Civic Generation: Policy Feedback Effects of the GI Bill on Political Involvement over the Life Course

SUZANNE METTLER AND ERIC WELCH*

One of the chief explanations for the decline of social capital in the United States is the passing of the ‘civic generation’, those who came of age during the Depression and the Second World War. These Americans experienced greater government largesse than previous generations, yet we know little about how public programmes influenced their subsequent involvement in public life. This article draws on policy feedback theory to examine how the educational benefits of the GI Bill, through which 7.8 million Second World War veterans attended college or gained vocational training, affected recipients’ political participation across three time periods, from 1950 to 1998. We find that initially, interpretive effects of programme implementation produced increased levels of participation among users generally. Later on, resource effects enhanced participation rates selectively, with the strongest effects among those who had attained the highest levels of education. Overall, the study illustrates distinct mechanisms, timing and sequencing through which public policy can shape the interests and capacities of programme recipients to engage in democratic participation.

Robert Putnam and others have identified a ‘civic generation’, a cohort of people born in the 1920s who contributed to the ‘golden age’ of civic activity in the 1950s and 1960s and continued to participate throughout their lives at higher levels than subsequent generations of Americans.1 Interestingly, these Americans’ formative years occurred during the Great Depression and the Second World War or the Korean War: a time when government, through new social programmes, had begun to play a greater role in the lives of citizens than ever before. What role did these generous programmes bear on citizens’ political activity over time? This question probes a largely unexplored terrain at the intersection between subfields. Scholars of political development typically examine the implications of programmes for subsequent policy-making efforts by public officials and interest groups, but refrain from probing effects for political participation among citizens. Behaviouralists, including those who focus on the life course and political participation, offer little attention to historical context and neglect to analyse the significance of the relationship between government and citizens during formative periods of life. The absence of theoretical development in this area is not surprising, however, given the lack of datasets that combine indicators of programme benefits and participation across time.

This article examines how the educational benefits obtained from the GI Bill of Rights affected recipients’ political involvement over the course of their lives. This programme – which enabled returning veterans to attend college or to acquire vocational training at government expense – was used widely by male members of the ‘civic generation’. Among American men born in the 1920s, about 80 per cent served in the military.2

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2 Putnam, Bowling Alone, p. 248.
GI Bill’s educational provisions were utilized by 51 per cent—7.8 million—of Second World War veterans, as well as by 42 per cent—2.3 million—of those who served in the Korean War.\(^3\)

Drawing on a theoretical model that articulates how institutional facets of policy work through resource and interpretive mechanisms to affect civic activity generally, we hypothesize about how such dynamics might operate over time, with specific reference to political activity. Then, using newly collected survey and interview data, we analyse the determinants of GI Bill usage among Second World War veterans and the subsequent effects of the programme on recipients’ political participation across three successive time periods from 1950 to 1998. A two-stage statistical test allows us to predict GI Bill use and its effect on participation separately, thereby reducing selection bias concerns. Our findings indicate that programme usage induced a cognitive response that boosted users’ participation in politics in the immediate post-war era. Subsequently, though such interpretive effects of programme usage faded with the memories of the experience, resource effects became more evident as the advanced education bestowed through the GI Bill grew increasingly powerful in boosting participation rates in middle and later adulthood. Overall, results indicate that the policy had a democratizing effect, depressing the usual socio-economic determinants of both advanced education and political participation.

In theoretical terms, this study suggests the value of bringing a historical, state-centred approach to bear on the study of individual political behaviour. Too much of what we claim to know about political behaviour—though exemplary for its attention to the mechanisms through which politics works—derives from cross-sectional data examined without reference to matters of temporality. Conceivably, what we know is illustrative of phenomena distinct to politics in the latter half of the twentieth century and the ways in which generations have experienced shifts in governance over this time period, but the data are rarely presented as such. Studies based on longitudinal data more typically incorporate attention to the timing and sequencing of events within individual lives, but still they offer little heed to historical and political context. Conversely, historical institutionalists, though increasingly attentive to matters of temporality,\(^4\) have yet to show how governance has mattered in the lives of individual citizens at particular junctures in history, and the effects that has had, in turn, for subsequent chapters in the story of democratic governance. The task of this article is to explore the mechanisms, timing and sequencing whereby a single public programme may affect the political activity of citizens, throughout the life course. In the conclusion, we call for a research agenda that continues the task, exploring the connections between politics at the micro level of individual behaviour and macro-level events such as the development of the welfare state, and the rise and decline of political participation across time.\(^5\)


APPROACHES TO STUDYING PARTICIPATION, THE LIFE COURSE AND GENERATIONS

Studies of individuals’ political participation over time generally focus on differences in participation either by age or by stage in the life cycle. Such analyses have grown increasingly sophisticated, recently highlighting how citizens’ participation in institutional settings, networks or relationships can affect their subsequent political involvement. Scholars have demonstrated how education, marriage or participation in the work place or civic associations foster greater involvement in politics at later stages of life. New research focuses on individuals as members of generations, analysing group levels of social trust and civic engagement, or showing how younger generations are socialized towards political participation by older generations through family lineage. Despite their rich contributions, these approaches neglect to examine how political and historical circumstances might affect a generation of individuals who experience them at the same stage in the life cycle.

Earlier research on generations focused more deliberately on the broader social and political milieu experienced by cohort groups, individuals who are at the same point in their life cycle at a particular juncture in history. Some stressed broad social indicators such as the level of economic growth, changes in occupational structure, the state of technological innovation and the education of the population. Others emphasized the

(F'note continued)


impact of particular historical events on the life course of a cohort group. Relevant to this study, Glen Elder and his co-authors looked extensively at the effect of war mobilization and military service for young people on later occupational achievement, marriage and health. Jennings and Niemi suggested the possible political consequences of such experiences by identifying ages 17 to 25 as the critical period during which a ‘political-cultural consciousness’ can be formed, establishing a distinctive, self-conscious generation. They stressed the formative influence of education, while others noted that coming of age at the time of war seems to promote higher levels of political participation subsequently.

Although this second approach offers more attention to the timing of historical events within individuals’ lives than the first, neither examines how the relationship between the state and citizens in a given time period might affect subsequent participation. Scholars neglect to examine the role of government even when it is implicit in their analysis. Those who stress the role of education, for instance, do not investigate the importance that educational policy may have. Those who emphasize the role of war explain such effects as the result of enduring shared adversity, but refrain from delving more deeply into the role of government itself, which is necessarily important at the time of war. The role that government might play in shaping individuals’ and generations’ political participation over time remains to be investigated.

POLICY FEEDBACK EFFECTS ON POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT: THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

The policy feedback literature offers a promising theoretical framework for examining how policies themselves may shape subsequent political activity. Some years ago, Paul Pierson called for more attention to policy feedback effects on ‘mass publics’, meaning citizens generally. He proposed analysis of two dynamics: (1) resource effects: how resources and incentives provided by policies shape patterns of behaviour; and (2) interpretive effects: how policies convey meanings and information to citizens. Recently, and Social Background’, in S. H. Barnes and M. Kaase, eds, Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1979), pp. 343–80.

11 Elder, ‘History and the Life Course’.
14 Jennings and Niemi, Generations and Politics, chap. 8.
16 Jennings and Niemi, Generations and Politics, chap. 8.
scholars have begun to pursue this agenda, probing why government programmes vary in their effects for political action and how such dynamics operate. Suplementing Pierson’s approach with concepts from the public policy and political participation literatures, Mettler proposes a theoretical framework of how policy feedback affects civic engagement. Drawing on Verba, Schlozman and Brady’s Civic Voluntarism Model, the framework shows how the resources bestowed on citizens through policy, whether in the form of payments, goods or services, have distinct resource effects for individuals’ material well-being and life opportunities, and thus affect their capacity (meaning ability, aptitude or faculty) for participation. Secondly, by utilizing Ingram and Schneider’s theories, the model elaborates how features of policy design, including administrative rules and procedures and the form and scope of eligibility and coverage, have interpretive effects for citizens, shaping their sense of their role, status and identity within the polity. As a result, policy design shapes citizens’ psychological predisposition to participate in public life.

Mettler tested the proposition that the educational benefits of the GI Bill may have had resource and interpretive effects that promoted increased civic involvement among beneficiaries in the immediate post-war era. Controlling for other key variables such as level of education, results showed that the GI Bill was a significant determinant of increased civic memberships and political participation among veterans in the 1950–64 period. Among several hypotheses tested, the policy feedback approach offered the best explanation of the increased participation, operating through two dynamics: (a) the resource effect of the policy, increased education, had a pronounced effect on individuals’ capacity to be involved, and (b) to the extent that individuals perceived the GI Bill benefits as making a meaningful difference in their well-being and life opportunities, the programme had interpretive effects that promoted individuals’ psychological predisposition for civic participation.

In this article, we focus exclusively on political participation and we refine this theory in two ways, both of which specify the effects of a public programme over the life course. First, when we analyse effects of GI Bill usage for political participation, we will control for selection bias characteristics. Hypothetically, those who used the GI Bill might have differed in some fundamental way from those who did not, and that difference might explain subsequent differences in participation. This possibility, the pre-existing characteristics hypothesis, has already been examined partially, and the results showed that the significance of GI Bill usage for civic activity is not reducible to socio-economic background, parents’ civic activity or veteran status. It is still possible, though, that the GI Bill users shared some personality or behavioural trait – being more motivated or out-going, for instance – that made them different from non-users, and that it is the source

21 Mettler, ‘Bringing the State Back In to Civic Engagement’.
24 Mettler, ‘Bringing the State Back In to Civic Engagement’.
25 Mettler, ‘Bringing the State Back In to Civic Engagement’.
of the disparity in participation rates. Here we will control for that possibility by using a two-stage model. We hypothesize that GI Bill use will remain a significant determinant of political involvement among beneficiaries in the period most proximate to GI Bill usage, 1950–64.

Secondly, we will compare the determinants of veterans’ political involvement in 1950–64 with factors affecting the next two time periods in their lives, 1964–79 and 1980–98. In the early period, interpretive effects of the GI Bill are most likely to be significant in affecting veterans’ participation in politics. Veterans’ memories of how they were treated by programme rules and procedures would be most fresh in this era, and the perception of how the benefits influenced their lives, most palpable. Likewise, to the extent that they felt that they owed something back to government or American society because they had received the benefits of the GI Bill, it is most likely to be apparent at this stage. It is reasonable to expect that interpretive effects of the GI Bill would be likely to diminish over time, once individuals’ experience of the programme faded in their consciousness. We hypothesize, therefore, that the GI Bill’s interpretive effects would serve as a positive determinant of political involvement among beneficiaries in 1950–64, and that they would fade out or disappear in subsequent time periods.

Conversely, we also expect that the resource effects of the GI Bill, transmitted through advanced education, would become stronger over time. Scholars have shown that, controlling for various demographic factors, GI Bill usage was a significant determinant of increased educational levels among Second World War veterans.  

Students of participation know that education begets, over time, an increase in other factors that promote civic capacity and thus boost participation: skills, networks and income. In short, the effect of education for participation becomes amplified with time. We hypothesize, therefore, that the elevated educational level of some GI Bill beneficiaries will become an increasingly powerful determinant of their participation in later periods, 1965–79 and 1980–98.

DATA AND METHODS

Most quantitative studies of political participation are based on large datasets that include numerous variables regarding demographic characteristics and attitudes but little about government programmes. Conversely, though a few surveys of veterans conducted shortly after the Second World War permit analysis of the characteristics of GI Bill beneficiaries and the socio-economic effects of the programme, they failed to ask about participation in civic and political life. This project, therefore, draws on recently collected, original survey data.

Because no ready means of access to a national, random sample of all Second World


War veterans was available, it was necessary to find an alternative means of reaching veterans. Many survivors from Second World War military units have formed their own veterans’ organizations, groups that typically have mailing lists, generate newsletters and hold reunions. Several such organizations were contacted in order to locate a few that were sufficiently different from each other and large enough to include veterans with a wide range of personal backgrounds, military ranks and wartime experiences. Lists from four military units were used, including two from the US Army (87th Infantry Division, 89th Division) and two from the US Army Air Force (379th Bomb Group; 783rd Bomb Squadron, 465th Bomb Group). These units included only men; also, because the Second World War military was still segregated, African Americans served in separate units, none of which were included in this version of the survey. The approach did yield a representative sample of male veterans.

A mail survey of 1,000 veterans explored similar topics to those in the interviews discussed above but permitted quantitative analysis. Although many questions had been used in prior surveys, most had never been combined in a single survey in a manner that would permit structurally valid statistical analysis. The data permit investigation of the GI Bill’s consequences for participation in political activities, while controlling for level of education and various socio-economic background factors. The survey subjects were randomly selected from 4,000 names on the Second World War military unit organizations’ lists. Surveys mailings were sent up to three times to each subject to increase the response rate, which eventually reached 73 per cent (716 completed surveys).

The adopted research and sample designs raise a number of potential sources of bias and other limitations of the data. The fact that several decades have elapsed since the GI Bill was administered necessitated careful attention to constraints upon subjects’ memory and recall. Before designing the survey, several open-ended interviews were conducted with veterans. This process, as well as the pre-test of the survey and focus group meeting that followed, helped guide the survey design process, limiting questions to those that veterans answer readily and with confidence. Participation in the war and the pursuit of education thereafter constitute landmark events in the autobiographical knowledge of most veterans, and as such, are memorable. Techniques were used that are known to improve accuracy of responses: a survey instrument that gave respondents ample time to answer questions, and questions organized in a framework that facilitated both forward (chronological) and backward recall.

The timing of the survey made it imperative to pay close attention to the representativeness of the sample. Conceivably, differential death rates among subgroups in the population might mean that a sample drawn in 1998 is likely to differ systematically from one drawn in the immediate post-war era. Among survey respondents, veterans who used the GI Bill for education constituted 60.8 per cent of the total, 10 per cent higher than among the original population. Nonetheless, considerable variation exists within the groups of GI Bill users and non-users in terms of level of education completed prior to

29 See Appendix B.
30 Questions were drawn from surveys such as the US Census, World Values Survey, General Social Survey, the 1990 Citizen Participation Study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, and various surveys conducted by the US Veterans’ Administration.
32 Tourangeau, Rips and Rasinski, The Psychology of Survey Response, pp. 94–5, 146. These measures are discussed further in Appendix A in the website version of this article.
military service. Given that the sample included some individuals who had pursued
advanced education prior to military service, each group had respondents from each of nine
different educational levels. While such variation assures us that we can control for
important background variables, we do need to recognize that the majority of GI Bill users
who responded to the survey pursued higher education whereas the majority in the original
population enrolled in vocational training. The underrepresentation of vocational training
participants in the data means that it will be necessary to consider the distinct consequences
of each type of programme usage. Nevertheless, the sample is representative of the original
population.  

Regional bias is less of a concern because Second World War units were drawn from
the nation as a whole, and veterans who served in such units and belong to the sampled
associations live throughout the nation. Further concerns that group membership might be
highly correlated with participation were alleviated initially through the interviews, which
revealed that not all members had initiated their own membership status, and that the
percentage that attend reunions and participate actively is small.

In order to interpret the findings of the survey data, we also draw on interview data from
twenty-eight semi-structured, open-ended interviews with Second World War veterans in
all regions of the United States. 34 Participants’ names were drawn from the lists of Second
World War military units. 35 The interviews covered such topics as family background,
political activities, military service, education and training, the GI Bill, occupational
history and demographics. The open-ended format offered the opportunity to probe
responses in depth and to understand their meaning in the context of individual lives. 36
They allow exploration of GI Bill beneficiaries’ perceptions regarding: the significance of
the policy for their lives, the character of the military unit in which they served or the
college or university they attended on the GI Bill, the differential effects of military and
wartime experience, the role of education, and beneficiaries’ civic and political
participation in the 1950–64 period as distinguished from the present. Each interview lasted
between one-and-a-half and three hours.

TWO-STAGE MODEL

We adopt a two-stage model because some of the variables that we intend to use to explain
political participation, such as educational level, may also determine GI Bill use. First, we
predict GI Bill adoption using logistic regression, and then we use those predicted values
in an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equation to predict political participation.
This approach permits us to control for the inherent problem of selection bias.

In the first stage of the analysis, the dependent variable is a discrete indicator of GI Bill
adoption (1 for use, 0 for non-use). 37 Independent variables include socio-economic and

33 See Appendix B.
34 The interviews followed a structured script format but questions were framed in an open-ended fashion and
the interviewer posed follow-up questions to some responses.
35 These interviews were conducted in all regions of the United States. Before each trip, letters requesting
interviews were sent to about thirty individuals living within a two-hour radius of a base location. Among those
who agreed to be interviewed, five to seven individuals were selected who lived in a variety of different
neighbourhoods and areas. Individuals’ names came from the same lists used for the survey, discussed below.
37 GI Bill usage is the dependent variable rather than level of educational attainment, because the majority of
veterans used the benefits to gain vocational training rather than to attend a college or university, and such
programmes did not increase veterans’ formal education as it is typically measured.
TABLE 1  Veterans’ Participation Rates in Political Activities by Time Periods, 1950–98

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of activity</th>
<th>1950–64</th>
<th>1965–79</th>
<th>1980–98</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contacted political official about community issue</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked on a campaign for a candidate running for public office</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Served on an official local government board or council</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributed money to an individual candidate, party, etc.</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in a protest, march or demonstration</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


socialization factors that are widely considered to be important determinants of educational attainment. 38 Socio-economic measures include parent’s level of education (seven-point scale ranging from ‘no formal schooling’ to ‘graduate or professional degree’), 39 and standard of living in childhood during the 1920s (five-category response from low to high). 40 While respondents subjectively judge their own standard of living, scholars have found that most people perceive their socio-economic status accurately. 41 Measures of socialization include the extent to which individuals were encouraged, while growing up, to pursue an education (five-point scale from ‘strongly discouraged’ to ‘strongly encouraged’). Level of education attained before joining the military is also included (nine-point scale from ‘elementary school’ to ‘advanced graduate work’). 42

The second stage OLS regression analysis tests an empirical model of the determinants of political activity for each of three different time periods, 1950–64, 1965–79 and 1980–98, as well as lifetime average. We operationalized the dependent variable, political

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39 This variable consists of fathers’ level of education except in thirty-seven cases in which it was not available and mothers’ level of education could be substituted. Given the large number of cases still missing data for this variable, which sharply reduced the number of cases in the regressions, the unconditional mean was imputed for data that was still missing. The main results of each regression analysis are the same regardless of whether data is imputed for this variable or not.

40 We chose to use the 1920s rather than the 1930s because it was a more ‘normal’ time and would be likely to indicate more about the persistent socio-economic status of families than the Depression Era, when so many fell into worse living conditions than they experienced generally.


42 See Appendix Table A3 for descriptive statistics of each variable included in the models of this article.
participation, as the sum of participation in a wide range of activities for any given time period or, in the case of lifetime average, as the average of political activity levels across the three time periods. Types of involvement include: ‘ever contacted a political official to communicate concerns about some problem or issue’; ‘worked on a campaign for a candidate running for national, state, or local office’; ‘served on any official local government board or council that deals with community problems or issues’; ‘contributed money to an individual candidate, party or other organization that supported candidates’; ‘ever participated in a protest, march, or demonstration’.  

The rates of veterans’ participation in each of the five types of political activities by period are shown in Table 1. Participation in two of these activities, contacting political officials about some problem or issue and contributing money to a campaign, increases dramatically over time. This pattern is consistent with Verba, Schlozman and Brady’s findings for the general population. Other measures of veteran activity peaked in the mid-life period, 1965–79, but declined slightly in the later period, 1980–98.

Independent variables include predicted values of GI Bill use from the stage 1 logistic regression and several other explanatory variables widely considered to be important determinants of political participation. For example, individuals’ level of educational attainment is regarded as a highly significant determinant, one which must be distinguished from use of the GI Bill itself. Thus, we include a measure of education attainment (nine-point scale from elementary school to advanced graduate work). We use standard of living during the 1960s as a measure of socio-economic well-being during the first two time periods and for the lifetime average, and current standard of living for the most recent time period (five-point scale from low to high). Additionally, individuals’ participation in early adulthood is highly influenced by parents’ level of participation; therefore the model incorporates parents’ political activity for the first time period (five-point scale from ‘not active’ to ‘very active’). Because all survey respondents are veterans and members of the same generation, it was unnecessary to control for veteran status or generation.

Finally, a more exploratory version of the political activity model tests the interactive effect of GI Bill and education to determine if the education level attained by GI Bill users is a significant explanation of subsequent participation. Five interactive dummy variables are added to the model: GI Bill use combined with educational level of four-year college degree or more; GI Bill use combined with some college or two-year college degree; GI Bill use combined with high school completion or less education; no GI Bill use combined with some college or more education. (No GI Bill use combined with high school completion or less is the reference variable.)

43 Each individual variable was coded 0 or 1 for each time period, 1950–64, 1965–79 and 1980–98.  
44 Verba, Schlozman and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, p. 73.  
45 We have chosen not to use lagged variables of predicted values of political activity in prior periods as independent variables in latter periods. Our reasons are two-fold. First, we do not have longitudinal data. Secondly, our purpose is to explain variation in determinants from period to period. Inclusion of the lagged effects would amount to use of a statistically redundant variable, and it would obscure the very variation that is of interest.  
47 Verba, Schlozman and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, chap. 15.
TABLE 2 Predicting Use of the GI Bill: Results of Logistic Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Vocational training users</th>
<th>Higher education users</th>
<th>All users in sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education encouraged</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>0.56***</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s level of education</td>
<td>-0.20*</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of living in childhood, 1920s</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education before military service</td>
<td>-0.35**</td>
<td>0.40***</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2 log likelihood</td>
<td>515.28</td>
<td>597.66</td>
<td>672.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square goodness-of-fit</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The entries show the coefficients of each variable and their significances; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

FINDINGS

Stage 1: Determinants of GI Bill Use

We begin by examining the determinants of GI Bill usage. The results of three separate logistic regression runs are reported in Table 2. The dependent variable is defined as ‘GI Bill used for vocational training’ in the first column; ‘GI Bill used for higher education’ in the second column; and ‘GI Bill used for either vocational or higher education’ in the third column. Veterans were significantly more likely to use the vocational training benefits if they had less education prior to military service than others; in the case of the higher education provisions, those who had advanced further in school before participating in the war effort were significantly more likely to be users. Encouragement to pursue an education while growing up also proved to be a highly significant determinant in the case of higher education benefits. Parents’ level of education acted as a significant positive determinant of use of the higher education benefits, though standardized beta coefficients indicate that socialization and preparedness factors were relatively more important. Conversely, respondents whose parents were less well educated were significantly more likely to use the vocational training benefits of the GI Bill. The other socio-economic factor, standard of living in the 1920s, proved to be insignificant in determining use of either educational benefit.

Some might expect that variables such as encouragement during childhood to pursue an education and pre-military education would be strongly associated with veterans’

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48 The number of cases included in each regression throughout this article is less than the total number of respondents and the number varies from one table to the next because of missing data. Respondents were asked to complete a twelve-page mail survey that included over 200 individual questions. Although the proportion that answered each question was high, the subsamples in the analyses are lower in some cases because a respondent who skipped a single question used in variable construction caused his case to be excluded entirely.

socio-economic backgrounds, but this proved not to be the case. In the interviews, veterans from a wide variety of different backgrounds, including some who grew up very poor or in lower-middle class homes, stressed that their family members had always emphasized the value of education. Neither is it unreasonable that level of education prior to military service proves not to have been biased by socio-economic level, given that Claudia Goldin has shown that secondary-school enrolment and graduation rates increased dramatically in the United States during the early twentieth century, especially in non-southern states with greater wealth and greater homogeneity of wealth. Ironically, the Great Depression boosted high school graduation rates by eliminating many of the jobs teenage males would fill, prompting such individuals to attend school instead.

The regression results demonstrate that GI Bill usage was not biased by the kinds of socio-economic factors that had typically determined educational attainment in the United States up until that time. To the contrary, the GI Bill’s educational provisions were quite broadly accessible to returning veterans and made educational institutions far more open to those from less privileged backgrounds than they would have been otherwise. The programme extended new opportunities to many who had been socialized to pursue more education but who would not otherwise have had the opportunity.

Stage 2: Determinants of Political Participation Across Three Time Periods

Next we examine the determinants of veterans’ political participation within each of three time periods, starting with 1950–64. As summarized in Table 3, the most striking result of the OLS regression is that the predicted values for use of the GI Bill’s educational provisions were highly significant in determining the degree to which veterans participated in political activities in 1950–64. This shows that GI Bill beneficiaries became significantly more active in political activities during the post-war era than those who did not benefit from the programme. Not surprisingly, given the well-known connection between socialization in childhood and subsequent participation, veterans whose parents were active in political activity were also significantly more likely to become politically active themselves in early adulthood. Interestingly, neither level of education completed nor standard of living in 1960 bears a significant relationship to involvement in political activities in the immediate post-war era.

These results suggest that GI Bill use had a positive interpretive effect during the post-war era, promoting participation in a wide range of political activities. They demonstrate, moreover, that level of participation is independent of educational attainment: veterans who came from lower socio-economic backgrounds and had less education were as likely to become involved in politics during the post-war era as veterans who grew up in higher status environments.

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50 The bivariate correlation between standard of living in the 1920s and education encouraged while growing up, while significant at the 0.001 level, is low: 0.23. The same is true of standard of living and level of pre-military education, at 0.26. Similarly, the correlation between parents’ level of education and both socialization variables is highly significant but low: 0.13 (p < 0.01) for level of pre-military education, and 0.18 (p < 0.001) for being encouraged to pursue an education.


53 Scholars recognize that the determinants of participation are numerous, and thus it is not surprising to have a relatively low $R^2$. It should be noted, however, that the purpose here is not to include all the possible explanatory variables but rather to test those deemed most significant.
TABLE 3  
Determinants of Political Involvement by Second World War Veterans, 1950–98: Results of Ordinary Least Squares Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predicted values, use of GI Bill</td>
<td>1.25 (0.18)**</td>
<td>1.46 (0.14)*</td>
<td>0.70 (0.07)</td>
<td>1.26 (0.17)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education completed</td>
<td>0.04 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.13 (0.24)***</td>
<td>0.16 (0.33)***</td>
<td>0.11 (0.30)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of living†</td>
<td>0.03 (0.02)</td>
<td>0.20 (0.11)*</td>
<td>0.17 (0.12)*</td>
<td>0.09 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents political activity</td>
<td>0.09 (0.11)*</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The entries are the unstandardized coefficients, with standardized coefficients in parentheses. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.
†Standard of living in 1960 was used for the 1950–64 and 1965–79 periods and for the lifetime average; standard of living in 1998 was used for 1980–98.

who were more privileged and educated. In other words, resource effects resulting from education (whether due to GI Bill adoption or not) were not important determinants of participation during the early stage of an individual’s life.

For the next two time periods, the regression results differ from those of the first time period. Predicted GI Bill use is a less significant and less important determinant of political involvement during the 1965–79 period, and it is insignificant by the later period, 1980–98. Level of education, by contrast, emerges as highly significant and the most important predictor of participation in each period. Standard of living also becomes a statistically significant indicator.

The results for the latter time periods are more consistent with what scholars already know about political participation: that level of education and socio-economic factors are important determinants. Meanwhile, the interpretive effects of the GI Bill, though evident immediately after programme implementation, gradually faded away. Still, given the relationship of the GI Bill benefits to educational attainment, it is possible that programme effects are implicit within the level of education variable in latter periods. We will turn shortly, therefore, to an examination of the interactive effects of GI Bill use and various levels of educational attainment.

Determinants of veterans’ lifetime average political activity are shown in the far right-hand column in Table 3. Level of education proves the most significant and strongest relative determinant of lifetime participation. Predicted values of GI Bill use are also significant, though at a lower level. Not only is the GI Bill positively associated with veterans’ political involvements in the period immediately after they benefited from it, but

54 Collinearity diagnostics revealed no problem in using level of education in the second stage model, though pre-military educational level was used in the first model. The fact that veterans used the GI Bill for such a wide range of degrees of additional education alleviates such difficulties.
TABLE 4  
Determinants of Political Involvement by Second World War Veterans, 1950–98: Results of Interactive Equation, Ordinary Least Squares Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predicted values, use of GI Bill</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI Bill use × 4 yr. college grad or more education</td>
<td>(0.12)*</td>
<td>(0.12)*</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.16)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI Bill use × 2 yr. college grad or some college</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>GI Bill use × high school grad or less education</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No GI Bill use × some college or more education</td>
<td>−0.20</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of living†</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents political activity</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The entries are the unstandardized coefficients, with standardized coefficients in parentheses. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.
† Standard of living in 1960 was used for the 1950–64 and 1965–79 periods and for the lifetime average; standard of living in 1998 was used for 1980–98.

it is also a significant contributor to their average level of involvement over the long term. Interestingly, standard of living is significant during later time periods but not for the lifetime average. Because we cannot determine the combined effect of GI Bill use and level of education from these results, we turn to an interactive model.

**Interactions between GI Bill Use and Level of Education**

Table 4 presents regression results of the interactive model across three time periods and for lifetime average political activity. All variables that were significant in the non-interactive model remain so in the interactive version. The critical findings in the new table involve the interactive dummy variables, which permit us to understand the extent to which GI Bill users of particular levels of education became involved in politics. The results are intriguing. Across time, as the independent interpretive effects of the GI

55 While we have retained the 'predicted values, use of the GI Bill' variable here, 'level of education completed' has been dropped as a lone variable and has been divided into three categories and combined with GI Bill use or non-use in the dummy variables. The reason is that we are testing whether GI Bill use as a resource mattered most at certain levels of education, while still controlling for endogenous characteristics that may have predicted GI Bill use.
Bill on participation wane, the resource effects of education provided through the GI Bill become increasingly important determinants of civic involvement. The greater the level of education attained by a GI Bill recipient in our sample, the more likely that individual was to become involved politically. We now return to the theory of policy feedback for civic engagement in order to make sense of these findings.

DISCUSSION: INTERPRETIVE AND RESOURCE EFFECTS OVER TIME

These results suggest that the GI Bill had feedback effects for recipients’ political participation over the life course, and that the dynamics through which such effects operated and the degree to which they affected different groups varied over time. In the first period, immediately after the war, the programme appears to have had interpretive effects that boosted participation among beneficiaries generally, regardless of their educational level. The educational benefits shaped veterans’ consciousness in ways that made them more inclined to participate in politics. Later, after the experience of benefiting from the programme faded from memory, still the policy appeared to boost participation but in relation to the degree of resources – the level of education – obtained through it. Here we will probe each of these dynamics in turn.

In 1950–64, the experience of having used the GI Bill had a direct effect on the political participation of beneficiaries generally, regardless of their educational level. The educational benefits shaped veterans’ consciousness in ways that made them more inclined to participate in politics. In keeping with the theoretical framework in Figure 1, the policy design of the GI Bill is likely to have had interpretive effects that boosted participation. The interview data illustrate how such dynamics worked.

First, positive interpretive effects of the GI Bill appear to have been transmitted through the administrative rules and procedures of the programme, a dynamic signified by the arrow marked ‘A’ in Figure 1. The universal eligibility criteria, contingent only on ninety days’ military service, treated all veterans uniformly, without means-testing or other invasive procedures. The routinized process through which the provisions were administered bestowed dignity on recipients, regardless of socio-economic background, treating them as first-class citizens. Although administration did not discriminate by socio-economic background, racial discrimination was commonplace. African Americans experienced unequal treatment to white veterans, especially in the South where...
efficient administrative procedures. As George Josten, graduate of a large midwestern land-grant university said, ‘We had to apply. I think it was processed through some regional offices, and then we simply got a [monthly stipend] check. I got a check for $75.00 and the school was paid [tuition] directly. It was an extremely convenient arrangement.’ Louis Bluestein recalled that he and his fellow veterans at a small private university were treated ‘efficiently and courteously’ by administrators, professors, other students. ‘I never heard of any problems,’ he added. ‘The student admissions office … took care of the paperwork. They were eager to have us.’ Veterans who used the benefits for vocational training often remarked that considerable ‘paperwork’ was involved in programme administration, but emphasized that standardized procedures were applied uniformly to all. James Johnson, who received training to advance in his job at the Atlanta Gas Light Company, explained, ‘You had to take these tests. First I went as an apprentice then I was moved up to a second-class journeyman and then moved up from there to a first-class journeyman [by passing] all the tests.’ Beneficiaries generally expressed sentiments that concurred with those of Richard Colosimo, a labourer before the war who earned a bachelor’s degree and part of a master’s on the GI Bill: ‘We were treated with respect.’ Such treatment is likely to have given veterans the sense of being incorporated as first-class citizens of the nation, in turn heightening their civic predisposition and thus their civic involvement.

Secondly, the resources bestowed through the GI Bill – the tuition payments and stipends – were recognized as highly valuable by many veterans and they were administered in such a way that made veterans consciously aware that government had sponsored their education. Thus, interpretive effects are likely to have emanated from programme resources as well, as noted by arrow ‘B’ in Figure 1. Scholars have suggested that the visibility and traceability of government programmes have an important bearing on their civic consequences among mass publics. The fact that veterans readily identified the GI Bill as a government programme and a generous one was evidenced by responses to the interview question, ‘What does the American government owe veterans? How well has government done in this regard?’ Almost all veterans responded that government had treated Second World War veterans well, especially through the GI Bill. Said James Murray, a university graduate who felt he might not have had the ‘initiative’ to attend college were it not for the GI Bill, ‘They’ve treated me okay … In terms of the GI Bill, I was very happy.’ Richard Colosimo agreed, ‘As far as World War II veterans, they did well. I must admit if it wasn’t for government and subsidizing our education I never would have gotten my degree, both degrees.’ Sam Marchesi, who became a custom builder through the vocational training benefits of the GI Bill, replied, ‘The government made many opportunities for us … for a man such as myself with a lack of education to better myself. I’m very grateful that we had those opportunities and the government was always ready to be behind us.’ Like administrative rules and procedures, GI Bill programme (F’note continued) both institutions of higher education and the new vocational training programmes were segregated; US Congress, Report on Education and Training Under the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, As Amended, 81st Cong., 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1950), pp. 1970–83; Hilary Herbold, ‘Never a Level Playing Field: Blacks and the GI Bill’, Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 6 (1994–95), 104–8; Martin D. Jenkins, ‘The Availability of Higher Education for Negroes in the Southern States’, Journal of Negro Education, 16 (1947), 459–73; William A. Caudill, ‘Negro Veterans Return’, Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 3 (Aug.–Sept. 1945). 14–17.

resources appear to have conveyed to veterans that they had gained an elevated status in the polity.

Conversely, while those who did not use the GI Bill also tended to mention it as a very positive programme, their comments suggested that they did not experience the same sense of incorporation that beneficiaries experienced. Harry Serulneck, who went back to work after the war, said, ‘I think the veterans of World War II that wanted to go back to school got to do that with the GI Bill of Rights. They got a lot of entitlements … As far as I’m concerned, I never got nothing from the government; the only thing I got was the $300 (a lump-sum veterans’ bonus payment) when I came home.’

Over time, as the experience of the GI Bill became more remote, these direct cognitive or interpretive effects faded. In middle-age and older adulthood, however, the resource effects of the programme became highly significant in promoting political activity. This effect is illustrated in Figure 1 by the arrow marked ‘C’, showing how positive resource effects of programme payments, goods or services may enhance subsequent civic capacity and thus stimulate civic involvement. In this case, those who had been able to attain the highest levels of education through the GI Bill became most involved politically, as evidenced by Table 4. As noted earlier, the effects of education for participation accumulate over time as those who are more highly educated gain more of the skills, networks and income levels that also help foster civic engagement. This explains why, among GI Bill users, those with the highest levels of education participated at the highest and most significant levels in politics, and those relationships became ever more apparent over time.

The more significant participation by highly educated GI Bill users than equally educated non-users in Table 4 suggests the presence of a lingering interpretive effect of the GI Bill, an interactive one that varied depending on the value of the resources – or extent of education – veterans had gained through the programme. This implies that resources themselves may also yield additional interpretive effects that boost civic predisposition, as demonstrated by arrow ‘D’. Veterans’ conceptions of the generosity and value of the GI Bill appears to have prompted many, especially the most educated users, to express a sense of gratitude for the programme. Paul Parisi, who earned a bachelor’s degree under the GI Bill, described himself as someone who lacked not only the resources to attend college otherwise but also the confidence in his own abilities that would have led him to consider college a possibility. He said, ‘I’m one of the beneficiaries. I feel that American government really, really went the limit to deal with the people who were in the service (in World War II). They really went the limit. Sometimes I wonder if I really earned all that I’ve gotten, to be frank with you.’ Anthony Miller, who attended two private universities on the GI Bill, described himself as someone who never have gone to college otherwise.’ Such feelings of gratitude may have been, for many veterans, translated into a sense of owing something back to society. Such results could be the product of the civic education gained by veterans who had the highest levels of education, or they could reflect the same beneficiaries’ understanding of having gained an especially valuable resource from government. In any case it is likely that the more highly educated the GI Bill beneficiaries, the more aware they were of how the programme had affected them and the more fully ensconced they became within the political community as a result.

In sum, the GI Bill had important democratizing effects among white men of the civic

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generation that came of age during the Second World War. The programme’s educational benefits not only expanded advanced education to many veterans who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to pursue it, but also, furthermore, they expanded participation in the democratic process. By being treated well in a government programme and believing themselves to benefit considerably from its generous resources, programme beneficiaries became more fully incorporated within the political community. Consequently, they were prompted to participate in politics themselves, becoming active in the processes of self-governance. It is especially striking that these effects were felt in the initial period by beneficiaries generally, regardless of socio-economic background or level of education. This offers evidence that the programme not only stimulated participation but also had a levelling effect on a phenomenon that is typically stratified by privilege. The two-stage analysis here shows that even as the effects for participation became associated, over time, with educational level, still the GI Bill ameliorated the usual determinants of participation.

CONCLUSION

Scholars generally agree that the decline in political participation among Americans over the last few decades is largely attributable to the shifting generational composition of the electorate, as the ‘civic generation’ has been replaced gradually by the less politically involved ‘baby boomers’ and members of ‘Generation X’. Yet, the question of why these generations participate at such different rates remains unanswered. Seeking an answer to why the ‘civic generation’ exhibited such public-spiritedness, Robert Putnam points to the ‘bonding experiences’ of the Second World War, but he does not specify how participation in such events as scrap metal drives and victory gardens might have prompted individuals to become involved politically. Connecting participatory outcomes to governance itself, Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, authors of The New American Voter, suggest that the ‘series of dramatic conflicts and failures in political leadership’ experienced by those who came of age from the Vietnam Era onward might shed light on why they became less engaged in politics or government. However, though they observe that the older, more civic-minded cohort grew up during a ‘formative epoch’, namely ‘the Great Depression that bred the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt’, Miller and Shanks neglect to clarify how governance might have prompted the civic generation to exhibit such high levels of political activity.

This study offers evidence that the experience of government shared among members of a cohort group may help explain their subsequent political participation, and it suggests particular mechanisms through which programmes affect such involvement throughout the life course. Specifically, the GI Bill appears to have acted as yeast among the civic generation, prompting a sizeable portion of that cohort group to become far more involved in politics than they would have otherwise, and to remain so throughout their lives. These


findings lead us to speculate about factors that may underlie trends in political participation among different generations, as identified by Miller and Shanks.

First, this study suggests that the impressive record of political participation among the ‘New Deal generation’ (including Second World War veterans) may be in large part attributable to the pronounced role of government in their lives. Miller and Shanks show that across time, the voter turnout of this generation held steady and even increased among the most highly educated, at the same time as rates declined among younger cohorts. Perhaps other social programmes from which this cohort group of Americans benefited in the immediate post-war era, such as assistance in purchasing homes and strong government support for unions, had similar effects to those of the GI Bill, also helping to bolster political involvement in the midcentury. We wonder, too, the extent to which the elevated involvement among the most highly educated of this generation later in their lives is attributable to the long-term, interactive GI Bill effect that we observed. In short, we need to investigate more fully the extent and mechanisms through which civic engagement may be generated by government activity itself.

Secondly, this study prompts us to hypothesize about why political participation declined among younger generations of Americans. Conceivably, changes in the scope and design of public policies may mean that they conveyed fewer positive resource or interpretive effects among Americans, such that younger citizens exhibit less attachment to government and politics. Strikingly, Miller and Shanks observe that the greatest differences among the New Deal generation and subsequent generations emerges in the participation of less advantaged individuals: indeed, among those with no more than a high school diploma, there is a 30-point gap between members of the older and younger generations. As we saw, the GI Bill had an equalizing effect on participation among beneficiaries in early adulthood, in the 1950–64 period, as it boosted especially the involvement of less educated citizens. While this dynamic, largely attributable to the GI Bill’s interpretive effects, dissipated later on, other public programmes – namely Social Security and Medicare – had similar effects later on. Once again, less advantaged members appear to have been incorporated into the political system through public programmes, and to have responded through higher rates of participation than would otherwise be expected.

The less advantaged members of younger generations, by contrast, have not experienced the kind of government largesse that was available to people like themselves in the post-war era. Indeed, since the 1970s, government has receded in the lives of such individuals. Veteran status, with its policy benefits, is much less common – Vietnam War veterans numbered only 40 per cent of those who had served in the Second World War, and the contemporary, all-volunteer force is much smaller – and, in any case, the GI Bill is no longer as generous as it was among the civic generation. As well, less advantaged Americans have witnessed the retrenchment of several government programmes that were important in assisting those in their circumstances previously – namely the decline in value of the minimum wage, welfare benefits and unemployment insurance benefits, as well as government support for unionization and unionization rates.

Might these and other shifts in the welfare state help explain the decline in political

64 Miller and Shanks, The New American Voter, pp. 56, 57, 64.
65 Campbell, How Policies Make Citizens.
participation among these later generations, just as other types of social programmes – including the GI Bill – had salutary effects for involvement among their forebears? Possibly changes in public programmes have contributed to younger Americans being more cognizant of government failures and less aware of government successes, and has rendered them more passive as political actors. These questions beg considerable additional inquiry that would probe the connections between policy design and resources and the inclination and capacity to be involved in politics, as well as actual levels and forms of involvement, across generations and socio-economic strata. To the extent that government is a significant force within the lives of citizens, it is reasonable to expect that it has consequences for their political activity. How those effects might vary across policies, across time, through the life course and across generations suggests a broad agenda for future research.

APPENDIX A: DEALING WITH MEMORY AND RECALL CONSTRAINTS

Some of the primary potential sources of error in a study of the Second World War generation pertain to subjects’ memory and ability to recall events that happened several decades ago. These concerns are alleviated to some degree by scholars’ understanding that salience matters: that is, people will recall events or activities that were important to them, otherwise known as ‘landmark events’. It is not important for this study to ascertain specific details from the past, such as the number of Lions’ Club or Parent–Teacher Organization meetings a person attended in a given year, or the particular elections in which they voted. Rather, the central question was whether the subjects were generally active participants in such activities or not.

The mail survey format does help to limit such concerns, given that a second chance to answer questions is known to stimulate memory. Respondents could respond to questions at their leisure, and take time to remember past activities. Several additional precautions were taken in order to reduce errors of recall as much as possible. First, the survey did not ask respondents about past attitudes, in which case responses would have been affected by intervening circumstances. Secondly, survey researchers have found that greater accuracy is obtained by framing questions for a specific time period; for this purpose, specific responses were requested for each of three periods: 1950–64, 1965–79, and 1980 to ‘the present’. This pairing of questions is intended to prompt respondents to consider how their activities might have changed, if at all, and thus to respond to the questions about the earlier period as clearly and thoughtfully as possible. Asking a number of questions about a given time period has proven to facilitate memory.

APPENDIX B: REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE SAMPLE

Among returning veterans of the Second World War, 51 per cent used the GI Bill for education; in the sample used in this study, 60.8 per cent used the GI Bill for education. Among the general population of Second World War veterans, 28.6 per cent of those who used the educational provisions pursued higher education, whereas the survey sample included 63.5 per cent such users.

Death rates may account, in part, for these different response rates. Nearly two-thirds of Second World War veterans were deceased when the survey was conducted in 1998. Studies show that in the United States, old age is positively correlated with being better educated. Demographers report a recent increase in longevity among American males that some consider attributable to the effects of the GI Bill. Accordingly, GI Bill users are likely to have experienced more favourable socio-economic circumstances than non-users and may thus have greater longevity; a similar disparity may exist between those who used the GI Bill for higher education and those who used it for programmes below the college level. Differential

death rates may also be explained by age disparity of GI Bill users and non-users. Use of the GI Bill was inversely related to age of returning veterans, and those younger veterans are more likely to still be alive and to have responded to the survey.71

Nonetheless, for the purposes of this study, it is unnecessary for either the ratio of GI Bill users to non-users or the ratio of higher education users to vocational training users to reflect the original population of Second World War veterans. Meaningful results are still attainable as long as each of these groups reflects characteristics of the same group in the original population, and we then consider effects for both higher education users and vocational training users separately. Such determinations cannot be ascertained from US Census data because the Census does not include questions about the GI Bill. It is possible, however, to make comparisons between the sample used here and data obtained in surveys conducted earlier, at a point closer to use of the GI Bill, and drawn from a nationwide random sample of veterans or the population more broadly.

Table A1 compares the veterans who used the GI Bill for programmes below the college level in this survey with those in a survey presented to Congress in 1956. The results suggest that the sample discussed here mirrors the original population, as measured by the President’s Commission, quite closely.

Using the same study permits comparison of Second World War veterans who used the GI Bill’s higher education benefits with their cohort group in the original population. This reveals that subjects in this study had more education prior to military service. These results are summarized in Table A2. The higher levels

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**Table A1**  
*Pre-military Educational Attainment of Second World War Veterans Using GI Bill for Vocational Education and Related Programmes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>President’s Commission Report</th>
<th>Survey used for this study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 years college</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years or more of college</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Table A2**  
*Pre-military Educational Attainment of Second World War Veterans Using GI Bill for Higher Education*

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>President’s Commission Report</th>
<th>Survey used for this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>47.0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 years college</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 years or more of college</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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of pre-military education among subjects in this study suggests that they may have been, on average, from more advantaged backgrounds than the original universe of veterans who used the GI Bill benefits for higher education. This would imply that the findings of this study err on the conservative side: the GI Bill may have provided greater access to more veterans than the findings here suggest.