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Author(s): Suzanne Mettler and Joe Soss

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The Consequences of Public Policy for Democratic Citizenship: Bridging Policy Studies and Mass Politics

By Suzanne Mettler and Joe Soss

Democracies, and the citizenries that stand at their center, are not natural phenomena; they are made and sustained through politics. Government policies can play a crucial role in this process, shaping the things publics believe and want, the ways citizens view themselves and others, and how they understand and act toward the political system. Yet, while political scientists have said a great deal about how publics influence policies, they know far less about the ways policies influence publics. In this article, we seek to clarify how policies, once enacted, are likely to affect political thought and action in the citizenry. Such effects are hard to locate within the standard framework of approaches to mass behavior, and they are generally ignored by program evaluators and policy analysts. To bridge this gap, we direct attention toward a long and vibrant, but underappreciated, line of inquiry we call the “political tradition” of mass behavior research. Drawing this tradition together with recent work on “policy feedback,” we outline a framework for thinking about how policies influence mass politics. The major types of such effects include defining membership; forging political cohesion and group divisions; building or undermining civic capacities; framing policy agendas, problems, and evaluations; and structuring, stimulating, and stalling political participation.

Do choices among different types of public policy matter for the vitality and functioning of democratic politics? How, if at all, do specific policy designs affect what individuals think, feel, and do as members of the polity? As political scientists, we ought to be able to tell our fellow citizens something—however uncertain or contingent—about how government actions affect their quality of political life. Yet aside from some notable exceptions,¹ political science has had little to say about the consequences of public policy outcomes for democratic citizenship. We seek to stimulate inquiry in this area by identifying conceptual barriers to, and possible bridges for, a more fruitful dialogue between students of public policy and students of mass political behavior.

When political scientists investigate the relationship between public policy and mass behavior, they usually do so in ways suggested by theories of representative democracy. Citizens, in this view, are background actors in politics; they exert an indirect influence on public policy through their efforts to select, support, and sway elected representatives.² Models of the political process adopted in the postwar era—for instance, systems theory and pluralism—formalized this basic framework for political scientists. “Politics” came to be defined as a sequence of reified processes that culminates in the “authoritative allocation of values.”³ Mass preferences and actions are cast in this model as system “inputs,” and public policies as system “outputs.”⁴

Pluralism and systems theory are less likely to serve as explicit frameworks for political scientists today than they were at mid-century.⁵ Yet these models’ underlying emphasis on representation continues to structure the relationship between students of public policy and students of mass politics. Relegated to opposite ends of the political process, these subfields remain effectively cordoned off from each other. Students of mass politics usually treat public policy as a remote, eventual target of political action, or as an indeterminate object of citizen preferences. Scholars who study policy formation focus on elite representatives and advocates, addressing mass publics primarily as background influences on the more proximate policy actors. Meanwhile, researchers who analyze policy effects usually limit their purview to social and economic outcomes—as if effects on democratic practice and other political consequences merited less concern.

Suzanne Mettler is Alumni Associate Professor of Political Science at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University (sbmettle@maxwell.syr.edu). Joe Soss is associate professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (soss@polisci.wisc.edu). The authors thank Kristi Andersen, Keith Bybee, Andrea Campbell, Sara Gubala, Peg Hermann, Jennifer Hochschild, Rogan Kersh, Frances Fox Piven, Sandy Schram, Jeff Stonecash, Kathy Cramer Walsh, and the anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier drafts. They are also grateful for generous research support provided by the Global Affairs Institute and the Campbell Institute of Public Affairs, both in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs; and they thank Amy Widestrom for formatting assistance.

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political arena.⁷ How do they come to be privileged in this manner? The answer lies, to a significant degree, in public policies that distribute educational opportunities to citizens and shape their quality of education.⁸ Yet studies of political behavior rarely mention government policy as an important factor influencing observed outcomes. And policy studies that focus on social and economic outcomes say almost nothing about how education policies affect the political process. In the overlooked space between these subfields, one finds the crucial question of how education policies create, sustain, and challenge political inequalities—and how such policies might better serve a polity that aims to govern itself in a democratic fashion.

The result is an incomplete vision of how public policy and mass politics relate to each other. When questions of representation drive political analysis, as they have so often in the past half century, we lose sight of the ways that policies, once created, affect the strength and logic of self-governance. Our scholarship thus distorts potentially crucial influences on mass opinion and behavior, forces the policy process into a model that is needlessly linear, and severs policy evaluation from critical questions of democratic theory. Political science stops short of exploring public policies' influence on what citizens want, how strongly they want it, and whether they engage the political processes that hold the power to supply or deny it to them.

We hope to promote a political science that has empirically and theoretically grounded things to say about the ways public policies further or thwart democratic purposes. Political scientists should be able to explain why some policies draw citizens into public life and others induce passivity. We should have a sense of how living under a given policy regime affects citizens' goals, beliefs, and identities—and hence, the possibilities and limits for future political action. The principal argument of our article is that mass political behavior cannot be adequately understood without attention to how it is influenced by public policy; and public policy cannot be adequately analyzed apart from its effects on mass opinion and behavior. Scholars can significantly advance each field by studying the ways that citizens' political thoughts and actions are molded by broad policy environments and influenced by direct encounters with specific public programs.

Consider, for example, the relationship between formal education and mass political orientations. The political-behavior field is riddled with studies showing that education enhances political knowledge and skills, levels of interest, and engagement in civic affairs.⁶ Citizens who receive more education are, to state the matter simply, *advantaged* in the

In the first part of this article, we try to facilitate the integration of policy influences into the study of mass political behavior. We begin by explaining how this research topic has been organized out of prevailing understandings of the field. Next, we show that our analysis fits into a diverse yet coherent political tradition of research on mass opinion and behavior—an approach that is insufficiently recognized as a distinct alternative to the three dominant research schools but that, ironically, has become central to the field. In the remainder of the article, we focus on the ways that public policies shape mass opinion and behavior. Although students of policy have devoted too little attention to this issue, we locate the conceptual tools for such an investigation in diverse strands of inquiry associated with the concept of “policy feedback.” Drawing on historical, comparative, and individual-level studies, we present a typology of the effects that public policies might have on mass opinion and behavior. Wherever we can, we highlight evidence that public policies do, indeed, have large and varied consequences for mass politics. In other cases, we draw on existing theoretical work to speculate about additional effects that deserve attention. In conclusion, we call for wide-ranging empirical research to explore this agenda, and we raise some questions for interested scholars to bear in mind.

Recognizing the Political Tradition

Surveying political behavior research, one can easily see the influence of systems theory and how the field has organized itself around questions of representation. Indeed, students of political behavior have often defined core objects of study in ways that assume a political process running from mass preferences and demands through elected intermediaries to policy outputs.⁹ Likewise, the explanatory approaches that have come to define the self-image of the field have been those that treat citizens' individual decisions and acts as fundamental units of political input.

Review essays in the field typically contrast sociological, psychological, and economic approaches.¹⁰ Surveying these reviews, we find one approach notably absent from the standard framework: the *political tradition* of scholarship that explains mass opinion and behavior as politically constructed outcomes—that is, as outcomes that arise through the interaction of political institutions, organizations, policies, and actors. Unlike the three recognized schools of thought, the political tradition turns systems theory on its head; it also illuminates collective dimensions of mass politics that cannot be easily conceptualized within the confines of methodological individualism. For both of these reasons, it offers scholars an approach to mass politics that clarifies the place of public policy within the field of political behavior. Policy feedback, we contend, need not be viewed as an idiosyncratic hypothesis about mass behavior, but can be developed as an integral part of a long-standing and influential—though poorly recognized—research tradition.

At the outset, we note two points about the political tradition. First, scholars have been producing studies in this vein for a long time, but few observers have recognized that these diverse works make up a coherent and distinctive approach to mass politics. Our goal is to bring attention to these labors and clarify the common analytic thread that runs through them, and to show how this perspective offers a bridge to emerging work on policy feedback. Second, the approaches that make up the standard framework are ideal types. The contrast of “schools” underscores important analytic differences. But the best work in the field often borrows across these analytic lines.¹¹ Additionally, the failure to name a distinctive political tradition has not prevented researchers from drawing on this tradition to enrich their sociological, psychological, and economic analyses.¹² Indeed, our goal is to clarify how such studies reach beyond the standard framework in ways that challenge the lingering systems-theory premises of the field.

The standard framework

It is useful to summarize each approach in the standard framework: Research in the sociological tradition explains mass opinion and behavior by linking them to the individual's position within social structures, social contexts, social networks, and processes of social communication and influence. The basic elements of this tradition can be traced to a series of mid-century works by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues,¹³ who envisioned mass politics as an organic community activity embedded in the group basis of modern society. At the heart of these studies were discrete individuals subjected to a variety of social processes that encouraged political differences across groups and political homogeneity within groups. The tradition can be readily seen in analyses of racial politics that emphasize group interests and positioning,¹⁴ and in research on the ways that social networks interact with social contexts to influence individual opinions and behaviors.¹⁵ A fine recent example of this tradition is Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady's Civic Voluntarism Model,

which explains group differences in participation by tracing them to “the fundamental *non-political* institutions with which individuals are associated during the course of their lives” (emphasis added).¹⁶

Research in the psychological tradition explains mass opinion and behavior by linking them to individuals' underlying identities, beliefs, values, attitudes, and symbolic predispositions—and more generally, to processes of motivation, cognition, and affect. The landmark work in this tradition, *The American Voter*, shifted the focus of electoral research away from the individual's group context to individual-level differences in such mental phenomena as partisan identification, political knowledge and sophistication, and attitudes toward issue positions and candidate images.¹⁷ Groups, in this tradition, are treated less as structural locations or sites of social processes than as bases for group identification and consciousness,¹⁸ stereotyping and prejudice,¹⁹ judgments of fairness,²⁰ and judgments regarding political tolerance.²¹ Political participation flows from psychological orientations—feelings of political efficacy, strength of partisanship, trust in government, a sense of civic duty, group consciousness, and the like.²² Scholars, in short, explain individual responses to political issues by appealing to (1) underlying principles, such as egalitarianism, individualism, and humanitarianism; (2) beliefs and feelings regarding groups; and (3) individuals' subjective perceptions of events and interests.²³

Research in the economic tradition explains mass opinion and behavior by linking them to individual self-interest, the instrumental pursuit of goals, and rational choices based on expected utility. The seminal work in this tradition, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*,²⁴ offered a magisterial application of neoclassical economic principles to political phenomena. And although “traditional” and “bounded” models of rational action have diverged over time,²⁵ both consistently treat political action as “goal-directed behavior based on rational beliefs about the relationship between means and ends.”²⁶ The economic approach tends to recast basic questions of mass politics as matters of individual choice, often suggesting how counterintuitive outcomes can emerge from the aggregation of rational individual choices. Classic examples can be found in writings on “rational ignorance,”²⁷ “rational abstention,”²⁸ and “free rider problems.”²⁹

The traditions that comprise the standard framework differ in important ways, but all may be fairly characterized as citizen-centered approaches. We mean this in two senses. First, all three approaches embrace methodological individualism: each treats the individual as the fundamental unit of analysis.³⁰ Second, each begins its analysis of mass politics with citizens. One tradition starts with citizens' social relations and locations; one starts with their attitudes, values, and reasoning processes; and one starts with their self-interests and instrumental actions. But they all treat mass opinion and behavior as a *vox populi* that emerges from sources that are not overtly political and that generates input for the political system.

The political tradition

As noted earlier, this is where the political tradition stands apart: it explains mass opinion and behavior as products constructed through the interplay of state structures and institutions, political actions and communication flows, mobilization and demobilization, and the density and the patterning of political organizations. Looking back to the twentieth century for a seminal work in the political tradition, one could hardly do better than *The Semi-Sovereign People*, which offers a paradigmatic political analysis of nonparticipation. Responding to those who would blame nonparticipation on “the ignorance, indifference, and shiftlessness of the people,” E. E. Schattschneider argues:

This has always been the rationalization used to justify the exclusion of the lower classes from any political system. There is a better explanation. . . . Whoever decides what the game is about decides also who gets into the game. . . . The root of the problem of non-voting is to be found in the way in which alternatives in American politics are defined, the way in which issues get referred to the public, the scale of competition and organization, and above all by *what* issues are developed.³¹

Building on these insights, scholars have produced a rich political tradition in the study of voter participation that emphasizes state institutions, party alignments, and efforts to shape the composition of the electorate.³² Rather than explain the class skew in American voting by citing differences in individual characteristics, political research has shown how it depends on “the competition between and organizational vitality of the parties”³³ and on whether “workers have a party clearly appealing to their interests.”³⁴ Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward explicitly contrast citizen-centered and political traditions in this area of research;³⁵ they exemplify the latter by analyzing the interplay of registration laws, party alignments, and efforts to demobilize the electorate as causes of nonvoting.³⁶

Looking beyond turnout to broader forms of political action, the political tradition is well illustrated by Steven Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen’s argument that “the key to understanding who takes part and who does not, when they take part and when they do not, is mobilization.”³⁷ This emphasis on “mobilization” contrasts with Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s concept of “recruitment” in a way that helps to distinguish political and sociological approaches: the former highlights the contributions of political organizations and elites, while the latter focuses on the role of “nonpolitical” social groups and community organizations.³⁸ The political tradition is likewise represented in the literature on social movements, by works that emphasize political opportunity structures, activists’ mobilization efforts, and relational dynamics of contention.³⁹

Turning from mass action to public opinion, one finds a parallel line of political scholarship. In the mid-twentieth century, proponents of such an approach included V. O. Key, Jr., who famously asserted that “the voice of the people is but an echo. The output of an echo chamber bears an

inevitable and invariable relation to the input.”⁴⁰ Benjamin Ginsberg has offered a more critical, structural argument along these lines, but one that nevertheless resonates with Key’s: “While contemporary Western governments do listen and defer to their citizens’ views, the public opinion to which these regimes bow so assiduously . . . is in many respects an artificial phenomenon that national governments themselves helped to create and that their efforts continue to sustain.”⁴¹ Or consider Murray Edelman, whose many books argued that mass political engagement, whether psychological or behavioral, should be analyzed as a product of symbolic threats and reassurances. Thus, contrary to systems theory, “the significant ‘outputs’ of political activities are not particular public policies labeled as political goals, but rather the creation of political followings and supports.”⁴²

The analyses put forward by Ginsberg, Edelman, and Piven and Cloward, might lead some to surmise that the political tradition reflects an inherently critical social science that is incompatible with the citizen-centered traditions. We think that such an oppositional view would be mistaken. Over the past two decades, behavioral research as a whole has taken a constructivist turn, placing greater emphasis on the ways mass responses get shaped by political actors, organizations, and information flows. The rising importance of such factors can be seen not only in the broadening appeal to mobilization,⁴³ but also in the burgeoning literatures on agenda setting, priming, and framing.⁴⁴

Growing attention to political communication, in particular, has paved the way for a powerful blending of the psychological and political approaches. Thus, Thomas Nelson and Donald Kinder, who work mainly in the psychological tradition, suggest that the extent of “group-centrism” in mass opinion does not flow directly from some underlying element of individual or group psychology. Rather, it “depends importantly on the political context. . . . The *framing* of issues—by partisan elites and mass media organizations—shapes public understanding of the roots of contemporary problems and merits of alternative solutions [*italics in original*].”⁴⁵ A similar perspective can be found in John Zaller’s landmark study, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*.⁴⁶ Like Edelman,⁴⁷ Zaller begins by assuming that “most people possess opposing considerations on most issues that might lead them to decide the issue either way.”⁴⁸ So an individual’s response to a particular issue at a particular time will depend on which considerations have been made salient and which have been made obscure. To find the factors that determine this mix, Zaller argues, we must look beyond the individual to the communication flows citizens receive from political elites and mass media.

The key point in these arguments, for our purposes, is that common patterns of political thinking in mass publics can be viewed as politically constructed outcomes. Additional examples abound. Scholars working in the political tradition argue, for instance, that beliefs about government responsiveness and one’s capacity to influence political outcomes (i.e.,

political efficacy) are not just socialized psychological orientations. They depend on mass appeals by political organizations,⁴⁹ and they are shaped by direct experiences of government institutions.⁵⁰ Likewise, group identification and consciousness do not simply emerge for individuals or social groups; they get organized into or out of the political process. As Adam Przeworski explains, "If political parties do not mobilize people qua workers . . . then workers are less likely to identify themselves as class members and, eventually, less likely to vote as workers."⁵¹ In this view, partisan loyalties are more than socialized identities or instrumental allegiances; they are also, as Martin Shefter argues, political achievements constructed by innovative organizations that actively seek to attract mass followings.⁵²

By claiming that the works discussed here share a common analytic approach, we do not mean to suggest that they are monolithic. On the contrary, the discipline's failure to recognize political explanations of mass behavior as a coherent body of research stems, in part, from divisions within this tradition. Scholars adopting a political approach sometimes differ sharply on the top-down versus bottom-up question of *which* political actors shape mass responses: elite individuals and organizations⁵³ or popular movements and insurgent activists.⁵⁴ Furthermore, work in this tradition sometimes appears to cleave into a "material branch" (emphasizing factors such as state structures and rules, the density and alignment of organizations, and the distribution of resources to mass publics) and an "ideational branch" (emphasizing political language, framing and discourse, causal narratives, and symbolic cues). Research in the political tradition also divides along lines of what Mustafa Emirbayer calls "substantialist" versus "relational" analysis.⁵⁵ That is, while some analyses posit stable political actors and try to specify the causal effects of their actions, others analyze the ways open-ended political transactions construct political actors and try to specify dynamic mechanisms that convert transactional logics into outcomes.⁵⁶

These and other divisions in the political tradition help to specify branches of a coherent analytic school. Research in the political tradition emphasizes factors that historically have been given short shrift in the major works of the other traditions, including the following: (1) the framing of ambiguous alternatives for ambivalent publics; (2) the diversity and direction of political communication flows; (3) the expressive effects of government actions; (4) institutions that cultivate values and beliefs; (5) the vitality and alignment of organizations that transform diffuse groups into coherent political collectives—e.g., parties, unions; (6) political actors' targeted mobilization and demobilization efforts; (7) language and actions that arouse or pacify the public; (8) agenda setting and the suppression of issues or alternatives; (9) institutional rules that promote or deter demand making; (10) political opportunity structures related to elite cleavages, propensity for repression, et cetera; and (11) state actions that distribute resources to political groups.

Public Policy and Policy Feedback

In the broad political tradition, we see an intellectual home for research that examines how public policies influence patterns of mass opinion and behavior. A subgroup of scholars has built a promising approach around the concept of "policy feedback." Before elaborating and clarifying this line of inquiry, though, we need to comment on standard approaches to public policy.

Standard approaches to public policy

In textbook formulations, political scientists typically approach public policy as a product developed through a series of stages—agenda setting, formulation, implementation, and evaluation—that mirror the basic model of systems theory.⁵⁷ The extent to which this sequence of processes should be deemed democratic is a question that pervades the scholarly literature. This issue is generally cast, however, in terms of whether policy outputs are produced in a democratic manner—not whether policies function to promote democracy itself. Thus, students of problem definition and agenda setting ask why particular issues become the concern of government officials while others are ignored, and why certain policy alternatives are prioritized while others get marginalized.⁵⁸ Some scholars focus directly on the quality of citizen input, investigating whether mass publics are capable of expressing rational positions on policy topics⁵⁹ and how they might engage more fully in deliberation.⁶⁰ Others observe how the politics of implementation can lead to inefficient or unintended outcomes, thwarting the original intentions or preferences of citizens.⁶¹

The linearity of the stage model notwithstanding, research by policy scholars often reveals a more dynamic process in which political forces stimulate and shape putative system inputs. Rather than treating goals as givens, constructivist studies show the myriad ways in which policy makers' beliefs and preferences are forged through a political process.⁶² "New institutionalists" of various stripes explore how institutional arrangements and the "rules of the game" structure the political agenda and shape policy design and enactment.⁶³ Scholars of problem definition and agenda setting demonstrate that institutional arrangements and "venues" interact with policy images to produce policy stability or change.⁶⁴

Although these approaches go far to illuminate political determinants of elite political behavior, they neglect to offer a parallel account of mass political behavior. The literature explains how political rules and preexisting policies shape the actions of public officials and interest groups, but it says little about the ways those same factors influence political thought and action in the citizenry. Indeed, the analysis of broad policy effects on the public, typically termed "program evaluation," is most often left to social scientists in fields other than political science. Such evaluation studies focus overwhelmingly on socioeconomic consequences and ignore explicit political activity. Thus, volumes get written on the ways policies affect outcomes such as poverty, longevity, employment, childbearing, educational attainment, the cleanliness of the air

or water, and incarceration, but little is said about what difference these policies make for the practice of democracy.

We believe that the nascent study of policy feedback can underpin a broader and deeper understanding of the relationship between public programs and mass behavior. It directs our attention to critical questions such as whether policies render citizens more or less engaged in politics and how public programs shape citizens' beliefs, preferences, demands, and power.

Origins of "policy feedback" as a concept

The idea that policies may themselves reshape the political environment has a long legacy.⁶⁵ In a pioneering study of pressure groups and tariff policies published in 1935, Schattschneider suggested that "new policies create a new politics." Beginning in the 1960s, scholars began to develop this idea in three trajectories of inquiry.⁶⁶

One group highlighted how different types of policies shaped the political interactions of organized interests and policy makers. Theodore Lowi argued that the policies' allocation of resources—through distributive, regulatory, or redistributive means—foster distinct types of political relationships and policy conflicts.⁶⁷ James Q. Wilson explained how a policy's costs and benefits may affect the propensity for organized citizen groups to become politically active.⁶⁸ Implementation scholars showed how administrative arrangements inscribed in policy designs can promote new political battles—for instance, by delegating authority to different levels or institutions of government.⁶⁹

A second group looked beyond lawmakers and pressure groups to see how public policies affect the beliefs, preferences, and actions of diffuse mass publics. Edelman, for example, argued that policies are simultaneously instrumental acts, with intended, tangible effects on the allocation of values, and expressive acts that convey meaningful cues to diverse political audiences.⁷⁰ They can alter preferences and perceptions of self-interest, shape basic beliefs about the nature of social reality, mobilize or pacify constituencies, and foment rebellion or serve to legitimate existing governmental and distributive arrangements. Similarly, Piven and Cloward argued that expansions and contractions of social benefits can function to mute civil disorder, sustain the legitimacy of the political order, influence the political and economic power of labor, and shape mass policy preferences.⁷¹

A third set of scholars explored how public policies affect the depth of democracy, the inclusiveness of citizenship, and the degree of societal solidarity. British sociologist T. H. Marshall, for example, traced the development of civic, political, and social rights from the eighteenth century through the twentieth century, emphasizing the ways social policies alter the possibilities for inclusive democratic politics and redefine the scope and meaning of citizenship.⁷² Furthering these ideas, Gøsta Esping-Andersen analyzed how social policies may impose class stratification, foster new kinds of equality or inequality, promote solidarity to different degrees, and alter citizens' dependence on states and markets.⁷³ More recently,

scholars have explored the reciprocal relationship between public policy and citizenship in relation to race and gender. Several have shown, for instance, how American social policies, historically, incorporated some groups as "first-class" citizens with social rights, while relegating others to "second-class" citizenship, beyond the reach of such provisions. Groups with enhanced social citizenship gained political access and leverage, advantaging them as participants in the political process relative to those with lesser status.⁷⁴

Drawing these three streams of scholarship together, and suggesting that timing and sequencing matter in such political dynamics, historical institutionalists in the past decade coined the term *policy feedback*. As defined by Theda Skocpol, "policy feedback" refers to the ways "policies, once enacted, restructure subsequent political processes." Skocpol pointed to two kinds of feedback effects: new policies may transform state capacities by creating, building upon, or undercutting administrative arrangements; and they may affect the identities, political goals, and capabilities of social groups.⁷⁵ Central to Skocpol's conception is the idea that the order in which events occur determines how policies create new politics.⁷⁶

Surveying the field in 1993, Paul Pierson argued that students of political development had successfully used the concept of policy feedback to shed light on the political activities of interest groups and elected officials. Unfortunately, Pierson noted, policy-feedback effects in the mass public had received considerably less notice. He urged attention to two types of feedback: resource effects (the ways policies act as producers of resources and incentives, thus shaping the costs and benefits associated with particular political strategies); and interpretive effects (the ways policies serve as sources of information and meaning, with implications for political learning).⁷⁷ Ten years later, however, we contend that policy-feedback scholarship still pays insufficient attention to citizens as political actors.

Though the literature on policy feedback now moves well beyond the constraining assumptions of systems theory, the effects that public policies have on mass opinion and behavior remain remarkably undertheorized. Moreover, empirical studies of such dynamics remain rare and fragmented. Just as political behavior scholars need to examine policy if they want to explain adequately patterns of mass politics, policy scholars need to pay greater attention to the ways policies affect mass opinion and behavior. By ignoring this topic of research, we prevent ourselves from understanding the full scope of effects that policies have on society, and we distort the nature of the political process that gives rise to public policy.

A Research Agenda for Policy Feedback and Mass Political Behavior

Pierson advanced useful ways to think about the mechanisms that allow policies to influence mass politics.⁷⁸ His essay, however, stopped short of specifying the types of mass effects one might expect policies to produce—or, put a bit differently, the varieties of empirical relationships scholars might focus on

as hypotheses for investigation. Drawing on existing scholarship, we propose a framework for pursuing policy-feedback effects in the arena of mass politics.

Defining membership

Most fundamentally, public policies define the boundaries of political community, establishing who is included in membership, the degree of inclusion of various members, and the content and meaning of citizenship. Immigration policies play the most obvious role in delineating, on legal grounds, between members and nonmembers. But any policy that sets forth eligibility criteria for benefits or rights, or establishes guidelines for citizen participation, implies that certain individuals are fully included within the polity and others are not, at least not to the same degree. For instance, contrary to its image as a liberal-individualist political culture, the United States has a long historical record of denying political and civil rights to individuals on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and immigration status.⁷⁹ Future research should do more to tell us the extent to which different portions of the public have noticed such denials and inferred something about who is truly “one of us” and who is only partially so.

As policies define membership, they also assign status, or what Judith Shklar calls “standing,” in the political community.⁸⁰ Through their rules and procedures, policies address people differently. By granting full rights—unequivocal and “earned”—to some individuals and treating them with dignity and respect, policies incorporate them into the esteemed ranks of first-class citizens. Other policies, ones that subject recipients to a heavy regime of direction, surveillance, and threats of disciplinary action, stamp recipients as inferior.⁸¹ Thus, encounters with policy treatment may affect citizens’ sense of status and their inclination to get involved in politics and civic life. Beneficiaries of the G.I. Bill, for example, enjoyed the generous and guaranteed nature of the program, which conveyed far different messages than did the stigmatized relief programs of their childhood. Through the G.I. Bill, veterans from less-advantaged backgrounds found themselves included as esteemed members of the polity, and they responded by becoming far more involved than would otherwise have been expected.⁸²

Public policies also may influence the ways individuals understand their rights and responsibilities as members of a political community. Through their design and coverage, policies supply citizens with what Lawrence Mead terms an “operational definition of citizenship”⁸³ and what Marc Landy calls a “civic teaching.”⁸⁴ Some policies—such as Title IX (the 1972 amendment that banned sex discrimination in schools, in both academics and athletics) or the Americans with Disabilities Act—expand and underscore citizens’ rights. In some cases, clients may be informed continually of their rights and of procedures that allow them to appeal government actions.⁸⁵ Other programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), stress the obligations that individuals must fulfill in order to merit full standing as citizens and to gain access to the benefits of social provision.⁸⁶

The mass audience for these civic lessons includes not only the direct targets or beneficiaries of government programs but also the public as a whole. Welfare state programs, for example, may convey to citizens that they bear rights to particular goods, services, or procedures; they may also cultivate a general sense that citizens have a right to expect their government to address certain social, economic, or political grievances.⁸⁷ These programs may also influence the ways mass publics perceive the nature of their civic obligations and the priority of such obligations relative to rights. At present, however, we lack the research needed to evaluate the extent of such broad civic effects.

Forging political community or delineating groups

Just as policies convey messages about membership to individual citizens, they also influence patterns of group identity. At their most expansive, policies may, as T. H. Marshall suggested, draw citizens together as a unified political community. Specifically, Marshall argued that government policies influence the evolving scope, strength, and terms of national citizenship over time.⁸⁸ More recently, scholars have contended that public policies may influence the level of cohesion in a polity through ambiguous symbolic appeals,⁸⁹ enforcement of common social behaviors,⁹⁰ or denigration of groups deemed to deviate from majority values.⁹¹

Alternatively, policies may foster group divisions within the polity and influence the beliefs and expectations of group members. It is well known that citizens tend to use social groups as a central referent for political thinking.⁹² It is less often appreciated that policies play an active role in constructing and positioning such groups, defining their boundaries, and infusing them with political meaning.⁹³ In some cases, public policies create, sustain, or deepen group divisions, even though the relevant groups may be defined on the basis of shared physical characteristics, cultural beliefs, or locales of residence.⁹⁴ In other cases, social groups exist only as a consequence of public policy. Without TANF, for example, the potent symbolic group known as “welfare mothers” would fail to exist. As a consequence, there would be no entrepreneurial political appeals to the electorate based on the castigation of this group. Without taxation policies, there could be no taxpayers and hence no political demands issued in their collective name.

In addition, policies convey messages about group characteristics directly to members of a target group and to a broader public audience. Treatment under a given policy can make a group appear powerful or weak, trustworthy or devious, morally virtuous or morally repugnant.⁹⁵ In this manner, policies can affect citizens’ ideas about which groups are deserving or undeserving, with major implications for the content of subsequent policy making.⁹⁶ Indeed, policy designs not only can affect the ways a target group is viewed in the society at large; they also can influence how group members perceive and evaluate one another—a feedback effect that has major consequences for the likelihood that group members will want to join together in collective political action.⁹⁷

Building or undermining civic capacity

Beyond the mobilizing or pacifying messages we have already discussed, policies may have a variety of effects on citizens' capacities for civic and political engagement. We identify four such dynamics.

First, the resources extended by policies may create material incentives for mobilization.⁹⁸ Individuals affected by a program may become active on related political issues, presumably to protect or expand benefits.⁹⁹ High rates of voter turnout among farmers, for example, may stem partly from government agricultural subsidies, which elevate "their sense of the personal relevance of politics."¹⁰⁰ Program resources also create material incentives for groups to band together in political activity.¹⁰¹ In many instances, social groups develop organizational capacity in response to the creation of a relevant public policy, rather than as a way to promote its passage.¹⁰² Such effects may vary across subgroups of beneficiaries. For instance, Andrea Campbell found policy-based mobilization to be strongest among low-income beneficiaries of old-age insurance, the group most likely to be dependent on Social Security income.¹⁰³

Second, policies can play a key role in building and distributing civic skills within the citizenry. It is well known that public policies—especially education policies—often aim to build "human capital" among citizens through job training, health care provision, and other public investments. Political scientists have routinely affirmed that formal education fosters political skills and promotes civic engagement.¹⁰⁴ As noted in the introduction to this article, however, little scholarship directly addresses how choices among educational policies can be expected to influence patterns of political thought and action. Moreover, formal education is only one of many policy areas that should be investigated in this manner. Depending on their design features, public policies of many types may help citizens learn how to deal effectively with government and allow them to experience the art of making collective policy decisions.¹⁰⁵

Third, policies may supply resources for political mobilization. As Lowi observed, a key function of public policy is to distribute and redistribute resources. In so doing, policies may supply citizens with materials that can be used to build, organize, and mobilize pressure groups, sometimes among otherwise disenfranchised members of the polity.¹⁰⁶ For example: in some localities, the Community Action Programs of the 1960s supplied insurgent black activists with offices, office supplies, and meeting spaces that in turn facilitated political activity, thus building a cohort of black political leaders.¹⁰⁷ By providing resources to neighborhood-based organizations, Sallie Marston contends, such programs "left a legacy of increased citizen participation in local governing."¹⁰⁸

Fourth, policy designs shape citizens' personal experiences with government and hence influence processes of political learning and patterns of political belief. Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram argue that by articulating particular messages to target populations, policy designs shape citizens' orientation toward government and their political participation.¹⁰⁹

Building on this work, a study of welfare clients in the 1990s, for instance, found that two social programs served as important sources of adult political learning.¹¹⁰ Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) recipients encountered a program featuring bureaucratic routines that were ultimately responsive to their demands; the experience bolstered their external political efficacy. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) beneficiaries, by contrast, met with a directive and threatening program, and took away negative lessons about government's responsiveness to people like them.¹¹¹ Later studies have supported this finding for AFDC and extended it to criminal justice policy.¹¹² Encounters with police, for example, alter citizens' attitudes about the fairness of the justice system—with negative consequences for the beliefs of African American men, who are pulled over on the road at especially high rates.¹¹³ By shaping citizens' encounters with government, the design and implementation of public policy constitute important forces shaping citizens' orientations toward the institutions and policies of government.¹¹⁴

Framing policy agendas, problems, and evaluations

Policy feedback also directs public perceptions of societal problems, policy agendas, and government actions.

First, public policies frame the meaning and origins of societal problems, by identifying target groups for government action and defining solutions. By pursuing particular types of solutions, policies convey messages about the underlying nature of a problem and shape citizens' perception of an issue—as a matter of individual or societal responsibility, for example, or as a public or private problem.¹¹⁵ Policy choices may thereby structure the public's expectations in ways that make it increasingly difficult, over time, to promote fundamental change. Consider the U.S. health care system: because most Americans rely on private insurance, Jacob Hacker notes that "any shift of the privately insured into the public sector would almost certainly be seen as a loss by people who had formerly enjoyed private coverage."¹¹⁶ Through such dynamics, policy framing at a given point in time is likely to influence the public's subsequent understanding of the appropriate roles of government and citizens in that issue area.

Second, policies have the potential to affect the salience of issues and actions for the public. In a large, representative democracy, there is a key distinction between those issues that are resolved under close public scrutiny and the larger number of issues that are resolved with little public supervision.¹¹⁷ Policy designs can move public issues in either direction. For example, when lawmakers index program benefits to inflation, future benefit increases pass unnoticed while decisions to freeze or lower benefit levels require public debate. The opposite is true for policies that allow benefits to stagnate in the absence of legislative action. Policies that require measurement of social phenomena also help determine their salience for the public: government tracking of the unemployment rate and of welfare fraud and overpayment offer clear examples.¹¹⁸ By contrast, the hidden nature of American tax expenditures may obscure the extent to which they foster

an upward redistribution of income;¹¹⁹ the extensive U.S. system of publicly sanctioned, privately provided health and pension benefits may have comparable effects.¹²⁰ The low visibility of such programs may help explain why “most citizens are less aware of changes to them” and, in turn, why program changes typically occur in the absence of organized support.¹²¹ In all these ways, preexisting policies, by virtue of their design and structure, may have a significant impact on citizens’ attitudes about the policy agenda.

Third, because public policies are expressive, they also have the power to shape public evaluations of governments and their actions. Such effects, as we have already noted, are central to the legitimation arguments advanced by Piven and Cloward,¹²² and by Edelman.¹²³ More generally, when specific policy actions take center stage in public discourse, they may “prime” particular standards for evaluating government performance (just as they may prime evaluations of specific public officials).¹²⁴ A foreign policy shift from diplomacy to active military intervention, for example, may have the secondary effect of reducing the threat that domestic economic woes pose to public confidence in government institutions. In a similar manner, by emphasizing a narrow set of goals, policy designs may shape the terms of policy evaluation in the mass public. For instance, by focusing policy design squarely on the goals of promoting work and reducing dependency, the architects of contemporary welfare reform arguably reduced the likelihood that the public would evaluate these policies on other terms.¹²⁵

Structuring, stimulating, and stalling participation

Public policies may structure political participation itself, influencing the extent of individual or group mobilization and the form that mass participation takes. Most fundamentally, policies define the universe of participants and demand makers, expanding or restricting the subset of individuals who are able to engage in particular types of political action. Consider the policies that bar convicted felons from voting in some states. Incarceration rates in the United States have quadrupled since 1975, in large part because of a vigorous anticrime policy agenda and strict sentencing policies. Therefore, 4.7 million individuals are currently prohibited from voting as a result of their status as felons or, in some states, as ex-felons. Evidence suggests that such disenfranchisement likely altered the outcomes of several gubernatorial and U.S. Senate elections and at least one presidential election.¹²⁶

Some policy designs actively encourage or discourage demand making. For example, the low visibility of policies that distribute benefits through tax expenditures may contribute to underutilization—especially by low-income individuals who tend to lack access to information about their eligibility, as in the case of the Earned Income Tax Credit.¹²⁷ Similarly, while some programs spend resources to encourage applicants to come forward (such as SSDI), others are designed to divert and deter claimants (such as TANF).¹²⁸ Such policies have demonstrable consequences. For instance,

compared with citizens who do not receive annual personal Social Security statements detailing their future benefits, those who do show more knowledge of and confidence in the program.¹²⁹

In addition to defining and encouraging participants, public policies also create arenas for political action. In the 1960s, Piven and Cloward recognized that welfare policies had established specialized venues for the demands of low-income people and that these could be exploited as part of a broad “crisis strategy” of political mobilization.¹³⁰ In this contentious form or in more mundane circumstances, welfare claiming can thus serve as a form of political action for eligible individuals.¹³¹ Other policies have similar effects when they create and legitimate new ways for citizens to seek government actions. Many environmental policies feature formal means of citizen involvement in implementation decisions.¹³² Several contemporary social policies and antidiscrimination laws permit citizens, individually or through class action, to go to the courts in search of conflict resolution.¹³³ Others stimulate political action in the form of rights claiming in nongovernmental institutions, including the workplace, schools, and religious organizations.¹³⁴

By creating new arenas for citizen demands, and through other design features, public policies also channel mass demands to some arenas rather than others. In recent years, policy makers have shifted considerable policy authority from national to state and local governments, and from public agencies to private and nongovernmental organizations. Such policy choices change the venues of future political interactions in ways that may have crucial implications for political power and policy outcomes.¹³⁵ Look at suffrage in the nineteenth century: unlike other Western industrialized democracies, the United States extended “universal” suffrage to white men by the 1830s—regardless of whether they owned property. As a result, white men became actively engaged in electoral politics, while women gained distinct gender-based political identities as outsiders and engaged in different patterns of mobilization.¹³⁶ New Deal social and labor policies had similar effects, promoting a gendered pattern of political engagement at the national and state levels of the federal system.¹³⁷ Likewise, recent school-choice policies have the unintended result of prompting the most involved parents to exit their home schools and to take their children and their activism elsewhere—presumably to schools that already function more effectively—and thus deprive struggling schools of an important source of information and civic involvement.¹³⁸

Newly created policies endow some kinds of demands with political legitimacy and therefore promote greater political involvement. The American labor movement, for example, grew bolder and gathered momentum following the enactment of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935.¹³⁹ Similarly, while organized advocacy pushed the court system to evaluate the constitutionality of segregated educational institutions, the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision helped stimulate the civil rights movement.¹⁴⁰ And the feminist movement gathered steam after the inclusion of the term

sex in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 enabled mobilization on the basis of sex discrimination.¹⁴¹ It remains to be seen whether *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003)—the Supreme Court's recent reversal of *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986), in a decision that emphasized the rights of gay and lesbian citizens and the dignity of their relationships—will mobilize mass constituencies in a similar manner.

Lastly, policies shape political group and party affiliations, inasmuch as citizens view particular groups or parties as protectors of policies that they support or oppose. Older Americans have tended to be a devoted constituency of the Democratic Party, in part because they have viewed it as the primary advocate for Social Security and Medicare benefits. In recent elections, Republican candidates have been reluctant to espouse the privatization plans endorsed by their party's leadership for fear of alienating older voters. Consider as well the political feedback created by civil rights policies passed in the 1960s. At that time, President Lyndon Johnson predicted that these policies would cost the Democratic Party white voters for at least a generation. Longitudinal studies of partisanship offer considerable support for this prediction.¹⁴² Recent white Southern conversion to the Republican Party is nearly as striking as black allegiance to the Democratic Party.

Conclusion

Today, government spending accounts for one-third to one-half of the gross domestic product in Western industrialized nations. Public social programs and tax expenditures constitute, on average, one-fifth of each nation's economy.¹⁴³ In addition to this spending, government regulations directly affect citizens' lives every day as workers, consumers, and community members. Thus, government programs and rules make up a basic and persistent presence in the lives of modern citizens. Policy analysts routinely examine the social and economic consequences of such programs, yet their political effects continue to be widely ignored.

To put the matter bluntly, we are mystified by the failure of communication between students of public policy and students of mass politics. It is difficult to understand why the important works we have reviewed remain exceptional in their efforts to show how government policies affect the potential for citizens to exercise meaningful self-governance and influence how citizens actually think and behave as members of the polity. What questions could be more central to the domain of empirical investigation that political scientists claim for themselves? What areas of inquiry could be more vital to our understanding of democracy's well-being? For citizens in the United States, public policy provides the basis for experiences of government-in-action far more regularly than do the activities that political scientists more commonly study, such as voting, contacting public officials, and participating in protests or demonstrations. For all these reasons, we believe that the consequences of public policies for mass political behavior are a subject ripe for investigation. We conclude by offering a few thoughts on the research agenda for this field.

First, research on policy feedback can be advanced by isolating the effects of specific features of policy design. We can gain insight by distinguishing, for example, between the resources delivered by a policy and the mechanisms of their delivery, or between a policy's surveillance tools and its enforcement tools. To understand why policies produce different types of feedback, we need to identify the underlying dimensions of policy variation that have political significance for mass publics: visible versus hidden, targeted versus universal, obligations-oriented versus rights-oriented, participatory versus nonparticipatory, supervisory versus distant, generous versus stingy, privately provided versus publicly provided, and so on. Comparative studies that enable us to examine the individual and conjunctural effects of policy design features across programs seem especially likely to facilitate our understanding of these dynamics.¹⁴⁴

Second, students of policy feedback must pay closer attention to the processes that mediate policy-feedback effects. Much can be learned from studies that show how policy actions, or features of policy design, correlate with public responses. But such research can take us only so far. Policy designs do not simply impose patterns of thought and action on the public; they have their effects because of the particular ways they fit into ongoing political transactions and because of the political processes they set in motion. Thus, scholarship on feedback effects must begin to trace the processes¹⁴⁵ and specify the mechanisms¹⁴⁶ that link public policies to mass responses. This will be an essential step not only toward explaining feedback effects, but also toward understanding their contingencies. Although some researchers have proposed process models for individual-level effects in specific target populations,¹⁴⁷ there is work to be done in this area. More generally, scholars must do more to illuminate feedback mechanisms related to policy targets, mechanisms that produce effects in the broader public, and the differences and similarities between them.

Third, research on policy feedback should strive to be, in some respects, more citizen-centered. A scholar evaluating policy design alone cannot intuit the material and symbolic effects of public policies with confidence. Such effects depend ultimately on how public policies fit into the lives of individuals and social groups. Some initial attempts investigate both resource and interpretive effects at the individual level,¹⁴⁸ but these are not nearly enough. Policy-based resources may have very different political effects, depending on individual and group characteristics. Clients in a single public program, for example, may draw different lessons from their encounters with the same design elements. Citizens must therefore be treated as active agents in the processes that give rise to policy-feedback effects. To do so, we will need to investigate citizens' political uses of policy-based resources and the "practices of meaning-making through which social actors attempt to make their worlds coherent."¹⁴⁹ This delving can be done effectively through field studies that compare how experiences and interpretations vary across users of a small number of distinct

programs, or between a single program's beneficiaries and a parallel group of nonbeneficiaries.

Fourth, students of policy feedback would do well to extend their concern for timing and sequence to the study of mass behavior. The effects of policies may be mediated by their timing within the lives of individuals and generations, as particular forms of governance intersect with the trajectories of chronological age as well as social and political development over the life course. Policy experiences in early adulthood, for instance, may be especially important for political learning, as suggested by scholarship on political socialization and by the large and enduring effects the G.I. Bill had on young veterans returning from World War II.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, the sequencing of policy experiences relative to other experiences of government may shape their effects. World War I veterans, for example, took to the streets to protest their poor treatment by government, a fact that can be comprehended only in light of their understanding that Civil War veterans had been treated far better. Conversely, World War II veterans who remembered the indignities of some relief programs during the Depression were especially responsive to the "earned right" status of the G.I. Bill.¹⁵¹

Fifth, the study of policy feedback should seek to integrate historical and individual-level analyses, offering the field an account of how trends in state development have affected prevailing patterns of mass opinion and behavior over time. Recent decades have seen major shifts in key political orientations and patterns of civic and political engagement, which appear to be deeply entwined with generational differences.¹⁵² Andrea Campbell's excellent book *How Policies Make Citizens* combines historical and individual-level analyses to demonstrate how Social Security and Medicare have enhanced seniors' political participation, such that seniors now influence policy outcomes more than they otherwise would.¹⁵³ To date, however, we have little sense of how other contemporary changes in mass politics might relate to the retrenchment of particular social and regulatory policies. Here, we suggest, is a crucial question for students of American political development. Over the past few decades, a period of growing inequality in income and wealth, welfare programs directed to nonelderly and less-privileged citizens have been scaled back dramatically. With some survey time series now running back more than 40 years, and administrative data sets for many programs running back even farther, political scientists are well positioned to investigate how broad trends in public policy affected mass political orientations and behaviors in the latter half of the twentieth century.

We hasten to add that the larger research agenda we propose here will require collection of new data. Most surveys of the general population, such as the National Election Studies and General Social Survey, ask citizens numerous political questions but collect little information about experiences with public programs. Others, such as the Survey of Income and Program Participation, investigate program experiences but address neither political attitudes nor political behaviors.

The study of policy feedback would be greatly advanced if such surveys began to include these types of questions.

Scholars can do much good work by combining existing survey and administrative time series and adding relevant questions to future mass surveys. Students of policy feedback, however, should not stop there. Instead, we should take a cue from the field of program evaluation, where panel designs and random assignment studies are routinely used to pin down the social and economic effects of policy variations. Individual-level analyses of policy feedback have traditionally relied on cross-sectional or retrospective data. The conclusions suggested by these works can be tested in more stringent ways if researchers add political questions to future program evaluation studies or, better yet, design their own full-scale "political evaluation" studies of such programs.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, panel designs offer great advantages for establishing pre/post differences in political attitudes and, if used to construct a "rolling" series of observations, could allow researchers to closely monitor the ways citizens' attitudes shift in response to specific experiences with government.

To these positivist strategies, researchers should add interpretive analyses based on historical and field research. Policy feedbacks can be easily integrated into the emerging field of "interpretive policy analysis."¹⁵⁵ In some cases, this work might complement the strategies we have already mentioned, by tracing the processes of interaction and meaning making that account for causal regularities observed in positivist analyses.¹⁵⁶ In other cases, interpretive research holds the potential to illuminate entirely different aspects of policy feedback, such as the interplay of policy designs, policy discourses, and understandings of citizenship; the ways cultural values and discourses shape the interpretation of program experiences; the ways policy classifications reinforce or subvert race and gender formations or other social groupings; and so on. The typology of effects outlined in this article suggests that the study of policy feedback will be greatly diminished if scholars do not attend to the workings of symbolism, culture, discourse, and meaning making.

The obstacles to studying policy feedback are, in general, no greater than what one finds in most fields. Moreover, the potential for this area of inquiry to make important contributions to both political science and democratic politics makes it well worth the effort. We hope that scholars will take up the challenge.

Notes

- 1 Pierson 1993; Ingram and Smith 1993; Schneider and Ingram 1997.
- 2 Pitkin 1969; Pateman 1970; Hardy-Fanta 1993.
- 3 Easton 1953, *passim*; Edelman 1983.
- 4 Easton 1957.
- 5 Merelman 2003.
- 6 For examples, see Verba et al. 1995; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996.
- 7 Nie et al. 1996.
- 8 Orfield 2001; Ravitch 2000.

- 9 For examples, see Verba and Nie 1972; Milbrath and Goel 1977; Yeric and Todd 1996.
- 10 Dennis 1991; Carmines and Huckfeldt 1996.
- 11 For examples, see Popkin 1994; Chong 2000.
- 12 In this regard, there is an important distinction between our ideal type of the “psychological tradition” and the subfield of scholarship known as “political psychology.” Rather than simply applying a psychological approach to politics, many works in political psychology explore the reciprocal effects of analytic elements we place in the psychological and political traditions (see, for instance, Krosnick and McGraw 2002). These works’ analytic appeals to, say, elite framing or institutional routines cannot, strictly speaking, be derived from psychological theories themselves. They flow from the political tradition’s contributions to the subfield of political psychology.
- 13 Lazarsfeld et al. 1948; Berelson et al. 1954; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955.
- 14 Campbell 1965; Jackman 1994; Bobo et al. 1997.
- 15 Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995.
- 16 Verba et al. 1995, 3.
- 17 Campbell et al. 1960. See also Converse 1964.
- 18 Sigel 1996; Conover 1988.
- 19 Sears et al. 2000.
- 20 Hochschild 1981.
- 21 Marcus et al. 1995; Chong 1993.
- 22 Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Miller et al. 1981; Campbell et al. 1960.
- 23 Kinder 1998.
- 24 Downs 1957.
- 25 See Simon 1985; Monroe 1991. “Traditional” models assume utility maximization, accurate information, stable rank-ordered preferences, a strong ability to calculate “best” alternatives, and the rationality of choice outcomes. By contrast, “bounded” models emphasize “satisficing” behavior, limited and uncertain information, the influence of cognitive maps and frames of reference, computational limitations, and the rationality of choice processes.
- 26 Chong 2000, 13.
- 27 Downs 1957, chapters 12 and 13.
- 28 Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Aldrich 1993; Jackman 1993.
- 29 Olson 1965.
- 30 Carmines and Huckfeldt 1996.
- 31 Schattschneider 1960, 102, 107.
- 32 Shefter 1984.
- 33 Burnham 1979, 112.
- 34 Alford 1963, 26.
- 35 “Explanations of nonvoting are roughly of two kinds: those that locate the causes of abstention outside politics, and those that attribute it to political processes of various kinds. . . . [For example,] does something about poorer or younger people lead them to abstain, or does the distinctive character of American political institutions selectively make it less likely that these groups will vote? This is a key question.” Piven and Cloward 1988, 15.
- 36 Piven and Cloward’s empirical claims about registration effects have been contested by a number of researchers (see, e.g., Highton 1997). Their broader analysis, however, emphasizes the conjunction of registration laws, party alignments and organizations, and processes of mobilization and demobilization; it provides a good illustration of what we call the political approach. A major theme that Piven and Cloward share with the larger body of research is the idea that turnout depends on the strategic choices made by political activists and elites. Citizen-centered approaches implicitly assume that party efforts to mobilize voters are a political constant and, hence, not a source of variation in turnout over time and across locales. However, scholars in the political tradition suggest that, in many instances, party leaders “regard the effort to rally additional voters to their side as terribly dangerous [because] they fear that the entry of new groups into the political system will lead the existing parties to be swamped by the new voters, or [because they] fear that pursuing such a strategy will lead them to lose control over their own party.” Shefter 1984, 143.
- 37 Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 7. The authors also provide an example of how the political tradition can be combined with insights and assumptions drawn from the economic tradition.
- 38 Verba et al. 1995.
- 39 For examples, see Tilly 1978; Piven and Cloward 1977; Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam et al. 2001. By contrast, the sociological approach is best represented by studies that emphasize resource mobilization, social networks, and social movement organizations (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1977). The psychological approach is expressed in “collective action frame” studies that emphasize group identities, perceptions of injustice, and efficacy beliefs (Gamson 1992; Klandermans 1997). The economic tradition can be seen in work that explores the free-rider problem and the incentives that allow rational individuals to overcome it (Oliver and Marwell 1988; Finkel et al. 1989; Chong 1991).
- 40 Key 1966, 2–3.
- 41 Ginsberg 1986, 32.
- 42 Edelman 1971, 4. See also Edelman 1964.
- 43 Rosenstone and Hansen 1993.
- 44 Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Iyengar 1991.
- 45 Nelson and Kinder 1996, 1,055.
- 46 Zaller 1992.
- 47 Edelman 1971.
- 48 The quotation is from Zaller and Feldman 1992, 585. See also Zaller 1992.
- 49 Alford 1963.

- 50 Soss 2000.
- 51 Przeworski 1985, 27.
- 52 Shefter 1978.
- 53 Zaller 1992; Burnham 1979.
- 54 Lee 2002; Piven and Cloward 1997.
- 55 Emirbayer 1997.
- 56 E.g., McAdam et al. 2001; Edelman 1971.
- 57 E.g., Peters 1999; Dye 1998; Rushefsky 2002.
- 58 E.g., Cobb and Elder 1972; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Rochefort and Cobb 1994; Kingdon 1995.
- 59 E.g., Page and Shapiro 1992; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Gilens 2001.
- 60 E.g., Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Shapiro 1995.
- 61 E.g., Chubb and Moe 1990; Bardach 1977.
- 62 Stone 1997.
- 63 Hall and Taylor 1996; Skocpol 1992; Shepsle and Weingast 1987; Moe 1989.
- 64 Baumgartner and Jones 1993.
- 65 Arguably, the concept of “policy feedback” can be found within systems theory itself. In his famous diagram of the political system, Easton 1957 included an arrow labeled “feedback” that ran from outputs back to inputs. The insignificance of feedback within Easton’s model, however, is well demonstrated by the fact that it is the only element of the diagram that is never mentioned (let alone explained) in the article. Moreover, from Easton’s discussion, it is possible to infer that he does not intend for the concept of feedback to signify that policy designs construct mass inputs. Rather, “feedback” in his model merely suggests that citizens will be satisfied or dissatisfied with policy outputs, and these responses will affect levels of system support. Thus, although we suspect that the term *policy feedback* may have some connection to Easton’s model, we trace the developed concept to other sources.
- 66 Schattschneider 1935.
- 67 Lowi 1964; Lowi 1972.
- 68 Wilson 1973; Wilson 1980.
- 69 Lowi and Ginsberg 1990; Lowi 1979; Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Derthick 1979; Mazmanian and Sabatier 1983.
- 70 Edelman 1964.
- 71 Piven and Cloward 1993 [1971]; Piven and Cloward 1977.
- 72 Marshall 1965.
- 73 Esping-Andersen 1990.
- 74 E.g., Quadagno 1994; Mettler 1998; O’Connor et al. 1999.
- 75 Skocpol 1992, 58; also see Weir et al. 1988; Brown 1983.
- 76 Also see Lindblom 1959; Hecló 1974.
- 77 Pierson 1993.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Smith 1997; Kerber 1998; Sapiro 1984; Keyssar 2000.
- 80 Shklar 1991.
- 81 Rothstein 1998.
- 82 Mettler 2002a.
- 83 Mead 1986.
- 84 Landy 1993.
- 85 Kagan 2001.
- 86 Mead 1998; Mettler 2000.
- 87 Piven and Cloward 1983.
- 88 Marshall 1965.
- 89 Kertzer 1989; Edelman 1988.
- 90 Gilbert 2002; Mead 1986.
- 91 Schram 2000; Piven and Cloward 1993 [1971].
- 92 Converse 1964; Nelson and Kinder 1996.
- 93 Yanow 2002.
- 94 Hayward 2003.
- 95 Edelman 1964.
- 96 Schneider and Ingram 1997.
- 97 Soss (forthcoming).
- 98 Campbell 2003.
- 99 Verba et al. 1995.
- 100 Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 33.
- 101 Wilson 1980.
- 102 Baumgartner and Jones 1993.
- 103 Campbell 2003.
- 104 E.g., Verba et al. 1995; Nie et al. 1996.
- 105 Morone 1998; Soss 2000.
- 106 Lowi 1964; Skocpol 1992.
- 107 Quadagno 1994.
- 108 Marston 1993.
- 109 Schneider and Ingram 1997.
- 110 Soss 2000.
- 111 Interestingly, though, both client groups experienced positive effects related to internal efficacy; successful efforts to deal with bureaucracy resulted in clients’ greater sense of confidence in their own ability to deal effectively with government. It is also worth noting that while the lessons conveyed by some policy designs may reinforce the political marginality of groups with low socioeconomic status, the messages conveyed by others may stimulate greater civic engagement than one would expect to find in such a group. Soss 1999; Mettler and Welch (forthcoming).
- 112 Lawless and Fox 2001.
- 113 Hurwitz and Peffley 2001.
- 114 See also Kumlin 2002, chapter 10.
- 115 Stone 1997; Gusmano et al. 2002. In relation to issues of poverty and joblessness, for example, job-training programs frame the problem as inadequate skills; public jobs and wage-supplement programs direct attention toward structural limits of the labor market; work requirements in welfare programs shift the focus to individual values, behavior, and self-discipline. Drug education and treatment programs depict users as victims in need of public intervention, whereas law-enforcement approaches frame drug abuse as a matter of personal responsibility. See Sharp 1994.

116 Hacker 1998, 122.
 117 Arnold 1990.
 118 Stone 1997.
 119 Howard 1997.
 120 Hacker 2002.
 121 Ibid., 283.
 122 Piven and Cloward 1993 [1971].
 123 Edelman 1964.
 124 See Iyengar and Kinder 1987.
 125 See Schram and Soss 2001.
 126 Uggen and Manza 2001.
 127 Phillips 2001; Glaeser and Shapiro 2002.
 128 Soss and Keiser 2001.
 129 Jacobs et al. 2002.
 130 Piven and Cloward 1993 [1971]; Pressman 1975.
 131 Soss 2000.
 132 E.g., Layzer 2002; Beierle 2000.
 133 Kagan 2001; Melnick 1994.
 134 Katzenstein 1998; Schudson 1999.
 135 Donahue 1999.
 136 Baker 1991; Skocpol 1992.
 137 Mettler 1998.
 138 Abernathy 2001.
 139 Foner 1979.
 140 McAdam 1982.
 141 Costain 1992.
 142 Carmines and Stimson 1989; Edsall and Edsall 1991.
 143 Howard 2003.
 144 See Ragin 2000.
 145 Bennett and George 1997.
 146 Tilly 1995; Tilly 2001.
 147 Mettler 2002a; Soss 1999.
 148 Soss 1999; Mettler 2002a.
 149 Wedeen 2002, 720.
 150 Mettler and Welch (forthcoming).
 151 Mettler 2002b.
 152 Miller and Shanks 1996; Putnam 2000.
 153 Campbell 2003.
 154 See Kumlin 2002.
 155 The phrase refers to research that makes participants' understandings an integral part of policy analysis, directly investigating the ways individuals and groups make sense of policy-relevant languages, objects, and acts. For a more detailed discussion and definition, see Yanow 1999.
 156 Lin 1998.

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