

# **From Godless Government to the Faith-Based State: The Failure of Compassionate Conservatism**

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## **Abstract**

Political scientists have approached the administration of George W. Bush from the perspectives of his foreign policy, tax plan, and entitlement reform proposals. One overlooked facet of Bush's presidency was his commitment to overhauling the social welfare system. This commitment provided the basis for his first campaign speech in 1999, "The Duty of Hope," as well as his first and second executive orders as president. President Bush's rhetoric and executive orders promoted a policy termed "faith-based initiatives" which involved administering federal welfare monies through local faith-based organizations for the purpose of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the welfare state. This paper assesses the importance of ideas in President Bush's proposal, specifically neoliberalism and neo-puritanism. This paper seeks to explain why contradictory frames were arranged and how these frames limited the success of the policy proposals thus generated.

## **Introduction**

Public policies are often understood in terms of effectiveness, implementation, and outcomes. It is also important to assess the ideas that go into the creation of public policy and the interaction of different ideas brought together as a single program. For instance, scholars have demonstrated that the ideas that generate policy frames enable individuals to better understand societal occurrences in the context of their "life space" (Benson and Snow 2000, 614). The

investigation of faith-based initiatives has been a subject of considerable scholarly attention. There exists political science scholarship evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of faith-based initiatives implemented at the state level (Kennedy and Bielefeld 2006). There have also been scholarly works studying the coalition-building process between neoliberals and religious conservatives, specifically on matters of welfare, though this work favored similarities rather than contradictions (Hackworth 2012). In sociology, scholarship has focused on institutional development of government offices promoting faith-based initiatives and theoretical explanations for the failed outcomes of these programs (Sager 2010). Interdisciplinary works have explored both the development of church-state relations in the United States and the normative, theological merits of faith-based initiatives (Daly 2009). This paper contributes to this literature by providing an assessment of how the ideas that brought faith-based initiatives to the political table were central to both the genesis and failure of such programs. In so doing, this paper seeks to expose some of the wider ideational contradictions in these frames that support contemporary conservative politics in America.

In this article I will bridge the gap between the ideational foundation of the faith-based initiative program and the outcome of the policy. I suggest that the frames employed to support these policy initiatives were not merely facades but were instead crucial to the integrity of the policy. I argue that the failure of the faith-based initiative comes from the inherent tension between the two frames invoked in support of faith-based initiatives, the neo-puritan frame and the neoliberal frame, despite the frequent attempts to blend these two frames cohesively in conservative politics. Secondly, I argue that these ideational tensions frequently occur in policy propositions because the political actors who offer them have short-term goals and privilege their reelection prospects over the success of specific policy initiatives.

I begin this paper with an introduction to the American legal history of state partnerships with religious organizations, the legislative history of the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Restoration Act (PRWORA) of 1996, and the history of Anglo social welfare. This paper proceeds to define both the neo-puritan and neoliberal frames illustrating how both ideational strains were juxtaposed in an effort to promote a new understanding of welfare. This paper analyzes the inherent contradictions between neoliberalism and neo-puritanism, and explains why political actors such as President Bush were insistent upon their compatibility. To demonstrate the rhetorical relationship between the neoliberal and neo-puritan frame, I provide an analysis of 30 speeches made by President Bush regarding faith-based initiatives. Finally, I evaluate the outcome of faith-based initiatives and its failure to significantly impact welfare policy.

### **Legislative History**

Since faith-based initiatives involve the interaction of religious organizations and government institutions, it is important to consider the legal history of church and state. Ultimately, policy ideas are contingent upon the institutional arrangements under which they are proposed. Constitutional prescription only insists on a vaguely defined separation of church and state through the Establishment Clause, which states that Congress “shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion” (US Const. Amend. 1).

Prior to the emergence of faith-based initiatives, the Supreme Court referenced two central doctrines in decisions on church and state: strict separation and accommodation (Epstein 2006). In the early Burger court, the court displayed a commitment to strict separation. During this period, the Lemon test was issued (*Lemon v. Kutzman* 1971) and tax exemptions for religious schools were declared unconstitutional (*Committee for Public Education v. Nyquist* 1973). Yet in the early 1980s, the court moved from decisions separating

religious organizations from public resources to protecting the right of religious speech and association in public matters, a position described as accommodation. Decisions were made granting religious organizations university support at public institutions of education (*Widmar v. Vincent* 1981), permitting federal funding for abstinence instructions (*Bowen v. Kendrick* 1988), and supplying public school teachers to work at faith-based institutions (*Agostini v. Felton* 1997). Perhaps, the most dramatic rearrangement of the church-state order came from the decision issued in *Mitchell v. Helms* (2000), which held that the third assertion of the Lemon Test, prohibiting “excessive entanglement between government and religion” was violable under unspecified circumstances.

While the validity of such interactions between government and state was upheld by the judiciary, the legislative branch developed faith-based initiatives as a means for religious organizations to receive federal funding in a bi-partisan effort to reform welfare policy. In the midst of the welfare reform discussions of the 1990s, John Ashcroft, Senator from Missouri and future Attorney General of the George W. Bush administration, introduced the Individual Accountability Act of 1995, which was the first piece of welfare reform legislation to grant religious organizations access to federally funded social service grants. Ashcroft’s proposal allowed for faith-based organizations to have complete autonomy over employment; though they could not deny services to beneficiaries on the grounds of the beneficiary’s religious beliefs (Individual Accountability Act of 1995). When Ashcroft introduced the bill on the Senate floor, he made little reference to federal funding for faith-based organizations, a provision referred to as “charitable choice.” He insisted that, in matters of social welfare, “government alone will not solve these problems,” revealing that the primary intention of this bill was to “reduce the bureaucracy” (Ashcroft 1995, S13750). In order to ameliorate the plight of the poor, it should be the work of the communities and the states rather than

the federal government. Ashcroft advocated both a reduction of the federal government and a localized approach to poverty assistance. In his remarks, he disavows “the horror that came to define the United States welfare system” characterized by “bureaucratic red tape” and “micromanagement” on the part of the federal government (Ibid). He suggests that poor Americans are in need of a system that operates on the subsidiary level of the “communities and the States” through “charitable and nongovernmental institutions” (Ibid). When reflecting on Charitable Choice in 2003, Ashcroft posits, “a government check may relieve hunger, but it might not supply hope” (para. 16). Ashcroft also notes that faith-based programs can steer people toward a “personally and civically productive life” (para. 29). In his remarks, Ashcroft criticizes the wastefulness of the old welfare system and offers a new system based on spirituality, meaning, and community to take its place.

Ultimately Ashcroft’s proposal was incorporated into the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), a bill which President Bill Clinton remarked would do nothing short of “ending welfare as we know it” (Clinton 1996). The terms remained as generous to religious organizations as they were in Ashcroft’s proposal. Under this law, religious organizations were allowed to accept state disbursements of social service grants as if they were any other nongovernmental provider. The employment practices of federally contracted religious organizations remained under non-federal direction. The internal governance of religious organizations is protected from intervention by the state and federal governments, and such organizations could not be requested to remove “religious art, icon, scriptures, or symbols” (PRWORA 1996, Sec. 104). The sole instrument of separation was the limitation of government funds, such that they might not be used for “sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization” (Ibid). This act stands as the chief legislative grounding for faith-based initiatives because it allows for local

congregations, not only large, religious-inspired non-profits, to receive federal funds. The executive measures issued under the Bush Administration years later found their validity in this doctrine of charitable choice, which was established through the aforementioned section of the PRWORA.

### **The Historical Setting**

Eric Hobsbawm wrote, “Concepts, of course are not part of free-floating philosophical discourse, but socially, historically, and locally rooted and must be explained in terms of these realities” (Hobsbawm 1990, 9). The notion of social welfare being administered through provincial means and dependent upon a combination of interpersonal relationships and religious sentiments has been present throughout Anglo-American history. Proponents of the faith-based initiatives, while proposing a policy initiative, evoked nostalgia for a time before welfare was decided by an impersonal, central state. In *From Poor Law to Welfare State* (1989), William Trattner reveals that the provincial welfare services idealized in faith-based initiatives find their roots in late medieval legal codes.

In 1536, the British parliament passed the Act for the Punishment of the Sturdy Vagabond and Beggars, referred to as the Henrican Poor Law. In 1601, they additionally passed the Act for the Relief of the Poor, which called for even greater government intervention. Both measures operated in a dual manner, not only punishing the able-bodied with penalties as severe as death, but also requiring local public officials to administer contributions from local tithings to those who were poor as resultant from circumstances beyond their control. This statute moved welfare from strictly parochial to a more systematic approach, involving local governments in the assistance process. This condition for social welfare remained until economic circumstances arose which demanded the empowered, benevolent state of the twentieth-century.

The historical context presented has already briefly alluded to neoliberalism and neo-puritanism. Organizing social welfare through a parochial administrative system, as was the case under Poor Laws, points to a central idea of Puritan conceptions of welfare. President Reagan's "New Federalism" which had as its aim, "devolution," sought to reduce the size of the state and permit a less restricted market economy provide the basis for neoliberalism (Wineburg 2008, 20). It is important to remove these ideas from their historical application in order to define them in abstract. A theoretical interrogation of both of these ideas will reveal the inconsistencies these ideas produce when brought together as part of a framing strategy.

### **The Two Frames of the Faith-Based Initiatives**

It would be misleading to assume President Bush's plan to introduce faith organizations into the provision of social services was merely a sign of piety or preference for sectarian cultural influences. President Bush's welfare plan dealt as much with his vision for American economic operation as it did with healing the poor who were cast out from the nation's wealth. President Bush believed that, since societal ills originated with the individual, their solutions should be limited to the immediate society closest to the impoverished individuals such as: churches, community centers, and families. The state's intervention was largely considered a waste of resources that could be put to better use through market forces. This opening left by the state's exit would leave room for churches, who had served as vehicles for social welfare throughout American history, to exert a more direct role in social policy. This combination of a state recession and greater exertion by the religious sphere was advocated through the juxtaposition of the neo-puritan and the neoliberal frames.

The tradition supported by rhetoric calling for church participation in social services has distinctly neo-puritan roots. According to James Morone (2003), the neo-puritan tradition is defined as the suspicion

that American society is in a perpetual state of peril due to poor behavioral attitudes condemned by the Christian tradition (14). Corrosive behavioral attitudes are usually thought of as “sinful” behavior, in that they offend the divine order, such as: laziness, substance abuse, violence, and sexual misconduct (Ibid, 15-17). While the insistence on personal responsibility and ethical behavior may be the Puritan tradition’s most visible lasting contribution to present-day American society, this sole image does not reveal the complexity of Puritanism and its reemergence in the neo-puritan form. An investigation into the political philosophy of Puritans offers deeper insights into their preoccupation with society’s moral integrity.

The Puritan rationale for strict moral codes resulted from a conviction of universal human interrelatedness and the resulting possibility that sin could spread quite rapidly. This awareness to the communal nature of the soul has also been manifested through compassion and solidarity. George W. Bush’s term, “compassionate conservatism,” is thus a fitting illustration of his neo-puritan approach. In John Winthrop’s (1630) “Model of Christian Charity,” he insists that “everyman might have need of others” in order to “knit more nearly the bonds of brotherly love” (34). This philosophical conviction that there is an inherently social component of peoplehood propels Puritan society toward the family, community, and the congregation. The Puritans’ belief in the intrinsic sociability of people did not translate into a strong state because it was measured by a conviction that no person shall be granted “more liberty and authority than will do them good” (Cotton 1655, 425). Therefore, a rule administered by God primarily through scripture and the local congregation was far more appealing to the Puritans. However, centralized government did have one legitimate function, and that was acting as a vehicle to organize charitable services for the lowly individuals in society. For example, the state operated to make food available in times of scarcity, ensuring that no section of society faced unnecessary starvation (Hall 2012).



Neoliberalism, on the other hand, provides a starkly different worldview. The primary values of the neoliberal order are “human dignity” and “individual freedom” (Harvey 2005, 5). Government is perceived as a burden upon the larger society and not only unable to ameliorate problems, but actually a cause of societal problems. Ronald Reagan, the most famous American entrepreneur of neoliberalism, declared, “Government is not the solution to our problems. Government is the problem” (Reagan 1981). Neoliberals perceive the market and forums for social interaction in general to be guided by individuals who “make rational economic decisions in their own interests” with no “asymmetries of power” to interfere with their capacity to do this (Harvey 2005, 68). Welfare in the neoliberal worldview is seen as a wasteful, ineffective extension of an unnecessarily large state. States should maintain social safety nets at a “bare minimum” and adopt “a system that emphasizes personal responsibility” (Ibid, 76).

There are crucial contradictions between these two frames. For one, neo-puritan views the human person and society as in search of transcendence through a spirituality seeking God. Puritans propose that the communities of the family and church are the basis of society. The neo-puritan frame is quite apprehensive about liberty. John Cotton, when writing on matters of government, remarked, “give man no more liberty than God does,” which, from a Calvinist worldview, is no liberty (Cotton 1655, 425). With respect to poverty, the Puritan perspective of poverty informed the aforementioned Poor Laws, describing poverty as intrinsic to the human condition because of the presence of sin throughout humanity after the Fall (Trattner 1989, 59). At the same time, neo-puritanism expresses a sense of obligation to the poor, even if their condition is of their own doing or misfortune, and, as a result, believes it is the responsibility of the state, in conjunction with local congregations, to direct some resources to ameliorate the suffering.

By contrast, in the neoliberal tradition, there is no appeal to transcendence; instead, neoliberalism is concerned with optimal market performance as its end. Neoliberalism casts the individual as a lone, rational actor. From this conception of human nature, follows a belief that choice is central to human dignity and therefore freedom should not be restricted. Neoliberalism posits poverty as a personal failure of the individual. Neoliberalism presumes that allocating resources toward welfare programs is futile as it promotes poor personal behaviors.

### **Why Are Incompatible Frames Arranged?**

The question arises, why were apparently contradictory and, at some level, incoherent policies strung together that shaped welfare policy in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early twenty-first century. As Robert Lieberman (2002) posits, “political arrangements are rarely if ever the products of a coherent, total vision of politics that informs institutions and ideas and knits them together into a unified whole (702).” Since this new basis for social welfare was proposed during a presidential election cycle, the short-term goals political actors sought to attain, specifically election, did not incentivize attention to policy implementation and success. Many scholars and pundits observed that, as a presidential candidate, George W. Bush in 2000 was especially interested in garnering evangelical support. At the time, the evangelical vote accounted for 23 percent of the electorate (Pew 2004). It was especially important for George W. Bush to secure the lead among evangelicals early in the primary, as many saw John McCain as a formidable candidate, but relatively unpopular with evangelicals (Knowlton 2000). Some scholarship suggests that the 2000 campaign marked a turn in presidential politics from swing votes to base mobilization (Panagopoulos 2016, 179-90). Identifying the evangelical dimension of the party as the most well-organized and engaged voters, it was a logical choice for President Bush to draw on their turnout for success in the

primaries and the general election. Faith-based initiatives rewarded evangelicals by privileging their institutions and Protestant Christian worldview as irreducible components of American identity.

Bush appealed to a developed theology within the evangelical tradition, which perceived the devolution in welfare that had taken place in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress as compatible with its own theological leanings. Like the neoliberal tradition, the Evangelical movement of the post-World War II period has been skeptical of the role of the state. Some popular Evangelicals saw the abolishment of the secular, public safety net as a path to issue in a new reign for the people of God. Lew Daly (2009) refers to these people as “dominionists” (102). George Grant, a contemporary Evangelical theologian and social philosopher, saw the introduction of church in welfare policy, preferably through tax credits, as part of this dominionist agenda, stating that, “Government cannot get out of the way if the church does not get into the way (Grant 2007, 120-1).”

This evidence suggests that the neo-puritan religious character of the nation was compatible with the neoliberal reforms impacting welfare. I would argue that because an idea may be coherent within sections of a particular religious movement, namely the evangelical, born-again movement, it does not mean that it is congruent with the neo-puritan movement. The neo-puritan movement speaks only to a set of religious ideals embedded in the collective conscience of America. A discursive analysis of George W. Bush’s speech, “The Duty of Hope,” will suggest that this vague, non-sectarian approach was the basis for his expansion of welfare reform. While the dominionists, like neoliberals, sought to eradicate not only the state as a participant but also as a provider of resources, there is no evidence to suggest this was President Bush’s explicit intention, although it may have been a strategic bolstering of his appeal to create a perceived overlap.

Policies that are initiated by and solely dependent upon the president for execution, like the faith-based initiatives, cannot be

treated in a vacuum without reference to the entire spectrum of the president's politics. The evidence suggests that the faith-based initiatives supported by the Bush administration have some direct relationship with President Bush's chief policy goal of this time, namely tax reform and deregulation. The popularity of the faith-based initiatives was simultaneous with the popularity of the president's plans for tax reform. This suggests a correlation between the two policy initiatives which was contingent upon a tacit presumption among the electorate that, somehow, a devolution of welfare would allow for people to keep taxes low by moving the burden of spending off the federal government to the local churches and individual philanthropists.

In Rogers Smith's (2015) work, *Political Peoplehood*, Smith identifies three themes that are presented in narratives constructed by political actors: economic, political, and constitutive (50). The idea of political actors seeking to construct ideas of peoplehood provides a means for considering faith-based initiatives as part of a broader integrative strategy. The faith-based initiative would fit firmly under the "constitutive" type because constitutive themes seek to "proclaim the members' religion, race, ethnicity, ancestry, language culture, history, class, customs, and practices or other such traits are integral to their very identities and affirm their moral while also delineating their duties" (53).

In the case of George W. Bush and faith-based initiatives, Bush makes an argument that there is something intrinsically religious, even Christian, about the United States and that its religious convictions should directly shape its approach to welfare. This conception of a unified religious tradition in America has been a key element in forming the nation's political culture. This proposition is so common throughout the history of the United States that it has led some scholars to define this non-denominational faith as "civil religion," a denomination that holds as its central tenets America's journey toward

some transcendent end (Bellah 1967). Kenneth Wald describes civil religion as “the idea that a nation tries to understand its historical experience and national purpose in religious terms” (Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2011). Smith asserts that constitutive themes, like those invoked through faith-based initiatives, are especially useful “when economic and political power benefits are being obtained, but by morally questionable” means (Smith 2015, 64). The faith-based initiatives provide a protective shield against the outrage, which would otherwise follow from an economic arrangement publicly perceived as unjust. By incorporating religious ideas into the wider political conversation through faith-based initiatives, economic policy is no longer measured only through a quantifiable lens, but also from a spiritual lens.

There has been an inherent tension between the nation’s economic development and the needs of the most vulnerable throughout American history. The service of the poor has frequently taken the guise of a religious mission, so this tension can be generalized as a struggle between economic motives and religious ideals. President George W. Bush’s explicit appeal to faith can be interpreted as a means to justify his larger economic policy of tax cuts and government devolution, which many Americans may object to as harmful to those already in need of financial assistance. By tapping into the religious currents that have historically flowed through the United States, Bush instructs the electorate to look beyond the material, structural reality to a transcendent one that offers individual salvation. Viewing the faith-based initiatives not as stand-a-lone policy but rather as part of an integrative narrative makes the ultimate failure of the program more comprehensible since it was designed to propose a story of peoplehood rather than execute a specific policy goal. Therefore, if faith-based initiatives were part of a campaign to assuage American concerns over the economic overhaul already in progress, it makes

sense that the objectives of the economic elements of Bush's narratives were prioritized over the faith-based initiatives.

### **The Duty of Hope**

The clear invocation of both neoliberal and neo-puritan frames surrounding faith-based initiatives is present in George W. Bush's speech, "The Duty of Hope," made in July of 1999. This was his first policy speech delivered during the campaign, and it took place in front of various religious leaders, both from the surrounding Indianapolis area and nation-wide. President Bush began by stating that those at "the frontlines of community renewal" should cooperate and that "government should take your side (par. 1)." Bush presented a communal interpretation of society and wealth, stating that "the purpose of prosperity is to leave no one out (par. 2)." Bush is not making a structural argument here; he clearly sees societal problems within the context of family breakdowns and poor individual decision-making. He speaks of *InnerChange*, a faith-based organization to which he provided collective funds as Governor of Texas. According to Bush, the strength of the program came from its insistence to teenage prisoners that "if you don't work, you don't eat," or as President Bush refers to it, "demanding love and severe mercy (par. 23)."

To balance the neo-puritan rhetoric with his neoliberal commitments, he identifies himself as an "economic conservative" and expresses his intentions for "cutting taxes to stimulate economic growth" (par. 4). It is immediately clear that there is a tension between government support for faith-based organizations and President Bush's commitments to lowering revenue and decreasing the size of government in general. Bush seems to renege his neoliberal commitments, stating that the nation is so prosperous that it can both "meet our priorities" and "take on new battles," implying a new task for government (par. 35). Bush then reverts back to his neoliberal position, calling on the Republican Party to apply "conservative and

free-market ideas to the job of helping real people” (par. 48). Bush’s insistence upon a free market approach to welfare seems to contradict his earlier statements calling on the resources of government to assist faith-based organizations.

Bush’s policy proposal suggests that he is actually calling on his party to increase the expanse of the federal government and entangle the government in subsidizing these faith groups. Since the “Charitable Choice” option of the PRWORA of 1996 allows for religious organizations to receive funds through a competitive grant based system, increasing the likelihood of religious organizations receiving significantly more federal funding would require an overall increase in welfare spending (PRWORA, Sec. 104). Here there exists a competition between the two frames invoked. Social welfare spending could have been maintained at its current rate, preferably reduced in line with the neoliberal program, or it could have increased in hopes of providing churches with funds necessary to correct society’s sins. Since Bush’s proposed faith-based initiatives have had marginal impacts on the welfare system, as will be demonstrated in the following sections, it can be said that the neoliberal frame was prioritized over the neo-puritan frame.

### **Framing and Faith-Based Initiatives**

A formal framing analysis of welfare reform with respect to the neoliberal and neo-puritan paradigms will reveal both the initial apparent similarities between the two frames and the crucial disagreement that is ultimately destructive to the policy of faith-based initiatives. It is important to note that policy framing is not an event that occurs in a single moment or outside of political time, but it instead unfolds through a pattern of “diagnostic,” “prognostic,” and “motivational” processes (Benson and Snow 2000, 615).

The diagnostic process of framing involves “identification of the source(s) of causality, blame, and/or culpable agents” within a given social problem (616). When both political actors and everyday Americans identified an apparent crisis of dependency in the welfare system, the diagnostic frame was settled, and the problem was identified as the dependence of individuals on the welfare system. The neoliberal frame fully endorses this perspective, seeing the welfare system as excusing recipients from correcting their behavioral attitudes. Furthermore, neoliberals perceive the state’s extension into welfare as unnecessary excess which withdraws capital from markets. Alternatively, the neo-puritan tradition frames the problem of welfare through a spiritual rather than economic lens. Neo-puritanism asserts that dependency’s greatest danger is to people’s souls, leaving them unable to participate in the spiritual dignity of work which is an obligation under Christianity’s precepts. Despite sharp variations in ideology, the conclusion of the diagnostic phase for both frames leads to the same initial course of action: reduce state involvement in welfare.

Through the prognostic element of a frame, political actors engage with the public to form an “articulation of a proposed solution to the problem (Ibid).” The prognostic goal of both frames remains similar: erode the involvement of the state from the social welfare system. Yet while the neoliberal frame seeks the erosion of the state, the neo-puritan frame calls for the state to abdicate its agency while still providing the necessary resources to churches and faith-centered action groups. This distinction keeps the policy from success in the later phases of action-related steps.

Although there are distinctions within the diagnostic and prognostic frame, there is still enough resemblance to formulate a coherent motivational frame which aims to provide a “rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action” (617). President Bush serves as the chief architect of this motivational frame surrounding faith-



based initiatives. He resurrects an obscure section of welfare reform legislation, namely section 104 of PRWORA, and turns it into his chief policy proposition as a presidential candidate. Appealing to the nation's religious character, he argues that a materialist conception of people has led the public into state dependency. This motivational process is not only rhetorical; a small institutional footprint follows as President Bush makes his first and second executive orders. He first creates the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) in the Executive Office of the President (EO 13199). To reinforce his commitment, his second executive order creates offices for faith-based organizations in five departments of government (EO1398). These initial attempts to build consensus around the issue of faith-based initiatives were undeniably successful in achieving popular support. By March 2001, about three-quarters of all Americans supported the faith-based initiatives program (Pew 2009).

The usefulness of these two frames is severely limited when considering the mobilization aspect. The "greater and more apparent contradictions" there are between frames, "the more problematic the mobilization" (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 616). While Bush implies more welfare spending in "The Duty of Hope," this would be opposed to the neoliberal principle of less government. At some point in a framing process developed upon contradictory frames, political actors must prioritize their commitment. The priorities of the Bush administration remained largely one-sided. While the neo-puritan model remained the basis for his rhetoric, it appears as though the neoliberal agenda received the greatest investment of political resources from the president.

Since framing is a political process which unfolds through time, President Bush utilized both the neo-puritan and neoliberal frames to focus on an overhaul of the American social welfare system because the superficial aspects of the frames had closely-related responses. The diagnostic process and the prognostic aspect of the two frames were

similar enough to allow President Bush to reconcile them for his campaign, where his unelected status limited his capacity to execute policy reform. His commitment remained through his early presidency when the motivational process of framing only required limited political resources, such as executive orders, the creation of small institutions within governments, and rhetorical investment. However, had President Bush appealed to further his agenda of welfare overhaul through legislative action, the inherent contradictions present in this policy would have made for a tough sell to the Republican base. The Republican-controlled Congress would have likely been opposed to the implied increase in funding for welfare necessary to actualize the overhauling reform President Bush envisioned faith-based initiatives achieving.

### **Rhetorical Analysis and Development**

George W. Bush's commitment to welfare reform and the framing process he employed cannot be isolated to one moment on the campaign trail and must instead be considered over time. I analyze 30 speeches delivered by George W. Bush. Twenty-nine of those speeches were made during his time in office. Descriptive statistics on these speeches are available upon request. These speeches were typically delivered before an audience either involved with executing faith-based initiatives or composed of members of prominent faith institutions. These speeches were all provided by the archived website for President Bush's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

There were two methods employed to analyze these speeches. The first method relied on interpretive text analysis. Each speech was read and moments within the speech that referenced the neoliberal frame or the neo-puritan frame were recorded. Interpreted references to the neoliberal frame included the following: 1) faith-based initiatives as an effective substitute for government administered welfare 2) the importance of tax cuts 3) economic growth 4) portraying faith-based

groups as the target of unwarranted discrimination 5) emphasis on the importance of work. Remarks which were considered references to the neo-puritan frame included the following: 1) the importance of faith in a higher power 2) the legitimacy of church and government interaction 3) the centrality of the family 4) the corrosive impact of drugs and addictions upon society 5) any comments made pertaining to preventing abortion and preserving traditional marriage 6) a community-centered understanding of welfare. The number of references were then compared through a ratio (neoliberal references/neo-puritan references).

The second method provided greater quantitative support to the rhetorical analysis. This analysis sought to quantify the number of times key words were used in the 30 speeches analyzed. The neo-liberal frame was analyzed through the frequency of the following words: results, entrepreneur, economy/economic, work/job, bureaucracy/bureaucratic. The neo-puritan frame was analyzed through the frequency of the following words: soul, love, faith, family, God/Lord/Almighty. The words associated with the neoliberal frame tend to measure President Bush's objectives through the lens of more efficient welfare policy, reduction of the bureaucracy, instilling values of hard work, and promoting a free market economy. The words highlighted as indicative of the neo-puritan frame associate President Bush's welfare policy with a perspective of salvation, love, religious devotion, and the sacredness of the family.

There are several important findings from this temporal rhetorical analysis. For one, the frequency of President Bush's speeches on faith-based initiatives declined considerably during his time in office. During his first term, the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives cites twenty-one speeches made to religious and community leaders on the progress of and the president's enduring vision for faith-based initiatives. In his second term, only 8 speeches of this sort were made.

Secondly, during his second term, the number of references to the neoliberal frame increases noticeably. As argued earlier, incompatible frames will likely yield a prioritization of one frame over the other and in the rhetorical analysis of second term speeches, it is clear that neoliberalism becomes a more prominent feature of President Bush's rhetoric. This was likely the result of his ambitious second-term agenda heavily influenced by neoliberal principles, specifically the privatization of social security. Also, upon his second term, the significance of Evangelical mobilization diminished as the imperative to calculate reelection considerations was removed.

Finally, the word searches conducted to quantify President Bush's rhetoric do not demonstrate the changes which the more interpretive data does. This is due to President Bush's creation of a focused lexicon of words such as faith, love, family, and divine invocations to support his agenda. Throughout his speeches, President Bush provided anecdotes, which focused less on policy-related rhetoric and more on moral principles and religious values. These stories were built heavily on terms central to the neo-puritan frame. While George W. Bush's invocation of the neoliberal frame involved more complex articulations and implicit meanings, his use of the neo-puritan frame centered on a succinct, efficient discourse heavily dependent upon buzzwords and phrases.

### **An Empirical Evaluation of Faith-Based Initiatives**

Faith-based initiatives thus did not receive any significant level of resources, as revealed in the following empirical analysis. It is important to first note that faith-based organizations are intentionally difficult to classify by the government agencies who process grant requests, as forcing faith-based organizations to disclose their status may trigger unwanted bias in the bureaucracy (Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Website).

However, the Government Accountability Office did conduct inquiries into the success and execution of faith-based initiatives. About \$500 million dollars was spent on “training and technical assistance” for faith-based organizations in the first few years of the Bush administration (GAO 2006, 3). This spending was allotted in the hopes of empowering faith-based organizations to both compete for funds and also administer them properly (Ibid). Since the program was designed to encourage participation of small, community-based religious organizations, federal inquiries were reserved for organizations receiving over \$500,000 a year (Ibid). Slightly less than one-third of all the agencies that received federal funds appeared to be either misinformed about the nature of “charitable choice” or in direct violation of federal guidelines (Ibid, 7). This suggests that the implementation of faith-based initiatives on many occasions involved violating statutory measures in the welfare reform bill.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that a system flooded with transgression could evolve to encompass a significant amount of welfare distribution. The last examination of expenditures pertaining to faith-based initiatives was conducted in 2006 by the Government Accountability Office, which estimated total expenditures to be \$2.1 billion (GAO 2006, 61). The difficulty in measuring these grants results from the different levels of government from which they can be administered and the ambiguity concerning the definition of a faith-based organization

A study conducted by the Rockefeller Institute of Government reviewed 28,000 federal grants from 2002 to 2004. The number of identified faith-based organizations receiving grants moved from 665 to 762, and the number of total grants awarded to these organizations moved from 1,042 to 1,332 (Montiel and Wright 2006). The majority of programs receiving grants had previously received grants. In 2002, faith-based organizations had received 11.6 percent of grants in the ninety-nine federal programs reviewed, and by 2004, that number had

only increased to 12.8 percent (Ibid, 6). Research conducted by National Congregation Survey compared the data surrounding the faith-based initiative program in 1998 to the data in 2006, revealing how limited the overall change to the welfare system was (Table 1) (Chaves and Wineburg 2010).

**Table 1: National Congregation Survey on Congregations and Social Services**

<b>% of Congregations:</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2006-2007</b>
Report Social Service Involvement:	58.4	45.4
Receive Government Funding:	5.2	7.4

*Source: National Congregation Survey hosted at Duke University.*

In the final analysis, faith-based initiatives are dependent upon total welfare spending. Therefore, without increases in total federal welfare expenditures, there is no increase in money for faith-based initiatives. Since most federal contractors are likely to receive renewed grants every year, it is unlikely that faith-based initiatives can steer away the grants that had been offered to non-faith groups in previous years. Therefore, a total increase in federal funds is necessary to increase the presence of faith-based initiatives.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the ideas which informed the frames applied to faith-based initiatives were responsible for those initiatives' failure to gain traction as innovative sources of social welfare reform. For this reason, it is crucial that political actors seeking specific policy initiatives employ complementary frames when introducing policy. A contradiction between frames demands a prioritization of frames in a

way that can have deleterious impacts for the overall integrity of the policy. This claim applies universally, as all policy involves framing from political actors, with framing being especially crucial to environmental, healthcare, and foreign policies. Additionally policies often have widespread impacts across different sectors of the political, social, and economic contexts, and coalitions are often diverse in background. Out of political necessity, the frames which support policy are often contradictory. A certain amount of accommodation of contradictory frames is possible, but there is a threshold of compatibility that, if not met, will lead to the ultimate failure of the policy.

This paper also explored the relationship between ideas and their historical context. The proposition for social welfare reform made by George W. Bush involved a return to the past, as all political actions require. In *The Search for American Political Development*, Orren and Skowronek argue “empty lots are few and far between. Building something new usually means disturbing something else” (Orren and Skowronek 2004, 22-23). Political actors involved with policy creation therefore should ensure that ideas proposed are informed by historical and institutional context.

This work has also offered a closer look at neo-puritanism. The neo-puritan frame has been described as promoting a rigid concept of morality and dichotomizing society between “us” and “other.” However, less explored are the frame’s core ideas, namely the communal setting of all people and an impulse toward charity for the poor, although rarely through structural or institutional devices. These tenets of the neo-puritan frame are irreconcilable with neoliberalism.

This paper contributes to an explanation for why irreconcilable political frames are placed together in an unfitting relationship. Political frames do not take place in an isolated moment, but rather, like all areas of political life, unfold through time. It should therefore be expected that incoherent framing strategies, if individually popular,

may exist for the early stages of the framing process. However, when greater quantities of political resources beyond simply rhetoric and gesture, such as legislation, become necessary for mobilization, the contradictions suffocate the chances of successful policy.

Beyond policy narratives and frames, the content of this paper should be part of a larger branch of research in American political science, specifically within the discipline's work on religion. This work notes the unsuspected parallel between increased religious presence in the public sphere and the onset of neoliberal economic reform. This is an especially peculiar arrangement because of the theoretical disagreements between these two worldviews. This paper's examination of the intrinsic contradictions, yet frequent interactions between the neoliberal and neo-Puritan frame identifies the irony on which contemporary American conservatism is founded.

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