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Why the United States Lacks Comprehensive National Family Leave Policies:
A Comparative Analysis

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Introduction

The United States is often criticized for its lacking social policies, yet rarely is anything done to improve them. The country is among the richest in the world, but there are still aspects of its welfare system that seem outdated, and some of our outcomes are not up to par with where we should be. Our infant mortality rate is unusually high among high-income countries, and many social policies in place seem much less effective when compared to other countries with similar resources. These policies impact Americans in more ways than initially meet the eye: for example, healthcare bills can increase debt and stress, and having to return to work as quickly as possible after giving birth can do the same. Other countries have policies in place to prevent situations like this, yet the United States fails to create those comprehensive policies. Family leave is possible, as shown in other high-income countries, but the United States cannot pass a strong, paid leave policy in a timely manner.

Why does the United States have ineffective and less comprehensive family leave policies compared to other high-income countries, such as Sweden and Great Britain? On a national level, the United States lacks social policies that ease the burdens many people face in their lives, yet other countries are able to accomplish these policy outcomes. The United States passed a family leave policy, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), in the early 1990s, but unlike other countries, this policy only offers twelve weeks of unpaid leave; the United States has no national paid leave. Great Britain, on the other hand, had a massive policy expansion in the early 2000s, where mothers were given more weeks of paid leave and fathers were given the option to take leave as well. Sweden was ahead of the curve and passed its policy in the 1970s, giving both parents the option of

paid leave for several months. Compared to these high-income countries, the United States is severely lacking. These policies impact parents' abilities to take care of their children and affect stress levels in parents. What institutional factors were present in Great Britain and Sweden that were not present in the United States? Which factors had an impact on policy? Why is the United States unable to have a comprehensive parental leave policy? By looking at theories regarding political institutions' impacts in policy development, I can predict which of these factors would be expected to matter in the policymaking process before examining what actually happened in each country to create these policy outcomes.

Throughout this paper, I will examine literature about the policymaking impacts of party systems, interest groups, and public opinion, because I believe that these will be central factors in each country's family leave policy development. Then, I will look at what actually occurred when each country developed its family leave, not only looking at peer-reviewed articles that examine the outcome but also reviewing newspaper articles, election speeches, and party manifestos from the time period these policies were passed. Finally, I will look at public opinion in-depth in order to see what attitudes and values citizens held before and after the policies were passed. These factors will paint the broader picture of why family leave policies face different developmental challenges, what contributes to their outcomes and implementation, and why the United States, specifically, seems to have issues in developing comprehensive policies.

I find that party systems and interest groups played a role in shaping the details of family leave policies in these countries, though not always in the ways one would expect, and a large factor in each case was electoral victory. Each policy was passed after an

election, where the victorious party was able to either put the policy on the agenda or sign off the final bill. While public opinion did not seem to have a direct role in policy outcomes, the public did play a role by electing these officials, and their attitudes toward social values and political institutions vary in each country, which may be attributed to the different systems in place in these countries. Overall, a combination of factors influences family leave policies, and this can have impacts beyond the issue of family leave or the years this was passed.

Evaluating which institutions were vital for this policy issue can show how institutions can impact the policymaking process in general, and how specific institutions can play a role in different policy areas. These findings about the family leave policymaking processes in Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States may also be applied to different high-income countries. Among this sample, very similar circumstances arose, and different factors determined how each country reacted to these circumstances. This occurred across countries and time periods, so it is reasonable to think about other potential areas and impacts that this research could apply to. These countries have changed their policies over time, and they are not immune to changing in the future. Using this methodology to examine patterns in each country could potentially help evaluate changes when they occur, or help us understand why these policies do not change. Family leave policies have impacts on many communities, so understanding the powers in place that influence these policies is important in working to understand societal elements like inequality and social values.

Literature Review

The differences in parental leave policies in the United States, Great Britain, and Sweden may be the result of party systems, interest groups, and public opinion. Each country faces different challenges and issues in policymaking when dealing with these influences, and these factors are theorized to have a strong impact on policy development and outcomes.

Party systems can play a large role in policymaking due to their influence on the strength of elected officials, how parties interact with each other, which issues are discussed, and many more political issues. These systems can be set up in a variety of ways, including proportional representation, majoritarian, two-party, and multiparty systems. Proportional representation (PR) is when parties gain the percentage of seats that they earned in votes in a country's electoral body. Majoritarian systems, meanwhile, only represent the party that wins the majority of the votes, and minority or losing parties do not gain any seats. Two-party systems have two prominent parties represented in a country, while multiparty systems have multiple parties that can be elected. Different types of governing structures such as parliamentary systems can also impact policymaking due to the way parties are represented within the type of governing body. The interactions between parties in these systems lead to diverse policy outcomes.

PR systems have many interests represented, which can lead to greater discussion of issues. Salomon Orellana discusses how PR and majoritarian systems differ in policymaking, saying that "the number of parties in a system affects the number of issue areas considered by the political system," and PR systems consider a broader range of issues than majoritarian systems because there are more parties represented; therefore

they are “associated with competition over a broader political spectrum.”¹ Majoritarian systems typically have a smaller number of parties due to the nature of their representation, leading to a smaller range of interests represented in the policymaking process. Parties must deal with a wide variety of opinions in PR systems, while majoritarian systems represent only the majority party’s interests. Because of this, PR countries are more likely to adopt more innovative policies “that other countries will eventually adopt,” and they will do this faster than majoritarian systems.² PR systems, with their wide range of interests, opinions, and ideas, are more likely to come up with unique and effective solutions earlier than their majoritarian counterparts due to the nature of the system.

Majoritarian systems have interesting features that impact the longevity of their policies as well. Majoritarian systems can change leadership more easily, because a party gaining the majority is all that is required to completely transform the interests represented. Arend Lijphart finds that “the supposedly coherent policies produced by majoritarian governments may be negated by the alternation of these governments; this alternation from left to right and vice versa may entail sharp changes in economic policy that are too frequent and too abrupt.”³ Newly elected representatives can quickly reverse the policies in place if they are against their interests, and the minority may be powerless to stop it. One party has the power in majoritarian systems. This can give advantages in certain policy areas, as Orellana notes, and, overall, these systems “influence how quickly

¹ Salomon Orellana, "How Electoral Systems Can Influence Policy Innovation," *Policy Studies Journal* 38 no. 4 (2010): 614.

² Orellana, “How Electoral Systems Can Influence Policy Innovation,” 620.

³ Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries*, 2nd ed., New Haven: Yale University Press (2012): 257.

certain policy issues and ideas can be debated, how quickly public opinion will shift on these ideas, and thus how quickly governments can respond to these issues and ideas.”⁴

PR and majoritarian systems discuss ideas in different ways, citizens have different types of power in each system, and the type of power a party possesses influences its response. Because of this, PR and majoritarian systems can yield unique policy outcomes.

Parliamentary systems have interesting impacts on policy due to how parties interact within them, which is specifically relevant in the case of Great Britain. Lijphart points out that a party that wins an election typically rules narrowly with a large minority, but it “wields vast amounts of political power to rule as the representative of and in the interest of a majority that is not of overwhelming proportions.”⁵ The majority party gains a lot of power despite the prominent presence of other parties. This causes “a large minority” to be “excluded from power and condemned to the role of opposition,” where they try to advance their interests by blocking policy attempts that they strongly disagree with.⁶ The opposition may not be able to have direct control over policy outcomes, but it has a greater impact than one may initially think. Meg Russell and Philip Cowley find that parties anticipate the reactions of the opposition, influencing policy development because the party in control thinks about the opposition’s interests.⁷ The majority party wants its policy to pass, so despite having the greatest amount of control, it must still consider the other side. This system may not have as many ideas discussed between

⁴ Orellana, “How Electoral Systems Can Influence Policy Innovation,” 624.

⁵ Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, 10-11.

⁶ Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*, 10-11.

⁷ Meg Russell and Philip Cowley, “The Policy Power of the Westminster Parliament: The ‘Parliamentary State’ and the Empirical Evidence,” *Governance* 29, no. 1 (2016): 133.

parties as a PR system, but all interests can have an impact on the policy, even if it is less direct.

With these theories in mind, parental leave policies in the United States, Britain, and Sweden would differ due to party system influence. In the United States, the majoritarian system would cause the policy to be adopted later than other countries, and the policy eventually implemented would be less innovative and expansive. With more competition from each party and less cooperation, the policymaking process would suffer as each party tries to promote its own agenda rather than working with the other party. The party in control would end up with a lot of say in the policy outcome. Similarly, Great Britain's parliamentary system would cause the narrow majority to make most decisions, but the opposition's reaction would be considered. There would be a strong influence by the party in control, but it would be kept somewhat in check by the large minority, so the policy outcome would consider more interests than the United States' majoritarian system. Both the United States and Britain have a tendency to switch the parties in power, so their policies may fall prey to reversal in each country, though the United States would have more of an issue with this than Britain would because Britain's party in control needs to at least consider the opposition when making policies. Sweden, meanwhile, with its PR system, would create a more innovative policy earlier than Great Britain and the United States. More parties would be represented in the policymaking process, so more issues would be covered and the parties would work together to develop a comprehensive parental leave policy.

Another factor that may have been important in the countries' parental leave policy development is interest group involvement. In domestic policies, Matt Grossmann

finds that “general support for policy changes by interest groups recognized as stakeholders” are important to enact the policy changes in question.⁸ Groups with a lot of power and resources may receive more attention and stronger consideration of their interests when developing policies. Grossmann further discusses that historians find that “interest groups are involved in significant policy enactments quite often,” in many levels of policymaking “but most often in Congress.”⁹ These dynamics are present in many systems, but they may have more of an impact in the United States. The groups with the strongest influence in policymaking are those that “develop reputations for representing stakeholders,” and these groups are “highly connected with one another.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Paul Burstein and April Linton say the groups that play the biggest role in policy decisions have influence “when their activities are directed at providing elected officials with information and resources helpful to reelection,” gaining power on one or many individuals rather than the system itself in some cases.¹¹ By making themselves unable to ignore, interest groups can create strong influences on policy in spaces that do not allow direct cooperation between stakeholders and policymakers. Elected officials rely on these groups for knowledge and funding, so they consider their interests when developing policies.

Institutions impacted by interest groups in this way would be considered pluralist systems, where many groups represent interests and there is no direct cooperation

⁸ Matt Grossmann, "Interest Group Influence on US Policy Change: An Assessment Based on Policy History," *Interest Groups & Advocacy* 1, no. 2 (2012): 188.

⁹ Grossmann, "Interest Group Influence on US Policy Change," 177.

¹⁰ Grossmann, "Interest Group Influence on US Policy Change," 192.

¹¹ Paul Burstein and April Linton, "The Impact of Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Social Movement Organizations on Public Policy: Some Recent Evidence and Theoretical Concerns," *Social Forces* 81, no. 2 (2002): 399.

between policymakers and interest groups. Corporatist systems, on the other hand, involve coordination between interest groups (oftentimes business groups) and policymakers, where the system encourages these interactions in order to create new policies. These distinctions create different policy outcomes. For longevity of policies, corporatist countries may have an advantage, because they develop more long-term policies with the opportunity for “fine-tuning programs within generally-agreed objectives,” as Jenny Stewart discusses, though this can also occur if a pluralist system contains one party with power for many years.¹² In pluralist systems, though, interest groups may not have as long-term of an effect as they would like, because “policy may vary too much from government to government to give those charged with evaluation the chance to determine whether one variant has worked as planned.”¹³ With less influence built into the system, interest groups cannot collaborate with opposing party members directly or negotiate their interests into policies, so what may work for them in one election cycle can change in the next one. However, they still receive responses from policymakers that consider their interests.

The speed of policy responsiveness varies in each system. Corporatism allows groups to cooperate directly with policymakers and have a wider range of policy options, but may be slow “to respond to cumulative pressures for change” and may have “more appropriate responses [to policy] but be unable to generalize them;” however “when they finally act they may be more likely to ‘get it right.’”¹⁴ Decision-making can take more time because there are more sides considered during the policymaking process, but the

¹² Jenny Stewart, "Corporatism, Pluralism and Political Learning: A Systems Approach," *Journal of Public Policy* 12, no. 3 (1992): 252.

¹³ Stewart, "Corporatism, Pluralism, and Political Learning," 252.

¹⁴ Stewart, "Corporatism, Pluralism, and Political Learning," 254.

advantage is a more comprehensive policy that considers many interests. Pluralism may have a greater response “in the short term, but be unable to break away from the effects of particularist interest in fashioning longer-term strategies.”¹⁵ Pluralist systems consider groups that provide resources, but they are limited in what they can contribute to the policymaking process, so they can encourage smaller or temporarily effective policies, but they cannot create the long-term solutions that corporatist systems have worked out how to produce.

Based on these political theories, for family leave policies, interest groups would be expected to play a large role in the policymaking process and policy outcomes, whether direct or indirect. The United States, often the prime example of a pluralist society, would have strong interest group influence, especially because family leave is a domestic policy. However, the policy would be a short-term solution, and while certain interest groups would achieve in advancing their beliefs, shifts in power would impact the implementation of the policy. Britain would face similar obstacles as another pluralist country, though its interest groups provide a lot of knowledge in the policymaking process that may cause it to lean slightly closer to the corporatist side of the spectrum than the United States, creating a short term policy still, but one a bit stronger than the United States'. Sweden, a corporatist country, would have a longer policymaking process than the other countries, but the outcome would be a result of collaborative efforts from stakeholders and government officials, and there would be more compromise between seemingly opposing sides like business and labor. This would produce a stronger family leave policy with more long-term success.

¹⁵ Stewart, “Corporatism, Pluralism, and Political Learning,” 254.

Public opinion may have an effect on parental leave policy outcomes, though scholars often debate this potential impact. Policymakers may consider other factors far before they consult the public, and even when the public is asked about their thoughts, public officials may not listen, since there are also debates about whether the public is even informed enough to contribute politically. However, to look at a more optimistic viewpoint, Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro find that congruence between changes in both opinion and policy occurs often, and it is “more frequent when the policymaking process is allowed time to react to change in opinion.”¹⁶ As policy issues are brought up, the public develops reactions, and policymakers tend to act in accordance with its opinions. Variation in issues and institutions “result from characteristics of public opinion,” which is not unexpected because “when the public has definite opinions, when those opinions change by large amounts, and when the changes endure over time, the political system will more often respond to the public's preferences.”¹⁷ The initial reaction of the public matters, but if there are consistent changes in public opinion, policies often reflect that. Paul Burstein finds that public opinion has a policy effect “three-quarters of the time its impact is gauged; its effect of substantial policy importance at least a third of the time,” with salience and the activities of interest groups, parties, and elites having an effect on the impact of public opinion.¹⁸ Other factors can contribute to policy outcomes if those opinions are similar to the public's, and political knowledge of the public plays a role as well. Public opinion has different impacts depending on other

¹⁶ Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy," *The American Political Science Review* 77, no. 1 (1983): 177.

¹⁷ Page and Shapiro, "Effects of Public Opinion on Policy," 182.

¹⁸ Paul Burstein, "The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda," *Political Research Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2003): 36.

issues, but there is still policy influence independent of this. Page and Shapiro also find “cases policy moved in a congruent direction only well after opinion changed: up until the time period one year after the opinion change, policy had changed contrary to public opinion or remained the same.”¹⁹ Public opinion likely changes when people are talking about an issue, which may provoke policymakers to act, and though it takes time for this action to occur, they may realize what constituents want and try to make it happen.

Scholars have some disagreement on if and how public opinion matters, though it may not be an issue of democracy itself. Burstein discusses how many analyses “adopt a zero-sum view of the political process,” with the government’s response to public opinion demonstrating how well democracy is working, but that is “only part of the political process... current estimates of the impact of opinion on policy are probably too high [but] this does not necessarily mean democratic procedures and institutions are not working well.”²⁰ However, F. John Mehrtens finds that for welfare systems, “mass political preferences warrant increased attention as a significant cause of welfare state development.”²¹ Public opinion is more likely to have an impact on social policies than other policies. Residents also have different views of social policies based on how comprehensive their welfare systems are. Countries with stronger social policies “are populated by citizens who have a more expansive conception of social justice as opposed

¹⁹ Page and Shapiro, “Effects of Public Opinion on Policy,” 186.

²⁰ Paul Burstein, “Why Estimates of the Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy Are Too High: Empirical and Theoretical Implications,” *Social Forces* 84, no. 4 (2006): 2286-7.

²¹ F. John Mehrtens, “Three Worlds of Public Opinion? Values, Variation, and the Effect on Social Policy,” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 16, no. 2 (2004): 137.

to their counterparts living under less-generous governments.”²² Public opinion and policies can impact each other throughout a country’s history. By having a generous welfare system, citizens are more likely to support stronger social policies, because their experiences affect their feelings on social issues. In the other direction, people with more egalitarian views “get a more active government which provides more extensive services and lower levels of poverty, inequality, and other social problems,” while those with less egalitarian views “get smaller government, less-generous social programs, and social outcomes left relatively unchecked.”²³ The public is less likely to support solutions that are unfamiliar to them, and their environment shapes the types of policies they support. Mehrtens says ideology and attitudes “vary in accordance with the documented variation in policy orientation,” where more egalitarian people support egalitarian policies and vice versa.²⁴ This creates different opinions in different types of countries, and causes certain people to be more inclined to back different policies.

Theoretically, public opinion would impact policy differently in the United States, Great Britain, and Sweden. Each country would strongly take public opinion into account when creating their parental leave policies, but public opinion itself would differ. The United States, with a weaker welfare system and therefore weak egalitarian views, would support less government intervention in social programs, so the leave policy would be less comprehensive. Britain, which leans towards the less egalitarian side of the spectrum but is more in the middle than the United States, would have a decent system in place, creating a family leave policy that is not extremely comprehensive but is more

²² Mehrtens, “Three Worlds of Public Opinion?” 134.

²³ Mehrtens, “Three Worlds of Public Opinion?” 134.

²⁴ Mehrtens, “Three Worlds of Public Opinion?” 134.

comprehensive than the United States' policy. Sweden, a country populated with strong egalitarian views, would have stronger social policies and welfare systems, so it would develop a very comprehensive leave policy.

Case Studies

Sweden

What actually happened when each country passed their parental leave policies is due to some of the factors discussed. Sweden was the first to pass its policy in 1974, extending parental leave to both mothers and fathers with the goal of addressing gender inequality and promoting women's participation in the work force. The original legislation provided parents with six months of paid leave, and this has been expanded during the years following its passing. Sweden was also one of the first countries to have a policy as comprehensive as this, which became a model for the rest of Europe throughout the rest of the decade. The policy provided paid family leave for up to six months, and this could be divided between parents. According to Juliana Carlson, "These benefits, known as parental leave insurance, were then and continue to be determined by a parent's employment income at the time of leave taking," and for those unemployed, there was a "low-base benefit."²⁵ The policy has evolved in the years since its passing, expanding the number of months parents can take off, promoting gender equality through measures to ensure that fathers take time off by giving leave time to each parent

²⁵ Juliana Carlson, "Sweden's Parental Leave Insurance: A Policy Analysis of Strategies to Increase Gender Equality," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 40, no. 2 (2013): 64.

specifically as well, raising the income ceiling to receive benefits, and giving a tax credit to families who evenly distributed time off among both parents.²⁶

The Social Democratic government was important to developing and passing the policy, along with influence from unions, feminist women, and corporatist agreements. Janine A. Parry discusses how the Swedish government made its decision to promote women in the work force, saying, “Women were preferable to immigrant labor from the perspective of Swedish unions,” so the Advisory Council to the Prime Minister on Equality, an executive council established by prime minister, was created “to promote state policies toward sexual equality.”²⁷ Their motives may not be expected, but their mission caused an increase in social policies and women’s employment. Women gained more power and wanted a voice in policymaking, and since gender equality was on the Social Democrats’ platform and agenda, women formed a joint female labor council, which was eventually replaced by the Advisory Council.²⁸ The original council, though, was responsible for many of the employment programs and policies in the 1960s to increase women’s participation in the labor force, because it recommended these measures.²⁹ Women formed the groups that impacted policy decisions, and Sweden listened to women in its effort to expand gender equality.

Sweden’s corporatist system greatly impacted the policy outcome. The tripartite group process consisting of “government officials, employers, and organized labor”

²⁶ Carlson, “Sweden’s Parental Leave Insurance,” 65.

²⁷ Janine A. Parry, "Family Leave Policies: Examining Choice and Contingency in Industrialized Nations," *NWSA Journal* 13, no. 3 (2001): 82.

²⁸ Parry, “Family Leave Policies,” 83.

²⁹ Linda Haas, *Equal Parenthood and Social Policy: A Study of Parental Leave in Sweden*, (Issues in Child Care, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992): 31.

influenced decision-making, and unions worked “on behalf of women and... contributed toward many of their gains.”³⁰ These groups worked together to create the best policy for everyone involved, and their ability to cooperate was directly due to corporatism. Linda Haas discusses that unions were “partners in the policymaking process within the government,” working toward goal of promoting equal employment opportunities while the government developed programs.³¹ Unions had employees’ best interests in mind, and, in this case, the employees they represented were women, so they wanted policy outcomes that would help women in the workforce, including comprehensive parental leave. Sweden was able to accomplish its widespread policy because of integrated variables, “with widespread acceptance of state interventionism...[and] leftist policy articulations via union influence and corporatist arrangements” allowing the country to adopt this policy.³² Residents and policymakers supported government intervention to expand gender equality, and corporatism enabled the policy to have representatives from the groups primarily affected by it contributing to the process. None of this would have been possible if the Social Democrats had not gained power, however, because their goals put parental leave and other social policies on the agenda, but Sweden’s corporatist system allowed different groups to shape what the final policy looked like.

The Social Democratic Party’s support during the general election of 1973 caused this policy to eventually be passed, so it is worthwhile to examine both the Social Democrats’ campaign and that of the opposing parties. During this time, unemployment was a concern among many citizens, and the parties tried to use this issue to sway voters.

³⁰ Parry, “Family Leave Policies,” 84.

³¹ Haas, *Equal Parenthood and Social Policy*, 31.

³² Parry, “Family Leave Policies,” 87.

The Center Party was one of the biggest sources of competition to the Social Democrats, but other groups included the Liberals, the Conservatives, and the Communists. The Center Party adopted the slogan “a hundred thousand new jobs” in its attempt to appeal to voters’ worries about the country’s large unemployment at the time.³³ It formed a coalition with the Liberals and Conservatives, led by the Center Party leader, as it was the largest party in the group.³⁴ In addition to discussing unemployment, the parties discussed “the need for a change after the long Social Democratic rule.”³⁵ However, this coalition was not significantly threatening to the Social Democratic Party, who still won the election.

The Social Democratic Party’s campaign focused on social equality and strengthening the welfare state. Its slogan, “do not vote your away social security,” seemed to take a more defensive approach for their election strategy.³⁶ In an address to Congress in late 1972, Prime Minister Olof Palme talks about what the Social Democrats have accomplished and what they hope to accomplish in the next term. He uses the angle of social equality throughout the speech, highlighting the roles of women’s movements, unions, and more in the growing discussions of equality throughout Sweden.³⁷ He even hints at the possibility of family leave policy when he says:

“We shall draw up a new Act concerning security of employment. The legislation concerning elderly employees was a first step in this direction, and the results

³³ Redaktionen, “The 1973 General Election in Sweden,” *Scandinavian Political Studies* 9 (January 1974): 219.

³⁴ “1973,” *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections*, (Historical Archive of Parliamentary Election Results, Inter-Parliamentary Union): 94.

³⁵ “1973,” 94.

³⁶ Redaktionen, “The 1973 General Election in Sweden,” 219.

³⁷ Olof Palme, “Democratic Socialism Means Solidarity: Opening address to Congress of Swedish Social Democratic Party, October 1, 1972,” in E.S. Reddy, *Socialism, Peace and Solidarity: Selected Speeches of Olof Palme* (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi: 1990).

have been encouraging. Adjustment teams and partnership groups in which people from the labour market and the union movement are represented are becoming more and more important. We shall go further in order to provide still greater security of employment.”³⁸

Reducing the cleavages among social groups is a central theme in Palme’s speech, whether these cleavages are due to class, age, or gender. This also tackles the public’s concerns about unemployment through promising security of employment. While the other parties directly spoke to these concerns, the Social Democrats tied the issue into their overall goals. Building up the welfare state not just to reduce unemployment, but to reduce inequality, was the Social Democratic Party’s primary concern, and this seemed to work in securing their reelection.

Overall, the Social Democratic government played a large role in policy development, along with unions and women’s groups. Corporatism let this policy develop in the way it did, with discussion on broad issues and different interests represented. Women’s groups’ recommendations were brought to the forefront of the discussion and unions also represented women’s interests in the policymaking process. Unions, employers, and government officials worked together to create and implement the policy. Therefore, interest groups played a large role in policy outcomes, especially because of corporatism. Party systems did not play the role that was expected; with a PR system, it would be expected that many parties would influence policy, but it was more important that the Social Democrats had power than the broad range of ideas present. The policy did develop sooner than other countries, though, and was more innovative and long lasting.

³⁸ Palme, “Democratic Socialism Means Solidarity.”

Great Britain

In the case of Great Britain, its policy passed in the early 2000s after Tony Blair's reelection and a parental leave campaign focused on mothers and the idea of gender difference to create more equal outcomes. This policy increased the amount of maternity leave a mother could take and introduced paid paternity leave. The European Union already had a policy in place that Great Britain chose not to implement, but through appeals to the EU in framing, the country was able to pass its own policy. Business coalitions and Conservatives opposed it, but the Labour Party was in a position where it did not need to compromise with Conservatives. One of the factors that sparked the discussion was media coverage and speculation about if Blair would take paternity leave, as his wife was pregnant. While at the time there was a lot of uncertainty about what the policy would actually look like, according to Dorian Woods, "By 2001, the Labour Party was much more specific about the kind of leave it would pass."³⁹ Then, after Blair's reelection, "further momentum for reforms gathered," and a green paper was produced that eventually formed the basis of the policy.⁴⁰

The leave policy went through a lot of development before becoming what was passed. The final policy extended the number of weeks a mother could take off work and gave them higher rates of payment. In addition, it introduced paid paternity leave for the first time and allowed new parents to request flexible work arrangements. The Labour Party had originally wanted an even more expansive policy to replace their less comprehensive leave policy that was in place before, but pressure from Conservatives

³⁹ Dorian Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation: US and UK Policies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 183.

⁴⁰ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 184-5.

and employers brought the policy down to the level that eventually allowed it to pass in 2003.

Blair himself played a large role in policy decisions and discussion, trying to gain interest group and public approval. As Woods says, Blair “appealed to the European Union in strengthening benefit measures in the UK as ‘good Europeans’ but at the same time assured UK business that the government would not go too far in restricting their advantages.”⁴¹ The goal of Blair and the Labour Party was to improve the system already in place without ignoring or making an enemy out of business, because they needed to cooperate in order to implement the policy. Blair adopted these ideas because during the period of the Conservative government, activists exerted pressure on the EU, rather than the Conservative government, in order to influence policy initiatives.⁴² Activists knew Conservatives had a lot of control and may not have supported the policies they were fighting for, so they tried to work around the government and gain EU support, and Blair took a page out of their book during the family leave policymaking process.

Many interest groups played a role in the policy outcome, such as the Maternity Alliance, the Citizens Bureaux, and the Trade Union Congress who supported the Parental Leave Campaign, while Conservatives and groups such as the Confederation of British Industry were against it.⁴³ The groups that supported it were in favor of Blair’s agenda, while those who opposed it worked to limit the policy. Labour government had a lot of control and was “more favorable...than the previous government” but there was

⁴¹ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 190.

⁴² Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 190-1.

⁴³ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 185.

resistance from employers, and they were able to push for a more restricted policy.⁴⁴

Since employers would be the ones implementing the policy, their voice mattered in the policymaking process, and this brought the policy farther away from the potential to be as comprehensive as Sweden's policy, as employers did not want a strong family leave policy. While the policy was now more restricted than Labour would have liked and there was opposition present, Labour could easily put its agenda in place because Labour had the majority and the oppositional Conservatives did not have the power to veto.⁴⁵ The final policy was passed to due Labour's power, but interest groups and the opposition affected how the policy looked.

Similar to Sweden, Britain's expansion of family leave occurred after a general election, and both countries experienced a reelection that solidified the leading party's power and allowed the policy to be created and pass. The parties relevant in the 2001 election were the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, and the Conservative Party. In their manifesto, Conservatives discussed giving more power and freedom to individuals, from having a powerful central government to having powerful local governments. The recurring phrase throughout the manifesto was "It's time for common sense," and they stressed British citizens' common sense, self-governance, and family values.⁴⁶ Despite their attention to family values, they do not mention family leave, but they do discuss reducing taxes, helping families through allowances and tax credits, and a Family Scholarship program to train parents in vocational or professional skills after taking time

⁴⁴ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 185-6.

⁴⁵ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 205.

⁴⁶ "2001 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto: Time for Common Sense," *Political News.co.uk* (2001).

off work to care for their children.⁴⁷ The party also criticizes Labour, the current party in charge, while enforcing its theme of supporting and trusting the common sense of British people rather than government.

The Liberal Democrats seem to align closer to Labour in their manifesto, but they have different goals and ways of achieving them overall. Their approach is based off three words: freedom, fairness, and trust, and these words shape the messages throughout the manifesto. Some of their goals include a fair distribution of power between people and government, environmental policies, and ensuring Britain's place as a global leader. They do mention a concrete plan for family leave, saying they will give new parents increased maternity pay in order to "give every child the best possible start" and provide more support for families.⁴⁸ They also talk about inequality, though it is less of a focus. Their goals are much more progressive than the Conservatives, and they take on the issues in a different way.

The Labour Party, meanwhile, concentrates on inequality, specifically discussing its strive towards equality of opportunities. In a campaign speech, Blair emphasizes "true equality: equal worth, an equal chance of fulfillment, equal access to knowledge and opportunity," but he says "the struggle for true equality has only just begun," discussing the support needed for children, healthcare patients, women, and more.⁴⁹ He also talks about how the other parties would hinder Labour's progress if they were in charge, specifically saying welfare reforms would be cut, echoing Sweden's Social Democrats'

⁴⁷ "2001 Conservative Party General Election Manifesto: Time for Common Sense."

⁴⁸ "Liberal Democrats: The Real Alternative," *therealalternative.org* (London).

⁴⁹ Tony Blair, "Tony Blair's Full Speech," *The Guardian* (1999).

“don’t vote away your social security” slogan.⁵⁰ In their manifesto, Labour further discusses equality and gives more specific details about what a family leave expansion would look like, and this includes increased maternity pay and adding paid leave for fathers.⁵¹ The manifesto says that they “need to do more to help parents balance work and family,” and he wants to do this by working “with business and employees to combine flexible working with the needs of business.”⁵² The focus on reforming public services and giving equal opportunities to all must have resonated with voters, as the Labour Party retained the majority and Blair remained prime minister. This allowed Labour’s idea of expanded family leave to pass.

Overall, the Labour Party’s majority was important because it was able to pass a more comprehensive and effective policy that Conservatives could not block, though the opposition did influence certain aspects of the policy. Blair’s reelection spurred the reforms, which was important to starting the discussion and developing the policy. As theorized, with Great Britain’s parliamentary system, the majority had a great amount of control during the policymaking process, but the opposition had to be considered, thus influencing policy outcomes. Interest groups affected the policy’s coverage and implementation, with groups both supporting and opposing impacting the final outcome. Employers and business groups were particularly important, because the opposition caused the policy to be more restrictive. These groups could not directly interact when policymaking like those in Sweden were able to, but they were still able to exert some control in what the policy looked like. With the opposition from Conservatives and

⁵⁰ Blair, “Tony Blair’s Full Speech.”

⁵¹ “Ambitions for Britain: Labour’s Manifesto 2001,” *Labour* (2001): 29.

⁵² “Ambitions for Britain,” 29.

interest groups, Labour was more limited in its reach, and the policy passed was not as comprehensive as the party originally planned. These factors led to a policy that was effective in a different way than Sweden's, though it was less comprehensive.

United States

The United States' passage of its parental leave policy involved a different journey than Sweden and Great Britain. After several attempts at passing FMLA, Bill Clinton signed the bill in the early 1990s once he was elected. The policy took a gender-neutral approach, including not only parents but also groups such as the elderly. The family leave that was proposed was unpaid and not universal, because, as Woods says, "A far-reaching financial support for caregivers was considered unrealistic from the start, which resulted in the early abandonment of the idea of a paid leave and universal leave."⁵³ The United States was unlikely to ever pass a policy with extremely strong coverage, so the idea that a policy as comprehensive as Sweden's or even Great Britain's was pushed aside from the beginning. Policy advocates knew that passing a comprehensive policy where the government provided paid leave to workers would be too difficult to pass. One of the greatest reasons this thinking prevailed was due to American culture. American influences are unusual because, according to Parry, "hostility toward state action...played the primary role" in why no policy was even considered until the late 1980s, and the lack of influence from social democratic parties and the absence of corporatism further delayed action.⁵⁴ These factors affected when the policy was developed along with the final outcome.

⁵³ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 192.

⁵⁴ Parry, "Family Leave Policies," 86.

The policy passed in the early 1990s, but it was put on the agenda throughout the 1980s. In the late 1980s, Democrats got control of Congress. Up until then there were different partisan approaches, but the “1988 election year brought a boost for the advocates of family leave because of the media coverage it evoked as the presidential candidates took up the issues.”⁵⁵ George Bush was president at the time, so there was divided government, and each side had different goals and desires for family leave. There was a long and difficult journey before the final bill was signed. Conservatives and Republicans close to business “opposed FMLA’s mandate to business,” while far-left Democrats and other Republicans against the bill “called it the ‘yuppie bill’ because of its provisions for unpaid leave which would only help those who did not need help,” but, gradually, more people began to support the bill.⁵⁶ With its place in national discussion and a need for more effective policy, the government continued working on the bill. Congress passed it, but then Bush vetoed it; after making some changes, Congress passed it again but then Bush vetoed it again, and while the Senate could override it, the House was unable to.⁵⁷ This process went on throughout the years until Clinton was elected. Along with Clinton’s win, more women were elected, but the House became more Republican.⁵⁸ Since Clinton and family leave advocates wanted the bill signed as soon as possible because some Republicans “were adding controversial amendments to the law in the early weeks of the administration” due to their newfound power, Clinton signed the bill that Bush vetoed.⁵⁹ The outcome was not ideal for Democrats, as the final bill was

⁵⁵ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 164.

⁵⁶ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 166.

⁵⁷ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 170.

⁵⁸ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 170.

⁵⁹ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 170.

more restrictive than they would have preferred, but a family leave policy was put in place at last.

How the policy actually looked was due to partisan division, but also because of interest groups. Women's groups like the Institute for Women's Policy Research "were instrumental in supplying analysis which resulted in becoming an important contribution to the debates around the benefits and costs of mandated family and medical leave."⁶⁰ They provided resources to policymakers and contributed to the discussion. Small businesses, led by the Chamber of Commerce, mobilized against family leave, but large employers, meanwhile, did not want to get involved.⁶¹ After Clinton was elected, though, the Chamber of Commerce backed down because "the bill was less threatening than other labor initiatives."⁶² Though they eventually relented, small businesses were able to influence policy implementation and the policy itself through their opposition. Because bipartisan support and advocates from many sides were needed, policy changed to gather more support from the opposition; AARP provided the financial backing of much of the support and "women's groups which advocated an equality approach were central."⁶³ By expanding who was covered, policymakers could gain more support from interest groups, though opposing groups restricted the potential for the policy.

During the election, Clinton and Bush took opposing sides on many issues, but both stressed family values during their campaigns. Bush strategically selected a small town with a Republican base that reflected the idea of family values as the place where he

⁶⁰ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 168.

⁶¹ Cathie J. Martin, *Stuck in Neutral: Business and the Politics of Human Capital Investment Policy* (Princeton Studies in American Politics. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000): 222.

⁶² Martin, *Stuck in Neutral*, 226.

⁶³ Woods, *Family Policy in Transformation*, 193.

accepted the Republican nomination.⁶⁴ His speech focuses primarily on foreign policy, and he discusses both what he has done during his term and what he plans to do if reelected. He says that Clinton has not talked about global issues enough, and then he reinforces the traditional Republican views of decreasing government spending and reducing federal government power.⁶⁵ Despite the importance of family values to him, though, Bush does not mention family leave directly, nor does he discuss his contributions to the United States' lack of such a policy. He discusses the gridlock, though, and blames the Democratic Congress for many of the problems the country is facing. He says, "I extended my hand—and I think the American people know this—I extended my hand to the Congressional leaders, the Democratic leaders, and they bit it."⁶⁶ His speech is primarily focused on his goals to reduce spending and his difficulty in working with Congress to promote his agenda, which he hopes will be reduced if Republicans gain control of Congress after the election. He does not want to help Americans through social policies, but through international strength and reducing their taxes.

In Clinton's speech accepting the Democratic presidential nomination, he mentions the hardworking, "forgotten" middle class Americans as the people he wants to help.⁶⁷ He also seems to allude to Bush's inaction on FMLA and other policies that would help families when he says, "I want an America where 'family values' live in our actions,

⁶⁴ Bill Torpy, "The Small Town in Georgia where George Bush Kicked Off His Reelection," *AJC* (Atlanta: 1992).

⁶⁵ George Bush, "In Their Own Words; Transcript of Bush Speech Accepting the Nomination For Another Four Years," *New York Times* (New York: 1992).

⁶⁶ Bush, "In Their Own Words."

⁶⁷ Bill Clinton, "'92 Democratic Convention: Clinton Text: 'I Still Believe in a Place Called Hope'" *Los Angeles Times* (1992).

not just in our speeches,” and he continues by saying he wants this America to include all types of families, traditional and non-traditional alike.⁶⁸ His speech is about his vision and hope for the United States, where Americans are able to do their part to follow their dreams, like paying back debts from going to college, while being granted the opportunity to do so, like being able to stay healthy through having access to healthcare.⁶⁹ He wants to help the middle class by giving these families a better future. While neither Clinton nor Bush show a commitment to reducing inequality like party leaders in Sweden and Britain demonstrate, Clinton’s focus on helping the middle class seems closer to this idea. In his speech, Clinton even says, “[Bush] won't give mothers and fathers a chance to take some time off from work when a baby's born or a parent is sick. I will.”⁷⁰ He directly takes on the topic of family leave while promoting his other goals and ideas.

Leading up to Election Day, family leave became a fiercely discussed topic yet again when Bush vetoed one of the family leave bills Congress passed. This was done unusually late at night, and “the timing...suggested that the White House was seeking as little publicity for its action as possible,” as it missed the usual news programs because of its lateness.⁷¹ The bill was “politically contentious,” and Bush was deep in his campaign at that point, which was the excuse his team gave for veto’s lateness: Bush had been campaigning all day.⁷² His reasoning for the opposition to the bill was the “mandatory system,” but he would support “an alternative plan that would merely encourage such policies,” and he unveiled a plan “in an attempt to blunt criticism of his stance [that]

⁶⁸ Clinton, “’92 Democratic Convention.”

⁶⁹ Clinton, “’92 Democratic Convention.”

⁷⁰ Clinton, “’92 Democratic Convention.”

⁷¹ Michael Wines, “Bush Vetoes Bill Making Employers Give Family Leave,” *New York Times* (New York: 1992).

⁷² Wines, “Bush Vetoes Bill Making Employers Give Family Leave.”

would provide tax credits to small and medium-size business that establish family leave policies for all their employees.”⁷³ This veto occurred at an important point in the campaign. Clinton, in response, said he would sign the bill if elected, a statement that proved to be true.

Overall, Clinton’s election finally allowed FMLA to pass after many attempts, with partisanship, interest groups, and bipartisan commitment helping to shape the final policy. With the United States’ majoritarian system, Democrats were able to exert their power once they gained control, both in policy development in Congress when they lacked executive authority and in finally passing the policy even after they lost Congressional influence. Clinton’s election drove the final bill, but there was a surprising amount of bipartisan efforts compared to what was theorized. However, the policy was less expansive and innovative than those in Sweden and Great Britain. The United States’ pluralist system had an effect on why action was not pursued earlier, but interest groups were still very important for the policy. Gathering support was vital in the policymaking process due to the resources interest groups provided—women’s groups provided information, and AARP provided financing. On the other side, key groups like businesses, who opposed the policy, shaped its outcome and restricted the nature of the policy. There was no direct interest group coordination in the policymaking process due to the nature of the United States’ pluralist system, but they still influenced what was passed.

⁷³ Douglas Jehl, “Bush Vetoes Family Leave Bill, Wants Voluntary Plan,” *Los Angeles Times* (1992).

Public Opinion

While, on the surface, public opinion did not seem to play a direct role in any of these countries' policymaking processes, the public still had a strong influence. Citizens' participation in interest groups was important in policy development; for example, those involved in the women's movement in Sweden had a large role in getting the policy on the agenda. The public also indirectly put the policy on the agenda by voting for candidates and parties who wanted to create or expand family leave, since all of these policies were right on the heels of an election. However, as shown in the earlier discussion of campaigns, the way candidates spoke about the issues and their goals seem to influence the public's votes. Candidates that highlighted inequality, specifically, seemed to have better results. More importantly, public opinion reinforces the idea that certain institutions in each country are stronger or weaker. Public values or confidence in institutions further illustrates the role of institutions in policymaking and demonstrates how public support can make a difference. Examining public opinion data for the three countries is vital in understanding what the public feels about the major topics surrounding family leave. I will use data from the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey to examine public attitudes towards institutions such as labor unions both before and after the policy was passed (when data is available). The questions asked on each survey used are not exactly the same, as some evolve throughout the years or the wording is changed slightly, but they tackle the same topics: how respondents would feel about an increased emphasis on family life, how they would feel about less importance being placed on working, their confidence in unions, and their confidence in government. Respondents to the first two questions typically responded

with either “good,” “bad,” or “don’t mind,” and responses to the questions about confidence were measured using “a great deal,” “quite a lot,” “not very much,” and “none at all.” Table 1 shows respondents’ answers to these questions.

As Sweden’s policy was passed much earlier than the other countries, data is only available after the policy was put in place. Using Sweden World Values Survey data from 1981, we can examine public attitudes towards social issues or learn about citizens’ values. Table 1 shows Swedish respondents’ answers when asked about the four topics in question (emphasis on family life, importance of working, union confidence, and government confidence). When asked whether a stronger emphasis on family life would be good or bad, a majority viewed this as a good thing, with only about 5% who felt this would be a bad thing. When asked whether decreased work importance would be good or bad, the majority saw the idea of work being less important as a bad thing, with over 75% of respondents answering this way and only about 16% saying it would be a good thing. Seeing how Swedish residents place value on both of these aspects of society, it is understandable how a policy contributing to both family values and the workforce can pass.

Other relevant factors include the institutions in each country. When asked about how much confidence they have in unions, almost half of Swedish citizens said they have little confidence in unions, though the other half has a decent amount of confidence. Despite unions’ stronger influence in Sweden due to its corporatist system, there is not a significant amount of confidence in this institution present. Respondents also answered about their amount of confidence in Parliament, which is nearly the same as that of unions. Slightly more citizens have little confidence in Parliament than in labor unions,

but 45% of respondents in both questions have “quite a lot” of confidence in Parliament, while less said “a great deal,” with about 9% giving this response when asked about unions versus 6% giving this response when asked about Parliament.

Data on Great Britain comes from the 1999 European Values Survey and the 2005 World Values Survey. Table 1 shows respondent data from the 1999 European Values Survey, which occurred before the family leave policy was passed. The questions tackled the same topics as the questionnaire for Sweden, though they were asked in a slightly different way. Before the policy was passed, we see similar attitudes as Sweden to the idea of placing more emphasis on family values, as the majority of people view this as a good thing, with almost 90% answering “good” and only 1.42% answering “bad.” However, unlike Sweden, we see that the majority of people view the idea of decreasing the importance of work as a good thing. More than half of the respondents answered “good” to this question, and only about 20% answered that this would be a bad thing. The policy implications of this response could help explain both why Britain’s expansion was not until many years after Sweden’s and why Britain’s policy is less comprehensive overall. On one hand, it could be expected that viewing work as less important may incentivize people to have better family leave policies because they would want time dedicated not to work but raising a family. On the other hand, people who want work to become less important may just be thinking about work less in terms of policy preferences. They could potentially separate work from family life even more. However, another explanation comes to fruition when comparing the pre-family leave policy data to the post-family leave policy data. As Table 1 shows, slightly more people support more emphasis on family life as the number goes up to almost 93% answering “good” and less

than 1% answer that it would be a bad thing. When asked about the idea of placing less importance on work, the number of respondents who felt it would be a good thing went down about 10%, and about 3% more people thought this would be a bad thing. While the number of those who think less emphasis on work is a good thing is still larger than that of Sweden, this number is still smaller than the number of respondents who answered this before the family leave policy was passed. A possible explanation of this drop in relation to family leave is that respondents may be more content with their workplace policies and therefore more likely to oppose decreased work importance, since the policy may allow them to have a better work-family balance. While it is impossible to know the true reasons for this shift based on the data, it is still worthwhile to think about the potential impacts of family leave policies on people's values.

For confidence in institutions, compared to respondents in Sweden, people in Great Britain were less confident in unions overall, and they actually had more confidence in Parliament than in unions. There were only slight significant differences between responses before and after family leave was expanded. In both pre- and post-family leave policy results, only about 3% of respondents had about "a great deal" of confidence in unions, about a quarter had "quite a lot" of confidence, about half had "not very much" confidence, and a little over 20% had no confidence at all. For Parliament, meanwhile, results showed slightly more confidence in this institution, with 4-5% of citizens having "a great deal" of confidence in Parliament, about 31% who said "quite a lot," a little less than half saying "not very much," and about 15-17% answering with "none at all." In general, British respondents are less confident in their institutions than Swedish respondents, though it is important to note that these surveys occurred about

twenty years apart and the questionnaire for Sweden did not include the answer “none at all” at the time. However, these differences in public opinion still reflect the differences in the nature of each country’s systems. Britain is not corporatist, so the lower level of confidence in unions may be due to how unions act in each country. Sweden’s corporatist system allows unions to be more interactive at every step of the legislative process, a component that Britain’s system lacks. Still, these differences in public attitudes towards various institutions and social values may be a major contributor in why leaders discussed these issues in different ways. What people are surrounded by may influence their opinions, so citizens who interact with different types of political institutions can harbor different feelings towards these institutions. This can influence their values, too, because the emphasis each system places on certain political issues or aspects of society can affect what people think about and how they feel. Policy outcomes reflect these thoughts and beliefs, so family leave looks different in Sweden and Britain because of both the institutions in place and how people interact with them.

Data from the United States further reinforces the idea that the institutions in place are much weaker than other high-income countries, and people are generally less supportive of them. Data for pre- and post-FMLA public opinion comes from the 1990 European Values Survey and the 1995 World Values Survey. The questions are similar to the previous surveys; respondents are asked their feelings about an increased emphasis on family life, their feelings about decreasing work importance, and their confidence in unions. There are changes to the measure of Parliament confidence, though, since the United States does not have a parliamentary system. The post-family leave survey asks about confidence in the national government, but the pre-family leave survey did not

have a measure like that. The most similar question was about citizens' confidence in civil service. This wording can create different implications than a question about the federal government or Parliament, so these may not be seen as quite as comparable as the other questions have been so far. However, looking at views of how people view the government and its administration brings us valuable knowledge, since they are the people enforcing policies.

For both the pre-family leave and post-family leave time periods, when asked how they would feel about an increased emphasis on family life, over 90% of respondents said it would be a good thing, and the number of respondents who said it would be a bad thing decreases from about 4% to less than 1%. Compared to Sweden and Great Britain, these results are not out of the ordinary, though a slightly larger majority said "good" in the United States than the other countries. When asked about whether decreased work importance would be good or bad, American citizens had similar answers as British respondents, but the changes were much more significant. In 1990, about 23% of Americans answered "good," and only about 14% answered "bad." However, in 1995, both of these numbers increase. 27.51% of respondents said less importance on work would be a good thing, increasing by almost 5%, and 43.55% of respondents said it would be a bad thing, which is about a 30% increase. Britain experienced respondents moving toward the response "bad," but not nearly to this extent, and it did not simultaneously have more people move toward "good." A possible explanation for this could be that the United States had a very large amount of "don't mind" respondents pre-family leave compared to other countries, with over 60% of respondents answering with this, a number that drops to less than 30% post-family leave. People may not have had

strong thoughts about the issue in the first survey, and something must have changed that in the years that followed. From a family leave standpoint, the increase in people responding that decreased work importance would be a bad thing could be for the same reason speculated for Britain's increase: people are more content with their jobs, and family leave may contribute to that. However, the United States' policy specifically may explain why the small increase in the "good" response is also present. The United States does not have a comprehensive leave policy compared to other countries, and it is unpaid, so employees may be overburdened with work and family responsibilities. This could potentially lead them to believe that work should be less important, as they may want to spend more time with their families without worrying about the financial impacts.

On another note, confidence in unions was relatively similar to that in Sweden and Great Britain. This had very little change from 1990 to 1995, the most notable being that those who answered that they had "not very much" confidence in unions went down about 4% from about 54% to about 50%, and those who had no confidence at all increased about 4% from about 12% to about 16%. There is actually less confidence in unions in Britain than in the United States, though. This brings about a reasonable explanation in this case study of family leave policy. In the United States, interest groups played a large role on both sides of the aisle—some were fighting to expand the bill and others were trying to oppose and restrict the policy. While interest groups on both sides also played a role in Britain, the focus was mostly on the opposition, and the final policy was not as comprehensive because of those groups. Unions, which would typically take the side of the employee, would be expected to support family leave. People in Britain may be less confident in this group than people in the United States because supporting

groups had a much smaller role in this issue. They may think that unions cannot adequately represent them in the policymaking process, so they may feel less confident in them.

Confidence in the government varied depending on the year. This is because the pre-family leave survey did not ask about respondents' confidence in the national government or another easily comparable question. When asked about confidence in civil service, about half of the respondents said they had "quite a lot," and about 36.8% said they had "not very much," so people lied more in the middle on this issue. When asked about confidence in national government in the post-family leave survey, only about 5% said they had a great deal of confidence, about a quarter of respondents answered with "quite a lot," over half said "not very much," and 14.22% said "none at all," so at first glance this seems like quite a departure in public opinion than in 1990. However, as discussed before, the term "civil service" may bring about different reactions than the term "national government;" the former may remind respondents of the people working in government providing services while the latter may make people think of the government as a whole, with all of its problems and gridlock. These responses vary so much because of this wording, so it is difficult to compare across the years in the United States.

The national government confidence question is more similar to Sweden and Britain's confidence in Parliament question, because both are federal decision making institutions that create policy. The United States, then, had less confidence in government than both Sweden and Britain. The results are more similar to Britain than Sweden. Only about 5% of American and British respondents post-family leave answered with "a great

deal,” but about 5% more in Britain answered with “quite a lot.” About 55% of American respondents said they did not have much confidence in national government as compared to about 47% of British respondents, though more British respondents said that had no confidence at all in Parliament than American respondents did for national government (about 17% versus 14.22%). Overall, though, Americans had less confidence in national government than both Sweden and Great Britain. This could be because of party systems; perhaps the United States’ majoritarian system does not invoke confidence in government because people may not feel represented and leads them to feel discouraged in the national government.

Another measure of confidence that takes place in some of these surveys is confidence in women’s groups. Women’s groups were one of the interest groups that mattered to policy outcomes, so examining these results is important. This data also continues to reveal valuable information about citizens’ faith in certain interest groups. This question was only asked in Britain and the United States post-family leave, in the 2005 World Values Survey and the 1995 World Values Survey. Data for women’s group confidence for Britain and the United States post-family leave is shown in Table 2.

In the United States, confidence in women’s group post-family leave is not very high, with only about 11% of respondents who answered with “a great deal,” more than 40% answering with “quite a lot,” almost 36% saying “not very much,” and about 11% saying “none at all.” The number of people with any sort of confidence in women’s groups is much lower in the United States than in Britain, where almost 14% have a great deal of confidence and over half have quite a lot of confidence. Compared to Britain, the United States has about 10% more respondents who said “not very much” and about 5%

more respondents who have no confidence at all. This is surprising, since women's groups seemed to have a stronger role in family leave policy in the United States. From this lens, the decreased amount of confidence could be because of what the policy actually entailed. The American policy was much less comprehensive, while Britain's policy, though more restricted than originally planned due to other interest groups, had more provisions for citizens, so people in the United States may feel that women's groups did not do enough. This finding reveals how Americans truly feel about how women's groups interact with the government—even when women's groups are involved in the policymaking process, people still do not feel confident in their ability to change policy. This further reinforces the way Americans interact with their government. They have little faith in the groups that would be able to make change, and this may impact their feelings on policy or government involvement in issues.

All of these results show that people interact with institutions in different ways and policy outcomes may influence how people view their surroundings. Their values may influence how policies come about, what they look like, and how they are passed. In turn, the policies (or lack of policies) in place can impact how people evaluate the world around them. Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States have different institutions in place and citizens with different cultural values, and the policymaking process and policy outcomes that occurred can be related to how the public thinks about these dynamics. The United States, specifically, has less confidence in its institutions overall, which is important in evaluating how policy is created and enforced. Public opinion reinforces the institutions in place in a country, so its influence in the United States will create weaker institutions, and this, in turn, influences the policies that come about.

Conclusion

The family leave policymaking processes in Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States were influenced particularly by party systems and interest groups, with strong agenda setting and decision-making power from the parties and candidates elected in recent elections that also played a strong role in policy outcomes. While public opinion was not explicitly an influence in the family leave policy process, the public's social values and attitudes toward institutions further enforced the patterns that were present in each country, and their electoral power also allowed the people who would make changes in family leave to be elected.

These findings are important in understanding Sweden, Britain, and the United States' policies in place. Institutions impact many aspects of society, and policymaking is one of these impacts. The institutions examined here may not play a strong role in every policy, and there may be institutions not covered here that are important as well. These findings may not be generalizable to every country, as this is a small sample of high-income countries with similar political systems, so low-income countries or countries with highly different cultures may not have the same policymaking outcomes as a result of these institutions. Countries also change and evolve, whether quickly or gradually, so these results could even differ in similar countries due to possible growing influences of different institutions. However, this paper examines three countries with different social values over several decades and finds similar influences in each case. These institutions should not be taken lightly when studying the policymaking process and policy outcomes.

Family leave influences the lives of many people, whether they actively think about it when trying to find a balance between raising their children and providing for their families financially, or if they never think about the implications of reaping their systems' benefits. The United States has much weaker policies than other high-income countries, and this produces different results among how residents choose to take their leave. National leave is unpaid, but there are state-level differences in the provision of family leave. Some states provide paid leave, while others simply abide with FMLA. Employers can fill the policy gaps, but this is not equally applied, as certain companies or positions vary in the benefits they provide. As inequality becomes more rampant, Americans may think more about the policies that may not provide enough support for citizens. Only time will tell if the United States' family leave policy is due for an upgrade, and if it does change, these institutions will likely play a role once again in what the policy actually looks like and how citizens feel about it.

Table 1: Survey data for each country pre- and post-family leave (when applicable), %						
		Sweden (post-family leave)	Great Britain (pre-family leave)	Great Britain (post-family leave)	United States (pre-family leave)	United States (post-family leave)
Less importance placed on work	Good thing	15.64	53.36	42.82	22.93	27.51
	Don't mind	7.99	27.14	34.9	63.19	28.95
	Bad thing	76.37	19.51	22.28	13.87	43.55
More emphasis on family life	Good thing	83.56	89.68	92.64	94.58	93.19
	Don't mind	11.12	8.9	6.95	1.51	6.27
	Bad thing	5.33	1.42	0.41	3.91	0.54
Confidence: Labor unions	A great deal	9.25	2.66	3.08	7.5	7.8
	Quite a lot	45.43	25.37	27.13	25.88	26.64
	Not very much	45.32	48.55	48.14	54.26	49.65
	None at all	-	23.42	21.66	12.35	15.92
Confidence: Parliament/Civil Service/National Government	A great deal	6	4.33	4.93	11.69	4.72
	Quite a lot	45.09	31.2	31.35	47.14	25.85
	Not very much	48.92	49.27	46.87	36.8	55.2
	None at all	-	15.2	16.86	4.37	14.22
Sources: 1981 WVS, 1999 EVS, 2005 WVS, 1990 EVS, 1995 WVS						

Table 2: Post-family leave women's movement confidence, %		
	Great Britain	United States
A great deal	13.79	11.07
Quite a lot	53.76	41.96
Not very much	26.91	35.88
None at all	5.54	11.09
Sources: 2005 WVS, 1995 WVS		

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