages collaboration?]*
- Is there coordination between service providers?
- What form does this coordination take (e.g., coordinated planning, funding, referrals)?
    - Is there duplication in services?
    - Are their geographic areas that are under-funded or over-funded?
    - Are there types of services that are under-funded or over-funded?
    - What improvement could be made for services providers to better coordinate?
- What is the level of public and political support for the work that you do?
- How do you think local government decisions with regards to social welfare funding affects your ability to serve poor families?
    - What are the barriers for receiving services (beyond implied financial issues)?

Appendix B:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

DEPARTMENT OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

(NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMED CONSENT
for a Research Study entitled
"Government Structure, Economic Inequality, and Social Safety Net Provision in US Counties"

You are invited to participate in a research study to explore the dynamics that impact social welfare spending at the county-level. The study is being conducted by Regina M. Moorer under the direction of Mitchell Brown and Kathleen Hale in the Auburn University Department of Political Science. You were selected as a possible participant because you are either an elected official or agency head in your county and are age 19 or older. You were also selected because you have first-hand knowledge of the political and/or administrative aspects of the county-level social safety net program structure and funding.

The purpose of this interview is to unfold the story of your role in the decision making process with regards to local social service provision. You will be asked questions regarding the economic and social issues impacting your county. You will also be asked about the relationships between policymakers and social service providers. Furthermore, this interview will touch on the social norms that may impact the local residents' perceptions of social safety net programs.

If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to participate in an audio recorded in-depth interview. Your total time commitment will be approximately 1 ½ hours to 2 hours. All audio recordings will be destroyed within two years after the successful defense of this research.

There are no known risks associated with participating in this interview. If you participate in this study, you should not expect to receive any compensation or other benefits. While you will not be mentioned by name in this dissertation, readers may be able to ascertain your identity.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the Department of Political Science.

Participant's initials ______ Page 1 of 2

Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement, published in a professional journal, or presented at a professional meeting.

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Regina Moorer at (334) 233-0319 or email at rmm0014@auburn.edu or Mitchell Brown at brown11@auburn.edu A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant's signature	Date	Investigator obtaining consent	Date
Printed Name		Printed Name	

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 3/19/15 to 3/18/16 Protocol # 15-091 EX 1503

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Appendix C:

QUALITATIVE RESPONSE TABLES

Table C.1 Pressing needs

County Codes and Responses
CO1 This is a very rural county and based on our community needs assessment and the feedback from our parents, there is a need for after school and recreational activities. The kids don't have fun activities unless they play sports. There is also a need for public transportation. We do not have public transportation.
CO2 The communities that we serve in Southern Arizona have very high levels of poverty. Tucson is our main service area and is the 6th poorest city in the nation. Many of the smaller communities we serve in rural areas have even larger percentages of families living in poverty. In addition, many children and families in Arizona do not have health insurance and medical and dental problems lead to other issues that affect school and work performance. As a Head Start grantee, we are required to conduct an annual community assessment in order to learn about the needs and resources in the communities that we serve.
CO3 Residents in this area need access to a living wage, affordable housing, and affordable healthcare.
CO4 Current funding level does not serve all eligible households in Wyoming. With the lowered funding levels, we have adjusted our maximum benefit levels down and we conduct very specifically targeted outreach to ensure we do not run out of funds in any given year.
CO5 Good paying jobs and homelessness, mental health, drugs and alcohol. We identify the needs as we see people come in to our agency. We require our employable recipients to look for work and attend the local employment One Stop Center where there are resources for employment and job readiness. We have been able to finding temporary housing by contracting with agencies to case manage homeless individuals to locate permanent housing. We require recipients to participate with mental health and drug and alcohol programs.
CO6 We are a rural, high-poverty county. Job opportunities and transportation are the most common barriers. Childcare is also a need. We do not have many licensed childcare facilities. So a parent may work on one side of the county, but travel across the county to a childcare facility.
CO7 Our agency performs an Annual Needs Assessment Survey that is given out to clients, board

members and partnering social service groups in each community. Crisis Intervention (utility assistance, food, shelter, clothing), Housing, Employment, Education all rank highest every year.

CO8
We complete a needs assessment every three-years and will begin the process in 2016. The most pressing needs in both Cayuga and Seneca Counties are adequate, affordable and safe housing as well as the need for public transportation.

CO9
Transportation is a major barrier. Most residents have to travel 30 miles to get to the grocery store. This is also an issue for Head Start because our bus rides cannot exceed one hour. Transportation does not really impact our LIHEAP program because the applications can be handled electronically or by mail.

Table C.2 Service provision challenges

County Codes and Responses
CO1 The rural nature of our county and the lack of public transportation makes our job difficult. We don't have taxis or other public transportation. Because this is a rural county, our families are so spread out and this makes transporting the kids very challenging. We have community stops, and that helps some. However, because of Head Start regulations, we are limited to how long our bus rides can be. This means that parents who do not have personal transportation rely on us transporting the kids to and from school. We have some children who have to drive a couple of miles to get to a community stop. Some of the kids also live down really long dirt roads and those roads are sometimes not even accessible by bus.
CO2 Geography is a major challenge. Our service area is very large and includes rural areas where families are spread out and often lack adequate transportation. In addition, making sure that families are aware of available services can be challenging as well as encouraging them to participate on a consistent basis.
CO3 Transportation is a challenge because my service area is largely rural. Communication is another challenge…can't presume our clients will have access to the internet. The legal status is also a challenge. Some potential clients are undocumented and may resist accessing services because of fears of deportation.
CO4 More funding would allow broader, more effective outreach to all eligible households in Wyoming and it would also allow us to transfer a higher percentage of LIHEAP funds to our Weatherization program. More funding would also afford us the opportunity to better assist eligible households by providing them with some education aimed at budgeting, energy cost/usage savings, etc. Put simply, we could do more to get more families on the road to self-sufficiency.
CO5 I don't know that we have any major challenges reaching residents that may qualify.
CO6 Since we are an extremely high-poverty county, most of the residents always meet the qualifications for our LIHEAP services, However, we do not always have enough funds to meet the needs. Also, our application process is handled in office only. Transportation is a challenge that hinders access. We do go to the senior centers to complete applications for assistance.
CO7 With our long time programs there aren't challenges, the clients know where to find us after 50 years. New programs we generally will have newspaper articles written and placed in the local papers to make people aware.

CO8
Transportation is a challenge because it may be difficult for individuals in the rural areas to access some of our services. We do have satellite sites throughout the county.

CO9
There are geographic and funding barriers. The Head Start funding process is more competitive for tribes now. The tribes does support the program with tribal resources. We could serve more people if we had more money. We also have differences with who are constituents see as the government. Some tribe members only recognize the tribe/tribal council as the government.

Table C.3 Funding Sources and Needs

County Codes and Responses
CO1 Our funding is primarily federal, but we have a mix of state and local funds as well. Our state funding comes for the North Carolina Pre-K initiative. Some of our classrooms are a mix of Head Start and NC Pre-K. The kids who qualify for NC Pre-K typically come from families that are over the income guidelines for Head Start. We have about 90 kids on our waiting list now. We have changed are eligibility criteria to accommodate the fact that grandparents now make up a lot of our primary caregivers. We have also started to focus on the needs of kids with incarcerated parents. We also have started a fatherhood initiative.
CO2 100% of our funding is federal funding to provide Head Start/Early Head Start services. The current level of funding does not support service to all of the families that qualify or wages that are commensurate to public school teachers or other similar jobs.
CO3 Our annual operating budget has typically included 51-55% of governmental sources (state, local and federal) - 54% in 2015. The state funds about 25% of our Head Start slots. The balance comes from earned income (rents when properties cash flow, interest earnings on loans - that support lending operations, private donations, United Ways and foundations). Clearly more funding would mean more services. We have just over 400 slots total -- to presume we could raise enough private funds to sustain the program is unrealistic.
CO4 Our LIEAP funding is 100% federal at this time. Current funding level does not serve all eligible households. With the lowered funding levels, we have adjusted our maximum benefit levels down and we conduct very specifically targeted outreach to ensure we do not run out of funds in any given year.
CO5 The program is 100% federally funded. I think we've done a good job with our internal policy and processes with the HEAP program. However, with an increase in funding I would most likely increase in HEAP benefits and staff.
CO6 Our funding comes from the federal government. We do get some funds for some activities from the local government. We could always do more with more money. We post announcements in the newspaper to recruit applicants. We could possibly move some of our recruitment online if we had more money. Right now, though, all of our funding is used for applicants and staffing and office maintenance.
CO7 Our funding structure is: Federal 45%, State 35%, Local 7% and Other 13%. There is never enough funding to meet all needs. With increased funding we could offer more life skills classes and provide education funds to get people a trade to be able to make a living wage.

Some counties are underfunded for local monies in their county. These are counties with little manufacturing and have a very low tax base for the community. This becomes an issue with some programs that we offer that require a local match.

CO8
Our funding comes from various sources. Federal 79.45%, this includes pass-through funds from State, County and City; School Districts 4.34%, Program Fees 7.15%, Donations 3.53%, Fundraising 4.78%, Other Revenue 4.78%. One of our programs has not had an increase in funding in four-years. We struggle with staff pay increases, offering programming to customers and marketing.

CO9
All of the funding for LIHEAP and Head Start comes from the federal government. The tribe does provide some support for both of our programs.

Table C.4 Partnerships and Collaborations

County Codes and Responses
CO1 We partner with the county health department. North Carolina also has the partnership for children and we work with them. We are also a part of the early learning collaborative. We try to get together with our partners to see how we can serve our parents better. We have a referral network.
CO2 We collaborate with many entities in the community. For example, we have agreements with all of our school districts to collaborate on services for children with special needs. We also collaborate with local health entities to provide dental screenings and other dental and health services. We work with our local community college and university for professional development for our employees as well as teacher training opportunities for college students.
CO3 It would be silly to say but collaboration is like our middle name. We have several MOU's in place with a variety of community partners. A local employer also donates their old computers to us and we give them to our Head Start families.
CO4 We contract with a non-profit to perform centralized application intake and processing for LIEAP. We also collaborate with local community partners across the state (such as Senior Centers, local DFS offices, Salvation Army offices, fuel suppliers, etc.) There is collaboration across public, corporate, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors as well.
CO5 We use a nonprofit to process HEAP applications. They are very effective in reaching out to eligible households as their agency works with low-income individuals and household. They provide many services that crossover to eligible HEAP household.
CO6 We collaborate with the school system, churches, and other agencies to provide referrals for the families that we serve. We also partner with county human resources to make sure that their families know when we have heating or cooling assistance available. We also rely on the churches to help us with announcements about available funds.
CO7 Head Start collaborates with doctors, dentist, health departments, our universities, and banks. PNC Bank is a huge asset that provides a book a month to every child (303). Additionally, they allow their employees to volunteer at one of our sites while on the clock with them. LIHEAP generally doesn’t have the collaboration while it is going on. Once it stops though, staff collaborates with every social service group and church to assist our clients.
CO8 We partner with both governmental and private entities. Our agency also uses a universal

referral application.

CO9
Our agency collaborates with a number of entities for Head Start. We have a partnership with the University of Oregon. Their student-teachers work with our Head Start programs. We also work with doctors and dentists; they go into our schools to see our students. With LIHEAP, we partner with the local agencies to provide referrals. We send our clients to agencies and the agencies send their clients to us as well. There is also a lot of local support for our programs like the parent GED program, the master gardener program. The Catholic high schools also provide tutors for our students.

Table 5.5 Public and Political Support

County Codes and Responses
CO1 We have the support of our superintendent and our board of education. Our county commissioners are also very supportive of all of our work. They all want more Head Start classrooms but we just do not have the space in our schools. We are breaking ground on a new school. That school won't be ready for another year and a half or two years. Since Head Start is not required, the board of education and the county commissioners have to take of what is required first and that is K-12. If the state passes this legislation that limits the size a class to 17-18 children, we may be pushed out of the schools because the kindergarten classes may need the space.
CO2 In general the state legislature in Arizona does not support early childhood and family education services or any type of social services. There are exceptions of course but the Arizona legislature is notorious for slashing critical prevention services that decrease future expenditures on things like prisons, remediation programs, and public assistance. In general, the citizens of Arizona support early childhood and family programs but not across the board. The elimination of services like basic health care for children and child care subsidies so parents can work has put a strain on all over services that remain available.
CO3 The public is very supportive of the work that we do. In terms of funding, the federal government takes care of our core needs. Our participants are not directly impacted by local government decisions. They are more impacted by the decisions made at the state level (like voter id laws). When we need emergency funding, we have individual donors and local foundations that are very supportive. We also have many community volunteers who fill the gaps where staffing may fall short.
CO4 There is great public support for the work I do. Political support tends to fluctuate over time. I don't know that local government decisions really affect LIEAP. State and Federal government decisions do affect our ability to serve poor families.
CO5 Our local politicians have been cooperative with our needs most of the time. Public support can go both ways depending on their position for welfare related programs. However, their decisions have not affected us in a negative way.
CO6 There is public and political support for our work. However, we mostly rely on the federal government for funds. Our county commission is able to provide some funding on a limited basis.
CO7 Many local governments want to deny there is a problem in their community. They don't

want programs to help with things like homelessness because it looks bad in their community. It is easier to deny the problem exists.

CO8
We have great support from our local government. The local government provides the "flow-through" dollars and if they are cutting their budget they often cut programming. Also at times, there are misconceptions related to the individuals we serve.

CO9
There is some support of our work. The tribe is very supportive. We do get some local support. The tribe does a good job supporting our cultural programs.

Table C.6 Community Characteristics

County Codes and Responses
CO1 We are a rural county and we do not have much in terms of retail shops and medical facilities. We do have one community college and many of our teachers are recruited from the community college.
CO2 Our organization is connected to the state and national Head Start associations. However, the rural areas have more difficulty with transportation issues to access services. In our urban areas, we attempt to locate our sites in close proximity to public transportation hubs.
CO3 Our service area has an aging population. Housing is an issue…quality, affordable housing. There has been an increase in poverty over the last few years. One of our major employers left the area, so the jobs also left. We are connected to the local university so they partner with us to give our students exposure to music and the arts.
CO4 Wyoming people pride themselves on being independent and individual and relate more to the Western region of the country. However, there is also a lot of patriotism among Wyoming residents. There is generally a dislike for Washington politics, though. The State does have leaders and institutions with ties to the larger region (AFLCIO, and so on). Wyoming is no different from other states in this respect. Wyoming's geography is diverse: mountainous, high plains, high desert, basins. And, the weather here can be very severe. This plays into the "toughness" that Wyoming people take pride in. Wyoming is also rich in minerals, oil and gas. This creates a boom/bust economy in some areas of the state. The current dropping gas and oil prices are having a negative impact on Wyoming. A large portion of State revenue comes from mineral and oil and gas taxes. So, budget cuts loom large right now. And, companies are laying employees off which affects local economies, social services, housing markets, etc. Some Wyoming regions have better access to the wider region than others: the southeast is close to Denver, CO; the southwest corner is close to Salt Lake City, UT; the northwest is close to Billings, MT. Many of the rural areas are cut off from the wider region. From my base location, it is a 6 hour drive to Cheyenne, Wyoming's capital. Wyoming folks travel great distances for items such as health care, affordable shopping, etc. Parts of the State have greater access to opportunity than others. Rural areas tend to have less access to opportunity.
CO5 We are mostly a rural county. We are also a long county and transportation can be an issue.
CO6 This is an extremely rural county. We are bordered by the interstate, and major US highway and two major state highways. Job opportunities are limited. We do have some factory and plant jobs. The only other jobs are county government and the county school system.

CO7

This is a tough one. In Kentucky, the state is viewed as three sections. Eastern KY that is known for coal mining, hillbillies and poverty, Western KY that is known for some mining, extremely rural and Central Kentucky that is a mix of rural and metro. We are in Central KY and my service area covers the city and the rural area.

CO8

We are located in Central New York and our state is often thought of as New York City and only that region. I do not believe most individuals look at the overall state and feel connected. Cayuga and Seneca counties represent two of the less populous and more rural counties in New York State. Both counties have population density well under the 2000 New York State estimated average of 402 persons per square mile. Both counties have slightly higher percentages of elderly than the state averages; this population group tends to have high levels of needs. Both counties have high rates of unemployment and below average income levels for New York State with over 12 percent of the population in these counties living on income below the poverty level. Level of need for health, nutrition, emergency assistance, employment and education are all high as a result. The housing stock in both counties is old, with a median age of 60+ years. This has implications for housing quality and energy usage. Over one-fifth of households are authorized for HEAP benefits. Issues of poverty are clearly evident, with high needs for nutrition programs, pre-natal services and school readiness and retention programs.

CO9

This is a very close-knit community. The people here have a lot of respect for tribal customs and practices. We work hard to make sure that those customs are acknowledged and honored in our classes.

Table C.7 Social Capital

County Codes and Responses
CO1 Most of our families have lived here all of their lives, so there are generational ties to the county and community. There are a couple of lion's clubs in the county also.
CO2 There is a wide variety of organizations in our service area, both civic and religious. Southern Arizona is in close proximity to the Mexican border and that is an example of cultural aspects that inform our service delivery (e.g. the need for bilingual staff members in those areas and sensitivity to acknowledgment of cultural family traditions).
CO3 We have a large faith community with many denominations. Some of our Head Start programs are based in churches. We also have a very engaged social service network—food pantries, clothes closets, and diaper drives. We have rotary clubs and other clubs. We also have other traditions related to our monk community. We do a lot to make sure we recognize the customs and cultural practices of the monks and Hispanics. We want all of kids to see their respective cultures represented in our classrooms.
CO4 There are many civic and religious organizations in Wyoming. A few examples include: Civic: YMCA; American Red Cross; SW-WRAP; Magic City Enterprises; Animal Shelters; American Legions; Habitat for Humanity; United Way; Salvation Army; Community Action agencies; UPLIFT; Boys and Girls clubs; Kiwanis; Elks; Serve Wyoming, Inc. Religious: Bethany Christian Services; Second Chance Ministries; Catholic Charities of Wyoming; Volunteers of America; Salvation Army; many local churches. Valued beliefs/cultural institutions in Wyoming: individualism; self-reliance; live and let live; agricultural/cowboy way; "cowboy up and cowgirl up"; western culture; hunting/fishing; gun culture.
CO5 There are mostly Christian based religious organizations. There are many civic organizations, too many to name. There also is a community college, hospital, Hospice, YMCA, museums, public libraries, SPCA, foundations. Many of these organizations host events and fund raisers open to the community. Most people seem to be family oriented, have good values. Music, art and live theatre are very prevalent. There also seems to be a lot of benefits for families to help with medical bills...when a family member or individual becomes ill.
CO6 We do not have that many civic organizations. The local churches are a few Catholic Social Services are the only organizations present. Some of the churches partner with the local food bank from time to time.
CO7 There are a number of community and civic organizations. The community really rallies around Kentucky basketball.

CO8

There are approximately 5 Catholic Churches in Cayuga County and all but one support us through Food Drives, Clothing and school supplies donations as well as Christmas gifts. Seneca County has several as well and one in particular is extremely supportive. The City of Auburn has several museums, the Seward Mansion and Harriet Tubman's home. Seneca County has the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Museum. Both counties have colleges, there is a Community College in Cayuga County and Seneca County has a Chiropractic College. Both communities are rich in culture with theatre productions. Both counties are extremely giving; people come out to support one in another in times of need. We still have small town community parades and many individuals volunteer at local human service agencies and churches.

CO9

We are a large tribal community and this is the culture that creates a bond for our community. Tribes have their own language and we have cultural programs that are steeped in tradition. We have clinics that teach traditional foods in the Head Start classrooms. We also incorporate the culture, traditions, foods, and language in our curriculum.

Appendix D:

VARIABLE CODEBOOK

A STATE

B COUNTY

C RURAL-URBAN CONTINUUM CODE_1993. US Department of Agriculture. U. S. Census Bureau, Summary File 1 (SF 1), Urban/Rural Update File

D RURAL-URBAN CONTINUUM CODE_2003. US Department of Agriculture. U. S. Census Bureau, Summary File 1 (SF 1), Urban/Rural Update File

E CENSUS REGION CODE. County region of country; categorized into one of the nine census defined regions that include Northeast Middle Atlantic, Northeast New England, Midwest West North Central, Midwest East North Central, South West South Central, South East South Central, South South Atlantic, West Pacific, and West Mountain. US Census Bureau.

F COUNTY GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE. Form of the county government (i.e. commission, commission/ administrator, or council-executive). National Association of Counties.
0=OTHER (NON-COMMISSION; I.E. TOWNSHIP)
1= COMMISSION
2= COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
3= COUNTY EXECUTIVE
4=ABOLISHED

G CONSOLIDATED CITY-COUNTY GOVERNMENT. National Association of Counties.
0=NOT CONSOLIDATED
1=CONSOLIDATED

H PROGRAM CONTENT FOR LIHEAP
0—Does not have any restrictions
1—Has one of the following restrictions:
  a. An assets test/asset limit
  b. Does not have expedited or automatic eligibility
  c. Does not have an online application
  d. Has some other program requirement
2—Has two of the above restrictions
3—Has three of the above restrictions
4—Has all of the above restrictions

I PROGRAM STRUCTURE FOR LIHEAP

1—Single county agency
2—Multi county agency
3—Nonprofit/Community Action Agency
4—State agency
5—County/Nonprofit collaboration

J PROGRAM CONTENT FOR HEAD START

0—Does not have any restrictions

e. 1— Does not have an online application
f. Does not meet five days a week; for at least 50% of enrollees
g. Does not use high-quality, center-based curriculum
h. Does not provide transportation

2—Has two of the above restrictions
3—Has three of the above restrictions
4—Has all of the above restrictions

K PROGRAM STRUCTURE FOR HEAD START

0—Does not have a Head Start program
1—Community Action Agency
2— School System
3— Tribal Government or Consortium
4— Private/Public Non-Profit
5— Private/Public For-Profit
6— Charter School
7—Government agency
8—Multiple grantees

L-AO HEAD START FUNDING TOTALS (PER PERSON AND PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). Consolidated Federal Funds Report: CFDA 93.600. US Census Bureau.

AP-BS LIHEAP FUNDING TOTALS (PER PERSON AND PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). Consolidated Federal Funds Report: CFDA 93.568. US Census Bureau.

BT-CW ANNUAL POVERTY RATE (PER COUNTY; 1996-2010) AND MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Estimates Branch.

CX-DL UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics.

DM-EA DECENNIAL GINI INDEX FIGURE PER COUNTY. US Census Bureau 1996=1990 Reported data

EB-EP PERCENT OF THE POPULATION 18 AND UNDER (PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). US Census Bureau.

EQ-FE PERCENT OF THE POPULATION 65 AND OVER (PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). US Census Bureau.

FF-FT TOTAL POPULATION (PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). US Census Bureau.

FU-GI PERCENT OF THE POPULATION AFRICAN AMERICAN (PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). US Census Bureau.

GJ-GX PERCENT OF THE POPULATION HISPANIC (PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). US Census Bureau.

GY-HM EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVEL PER COUNTY (PERCENT OF THE POPULATION WITH BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER). US Census Bureau.
1996=1990 Reported data

HN-IB PERCENT OF FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS (PER COUNTY; 1996-2010). US Census Bureau.

IC-IQ COUNTY IDEOLOGY. County's ideological majority during a presidential election year. *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. http://uselectionatlas.org.
0=Republican
1=Democrat