

# **Stable Conflict in the San Francisco Homeless Policy Field**

**By**

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Dear CCOP readers,

This paper is based on a research project that was primarily developed and conducted to use sociological tools to practically assist with grassroots organizing and community policy making around homelessness in San Francisco. The research was originally framed for that purpose in collaboration with community organizations in the field, and the information gathered was originally organized with that in mind. My biggest challenge has been taking the reams of data I have which served practical organizing purposes, and finding a way to base an academic paper out of it. This paper is an attempt at doing that, but any suggestions you might have both in terms of how I might want to better frame this or relevant literature I should address would be really helpful! Of course, any other sorts of comments and critiques would also be greatly appreciated!  
Thanks, Darren

**Abstract:**

This article combines network analysis and cognitive frame analysis to explain the institutionalization of homeless politics in San Francisco into a stasis of organized stable conflict. The persistence of stable conflict within the San Francisco homeless policy field brings into question the widespread notion within sociology that the stable ordering of a social field or institutional arena emerges when a group of incumbents or elites comes to dominate that arena and impose their conception of the world onto it. The San Francisco homeless policy field shows that even in the absence of a dominant organizing conception of the world, stable order within an institutional arena can still be achieved through a complex equilibrium of ideas, relationships, power, and resources.

**Introduction:**

Homelessness is one of the largest human crisis in America. Each night, it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children across the nation are without a home. (Institute 2000) Theories about the causes of homelessness generally focus on either individual factors, including mental illness, behavioral problems, substance abuse, and family estrangement; or on structural conditions, such as changes in the labor market, increase poverty, widening income inequalities, decreased affordable housing production, gentrification, and increasing housing costs. Overall, most remedies and public action around homelessness have focused on individual factors. (Sommer 2000)

Alongside individual and systemic focused remedies to homelessness, localities have also used punitive measures and “quality of life laws” for dealing with homeless people, including the criminalization of activities needed for survival by those living in public places such as sleeping, panhandling, and sometimes even sitting. In 1998, 85% of cities surveyed by the National Law Center Of Homelessness and Poverty had imposed laws to prohibit or restrict begging; 73% had passed laws to restrict sleeping in public (Sommer 2000). Sommer suggests that “quality of life” laws and the punitive approach to homelessness has been on the upswing throughout the 1990s. Moreover, she suggests

that these punitive policies do not represent “compassion fatigue” amongst the general public, but “are driven by a small but economically powerful or politically vocal minority (Sommer 2000).”

As homelessness emerged as a national and a local issue, so too did local organizational and political fields emerge around the issue of homelessness. New actors, such as homeless service providers and homeless advocates, came into formation; and homeless debates became crucial aspects of local politics in many urban areas. Within these emerging homeless policy fields, broader organizing conceptions of the world shaped community debates over homelessness. For example, the systemic and individual theories of the causes of homelessness are themselves reapplications of broader individual versus systemic framings of the causes of social inequality and poverty in general. At the same time that these broader discourses shaped community homeless debates, local homeless policy fields became important locations where these overarching social conceptions are hermeneutically constructed via locally level political action and communication.

Investigating the nature and dynamics of homeless policy fields can therefore provide us insights into three domains. First, it should help us to better understand the policy making process which underlies local efforts to address homelessness. This enhanced understanding can allow communities to improve homeless policies and policymaking.<sup>1</sup> Second, investigating homeless policy fields can help us to better

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<sup>1</sup> The research of San Francisco’s homeless policy field upon which this article is based was initially designed for this purpose of aiding community organizations. The information gathered in this research project has been successfully and widely used in multiple ways to assist policy makers and community organizations to better grasp their policy field dynamics and, therefore, to enhance their capacities to address homelessness.

understand the functioning and institutionalization of local organizational fields. Finally, investigating homeless policy fields can help us to better understand the relationship between conceptions of the world, organizational actors, and strategic political action within institutional arenas.

This article draws upon a detailed mapping of the homeless policy field in San Francisco, California in order to better understand the functioning of local organizational fields, and thus to better understand dynamics within institutional arenas. In few urban areas in the United States is homelessness as important or as contentious an issue as in San Francisco. In the city of San Francisco, homelessness is often ranked as one of the most important issues that the city faces, and has been a pivotal concern during mayoral elections throughout the final two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (SF Controller 2002). Thus San Francisco provides an ideal location for investigating the dynamics of homeless policy fields.

## **Literature Review**

The notion that social stability arises when a particular ruling group or elite takes power and imposes its conception of the world onto social institutions can be found throughout sociological literature. Two classic examples of this are Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Bourdieu's theory of fields. In Gramsci's formulation of hegemony, a ruling group or bloc maintains power not only through force, but also through the assertion of moral and intellectual leadership. Hegemonic groups project their particular class interests as the universal interests of society, and through this projection elicit the spontaneous consent of the dominated. By controlling the ideological apparatus of society, the ruling class leads the dominated to see their own well being and interests as tied to supporting those who dominate them (Gramsci 1971, Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

In Bourdieu's theory of fields, society involves an amalgam of different social fields – such as the artistic field, the religious field, the political field, etc. – all of which are organized within a larger meta-field of power. Fields are sites where social actors compete for various types of capital. Categorization struggles are an important aspect in the field. Those who possess capital in a field are able to define particular rules and conceptions which not only orient the game within the field, but also tilts it in their favor (Bourdieu 1983, 1986, 1990, 1991). For both Gramsci and Bourdieu stability within a social arena emerges out of the ideological domination of that arena by elites.

The notion that social stability emerges from unified or hegemonic norms and conceptions can also be found underlying theories which do not have as explicitly a political approach as Gramsci and Bourdieu. Durkheim's theory of primitive social integration via shared collective representations is a classic example of this. A more contemporary example can be found in Swidler's bifurcation of culture into two phases – settled and unsettled (Swidler 1986, 2001). Settled periods are marked by little overt ideological or cultural conflict because a dominant hegemonic conception reigns over all; and therefore there is no need for individuals to personally adhere to strict or coherent cultural models. Unsettled periods, in contrast, lack unifying ideas to organize society. In unsettled periods, the field is in flux, fights are explicit, and the possibility for rearranging social structures or positions is imminent. In such times, individuals are forced to make their ideological commitments more unequivocal and coherent.

One of the most explicit theoretical formulations of the way that stability is maintained through the domination of hegemonic conceptions can be found in Fligstein and McAdam's theory of organizational strategic action fields (Fligstein and McAdam 1995, 2003). Fligstein and McAdam posit that organizations exist within organizational fields, and usually take the role of either a dominant incumbent or a challenger in those

field. Fields contain “conceptions of control” which govern the action of individual organizations as well as the collective action of the field. The conception of control is fashioned and diffused by dominant incumbents so as to reinforce their power. Thus political contests within fields are often contests over the conceptions of control within the field. Incumbents try to maintain the conceptions on which their power is based, while challengers try to subvert those conceptions. To the extent that incumbents are able to maintain dominant positions in the field and to maintain the dominance of their conception of control over the field, the field is held stable.

In this article, Fligstein and McAdam’s theory of strategic action fields will provide the backdrop and terminology for the analysis of the San Francisco homeless policy field. I have chosen to utilize Fligstein and McAdam’s theory of strategic action fields as an exemplar of the pervasive sociological notion that social and institutional stability arises when a particular ruling group or elite takes power and imposes its universal or unified conception of the world. By showing that stable order in the San Francisco homeless policy field in the 1990s was maintained without a common conception of control as McAdam and Fligstein theorize – but rather through a complex equilibrium of ideas, power, resources, and relationships – I will call into question the notion of institutional stability emerging out of unifying or hegemonic organizing ideas.

I have chosen to use Fligstein and McAdam’s theory as an exemplar of the sociological approach to stability via hegemonic conceptual domination both because it is one of the most clear and explicit statements of this approach, and because their delineation of organizational fields provides a useful way to empirically examine the homeless policy arena in San Francisco. While McAdam and Fligstein’s theory of fields

resembles Bourdieu's field theory in many ways, particularly his analysis of the political field, their approach is more easily applied to the San Francisco local homeless policy arena than Bourdieu's. Their theory was developed with organizations in mind, whereas Bourdieu's approach to fields was more oriented towards individual actors engaged in competition for capitals. Their theory also has a more adjustable apex that can be fitted to multiple levels of social organization. It can be applied to the local just as easily as the regional or national; whereas Bourdieu's theory of fields was much more explicitly fashioned towards national level fields. Finally, because Fligstein and McAdam's theory of fields is more general; it allows for a more heterogeneous field membership than Bourdieu's. Homeless policy fields are comprised not by a set of fairly similar types of actors, but by a wide diversity of organizational forms, including everything from service providers, to big business lobbying firms, to government offices, to organized homeless insurgents.

While Fligstein and McAdam's theory of strategic action fields provides the overall backdrop for conceptualizing organizational fields in this article, the task of empirically mapping the San Francisco homeless policy field required the development of a methodological approach based upon two additional streams of sociological literature. The first stream, network analysis, posits that the domains in which policy is fashioned may be understood as networks of organizations which interact, compete, cooperate, and connect to each other in a myriad of ways ( DiMaggio 1986, Laumman 1987, Diani 2003). The second stream is neo-institutionalism – which focuses on the way that cognitive scripts, conceptions, and conventions govern organizational action (Meyer 1977; Dobbin 1994; Fligstein 1995).

In developing a methodology for empirically mapping the San Francisco homeless policy field, network approaches are quite easy to operationalize. These approaches in sociological usage developed largely as an empirical method for collecting data about social interactions. The neo-institutional focus on scripts, concepts and conventions does not provide as immediately available a method of operationalization. There exist numerous works utilizing a variety of approaches to understand the role of ideas, paradigms, and causal stories in policymaking (Stone 1989; Weir 1992; Hall 1993; Campbell 2001). I found frame analysis, especially as it has been used to explain to political processes within social movements, to be the most useful approach for measuring conceptions within a local organizational field. Cognitive frames serve to identify social problems, attribute blame for problems, suggest remedies to problems, and provide motivation to mobilize on behalf of those remedies (Goffman 1974, Snow 1992; Snow 2000).

Drawing together network analysis and neo-institutionalist approaches to organizations, allows for a synergy which mitigates some of the weaknesses of both of these approaches. Network analysis can provide detailed descriptions of the formal properties of patterns of interconnection amongst social actors. However, simply describing or analyzing these network patterns can often leave us without much leverage to comprehend meaning-filled social processes. On the other hand, sociological neo-institutionalist approaches point out how ideas and conceptual models shape social action, but this literature often lacks a specific description of how institutionalized ideas diffuse throughout society. Ideas simply seem to permeate through thin air. Of course,

this lack of modeling of how ideas diffuse stems in large part from the complexity of tracing their paths (Hall 1993).

The primary aim of this article is not to fully resolve the difficulties of either of these sociological approaches; nor is it to fully address questions about how ideas are generated or transmitted in the context of social networks. This article does not ask exactly where and how ideas are generated; it does not ask what specific role networks play in governing, expressing, or formulating ideas; and it does not ask casual questions about whether networks follow ideas or ideas follow networks. However, this article does offer one example of a methodology by which neo-institutionalist focuses on norms and concepts can be productively operationalized in terms of frames and discourses; and then integrated with the literature on networks.

When measures of cognitive framing are overlaid onto organizational networks, a coherent story emerges which gives us some leverage to comprehend the meaning-filled social processes mediated by these networks. At the same time looking at conceptual models and political ideas within the context of organizational networks of communication, alliance, and information sharing provides some suggestions as to what specific trajectories and mediums of cognitive diffusion may look like.

Applying this combination of neo-institutionalist and network approaches to policy domains allows us to understand public policy as emerging out of networks of organizations engaged in struggles over how we ought to frame the world, and based on those framings, what policy actions we ought to adopt. Material interests and resource preferences are shaped by these framings; at the same time that actors strategically utilize framings to advance material interests. In this approach to policy fields, we cannot

simply reduce networks, frames, resources, or political influence into abstract, independent, and separate variables. Rather these factors are interrelated and mutually constitutive elements of a complex system. Mische points to this type of mutual constitution in her work highlighting the way that networks are not only conduits of cultural forms, but are also generated by cultural processes such as conversation. (Mische 2003) Like Mische, I also see networks, communication, and culture as mutually generating. However, I add into this equation and into my empirical mapping of the San Francisco homeless policy field, the additional factors of influence and material resources.

### **Methods:**

In order to empirically map the San Francisco homeless policy field, I measured five aspects of the field: 1) organizations, 2) relationships, 3) frames, 4) material resources, and 5) political influence. I discuss here the methodological steps which I used to operationalize each of these elements.

#### *1) Organizations*

Newspaper archives, key informants, rosters of homeless service providers, notes from public meetings, city documents, homeless ballot initiative campaign contribution records, internet searches, and snowball techniques were used to identify a long list of key organizations in the San Francisco homeless policy field. This list was pruned down to a total of 170 key organizations representing the following organizational categories: City Departments and Committees; State and Federal Agencies; Elected Officials; Business/Economy; Neighborhoods and Civic Groups; Unions; Direct Service Providers;

Advocacy; Housing; Foundations; Policy and Research; Political Clubs and Parties; and Media. (Individual elected officials are considered organizations in as much as they represent offices.)

In the summer and fall of 2003, I conducted extensive interviews with representatives of 59 of these 170 organizations. I used intentional sampling and snowball method to select a representative sample for interviewing. I began by choosing a handful of the most important organizations and interviewed someone from each of them. I spoke with either the director of an organization, the person in charge of homelessness/homeless policy for the organization, or as high up as I could in the organizational hierarchy. Then as I learned more about the field from these initial interviews, I continually added to my selection of organizations to interview.

I especially wanted to focus on speaking to the most powerful organizations in the field. As I will discuss in more detail below, I measured power as “perceived influence.” Of the 22 organizations with the highest rankings of “perceived influence,” I interviewed 20 of them. The other 39 organizations I interviewed were intentionally selected to represent a sampling of each of the organizational types within the field. To insure anonymity I do not name organizations in this study or present a list of organizations interviewed.

## 2) *Relationships*

I measured relationships using social network analysis. I collected network data about the field by asking organizational representatives to examine the list I had compiled

of 170 key organizations in the field. I then asked respondents to answer the questions below in regards to this list of 170 organizations.

Discussion Network: Would you please identify all of the organizations on this list with whom your organization regularly and routinely discusses homeless policy matters?

Frequent Discussion Network: Would you now identify up to eight organizations with whom you most regularly and frequently discuss homeless policy matters?

Alliance Network: Often homeless policy involves the formation of organizational coalitions. With which eight organizations on this list does your organization most often find itself on the same side of policy issues and working with in direct coalition?

Opposition Network: With which eight organizations on this list does your organization most often and most strongly find itself on opposite sides of the fence on homeless issues?

Credible Information Network: Would you please tell me the four organizations which you consider to provide the most consistently reliable, accurate, and useful information about homelessness and homeless policy issues?

Not Credible Information Network: Could you now identify up to four organizations who most often provide information about homelessness and homeless policy issues which you consider unreliable or inaccurate?

Using the information collected about organizational relationships, I was able to employ UCI-Net software network analysis functions to divide the field into clusters of organizations. Because there is no consensus within network literature either as to what algorithms work best for dividing networks into clusters, nor as to which specific type of

connection serves best for identifying groupings, I examined a variety of different possible ways to analyze the network data. I began by using faction algorithms and alliance network data to divide the homeless policy field into groups. I varied the number of factions I asked the algorithm to divide the field into from only a few factions up to over a dozen factions. I examined what natural groups stayed together regardless of how many factions the field was split into. I then performed a similar process using blockmodelling techniques. Finally, I similarly employed both faction and blockmodeling techniques utilizing the frequent communication data.

This process allowed me to generate numerous lists of different possible divisions of the field into basic factions. Out of these lists, there emerged some key groupings and organizations that almost always clumped together. Most of the organizations in the field fit into these key groupings regardless of the approach to splitting the field. However, there were some organizations that did jump around. In order to decide where to categorize these groups, I privileged faction algorithms, since they are more specifically oriented towards identifying factions of the type in which I am interested. I also privileged the alliance network data since it is most specifically oriented towards identifying groupings of allies; and frequent communication networks may show connections to main opponents, or to neutral government centers, as easily as to allies. Finally, after taking all of these factors into account, I was able to verify the validity of divisions of the field into factions based on my qualitative, big picture understanding of the field derived from previous observation and interviews.

In the end, I divided the homeless policy field into nine distinct factions based primarily on a faction algorithm asking the field to be divided into nine groups. After

faction membership was determined, I assigned each faction a descriptive label which categorized the type of organizations in that faction.

### *3) Frames*

I conducted open ended interviews with one or more representative from each of the 59 organizations included in this research . The interviews were generally structured by common questions, but the questions were open ended, and there was some divergence in the questions discussed in each interview. Interview questions asked respondents about a range of issues relevant to the homeless policy field, including their views about: their organizational goal and activities, the nature and causes of homelessness, their understandings about homeless people, the impact of homelessness on the community, overall and San Francisco specific responses to homelessness, best policies for addressing homelessness and biggest obstacles, political dynamics within the San Francisco homeless policy field, history of San Francisco homeless politics, their views on and relationship with other organizations, and their participation in homeless policy creation.

Drawing on Sommer's summary of homeless literature as well as my own review of public documents and media accounts of homelessness in San Francisco, I also identified four prevailing master-framings of homelessness in San Francisco. (Sommer 2000) I codified each of these master framings into statements similar to Gamson's framing statements in Talking Politics. (Gamson 1992) After the open ended questions of the interview were completed, I asked interview respondents to look over these statements one at a time and comment on them. I then asked them to identify who on the list of 170 organizations involved in San Francisco homeless policy described above, they thought would be most likely to say each of these statements.

The statements are as follows:

a) Homeless people are trashing public areas, hurting local businesses, deterring tourists, and discouraging conventions from being held in town. This is causing a decline in San Francisco's economy. A healthy economy and the tax revenue which it provides is essential for the city to have the necessary funding to provide homeless services. Therefore, it is in the interests of the business community, homeless people, and the city as a whole for San Francisco to quickly enact strong measures which prevent homeless people from aggressively panhandling, from violating quality of life ordinances, from trespassing, and from obstructing business.

b) While there are some homeless people who are temporarily down-on their luck, most chronically homeless people have mental health disorders and/or drug and alcohol addictions. Therefore, the only real long term solution to homelessness is adequate services, such as mental health and substance abuse treatment, in combination with homeless people taking the initiative to turn their lives around.

c) Homelessness is largely a result of the failure of the housing market to provide a sufficient supply of affordable housing and the labor market to provide a sufficient supply of well-paying jobs. Homelessness can, therefore, only be resolved if the government provides billions of dollars in funding for affordable housing, employment creation, and community health services. The government will also need to adequately regulate housing and labor markets to insure living wage jobs and regulate the creation of affordable housing by private developers.

d) The inability to deal effectively with homelessness in San Francisco is largely due to a lack of leadership amongst policymakers and a failure of organization and coordination amongst city departments. Homeless policy has become too politicized, too fragmented, and too adversarial; and millions of taxpayers dollars have been misspent because of that. What the city needs is leadership to set long range goals for dealing with homelessness, and to rationally implement those goals with specified benchmarks and periodic audits. Ineffective programs should be cut and the city should contract services through competitive bids. Until these management issues are dealt with, no matter how much money San Francisco throws at the problem, it won't improve.

Using the transcripts of these interviews, including comments made both in open ended questions and in response to the above four statements, I identified over 300 unique clusters of propositions or statements which expressed respondents understandings of homelessness, the causes of homelessness, impacts of homelessness, solutions to homelessness, and San Francisco's response to homelessness. My methodology for generating these codes was inductive. I look through interview transcripts, and for every unique logical proposition I found, I generated a code.

Each individual had a unique way of thinking about and discussing aspects of the homeless policy arena. However, statements made by different individuals often had similarities, or had underlying logics in common. So I began to group these statements together to create constellations of thought, and code them as such. When the same or similar propositions were made by other respondents, I would add those statements into the code; and include both respondents' statements within that code. Each code represents a cluster of ideas that were strongly related to each other and shared important basic characteristics. As I went through more and more transcripts, patterns began to emerge; and I would at times merge or reorganize codes.

I was also able to group these codes into larger master framings of homelessness. Master framings included multiple codes within them. Some of these master framings were highly related to – though they did not entirely overlap with the 4 statements above upon which respondents commented.

Of course, any inductive coding process of this sort is never entirely inductive. It depends on my own theoretical choice of how I think propositions should be divided. Even before the coding process began, the very questions I asked respondents, and in particular the framing statements I asked them to respond to, already contained within them categorical divisions about various understandings of homelessness. As I organized the coding system after the interviews were done, I continued to make interpretative categorical decisions as to which statements fit together, which codes should be merged and which should not, etc. These interpretive categorical decisions were informed by my collected understanding developed out of intensive interviews with the heads of 59 key organizations involved in homeless policy in San Francisco; my

reading of relevant academic literature; and by my prior experience working in homeless social services and as a street level community organizer with homeless people.

I generally only interview one person in each organization. While this does cause some concern as to the degree to which their individual responses could be taken to represent the views of the organization as a whole, this is not overly problematic. To begin with I spoke with organizational leaders, most often the director of an organization. Though interviews were confidential to allow them the opportunity to speak freely, they were speaking in their official capacity as an organizational representative and leader. Thus, their viewpoints might quite reasonably be taken to representative of their organization as a whole. Also, because I am interested here in field level dynamics and the distribution of viewpoints across the field as a whole rather than investigating specific organizational viewpoints, to the degree that there is some error or variance in asking organizational leaders to represent their organization, this potential error is mitigated and diffused when we pay attention to the field as a whole.

#### 4) *Resources*

I did not measure resources of individual organizations in my study of the San Francisco Homeless Field. Often resources are obvious (i.e., big business organization's tend to have much more material resources than homeless advocates or neighborhood associations). I did, however, measure the relative wealth of opposing factions by looking at campaign contributions to controversial homeless ballot initiatives and to political candidates who held opposing positions around homeless issues.

5) *Political Influence*

My approach to political power in the homeless policy field was to identify it with influence specifically within that field. Since many of the organizations involved, such as neighborhood associations, media, or big business organizations, did not limit their organizational activity to issues of homelessness, it would not have made sense to examine some sort of total measure of their overall power. While a major industry lobbyist group may have across the board significantly more overall “power” than a homeless service provider, specifically within the local field of homeless policy making, the service provider may actually have more influence than the industry lobbyist.

I measured influence in terms of “perceived influence.” Perceived influence, of course, is only one of many ways of representing influence and power; and may be criticized in that it assumes that field members’ perceptions of power are accurate. Nonetheless, within a local homeless policy field such as San Francisco, where all parties know each other, perceived influence as a measure of power is just as, if not more, appropriate than any other measure. Additionally, the degree of overlap of perception of who is influential across respondents suggests that there is indeed a concrete reality underlying their perceptions.

In order to determine perceived influence, I asked interview respondents to identify out of the list of 170 organizations in the field, up to eight organizations which they felt were the most influential in formulating San Francisco homeless policy, in implementing San Francisco’s responses to homelessness, and in shaping the way the public views homelessness. In total 32 of the 170 organizations were selected by more than one

interviewee. 22 were selected by more than two interviewees. This is a rather narrow selection and demonstrates substantial consensus given the total number of possibilities which could have been chosen.

I added up the total number of respondents who selected each organization as being one of the 8 most influential, and scaled these sums off so each organization interviewed received a perceived influence rank between 0 and 5. I also sought to identify the core powerholders in the field; or in Fligstein and McAdam's terminology, the field incumbents. Based on my own understanding of the field and the organizations for which I had direct interview data, I delineated the incumbent group to be the 19 organizations with highest perceived influence rankings. A review of news articles over the last fifteen years shows that these 19 organizations are also the ones which have been most consistently vocal and involved in homeless policy throughout that time.<sup>2</sup>

**Factions:**

Utilizing the procedure described above for identifying factions, I identified 9 distinct factions in the San Francisco homeless policy field. These 9 factions divided into three groups of three : three "left" factions, three "center" factions, and three "right" factions. It is extremely important throughout this paper, to recognize that *by the terminology left, right, and center; I am referring to particular positions within the San Francisco Homeless policy field*, and not to the political positions of San Francisco voters as a whole or to political positions within the national political arena. For example, someone who is in the center of the San Francisco Homeless field, might be considered on the left from the perspective of national politics. Moreover, these factions

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<sup>2</sup> Because I guaranteed interviewees confidentiality, I can not provide the names of these organizations.

are not intended to represent divisions of the San Francisco political arena in general or in the general electorate – although some of the layout of these factions does indeed coincide with the broader political arena. Instead, these factions are particular to alliances around the issue of homelessness amongst the organizations interviewed for this study.

The factions are numbered in order from the most politically “left” to the most “right.”

They are as follows:

## **LEFT FACTIONS**

### **1. Poor People’s Organizations**

(organizations interviewed in this faction include 4 advocates and 1 small provider\*) [\*the term “provider” refers to either a service provider or a non-profit affordable housing developer]

### **2. Radical Small Service Providers**

(organizations interviewed in this faction include 3 small providers and 1 advocate)

### **3. Progressives**

(organizations interviewed in this faction include 3 political offices, 2 small providers, a neighborhood group, and a media organization)

## **CENTER FACTIONS**

### **4. Liberals / Big Service Providers**

(organizations interviewed in this faction include 5 large providers, 2 political offices, 2 technical assistance/research organizations, 2 small providers, and 1 advocacy organization)

### **5. Centrists/Foundations**

(organizations interviewed in this faction include 3 foundations, and 1 large provider/interest advocate)

### **6. Core City Government**

(organizations interviewed in this faction include 6 government agencies, 1 political office)

## **RIGHT FACTIONS**

### **7. Law, Order, and Quality of Life**

(organizations interviewed in this faction include 3 government agencies, 2 neighborhood organizations, 1 politician, and 1 business organization)

### **8. Moderate-Conservatives**

(organizations interviewed in this faction include 2 political offices, 1 research/policy organization, 1 media organization, and 2 business organizations)

### **9. Big Business**

(organizations interviewed in this faction include 4 business organizations)

Concentrated in the center and left of the San Francisco homeless policy field, in factions 1 through 6, are the non-profits and government agencies that are most frequently involved in homelessness on a day-to-day level, in administering homeless programs, and in developing affordable housing. Concentrated on the right, in factions 7 through 9, are business organizations as well as other organizations and government agencies which specifically interact with homeless people through their focus on public safety and public cleanliness. Politicians, media, neighborhood associations, and research organizations are found throughout the factions in the field.

Sometimes particular types of organizations are all in a single faction. For example, all of the foundations interviewed for this study were members of faction 5, the Centrists/Foundations Faction. However, some organizational types spread out across factions. For example, service providers are in both left and center factions; business organizations can be found throughout the three right factions; and government agencies can be found both in the center Core City Government faction, as well as, in the right Law, Order and Quality of Life faction.

In addition to breaking the organizations down into factions, UCI-Net software also permits the visual drawing of the organizational network. The following map displays the spatial organization of the San Francisco homeless policy field based on alliance network data. Each node represents an organization. Each arrow represents an alliance network connection. Arrows point from respondent's organizations to the organizations respondents identified as most often falling on the same side of homeless policy issues as themselves.

The color and label of an organization indicates the faction to which it belongs. The size of the node is scaled to the organization's perceived influence ranking. So the bigger the node, the more powerful the organization. This can be slightly misleading comparing among shapes because the different shapes with the same power scale, sometimes appear to be differently sized. Finally, the shape of the node corresponds to the type of organization: squares are business organizations; circles are service providers; diamonds in the upper left are advocacy organizations; diamonds in the lower-center and in the upper-right are government agencies; up triangles are both neighborhood groups and media; down triangles are both foundations and technical assistance/research organizations; hourglasses are elected officials/politicians.

UCI-Net arranged these organizations in order to minimize the distance of their alliance network ties. Those clusters of organization which commonly identify each other as part of their network will appear spatially closer to each other in the map. Since

factions were determined using similar analysis of alliance network ties, organizations that are members of the same faction, tend to be located near each other on the alliance network map.

## **Framings**

In this article, I will focus on four of the most important master framings of homelessness in the San Francisco policy field. These four framings were hinted at by the four statements above to which respondents were asked to respond. These four framings are: the individual frame, the systemic frame, the social control frame, and the bureaucratic failure frame. The individual framing focuses on the deficiencies and deviance of individuals as the *primary* cause of homelessness. The systemic frame focuses on altering broad social structural factors, such as lack of affordable housing, living wage jobs, or health care, as the *primary* cause of homelessness.

The social control frame focuses on the necessity of social or police coercion of homeless people and criminal justice tactics to address homelessness. Two basic sub-propositions within this frame are: 1) that homeless people resist services and do not want help, and thus must be forced into recovery and housing; and 2) that homeless people harm the economy and quality-of-life in the city, and thus must be controlled through criminal justice measures. The bureaucratic failure frame views homelessness as caused by a self-perpetuating, inefficient government homeless bureaucracy and non-profit homeless industry.

These four framings are not mutually exclusive, but can coexist within the “cultural toolkit” which an individual draws upon to understand homelessness. (Swidler 1986) Even the systemic and individual frame can coexist either unconsciously, or at times self-

consciously, within the repertoire of the same individual. Therefore, the important aspect of these framings to examine below their prevalence and dispersion throughout the field. Focusing on field level prevalence of framing again underscores why it is reasonable to take interviews with individuals to represent organizational positions. The location of any one instance of a particular framing in the field is not as important as the overall distribution.

These four master-framings of homelessness can be seen as broad organizing categories for many of the 300 unique ideas I coded out of statements respondents made during interviews. These 300 unique ideas were concrete propositions *about* the world; they were specific points or arguments which at times may strongly resonate with a single framing and at times may incorporate multiple frames into their construction. These specific propositions might be thought of as the particular details, the canyons and rock formations, within cognitive landscapes; whereas the frames represent the general topography of the cognitive landscape. The frames are the gestalts which bound reality and direct our attention. They are underlying interpretive logics within which specific propositions exist.

Of these four framings, the most broad and encompassing of all framings is the systemic frame. It included such a wide range of propositional ideas mentioned by respondents, that for the sake of comparison with the other three frames, it is useful to examine one sub-set of ideas within this systemic frame, the economic systemic frame. This framing sees the “economic system” as the cause of homelessness.

## **The Incumbent-Challenger Model**

Fligstein and McAdam claim that organizations in a field usually take the role either of a dominant incumbent or of a challenger (Fligstein and McAdam 2003). Fields are governed by conceptions of control which shape the action in the field and which reinforce the power of the dominant incumbents within a field. Field level stability is achieved by the domination of incumbents and their conception of control. As I will show in more detail below, the San Francisco homeless policy field was indeed held stable throughout the 1990s and through the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If the stability of San Francisco's Homeless policy field was caused by incumbent-challenger dynamics as outlined by Fligstein and McAdam, the following three propositions would hold true: 1) the main powerholders in the field would be allied incumbents, and thus would not identify each other as most frequently on opposite sides of homeless policy debates; 2) the main powerholders would have similar conceptions of homelessness; and 3) there would be a cohesive citywide homeless policy based on the incumbents conceptions. The findings of this study reject all three of these propositions for the San Francisco homeless policy field.

*Proposition 1 : If incumbent-challenger dynamics exist in the field, the main powerholders should be allies and should not identify each other as most frequently on opposite sides of homeless policy debates.*

Diagram 1 shows the opposition network amongst the 19 main powerholders in the San Francisco Homeless Policy Field. The diagram is a subset of the alliance network above, and maintains the same relative spatial positioning of organizations in relation to each other based off the alliance network mapping. If these organizations

were a unified group of elite, then there would be no oppositional arrows amongst them. This diagram shows that there is a great deal of opposition amongst these organizations. There is no central set of organizations which form a ruling incumbent group. One might argue that this is because incumbents rule the field, but are still in competition with each other. However, this opposition is not simply a market type competition of all against all; but rather a bifurcated opposition of left versus right.

The oppositional arrows in the field point from the left to the right, and vice-versa. The largest big business organization and the largest poor people's organization are the two extremes of the field and the most frequently opposed organizations from the opposite sides. Thus, proposition 1 fails, as there is heavy polarized conflict amongst the main powerholders in the field.

### ***Opposition Network of Main Powerholders***

*This network shows that there is a great deal of conflict amongst main powerholders. Each node represents an organization. Each arrow coming out of an organization points to an organization which it identified as one of its main opponents in the homeless policy field.*

*Proposition 2 : If incumbent-challenger dynamics exist in the field, a dominant conception of control would exist and the main powerholders would have similar framings of homelessness.*

The figures below demonstrate which of the 19 main powerholders hold aspects each of four major framings of homelessness in San Francisco: the individual frame, the economic systemic frame, the social control frame, and the bureaucratic failure frame. In each figure, those organizations which are colored in shapes adhered to the framing

examined in that figure. Hollow shapes represent organizations which did not hold that framing. The figures are again based on the alliance network mapping, and arrows in them represent alliance connections between organizations.

We can see from these mappings that the main powerholders are deeply divided in their framing of homelessness. Thus, proposition 2 fails.

***Mapping of the individual frame***

*This map shows us that main powerholders on the right of the field along with one in the center adhere to the individual frame.*

***Mapping of the economic systemic frame***

*This map shows us that powerholders on the left and center of the field adhere to the economic systemic frame.*

***Mapping of the social control frame***

*This map shows us that powerholders on the right of the field along with one in the center adhere to the social control frame.*

### ***Mapping of the bureaucratic failure frame***

*This map shows us that powerholders on the right of the field adhere to the bureaucratic failure frame.*

*Proposition 3 : If incumbent-challenger dynamics exist in the field, there would be a cohesive field wide policy based on the incumbents conceptions.*

Proposition 3 also fails. One of the few points of agreement amongst respondents across factions is that San Francisco has failed to create a cohesive homeless policy. Community homeless plans, such as two versions of the federally mandated Continuum of Care plan, have failed to gain legitimacy or consensus to become the guiding document in the city's homeless policy. In 2002, the San Francisco Controllers office conducted a largescale audit of city homeless programs and found that the largest problem with San Francisco's homeless services has been the city's consistent failure to develop a policy with clear goals and a citywide set of implementation priorities. (Controller 2002) Even things as seemingly basic as a definition of who is homeless, or how many homeless people live in the city, remain deeply contested facts. At the time of this research, the most frequently cited figures of the homeless population of San Francisco ranged nearly 100% between 8,000 and 15,000.

Another piece of evidence suggesting the lack of a dominant conception of control orienting San Francisco's homeless policy field is the lack of ideological cohesion within the Core City Government faction. This faction consists primarily of the bureaucratic city agencies most directly responsible for overseeing and administering city homeless policy.

In the following table, I measure the ideological coherence of each faction. To do this, I first identified for each faction the 20 most prevalent organizing ideas about homelessness and homeless policy within that faction. I then calculated what percent of members of each particular faction mentioned each of the factions top 20 ideas. I add up these percentages to provide a total coherence score for each faction. The higher the score, the greater the level of ideological coherence amongst the faction. I also provide combined scores for the left, the center, and the right factions as a whole. This table shows that there is a high level of ideological coherence amongst factions on the extremes of the field; and a lower level in the center. Faction 6, the Core City Government, is the least coherent of all factions.

## FACTION COHERENCE TABLE

	Faction 1	Faction 2	Faction 3	Faction 4	Faction 5	Faction 6	Faction 7	Faction 8	Faction 9
Mention of top 20 ideas for each faction	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	0.875	86%	100%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	91%	100%	75%	86%	100%	100%
	100%	100%	100%	91%	75%	75%	86%	100%	100%
	100%	100%	88%	83%	75%	75%	86%	100%	100%
	100%	100%	88%	75%	75%	63%	71%	100%	100%
	80%	100%	88%	75%	75%	63%	71%	100%	100%
	80%	100%	75%	75%	75%	63%	71%	100%	100%
	80%	100%	75%	67%	75%	63%	71%	83%	100%
	80%	100%	75%	67%	75%	63%	71%	83%	100%
	80%	100%	75%	58%	75%	63%	71%	83%	100%
	80%	100%	75%	58%	75%	63%	71%	83%	100%
	80%	100%	63%	58%	75%	50%	71%	83%	100%
	80%	100%	63%	50%	50%	50%	71%	67%	100%
	80%	100%	63%	50%	50%	50%	71%	67%	75%
	80%	100%	63%	50%	50%	50%	71%	67%	75%
	80%	100%	63%	50%	50%	50%	71%	67%	75%
<b>Faction Coherence Scores (sums):</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>15.1</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>19</b>
	<b>LEFT</b>	<b>CENTER</b>	<b>RIGHT</b>						
Mention of top 20 ideas for each faction	100%	100%	100%						
	100%	92%	94%						
	100%	88%	88%						
	94%	75%	88%						
	94%	75%	88%						
	88%	67%	82%						
	88%	63%	82%						
	81%	63%	82%						
	81%	63%	76%						
	75%	58%	71%						
	69%	54%	71%						
	69%	54%	71%						
	69%	54%	71%						
	69%	50%	71%						
	63%	46%	71%						
	63%	46%	65%						
	63%	46%	65%						
63%	46%	65%							
56%	46%	65%							
56%	46%	59%							
<b>Faction Coherence Scores (sums):</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>15.2</b>						

Of course, this table provides somewhat artificial and over-processed measurements of ideological coherence. It is quite sensitive to both measurement and computational

influences. For example, faction 2 and faction 5 coherence scores are probably a little artificially high since they had the smallest number of members, and that made it easier for them to have higher percentage of agreement. However, this table does provide a rough heuristic display demonstrating the relative lack of coherence amongst the center of the policy field, and particularly the core city government organizations.

The high levels of coherence on the extremes of the field and the low levels in the center does suggest that there are fairly unified and coherent polarized ideological blocks within the field fighting over control of it. These blocks have fairly high amount of agreement amongst themselves, and use those agreements as a basis for the policies, positions, and politicians they support.

Two possible interpretations of the low frame coherence of the core city government agencies are : 1) The core city government is caught in between and fought over by two ideologically coherent forces. The city government is split because parts of it are captured or influenced by one side, and parts of it by the other. Neither side, however, is able to fully win control over the city agencies as a whole and so the city remains incoherent. 2) The core city government agencies and the politicians who control them struggle for power and resources amongst each other. They seek power and support by playing off different ideological framings and appealing to different sectors or constituencies in the broader community. Frame battles then become central to the internal struggles of core city government agencies and city politicians. Over time layers of the bureaucracy are laid down embodying divergent approaches to homelessness, and an overall incohesion results.

These two interpretations are in some sense flip sides of the same coin. The first emphasizes capture of the city government by outside forces; the second emphasizes mobilization of outside constituencies by government officials and politicians engaged in an internal power struggle. Both interpretations are supported by widespread statements of respondents across the field that homeless policy making in San Francisco is hampered by “overpoliticization.” Moreover, more than any other faction, respondents in core city government decried the detrimental effects of “overpoliticization” of homeless policy in San Francisco and the lack of a commonly agreed upon set of goals for addressing homelessness. Many representatives of city bureaucracies identified “overpoliticization” as the biggest obstacle to resolving homelessness in San Francisco.

### **Stable Conflict**

The San Francisco homeless policy field is rife with explicit ideological conflict and there is no dominant framing of homelessness. At the same time, there is a highly coherent opposition and alliance network in the field, which locks organizations into stable positions vis-à-vis each other. The field is in a prolonged period of stable ideological conflict. Interview respondents frequently mentioned both the sharp ideological divisions in the field and the stability of the conflict over those divisions. Respondents from across the field agreed that the high level of contention in the homeless field has remained consistently unresolved for at least a decade, if not longer. This was actually one set of beliefs that people across the field held in common. They decried the city’s homeless related bureaucracy as fragmented and uncoordinated, and homeless policy as consistently incoherent and without clear goals.

Corroborating this characterization of the field are media reports about homelessness in San Francisco between 1990 and 2002.<sup>3</sup> The same issues, framings, debates, and organizational actors were present in field level conflicts throughout the 1990s. The field has remained a fairly stable stalemate of warring factions which possess fractious conceptions of homelessness.

Between 1990 and 2003, one of the key issues around which this field level conflict centered was whether or not San Francisco should increase social control of homeless people. The right pushed for increasing control of homeless people through police measures and forced treatment. The center somewhat silently opposed such measures; and the left vocally opposed them. Other key issues included the development of affordable housing, the funding of health and treatment services, and the payment of cash welfare benefits to homeless people.

The inability to develop cohesive homeless policy in San Francisco does not simply stem from the fact that there is conflict or polarization in the policy field. Few, if any, political issues are without conflict or polarization. However, in many political fields conflict is frequently resolved by one side or another winning its issues, or through a compromise which tilts towards one side or another. In San Francisco, this has not happened. Despite individual wins and losses in regards to issues, no side in the homeless policy conflict has been able to win an outright and lasting victory. Without any resolution, or even any lull in the fighting, the patterns of opposition have consistently

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<sup>3</sup> For some examples see: SF Weekly May 8, 1991; San Francisco Chronicle April 10, 1991; City Journal Autumn 1994 Vol.4, No. 4; San Francisco Examiner September 1, 1995; San Francisco Chronicle, September 9, 1995; San Francisco Chronicle, November 30, 1995; San Francisco Chronicle January 12, 1996; San Francisco Chronicle September 17, 1996; San Francisco Examiner, January 9, 1997; San Francisco Examiner, February 7, 1999; San Francisco Chronicle, September 28, 2001.

deepened in the field; and people become further and further entrenched into positions of conflict

Of course, conflict over homelessness in San Francisco arises not only because of an inability to create an agreed upon, cohesive approach to resolving homelessness, but also fundamentally because of the continuing presence of homeless people after many years of public attention. This has led many people working within the field to believe that homelessness is a national or state issue that is beyond the scope of San Francisco as a locality to solve; and that greater federal funding of homeless programs is essential. The merit of this claim is, of course, beyond the scope of this research.

Stable conflict in the San Francisco homeless policy field also related to broader political dynamics. In many ways, conflict in the field took on the dimensions of classic class struggle. This is perhaps not surprising given that San Francisco is one of the most left-leaning urban centers in America, while it is simultaneously the financial capital of the west coast. We might, therefore, see policy battles over homelessness in San Francisco as only the tip of a larger political iceberg in the city.

A number of interview respondents were asked about their vision of San Francisco 20 years from now, apart from the issue of homelessness. Three broad themes emerged: The largest theme located in the center and left of the field was about maintaining and enhancing economic and cultural diversity. A second theme located amongst a smaller group of organizations focused largely in the right of the field, with some center and left, spoke about enhancing the economic vitality of the city. The third theme mentioned by the smallest number of organizations, and located primarily in the center and right of the field, spoke about the need to protect the middle class. Conflict in the San Francisco

homeless policy field might be seen as representing conflict amongst these three broader visions of the city playing out through the positions, battles, and behaviors within the homeless policy field.

At the same time that the conflict over homelessness can be seen as part of a broader contest over the definition of the city as a whole, it can also be seen as part of a broader power struggle playing out between four basic organizational sectors in the city: 1) business organizations, 2) government agencies, 3) non-profits/service providers, and 4) advocates/activists/community organizations. These organizational sectors underlie the homeless policy field factions described in this article.

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**Balance of Power and Symmetry:**

If there is no overriding conception of control governing the San Francisco Homeless policy field, and if there are not incumbents who dominate the field with their conception of control; the question arises, what is causing stability in the field? The finding of this article is that the field is held stable by a balance of power and symmetry within the field. This symmetry is based on the complex interplay of field positions, relationships, frames, influence, and resources.

In order to understand this symmetry we should look at the distribution of framings of homelessness throughout the field as a whole, and not only at the framings adhered to by the main powerholders. The following four diagrams map out onto the policy field as a whole particular propositions about homelessness that fall within each of the four master framings discussed above. I have chosen to map in these diagrams specific propositions falling within each of the master framings, rather than to map the frames as a whole

again, because these propositions allow a more textured view into the types of ideas that arise within each of these broad framings.

In the following mappings, it is important to note that just because an organizational representative is not represented as adhering to a particular proposition, does not mean they would absolutely disagree with it – only that they did not voluntarily make this statement in the course of our interview. At the very least, this means that this proposition was not one their most salient understandings of homelessness.

The below field mappings include all organizations interviewed in this research. The spatial positioning of organizations are exactly based on the alliance network map displayed above. To simplify presentation, however, the network connections, as well as the indicators of organizational power and organizational type, presented in the alliance network map, are removed from the diagrams below. Instead, shapes represent which faction particular organizations belong to: triangles are left organizations, circles are center organizations, and squares are right organizations. Colored in shapes represent organizations whose representatives expressed the specific propositions examined in each figure. Hollow shapes represent organizations whose representatives did not express that proposition.

These mapping show that when looking at actors across the field the center and left of the field share quite similar understandings of homelessness, and their understandings contrast with the understandings of the right.

**Individual Framing : Individual choice to be homeless**

*This diagrams maps all organizations whose representatives asserted that a major cause of homelessness is that homeless individuals irresponsibly choose to be on the streets and refuse homeless services. This diagram shows that this notion is prevalent primarily on the right of the field.*

**Economic Systemic Framing: Unemployment, low wages, and unstable jobs**

*This diagrams maps all organizations whose representatives asserted that a major cause of homelessness is societal level unemployment, low wage jobs, and lack of job stability in the contemporary labor market. This diagram shows that this notion is prevalent throughout the left and center.*

**Social Control Framing : Increased legal penalization**

*This diagrams maps all organizations whose representatives asserted that a crucial aspect of resolving homelessness is increasing “quality of life enforcement by police against homeless people and increasing penalties and convictions by courts. This diagram shows that this notion is prevalent primarily on the right, as well as, amongst some centrist foundations.*

**Bureaucratic Failure Framing: Most homeless programs failing**

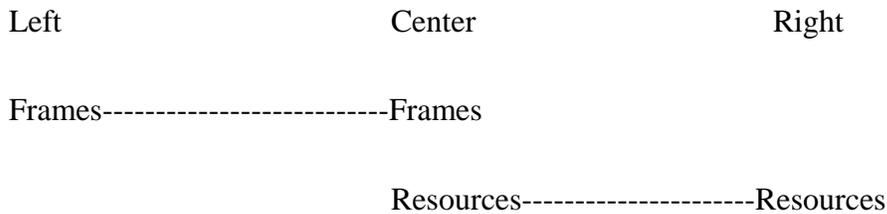
*This diagrams maps all organizations whose representatives asserted that that many – if not most – homeless programs are inefficient, failing, and wasting resources without producing results. This diagram shows that this notion is prevalent on the right.*

The center and the left in each of these figures adhere to very similar understandings of homelessness. The issues which are salient to them in understanding homelessness sharply contrasts with the right. When looking overall at the many issues brought up by interview respondents this finding became even more pronounced. Framings in the center and the left of the San Francisco Homeless Policy field focus on the role of economic and housing systems in causing homelessness, as well as, on society's systemic failure to provide adequate health care, substance abuse treatment, mental health care, and other social benefits. The center and left also broadly agree on the lack of effectiveness of social control or punitive measures in resolving homelessness. Additionally, the center, along with many in the left, believe that for the most part San Francisco homeless programs are doing good work and have model programs, but are constrained by insufficient funding.

While the center and the left see homelessness in fairly similar ways, their framings are in stark contrast to the framings of organizations on the right of the policy field. The most pervasive propositions about homelessness amongst the right focus on the harms that homeless people cause to the quality of life in the city and to the economy, particularly to merchants and the tourist industry. Many on the right focuses on individual deficiencies – such as substance abuse and choosing to be homeless – as the primary cause of homelessness, denying the importance of systemic causes. Belief that homelessness stems from individual deviance and that homeless people harm the community goes hand in hand with belief in the need to increase social control of homeless people, coerce them into services or institutions, and further enforce “quality of

life” laws. Finally, the right sees the city’s homeless programs as a hopelessly inefficient bureaucracy that wastes millions of taxpayer dollars. Some even believe that service providers actively maintain homelessness in order to sustain their organization’s revenues.

The left and center, however, were unable to form an effective winning alliance because their common framing of homelessness was not in itself enough to come together to form and win a coherent homeless policy in San Francisco. While the left and center shared similar framings of homelessness, the right had twice the political influence and many more material resources than the left. The left and the right therefore managed to split the center: the left winning the framing battle, and the right pulling the strings of power and money. This symmetry held the field in stable conflict, and might be depicted as :



Evidence that the right had twice the political influence as the left can be found by calculating the perceived influence rankings determined for each organization via the method described in the methodology section above. When combining the perceived influence ranking for each member of specific factions, the right has a sum influence score of 22, compared to the left’s score of 10. Evidence that the right controls vastly greater material resources than the left can be seen by looking at campaign spending. At the time of this research, a controversial homeless ballot initiative was being floated to the voters. The measure would increase criminal sanctions for “aggressive” panhandling.

It was a classic social control initiative supported almost unanimously by the right and opposed almost unanimously by the left. In this ballot campaign, the right outspent the left by a ratio greater than 50 to 1. During that same election, a mayoral campaign unfurled in which homelessness was the right candidate's primary issue. That candidate backed by big business interests, outspent his left opponent at a rate of 9:1. Again, though, it is important to remember that the terms left, right, and center in this article refer specifically to positions in the San Francisco homeless policy field mapped here, not to positions in the national political spectrum or to positions amongst the cities electorate as a whole.

The fact that the right in the San Francisco homeless policy field controls so many more material resources than the left is particularly important because center organizations in the field, such as service providers, foundations, and city government agencies are all dependent on those resources controlled by the right. Importantly, when asked about constraints to resolving homelessness, respondents from center organizations most frequently mentioned the lack of funds. The center's focus on funding as the main obstacle to addressing homelessness underscored the right's ability to use material resources to control the center and split the center from the left, despite the center's broader frame agreements with the left in terms of causes of and solutions to homelessness.

The inability of the center and left to form a productive alliance based on their common framings of homelessness is evinced not only by their inability to win a cohesive homeless policy for the city based on their common framings; but also by the oppositional relationship between many organizations on the center and left. When asked

to name their key opponents in the field, despite the commonality of their framings compared with the right, many center organizational representatives named left organizations as their main opponents; and vice-versa.

The inability of the center and left to form a winning alliance may also relate to the collective misrecognition throughout the field of where particular framings are located. I asked respondents to look at the four statements about homelessness listed in the methodology section above; and to identify what organizations in the field might make these statements. Respondents identified the systemic oriented statement as occurring primarily amongst left organizations, and the individual focused statement as occurring amongst centrist organizations. However, when I asked respondents across the field what they thought about these very same statements, the systemic focused statement was agreed to both by the center and the left; and the individual focused statement was adhered to much more on the right of the field. People thought the systemic frame was a left view in the field, whereas it was more of a centrist view; and they thought the individual frame was centrist, whereas it was more of a right view. There was a displacement of people's perceptions of the belief structure of the field. This collective misrecognition probably hampered the ability of left and center to form a working alliance around the systemic framing.

### **Hybrids and Compromises:**

The result of the conflicting symmetry between frames, influence, and resources in the San Francisco homeless policy field is that no overriding conception of homelessness was able to dominate the field. The left and center were unable to install a fully systemic oriented response. They were unable to secure the necessary resources for

adequate housing and services to meet demand, and they were unable to stop the criminalization of homeless people through frequent citations for “quality-of-life” offenses such as sleeping in public. Their inability to accomplish these tasks was in large part because the right used its influence and material resources to control the center and to block a stronger center-left alliance from dominating the field.

At the same time, the right in San Francisco was unable to push complete social control and police measures, as other urban areas like New York and Chicago had, which swept homeless people out of sight. Though many on the right point to the approaches of these other cities as ideal, the left managed to eventually blocked large-scale police initiatives, such as Mayor Jordan’s Matrix program; and to effectively challenge “quality-of-life” citations in the courts and in the political arena.<sup>4</sup> The left’s success was in part due to the fact that the center of the field ideologically opposed such social control measures and preferred a systemic approach to homelessness – though center organizations whose purse strings were held by the right were often quite timid in voicing that opposition.

Amidst this stable conflict, one program model that was growing in popularity across the political spectrum during the time of my fieldwork was supportive housing. Supportive housing combines the provision of affordable housing with on-site support services by placing caseworkers and other support staff in buildings with subsidized housing units. Mostly amongst the center of the policy arena, some respondents believed that the supportive housing model provided the key to solving homelessness. The supportive housing model can be seen as a hybrid approach to homelessness which resonates with multiple framings. It is a model which brokers an ideological compromise

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<sup>4</sup> City Journal Autumn 1994 Vol.4, No. 4

between factions that push systemic focused understandings of homelessness, and those which push individual and social control focused understandings of homelessness.

Because supportive housing involves an increase in housing units, it resonates with the systemic view of the center-left. At the same time supportive housing places homeless people within a setting where they can be overseen and managed by caseworkers, and it therefore resonates with the right's view of the need for increased social control and individual deficiencies as the cause of homelessness. Given that it is a sort of hybrid compromising model, it is not surprising then that supportive housing was most often mentioned and touted as the solution to homelessness by centrist organizations.

But the supportive housing model is not without critique by some interview respondents. Critics on the left pointed out that resolving homelessness is not only about finding a place to put those who already are on the streets, but also about assuring the security of those low income people who are one step away from being homeless and addressing a broader systemic lack of affordable housing and good jobs. Supportive housing may be the best answer for those who are currently on the street and who have serious personal challenges, but unless broader systemic insufficiencies are resolved, more people will continue to end up on the street — even as those who are currently homeless are transitioned into supportive housing units. Water may be scooped out of the hull of the sinking boat, but the leak will not be plugged. Some on the left also claimed that not everyone needs on-site support services, and to put those who do not need these services into supportive housing unfairly institutionalizes them. Critics on the right pointed out that San Francisco's homeless system is already so unaccountable and

wasteful that before adding another layer to it, such as building additional supportive housing, serious cuts and measures of accountability needed to be put in place.

A few months after I concluded my field research, San Francisco elected a new mayor, Gavin Newsom. Newsom focused his election campaign on the issue of homelessness and proclaimed supportive housing to be the centerpiece of his approach. Newsom, whose campaign was heavily funded by the right, first took interest in homelessness as a member of San Francisco's Board of Supervisors. In the year and a half previous to being elected mayor, Newsom sponsored two homeless related ballot initiatives: one that reduced cash benefits to homeless people in lieu of services, and one that increased legal restrictions and fines for "inappropriate" panhandling. Both of these are measures that the right had been trying unsuccessfully to pass for a dozen years. Newsom sold both of these initiatives to voters by framing them as the compassionate approach, and presenting them as measures that would increase housing, services, and substance abuse assessment for homeless people. Opponents of the initiatives claimed the measures were mean spirited, and the provisions within them to increase services were empty, unfunded advertising gimmicks.

Since his election Newsom has become the darling of the Bush administration's federal homelessness agency – even as he has clashed with the federal administration over gay marriage. His programs in San Francisco and his citizen volunteer days to help the homeless have been touted as national models. The Newsom administration claims to have seriously reduced homelessness in San Francisco, and to have created substantial new supportive housing units. He has shifted his focus towards addressing "chronic homelessness" the most visible of all homeless populations, in part because the Bush

administration has pushed localities to make “chronic homelessness” the priority issue in their local level planning.

Newsom has been able to publicly present himself as breaking through the stable conflict in the San Francisco homeless policy field, and to proclaim that he has finally created a coherent approach to homelessness in San Francisco that is having real beneficial results. To the extent that Newsom’s public proclamation of his success is indeed a reality; he was able to break through a decade and a half of institutionalized stable conflict by combining in his rhetoric and approach to homeless policies the political resources and support of the right with the framing of the center-left.

Prior to becoming mayor Newsom pushed policies intended to address the common concerns of the right, such as increasing social control and decreasing bureaucratic waste, selling these policies with center-left rhetoric of compassionate provision of services and housing for homeless people. Since becoming mayor Newsom’s focus on the construction of supportive housing units has allowed him to appear as though he were pursuing a systemic solution to homelessness, even as he reassures downtown interests that he is a representative of the business community.

Newsom has managed to do an incredible PR job in favor of his supportive housing initiatives, while quietly stepping up police enforcement of “quality of life” citations to levels higher than it has been in decades. Critics claim that Newsom has basically driven homeless people out of town with police measures and by reducing welfare assistance to a far greater number of people than the amount of new housing he has generated. They argue that Newsom’s supportive housing programs are really no different than the approach of the past two terms of the previous mayoral administration.

Supportive housing was already the main housing approach of the city, and many units had already been developed by city agencies – though Newsom is much better at advertising it and playing the press than the previous administration had been. Critics also claim that Newsom has seriously cooked his statistics showing a major reduction in the city’s homeless count. Critics argue that these false statistics, which are taken as the proof of his homeless policy successes, have been unquestionably adopted by the moderate-right mainstream media in San Francisco and fallaciously been taken as facts by the general public.

Critics further contend that Newsom who has focused his efforts on the “chronically homeless,” the most visibly homeless people; though he may have reduced the sight of homeless people on San Francisco’s streets, he has failed to address the underlying problems of crowded living and poverty amongst San Francisco’s poor families and immigrants. He has failed to really address the structural causes of homelessness, even as he has allowed the three decade long process of gentrification in San Francisco to continue to unfold. Moreover, some critics contend that he has not even reduced the level of homeless people visible on the streets, just moved them away from downtown areas. Newsom’s policies fall well in line with the Bush administration which has focused it’s federal homeless agency specifically on removing the public blight of the most visible indigent homeless people; while on a broader level the Bush administration has continued to cut back on social welfare programs, housing subsidies, and other initiatives which address the systemic causes of poverty in America.

Whatever the merit of Newsom’s approach to homelessness in San Francisco, he has managed to seriously undermine the political strength of the left of the homeless

policy field. For a number of reasons, some of the fiercest organizations on the left have faced severe difficulties in the last few years since Newsom's election. The voice of left opposition to the city's homeless policies and to right oriented homeless initiatives has fallen very quiet in public policy debates and media reports. Whether this is a sign of Newsom's concrete programmatic success or of his skillful political maneuvering is still uncertain. What is perhaps more certain is that Newsom represents the end of some of the last vestiges of the welfare state in San Francisco's homeless policy arena. He has replaced it with what might be called multicultural neoliberalism; a business oriented economic approach with a healthy respect for diversity and a personal ethic of compassion. Under such a regime, the state's welfare role is limited to targeting those who are most visibly suffering and to promoting the interests of business as the interests of all, rather than mounting a systemic response to structures of poverty, racism, or inequality.

**Conclusion:**

Drawing on the analysis of the San Francisco homeless policy field presented in this article we might posit two basic axis along which to understand field configurations. One axis is the field's level of social organization, and the other, it's level of cognitive order. Social organization refers to the positioning, alliance formations, and networks of organizations within the field. A field with high levels of social organization has well defined patterns of interaction, alliance structures, communication networks, and social positions. Cognitive order refers to shared framings within the field about the issues and actions around which the field is formed. Cognitive order can be measured based on the level of consensus in the field. A field with high levels of consensus in it's cognitive

order would be one in which there is widespread agreement about the nature of the world in which the organizations are acting, agreement about the goals of action within the field, and agreement about the appropriate actions to be taken to reach those goals. In short, cognitive order is about shared framings and social organization is about coherent networks and positions.

I offer the following two by two table as a means for classifying organizational fields according to these two dimension.

		<b>Social Organization</b>	
		<i>Unorganized</i>	<i>Organized</i>
<b>Cognitive Order</b>	<i>Consensus</i>	Common Sense	Hegemony
	<i>Lack of Consensus</i>	Disorganization	Stable Conflict / Stable Pluralism

Through my investigation of the San Francisco homeless field I depict a field locked in stable conflict. It's social organization became firmly institutionalized without a unified cognitive order. Fligstein and McAdam's conception of a field stabilized by a dominant conception of control is an exemplar of a hegemonic field. I do not deny that hegemony, and incumbent challengers dynamics are important sources of stability in many, or even most, fields. I do seek however to augment their theory by demonstrating another dynamic leading to stability.

If we assume hegemony and domination is the only way that stability might be developed in a field, we miss the degree to which fields, such as the San Francisco homeless policy field or other fields engaged in either conflict or pluralistic power

sharing, might be institutionalized without a unified conception of control or widely held norms and goals. Assuming that a field is unstable until the point in which one conception of control wins the field, misses the frequent examples – especially in the political arena or in class conflict – of stable conflicts which continue through fairly routine and self-reproducing mechanisms without ever being resolved, and without ever having a conception of control win out.

Perhaps underlying the difference between my example of the San Francisco homeless policy field and many other inquiries into fields is that I am investigating a “heterogeneous” one, rather than a “homogenous” one. A homogenous field is one in which the organizations that make up the field are of the same type and are engaged in similar functions (i.e. nonprofit theatre groups, museums, health care providers, software developers, oil companies, etc.) These organizations operating in their respective fields must account for each other as competitors or allies engaged in parallel endeavors, but who function in very similar ways and who share similar goals. A heterogeneous field, in contrast, is one in which the organizations which make up the field are of very different types. These heterogeneous organizations perform different sorts of functions, but must account for each other because they both enable and constrain each other’s actions and each other’s ability to impose their will upon social arrangements.

Beyond this distinction between homogenous and heterogeneous fields, however, I believe that there is a more fundamental divergence between my focus on stable conflict in this article and the approach which sees field stability as deriving from hegemony and domination. The hegemonic approach has at its root a pervasive notion throughout sociology that stability arises when a particular ruling group or elite takes power and

imposes its conception of the world onto social institutions. Bourdieu, for example, in his focus on social reproduction emphasizes the domination of fields by elites who are able to impose the categories and rules which shape social action. He attempts to combine together Durkheim's concerns with social integration and categories of thought with Marx's awareness of class conflict and capital accumulation.

In this article, I have tried to utilize an alternative means of understanding the stable reproduction of society which also involves combining attention to social integration and categories of thought with an awareness of social conflict. In the approach developed in this article, society and social institutions are seen as revolving around particular symbols or issues. As hegemonic theories point out, cooperation around, shared framings of, or acceptance of domination in relation to the central symbols or issues in a field or institution may allow social stability and order to emerge. But these symbols around which the field revolves may also be contested; and the very dynamics of this contestation which unfolds through words, frames, songs, resources, relationships, influence, etc. may also lead to an equilibrium which holds a stable order without having a unitary set of framings imposed upon all field members. Institutions, and the symbols and issues around which they form, can become the suspended focal points of social interaction and communication in which the dialectic of history needs no inherent resolution, nor absolute progression; and in which there is the possibility of stability without the necessity of an ultimate hegemon or dominant social class.

Drawing on the approach developed in this article, society can be viewed as a uniting network which organizes contesting and cooperative relationships in relation to each other; and in so doing organizes framings and representations, individuals and

collectivities, in complex interrelation. Society organizes, forms, and holds its various component parts much as the force of gravity organizes, forms, and holds the spiraling solar systems of the Milky Way Galaxy in relation to each other.

The upside of this approach to stability without hegemony is that it suggests that there is the possibility of peace without domination. Society might be held orderly by equilibriums of respect. Of course, conflict and tension is inevitable so long as more than one person is involved in anything. A peace without domination does not mean the end of conflict. Rather, it would involve the balancing of social tensions and conflicting social demands through generosity, respect, and mutuality. This type of peace without domination is the dream of radical democracy, the dream of a classless society. But it is a difficult dream; one which cannot be actualized simply by fine tuning political institutions, redistributing material resources, or creating new systems of justice. All these external, worldly endeavors are, of course, essential; but a social stability without domination would also require that humans learn to balance the inevitable experience of social tension and resolve the inescapable arising of social conflicts with hearts of nonviolence and respect, compassion and simplicity, contentment and frugality. This is no small task.

And then, even if we were to do all that, even if we were to truly find a way beyond hegemony; or a way of institutionalizing Laclau and Mouffe's ever contingent decentering hegemonies; even if we were to find stability without violence; even if we were to construct an equilibrium of peace – even that could not last. There still would remain the inescapable law of change; the never ceasing motion of the universe.

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