Bringing the State Back In to Civic Engagement: Policy Feedback Effects of the G.I. Bill for World War II Veterans

SUZANNE METTLER *Syracuse University*

American civic engagement soared in the mid-twentieth century, succeeding an era in which national government had become more involved in citizens' lives than ever before. I examine the effects of the G.I. Bill's educational provisions for veterans' subsequent memberships in civic organizations and political activity. I consider theoretical arguments about how public social programs might affect civic involvement and advance a policy feedback approach that assesses both resource and interpretive effects of policy design. Newly collected survey and interview data permit the examination of several hypotheses. The analysis reveals that the G.I. Bill produced increased levels of participation—by more fully incorporating citizens, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, through enhancement of their civic capacity and predisposition for involvement. The theoretical framework offered here can be used to evaluate how other public programs affect citizens' participation in public life.

American civic engagement peaked in the mid-twentieth century, as memberships in civic organizations soared and political participation reached record levels (Putnam 2000, chap. 1). This "golden age" succeeded a period in which national government had become more involved than ever before in providing rights of economic security and well-being to American citizens. Was the sequencing of government-sponsored social opportunity and heightened levels of civic activity merely a coincidence? If not, how did government programs encourage beneficiaries to become more active citizens? Current research cannot tell us, because analysts of civic and political participation focus primarily on individual demographic factors or social conditions. When government programs are discussed, the focus is generally on means-tested welfare programs, which are associated with lower levels of participation among recipients (Mead 1986; Piven and Cloward 1971). We know little about how major social programs that reach broad sectors of the population have shaped civic participation.

This article examines the effects of the G.I. Bill of Rights, one of the most generous and inclusive social entitlements the federal government has ever funded and administered, on veterans' participation in civic organizations and political activities during the postwar era. Formally known as the "Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944," the program extended numerous social benefits, including higher education and vocational training, to returning veterans of World War II (Olson 1974; Ross 1969). Fifty-one percent of all returning veterans—7.8 million—took advantage of the educational benefits. By 1947, veterans on the G.I. Bill accounted for 49% of students enrolled in American colleges. Within 10 years after World War II, 2,200,000 veterans had attended college and 5,600,000 had participated in vocational training programs or on-the-job training under the G.I. Bill (U.S. Presidents' Commission on Veterans' Pensions 1956a, 287).

Perhaps one of the most important effects of a public program is whether it promotes or discourages citizen involvement in the day-to-day activities of American democracy. Does a vast commitment of public resources yield only social and economic effects, such as increased education, with no effect on democratic governance itself? Alternatively, might program benefits render recipients less inclined to participate in public life, if being treated as rights-bearing citizens makes them lose sight of their civic obligations? Or could program participation have a positive effect, either by endowing beneficiaries with a sense that they owe something back to society or by more fully incorporating them as full members of the democratic community?

Arguably, the policymaking process should be informed by consideration of questions such as these, which address the effects of policy design for civic engagement. Despite contemporary concern over the decline of social capital and participation, we have not developed a systematic way of investigating the role that government plays in shaping citizens' involvement. Such relationships are complex and must be understood in historical context. This article focuses on the effects of one landmark program for civic engagement and offers a theoretical framework though which other public programs might also be evaluated.

Suzanne Mettler is Associate Professor of Political Science, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Department of Political Science, Syracuse University, Eggers 100, Syracuse, NY 13244 (smettler@maxwell.syr.edu).

This research was supported generously by the National Academy of Education Postdoctoral Fellowship program and the Spencer Foundation, as well as the Center for Policy Research and Center for Demography and Economics of Aging, both at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. I am thankful to Wayne Grove, Jeff Stonecash, and, Eric Welch for numerous invaluable conversations at every stage of the process and to Andrew Milstein, Lori Beth Way, and McGee Young for extensive research assistance. Several scholars provided useful comments on early drafts of this paper, including Vernon Greene, Jerome Legge, Robert Lieberman, Paul Peterson, Sally Selden, Elaine Sharp, Doug Wolf, four anonymous reviewers, and participants in the Center for American Political Studies seminar at Harvard University, the American Political Development and Political Institutions seminar at the University of Michigan, and the Political Psychology, Public Administration, and American Politics seminars at Syracuse University.

POLICIES AS INSTITUTIONS: POLICY DESIGN AND FEEDBACK

The role of government programs has received relatively little attention from scholars who study determinants of civic and political participation. Most focus primarily on social and demographic characteristics such as age, sex, income, and free time, evaluating their importance as predictors of participation (e.g., Putnam 2000, chaps. 10–13; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, chaps. 10–12). To the extent that institutions are studied, the focus is usually on nonpolitical institutions such as churches, civic associations, and the workplace (e.g., Baumgartner and Walker 1988; Peterson 1992).

When the participatory effects of government programs are investigated, scholars suggest that they do matter: Beneficiaries exhibit higher subsequent levels of involvement with regard to related issues. Noting that farmers vote at significantly higher levels than other citizens, Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980, 32) propose that government agricultural programs elevate "their sense of the personal relevance of politics." Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, chaps. 7, 14) find that the magnitude of participatory effects varies by program: Beneficiaries of non-means-tested programs such as Social Security and Medicare are more likely to get involved in related issues than beneficiaries of means-tested programs. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, 101–17) reason that participation by program beneficiaries is higher, as in the case of Social Security recipients, because politicians and groups target those individuals for strategic mobilization. These analyses serve as correctives to the society-centric focus of most studies of participation. While their focus is limited to citizens' instrumentalist efforts to influence the issue area that affects them directly, collectively they point to the broader question of how government programs might shape citizens' orientation toward and participation in public life generally.

Among students of public policy, this question was raised long ago, first by E. E. Schattschneider (1935) and later by Theodore Lowi (1964). Both suggested that policies function as institutions, imposing particular norms and rules on recipients, and thus, in turn, reshaping politics itself. Furthering these ideas, scholars have noted that policies convey to citizens their rights and privileges as well as their duties and obligations as members of the community (Landy 1993; Mead 1986, 7). Through features of their design, policies may shape beneficiaries' subjective experience of what it means to be a citizen, giving them a sense of their role, place, and value within the polity; they may affect the formation of political identity among individuals and groups; and they may unify or stratify society and the political community in new and different ways (Schneider and Ingram 1993, 1997, 78–89, 140–45).

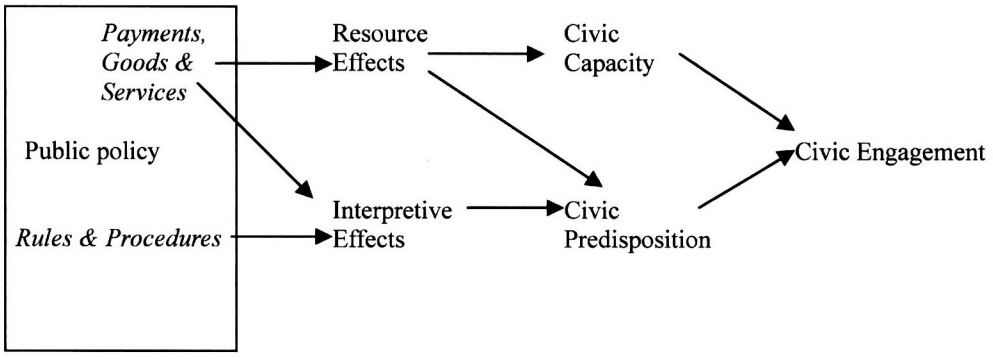
Two recent studies begin to test these claims empirically, offering insights into why government programs vary in their effects on political action. Joe Soss (1999) found that program clients perceived the agency with which they interacted as a microcosm of government itself and extrapolated from their experiences lessons about their own role in the political system. Given distinct rules and procedures marking program administration, social insurance beneficiaries gained a greater sense of external political efficacy, while public assistance recipients took away negative messages. Andrea Campbell (2000) demonstrates that Social Security has especially salutary effects on program-related participation among beneficiaries from low to moderate income backgrounds, as greater dependence on program resources makes them more inclined to be involved.

Continuing this line of inquiry, I propose a theoretical model of the dynamics through which policies affect civic and political participation, highlighting aspects of policy design that might produce such effects. I build on the policy feedback approach, which views public policy as an independent variable with consequences for politics (Pierson 1993; Skocpol 1992, 57–60). Paul Pierson (1993) has noted that policy feedback analysis to date has focused primarily on effects on organized interests or political elites and has called for more attention to effects on "mass publics," meaning citizens generally. He proposed analysis of two dynamics: (1) resource effects—how the resources and incentives that policies provide shape patterns of behavior; and (2) interpretive effects—how policies convey meanings and information to citizens. To make Pierson's approach more applicable to the effects of policy on civic engagement, I draw on Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995, 270–2) Civic Voluntarism Model, with its attention to the impact of resources (free time, money, and civic skills) and psychological predisposition (attributes such as political efficacy, a sense of civic duty, and a group consciousness of having one's fate linked to others').[1] In addition, attention to the tools and rules of policy design, as highlighted by Schneider and Ingram (1997, 93–9), permits analysis of interpretive effects of public policy.

The resulting theoretical framework, illustrated in Figure 1, extends policy feedback theory to specify how policy affects civic engagement. First, the resources bestowed on citizens through policy, whether in the form of payments, goods, or services, have distinct resource effects on individuals' material well-being and life opportunities and, thus, directly affect their capacity (meaning ability, aptitude, or faculty) for participation. Second, features of policy design, including the administrative rules and procedures highlighted by Soss and the form and scope of eligibility and coverage, have interpretive effects on citizens. Through such features, individual citizens acquire perceptions of their role in the community, their status in relation to other citizens and government, and the extent to which a policy has affected their lives. As a result, policy design shapes citizens' psychological predisposition to participate in public life. In addition, the resources offered through a policy have interpretive effects inasmuch as citizens

[1] This study uses the term "predisposition" to refer to such traits rather than adopting Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's term, "engagement." This avoids confusion with "civic engagement," which refers to being involved in civic and/or political life.

FIGURE 1. Policy Feedback for Mass Publics: How Policy Affects Civic Engagement



perceive those aspects of government programs to affect their life circumstances. Finally, resource effects influence civic predisposition: Education, for example, promotes attitudes of civic duty (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 36). This study uses this theoretical framework to examine the effects of one broad-based, universal social program for civic engagement; potentially, a wide range of public policies can be investigated similarly.

HYPOTHESIZING THE EFFECTS OF THE G.I. BILL ON CIVIC LIFE

Considering how the educational provisions of the G.I. Bill might affect civic and political participation, existing theoretical approaches would lead scholars to make a variety of predictions. The most common of these, based on society-centered and behavioral explanations, assign little causal significance to public programs. The first, the *preexisting characteristics* variant, would suggest that any differences in the participation levels of program users and nonusers must emanate from endogenous factors, differences in the prior personal attributes and experiences of those from each group. Proponents might point to the veteran status of program users, noting that those in birth cohorts that were of draft age at the time of major wars have higher subsequent participation levels than other citizens (Bennett 1986, 104–5). Others might stress membership in the "civic generation," Americans born between 1910 and 1940, whose engagement may have been prompted by the shared experience of World War II (Putnam 2000, chap. 14). Still others would suggest that veterans who took advantage of the G.I. Bill's educational provisions were likely to have come from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds than nonusers (Story 1998), already endowed with factors that facilitate subsequent participation. The preexisting characteristics approach implies that as long as the analysis controls for the appropriate variables, the G.I. Bill will be revealed to be insignificant in explaining participation.

A second type of behavioral analysis, the *by-product explanation*, recognizes that the goods or services extended through public programs have effects on participation but considers policy design to be irrelevant to such outcomes. This explanation is salient in the case of policies that extend resources, such as education, which are considered to be determinants of civic activity. The fact is well established that higher educational levels are positively related to higher participation levels (e.g., Jennings and Niemi 1981, chap. 8; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 17–24). The institutions of formal education are known to produce a more tolerant and informed citizenry (e.g., Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; *PS* 2000). Therefore, the by-product approach would predict increased participation inasmuch as the G.I. Bill allowed people to extend their education. The mechanism through which such education was provided, however, would not be considered determinative of the outcomes. The public program would be understood only as an incidental vehicle for the true source of increased participation, education itself.

Other theoretical approaches assume that policies themselves have causal effects on participation. The *passivity explanation* implies that social programs are responsible for undermining active citizenship. Adherents assert that the expansion of social rights has weakened civil society and fostered dependency among citizens, advancing a rights-claiming orientation that has displaced attention to civic obligations (e.g., Fukuyama 1995, 313–4; Glendon 1991). In fact, these criticisms are generally leveled at means-tested public assistance programs, not universal programs. Yet, because this literature does not specify differential effects of policy design, it is included in this analysis to test its explanatory value more broadly. Applied to the G.I. Bill, the passivity approach implies that beneficiaries would exhibit lower levels of involvement in public life than those who did not rely on government benefits to fund their education.

Despite their differences, these first three explanations share the common trait of downplaying the significance that public programs may have in citizens' lives and overlooking the intricacies of the relationship between program design and civic outcomes. The behavioral approaches perceive public policy to be

epiphenomenal, while the passivity approach treats government programs in an overly generalized fashion. A policy feedback approach, in contrast, offers attention to both resource and interpretive effects of policy design and, thus, provides analytical tools for explaining how program features affect participation.

The G.I. Bill was designed as a broad-based, universal program, with generous educational benefits that were widely accessible to returning veterans (Skocpol 1996). To be eligible, veterans needed only to have an honorable discharge and to have served at least 90 days of active duty (Brown 1946, 13). The policy granted one year of education or training to all veterans who had served for 90 days, with an additional month of education for each additional month of service up to a maximum of 48 months. All tuition and fees were covered up to a total of $500 per year, and veterans received monthly subsistence payments of $75 if they were single, $105 if they had one dependent, and $120 if they had two or more dependents (U.S. Congress 1973, 20).[2]

Drawing on the policy feedback approach, I propose that these features of policy design had resource and incentive effects that promoted increased participation. Given that G.I. Bill educational benefits were generous, and because education has far-reaching consequences for individuals in terms of occupational status, income, and social networks, the resource effects of the policy were likely to have had a pronounced effect on individuals' capacity to be involved in civic and political life. In addition, to the extent that individuals perceived the G.I. Bill benefits to make a meaningful difference in their well-being and life opportunities, the program may have had interpretive effects that promoted individuals' psychological predisposition for civic participation. These resource and interpretive effects could operate through two dynamics: reciprocity and critical effects.

According to the *reciprocity explanation*, the G.I. Bill's resource effects would have fostered among recipients a sense of obligation, of owing something back to society. In the post-World War II era, the G.I. Bill was not considered a quid pro quo for military service; rather, it was enacted fairly late in the war as a way to convey appreciation to veterans and to prevent massive unemployment by channeling some veterans toward school instead of the workplace (Olson 1974, chap. 1; Ross 1969, chaps. 3, 4). The law's provisions were munificent and broad in scope compared to the meager benefits offered to World War I veterans, which were geared toward disabled veterans (Kato 1995, 2038–9). Receiving such unexpected and valuable resources may well have promoted a sense of reciprocity among veterans.

The *critical effects explanation* suggests that the G.I. Bill's extension of social rights may have had, through both resource and interpretive effects, a pronounced impact on individuals from less advantaged groups that, in turn, affected their participation dramatically. Scholars have noted that while socioeconomic background plays an important role in influencing the likelihood of political participation, subsequent factors such as participation in religious and social organizations or the workplace may ameliorate such effects and elevate the participation levels of those who began life without generous civic endowments (e.g., Strate et al. 1989; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, chap. 13). Comparable results could be expected from the G.I. Bill if the policy incorporated less advantaged citizens more fully into the polity.

How might such dynamics operate? First, the G.I. Bill's resources may have been most consequential for civic capacity among those who could not have afforded advanced education otherwise. This hypothesis draws on the work of Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980, 25), which found that while increases in education generally raise the likelihood of voter participation, college education has an especially pronounced effect in promoting participation among those from poorer backgrounds and matters somewhat less for those from higher-income backgrounds. Second, features of program design may have had interpretive effects that enhanced less privileged veterans' predisposition to participate most dramatically. The G.I. Bill functioned as a universal policy, open to any veteran who wished to take advantage of it, regardless of income or class background. The program operated through impersonal, routinized rules and procedures rather than the invasive scrutiny and means testing associated with public assistance programs. Scholars have suggested that such policies may bestow dignity upon individuals, whereas targeted or means-tested policies tend to stigmatize them instead (Skocpol 1991, 414).

THE DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Most studies of participation are based on large data sets that include numerous variables regarding demographic characteristics and attitudes but little about government programs. Such data are generally inadequate for examining in depth the kinds of hypotheses discussed above, and they are useless for studying the G.I. Bill's effects because they lack indicators about program participation. Conversely, although a few surveys of veterans conducted shortly after World War II permit analysis of the characteristics of G.I. Bill beneficiaries and the socioeconomic effects of the program, they failed to ask about participation in civic and political life (e.g., Frederiksen and Schrader 1951; U.S. General Accounting Office 1951). Therefore,

[2] Based on the Consumer Price Index, the purchasing power of these amounts, in 2000 compared to 1948, is as follows: $500 would be worth $3,573; $75, worth $536; $105, worth $750; and $120, worth $857. These calculations are based on the Consumer Price Index, Urban Consumers, available at the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, web site, http://www.bls.gov/cpihome.htm. It should be noted, however, that tuition and fees at universities and colleges have risen faster than the consumer price index over time. In 1948–49, the average cost of tuition and books and supplies was only $234 at a four-year public institution and $418 at a four-year private institution; two-year colleges and vocational programs cost substantially less (U.S. Congress 1973, 29).

to conduct systematic analysis for this study, it was necessary to collect original data.

I used a survey and in-depth, open-ended interviews to collect both quantitative data and qualitative data. A national, random sample of all World War II veterans was not available, so it was necessary to find an alternative means of reaching veterans. Many survivors from World War II military units have formed their own veterans' organizations, groups that typically have mailing lists, generate newsletters, and hold reunions. I contacted several such organizations in an attempt 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. For the study, I used lists from four military units, two from the U.S. Army (87th Infantry Division, 89th Division) and two from the U.S. Army Air Force (379th Bomb Group; 783rd Bomb Squadron, 465th Bomb Group).[3] These units included only men; also, because the World War II military was still segregated, African Americans served in separate units, none of which were included in this version of the survey.[4]

The quantitative component of the research design consisted of a mail survey of 1,000 veterans. The survey investigated topics such as family background, civic and political activities, military service, education and training, the G.I. Bill, occupational history, and demographics. Most of the questions had been used in prior surveys but never combined in a single survey in a manner that would permit systematic analysis.[5] The data permit investigation of the G.I. Bill's consequences for memberships in civic organizations and participation in political activities, while controlling for level of education and various socioeconomic background factors. The survey subjects were randomly selected from 4,000 names on the World War II military unit organizations' lists. In August 1998, each subject received a cover letter, a 12-page survey booklet, and a reply envelope, followed by a reminder postcard one week later. Two subsequent packets were sent to nonrespondents four weeks and eight weeks later, to limit bias from early respondents. The survey yielded 716 completed surveys, a 73.5% response rate.

I considered the possible sources of bias in a sample based on military unit associations. Regional biases were not a concern because World War II units were drawn from the nation as a whole, and veterans who belong to their associations live throughout the nation. Possibly, this research design might target veterans who were predisposed to active participation in civic life if membership in a veterans' organization implied such bias. Interviews revealed, however, that these groups do not demand active participation and that not all members initiated their own membership status. Rather, the groups have made a great effort to include as many survivors as possible on their lists, while the percentage who actually attend reunions and participate actively is small. Survey questions about participation in each veterans' organization confirmed the wide disparity in degrees of involvement.

The fact that several decades have elapsed since the G.I. Bill was administered necessitated careful attention to constraints upon subjects' memory and recall. Before designing the survey, I conducted several open-ended interviews with veterans. This process, followed by a pretest of the survey instrument and focus group with participants, allowed me to improve question wording and to limit questions to those that veterans typically 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 (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000, 67–83). I used techniques that are known to improve the 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 (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000, 94–5, 146). These measures are discussed further in Appendix A.

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 mean that a sample drawn in 1998 is likely to differ systematically from one drawn in the immediate postwar era. Users and nonusers of G.I. Bill educational benefits provide the primary basis of comparison for this article. Among survey respondents, veterans who used the program constituted 60.8% of the total, 10% higher than among the original population. It is important to note that considerable variation exists among both G.I. Bill users and nonusers in terms of level of education completed prior to military service: Respondents from each of nine educational levels were present in each group. Such variation makes it possible to control for important background variables. Vocational training participants are underrepresented, meaning that it will be necessary to consider the consequences of each type of program usage separately. The representativeness of the sample is considered more thoroughly in Appendix B.

The qualitative component of the research consisted of 28 semistructured, open-ended interviews with veterans in all regions of the United States. Their names were drawn from the same lists as used for the survey.[6] The interviews covered the same basic topics as the survey but offer the opportunity to probe responses in greater depth and to understand their meaning in the context of individual lives (Hochschild 1981). They

[3] An obstacle to attaining mailing lists is that some veterans' organizations have bylaws that prohibit list circulation; efforts to attain lists from Navy and Marine units were thwarted by such restrictions.

[4] Among the respondents, 98.5% described themselves as white.

[5] Questions were drawn from the U.S. Census, the World Values Survey, the General Social Survey, the 1990 Citizen Participation Study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, and various surveys conducted by the U.S. Veterans' Administration.

[6] To conduct these interviews, I traveled to all regions of the United States. Before each trip, I sent letters, requesting interviews, to about 30 individuals living within a two-hour radius of my base location. Among those who agreed to be interviewed, I selected five to seven individuals who lived in a variety of neighborhoods and areas.

allow exploration of veterans' perceptions regarding the role of military service and education in their lives, civic and political participation in the period 1950–64 as distinguished from the present, why they did or did not use the G.I. Bill, and their attitudes toward the program. Each interview lasted between one and a half and three hours. Analysis of the survey data and interview data is an interactive process: I alternately investigate the survey data regarding questions or patterns suggested by the interviews and return to the interview data for a contextual understanding of how aggregate trends are manifested in the lives of individuals.

The analysis here is limited to the immediate postwar period, 1950–64. This era partially overlapped with and succeeded the time during which veterans had access to the G.I. Bill's educational benefits. Thus, effects of inclusion in the program might be traced most clearly during this period. Also, because the era is considered the high-water mark for organizational memberships in the United States (Putnam 2000, 54), I limit the analysis to assess whether the G.I. Bill contributed to such outcomes.

I have operationalized the dependent variable, civic engagement, in two ways: civic group memberships and political participation. The first of these combines the sum of each individuals' memberships in four types of civic organizations from 1950 to 1964. The rate of memberships in organizations is regarded as a chief indicator of civic engagement (Putnam 2000; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000). The survey asked respondents to indicate whether they have ever been a member of each of several organizational types and then, if they have, to note the number of such organizations to which they belonged during each of three time periods. The civic memberships variable combines memberships in fraternal groups (e.g., Lions, Elks), neighborhood or homeowners' associations, Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) or school support groups, and a category entitled "any other civic or community organization."[7]

Second, to assess determinants of political participation, I have operationalized the dependent variable as a composite of participation in a range of political activities between 1950 and 1964. One indicator, memberships in political organizations during the period 1950–64, includes the number of memberships in political clubs or political party committees. Five other indicators of participation during the same time period are also included, namely, contacting a political official to communicate concerns about some problem or issue; working on a campaign for a candidate running for national, state, or local office; serving on any official local government board or council that deals with community problems or issues; contributing money to an individual candidate, party, or other organization that supported candidates; and participating in a protest, march, or demonstration. Each of these is coded 1 if the respondent ever participated during 1950–64 and 0 if never.

The analyses include several explanatory variables that are widely considered to be important determinants of participation. Scholars know that individuals' participation in early adulthood is highly influenced by factors such as socioeconomic well-being in childhood, parents' level of participation, and educational level (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, chap. 15). As measures, I include level of education (measured on a scale from 1 to 9, from elementary school to advanced graduate work), parents' level of education (coded on a seven-point scale, from no formal schooling to graduate or professional degree),[8] standard of living during their childhood in the 1920s (ranked on a scale from 1 to 5),[9] and parents' civic activity and political activity (each ranked from 1 to 5, from not active to very active). Standard of living during the 1960s (ranked from 1 to 5) offers a measure of socioeconomic well-being during the period under investigation. The G.I. Bill variable pertains to nonuse or use of the program's educational benefits (coded 0 or 1, respectively). Because all those in the sample are veterans and members of the same generation, it was unnecessary to control for those variables.

RESULTS

Did the educational provisions of the G.I. Bill affect participation in public life and, if so, how? To assess this relationship, first I consider a model for predicting the rate at which veterans joined civic organizations in the postwar era. The model contains G.I. Bill use and standard explanatory variables and control variables for participation.

The most striking result of the ordinary least-squares regression (OLS), presented in Table 1, is that use of the G.I. Bill's educational provisions was highly significant in determining the degree to which veterans joined civic organizations in 1950–64.[10] G.I. Bill use had a positive

[7] From the qualitative data in the survey, I have deduced that this last category included several organizational types: service organizations, health-related organizations, alumni organizations and fraternities, cultural and educational organizations, commercial clubs, and local social, sports, or hobby clubs.

[8] This variable consists of fathers' level of education except in 37 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, I took the additional step of imputing the unconditional mean (2.83) in such cases. The imputation of the mean increased the number of cases in the civic model by 24%, and that in the political model by 26%. The analyses yield the same results regardless of whether or not data are imputed, though doing so yields lower R^2 figures given that less variance is explained by each model.

[9] I chose to use the 1920s rather than the 1930s because it was a more "normal" time that would indicate more about the persistent socioeconomic status of families than the Depression Era, when so many fell into worse living conditions than they experienced generally.

[10] Because of missing data, the number of cases included in each regression analysis is less than the total number of survey respondents. Respondents were asked to complete a 12-page mail survey that included over 200 individual questions. Although the proportion that answered each question was high, ranging from 558 to 661, enough respondents skipped or provided an unreadable response to an individual question to reduce quite substantially the number of cases that could be included in regression analyses. To assess whether the subsample provides an adequate reflection of the full sample, I compared the bivariate regression relationship between each individual independent variable and the dependent variable within the subsamples with those same relationships in the full sample. I found

TABLE 1. Determinants of Civic Memberships, 1950–64: Results of Ordinary Least-Squares Regression

Variable	*b*	*β*	Significance
Level of education completed	0.09	0.13	0.02
Parents' level of education	0.00	0.00	0.97
Used G.I. Bill for education	0.47	0.14	0.01
Parents' civic activity	0.28	0.21	0.00
Standard of living, 1920	0.07	0.04	0.45
Standard of living, 1960	0.23	0.09	0.06
R^2	0.14		
Adjusted R^2	0.13		
Sample size	393		

effect: Individuals who benefited from the provisions were members of significantly greater numbers of civic organizations than nonusers. Not surprisingly, given the well-known connection between socialization in childhood and subsequent participation, veterans whose parents were active in civic activity were significantly more likely to be members of organizations (Jennings and Niemi 1981, chap. 4; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 418–20, 437–8). Level of education and standard of living during the 1960s also proved to be positive determinants of joining organizations, the latter at a lower level of significance.[11] Neither of the two childhood socioeconomic indicators appears to bear a significant relationship to civic organization memberships.[12]

While these results verify the importance of the demographic and social factors emphasized by the preexisting characteristics approach, they also reveal that a model that overlooked the role of the G.I. Bill would be deficient in explaining the likelihood of veterans to join civic organizations. Certainly, preexisting characteristics themselves matter. Most notably, veterans raised by parents active in civic activities became socialized to participate at high levels themselves once they reached early adulthood. Similarly, those who enjoyed higher standards of living participated at higher levels, a finding consistent with research that illustrates how the abundant civic resources, skills, and networks associated with high socioeconomic status lead to greater participation. Yet the most novel finding here is that the G.I. Bill's impact is not reducible to socioeconomic background. Nor can the effect of the G.I. Bill on civic participation be discarded as a proxy for veteran status or belonging to the generation that came of age with World War II.[13] The preexisting characteristics hypothesis, therefore, is incomplete.

The by-product explanation, similarly, proves to be insufficient for explaining veterans' civic participation. Certainly the G.I. Bill facilitated increases in individuals' educational attainment, which is likely to have prompted higher rates of joining organizations. Perhaps the most fascinating finding here, though, is that the G.I. Bill benefits were not merely a conduit for higher levels of education. The policy also had an independent effect on civic membership rates. The form of public provision through which G.I. Bill beneficiaries obtained their education appears to have stimulated civic involvement.

The passivity explanation must be discounted, given that it predicted a negative effect of the G.I. Bill on civic participation. Contrary to expectations, this government program promoted civic involvement. This finding suggests that attention to the features of policy design and the dynamics they engender is necessary for explaining how the G.I. Bill and other government programs might vary in terms of their consequences for participation.

The prediction offered by the policy feedback explanation, that the G.I. Bill would yield significant, positive effects, was the single theoretical argument that proved correct in the case of civic memberships. Next, we examine the effect of the G.I. Bill on memberships in political organizations and activities in the same period, 1950–64. Here the model is similar to the civic version used previously, with the substitution of parents' political activity for parents' civic activity. The OLS regression results are shown in Table 2. Notably, once again, use of the G.I. Bill for education proved to be a significant positive determinant of participation. Parents' political activity had a significant, positive effect on veterans' political activity.[14] The G.I. Bill made a marked difference, even independent of educational level, in promoting participation in a wide range of political organizational memberships and activities during the

the slopes to be sufficiently similar to proceed with the analysis of the subsamples.

[11] Although standard of living in the 1960s, with a 0.06 significance level, fails to meet the conventional test of a 0.05 level of statistical significance, it seems reasonable to regard the coefficient as substantively significant. This distinction is especially important for studies of relatively small samples (Achen 1982, 46–50).

[12] 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.

[13] Another variant of the preexisting characteristics hypothesis suggests that some behavioral or attitudinal characteristic of G.I. Bill users may have set them apart from non-G.I. Bill users, in turn explaining their different rates of civic memberships. For instance, users may have been more motivated or outgoing than nonusers. Eric Welch and I have utilized a two-stage model to control for such possibilities and found the same results for civic participation, discrediting this hypothesis (Mettler and Welch 2001).

[14] I considered including religious denominations as independent variables. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady found that churches play an important mobilizing function in the United States, and they and others have noted variation in the mobilizing effects of different denominations (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, chap. 13). None of these variables proved statistically significant, nor did they improve the fit of the model. I dropped them to make the model more parsimonious.

TABLE 2. Determinants of Political Participation, 1950–64: Results of Ordinary Least-Squares Regression

Variable	*b*	*β*	Significance
Level of education completed	0.01	0.03	0.67
Parents' level of education	−0.00	−0.00	0.94
Used G.I. Bill for education	0.38	0.16	0.01
Parents' political activity	0.18	0.17	0.00
Standard of living, 1920	0.11	0.08	0.14
Standard of living, 1960	0.06	0.03	0.54
R^2	0.08		
Adjusted R^2	0.06		
Sample size	379		

1950s and early 1960s.[15] These findings parallel the results for civic memberships, once again demonstrating the shortcomings of behavioral models that overlook the role of public programs and showing the inadequacy of the passivity explanation.

The fact that the G.I. Bill's educational benefits had an independent effect on subsequent civic memberships and political activity among World War II veterans means that the policy feedback explanation requires more in-depth analysis. The question remains, how might we explain the dynamics through which the G.I. Bill produced such results? Toward that end, I consider the value of the reciprocity thesis and the critical effects thesis.

POLICY FEEDBACK: THE RECIPROCITY THESIS

The interviews provide an opportunity to explore the reciprocity thesis, the possibility that the G.I. Bill fostered among beneficiaries a sense of obligation that led to higher levels of civic participation. First, I consider whether veterans viewed G.I. Bill benefits as a right or a privilege, a distinction that may have a bearing on their response to the benefits.[16] When asked about this, nearly all respondents answered unequivocally that they did not regard the provisions to be a right to which they were entitled. The most common sentiments are summed up in the response of Richard Colosimo,[17] for whom the G.I. Bill benefits covered a bachelor's degree at the University of Pittsburgh and part of a master's degree at the University of Southern California:

> I considered it a privilege, a sign of gratitude. I thought, they didn't have to do that. They could have just did like they . . . did in World War I, where they gave them a bonus and that was it. They could have done that. I think this was a really smart idea and I took it with appreciation. . . . It was an opportunity. I think anybody that didn't take advantage of it missed out on an opportunity because it was rather magnanimous.

Veterans explained that the G.I. Bill could not be considered a right because military service was an obligation of citizenship for which no recompense was owed. As Robert Foster, whose dental school training at the University of California in San Francisco was funded mostly by the G.I. Bill, articulated, "I think it was more of a way of appreciation than a right. We did what we were supposed to do and we really didn't plan on anything special. It was, of course, a very desirable thing when it came along." Veterans often emphasized the significance of the G.I. Bill in their lives as they explained why they viewed it as such a privilege. Stanley Soloman used the G.I. Bill's vocational education provisions to attend the DeVry School in Chicago, where he became a television repairman. Already married when he used the benefits, he answered, "Well, I guess it was a privilege because [sighs] . . . it was great. It paid for my schooling, paid for my upkeep. We had our own little apartment and I was able to keep it up." Another vocational training beneficiary, Sam Marchesi, became a custom builder through four years of on-the-job training and coursework in architectural drawing and estimating at the Alfred Leonard School in New Rochelle, NY. He described the G.I. Bill as an opportunity:

> When we were all coming back at that time a lot of boys had to go to school—to college or to finish grade school. I was 17 when I enlisted; you had to be 18. (You had to lie about your age.) When we were discharged we were all in that same kind of boat. It disrupted [our] education to go to war; I think it was a great thing what the government did—to have this opportunity to pick up where we left off. We had to face the world. We had to make a living.

Paul Parisi, who reported that he would never have attended college without the G.I. Bill, sighed and said simply, "It was one hell of a gift, an opportunity . . . and I've never thought of it in any other way."

The veterans' widely shared attitude that the G.I. Bill was a privilege rather than something owed in exchange for military service was often paired with a belief that, in receiving the benefits, they incurred no further debt to

[15] Eric Welch and I probed the cause for this null finding on educational level. We found that in later time periods—1965–79 and 1980–98—level of education becomes a highly significant positive determinant of veterans' political activity, and G.I. Bill use gradually becomes insignificant. We reason that the interpretive effects of the G.I. Bill were especially strong in 1950–64, immediately following program usage. The program had a democratizing effect on participation, even displacing the traditional role of educational level, in part because vocational training programs did not increase veterans' formal educational level but had salutary civic effects regardless. After more time elapsed, the interpretive effects faded, and the resource effects of the G.I. Bill—increased educational levels—advantaged those who had used it for higher education (Mettler and Welch 2001).

[16] I asked them, "How did you consider the educational and training provisions of the G.I. Bill: as a right, a reward for military service, or as a privilege? Tell me why you characterize them as you do."

[17] Actual names are used for those interview subjects who have granted permission; pseudonyms are used for those who have not.

society. When asked, "After receiving the G.I. Bill benefits, did you think you owed anything back to society?" James Murray, who had been a prisoner of war and who later used the G.I. Bill to attend college at a large public land grant university, replied in a manner that captures the responses of many others. He explained, "I have to be honest, I didn't think about it in those terms. I felt more of it as a reward than [as something for which I] owed back. I figured I'd paid for it. Being there, I saw my friends killed."

When veterans did suggest that they felt a sense of owing back, they emphasized that it was not as an explicit quid pro quo. Isaac Gellert, whose G.I. Bill-sponsored higher education enabled him to became a chemist and college professor, responded, "Yes. In the normal sense in which good citizenship demands that you live in the society and make a contribution to it. Make a contribution not only in your community but also in whatever professional life you have. I regard teaching as an important calling." Another veteran, Paul Parisi, wondered aloud during the interview whether his lifetime of extensive voluntary participation in numerous civic organizations might have been his own attempt to give something back to society after receiving the benefits.

The survey data allow us to explore the reciprocity explanation further. G.I. Bill recipients were asked to indicate, on a four-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), their level of agreement with the statement, "It is fair to say that after benefiting from the G.I. Bill, I felt I owed something back to American society." The mean response was 2.9, very close to the "agree" response, with a standard deviation of 0.87. The question remains whether those who experienced an attitudinal response of owing back afterward actually proceeded to participate at higher levels. To evaluate this, I tested a reciprocity version of both the civic and the political models, replacing G.I. Bill use with the variable measuring attitudes about owing something back. This test must be limited to effects among G.I. Bill users only, given the lack of a comparable measure for non-users.

The results, presented in Tables 3 and 4, suggest that the reciprocity model offers a partial explanation for why G.I. Bill beneficiaries participated in civic organizations but not for political activity. Among G.I. Bill recipients in the civic model, the reciprocity variable was surpassed only by parents' civic activity in explaining civic memberships. In the political model, however, parents' political activity and standard of living in childhood were the only significant variables.

These results suggest that the reciprocity thesis has merit, at least with regard to civic memberships. To the extent that G.I. Bill beneficiaries felt a sense of owing something back to American society in return for program usage, they invested their time and energy in civic organizations, contributing to the blossoming of civic life in the midcentury. Subsequent analysis might explore whether this model is most useful for explaining the behavior of particular groups of recipients, based on the type of educational program from which they benefited or the duration of their benefits.

TABLE 3. Reciprocity Model of Determinants of Civic Memberships, 1950–64, for G.I. Bill Users Only: Results of Ordinary Least-Squares Regression

Variable	*b*	*β*	Significance
Level of education completed	0.07	0.09	0.17
Parents' level of education	−0.02	−0.02	0.72
Vets owed back after G.I. Bill	0.32	0.16	0.01
Parents' civic activity	0.27	0.20	0.00
Standard of living, 1920	0.10	0.05	0.41
Standard of living, 1960	0.25	0.09	0.14
R^2	0.12		
Adjusted R^2	0.09		
Sample size	258		

TABLE 4. Reciprocity Model of Determinants of Political Participation, 1950–64, for G.I. Bill Users Only: Results of Ordinary Least-Squares Regression

Variable	*b*	*β*	Significance
Level of education completed	0.05	0.08	0.27
Parents' level of education	−0.06	−0.01	0.91
Vets owed back after G.I. Bill	−0.02	−0.01	0.87
Parents' political activity	0.21	0.17	0.01
Standard of living, 1920	0.20	0.13	0.07
Standard of living, 1960	0.01	0.01	0.93
R^2	0.06		
Adjusted R^2	0.04		
Sample size	246		

POLICY FEEDBACK: THE CRITICAL EFFECTS THESIS

The critical effects hypothesis suggests that the G.I. Bill had a pronounced impact on civic engagement among veterans from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. In the terms suggested by the theory presented earlier, this outcome could be expected if either of two dynamics were operating through the G.I. Bill: (1) targeted resource effects, to the extent that educational benefits were most consequential for those from low to moderate socioeconomic backgrounds; and (2) targeted interpretive effects, if program design, featuring universal eligibility and routinized procedures, may have bestowed dignity on the same group by including all veterans on an equal basis rather than stigmatizing

TABLE 5. G.I. Bill Users Level of Agreement That Additional Education Would Have Been Unaffordable Without G.I. Bill, by Standard of Living during Childhood in 1920s

	Standard of living (%)			
Level of agreement with statement	Low	Low–medium	Medium	Medium–high or high
Agree or strongly agree	76.7	69.5	57.1	43.9
Strongly disagree or disagree	23.3	30.6	43.0	56.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	43	108	156	41

Note: $\gamma = 0.324$, $p < 0.001$.

less advantaged citizens. Here I consider each of these dynamics in turn, then test the critical effects thesis.

To assess critical resource effects, first I consider whether veterans perceived the benefits to be measures that broadened their access to education. Veterans were asked the extent to which they agreed with the proposition that "If the G.I. Bill or Public Law 16 had not existed, I could not have afforded the education or job training that I acquired after military service."[18] Responses were coded from 1 to 4, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.[19] Table 5 presents the cross-tabulation between G.I. Bill users' responses and standard of living in childhood.[20] The table reveals that the lower the veteran's standard of living in the 1920s, the greater the likelihood that he agreed or strongly agreed. From the perspective of majorities of individuals from low to moderate socioeconomic backgrounds, the availability of the G.I. Bill made a marked difference in life opportunities, enabling the pursuit of additional education. Such education is likely to have enlarged beneficiaries' civic capacity appreciably through the skills, income, and networks it fostered subsequently (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 433).

Second, I consider whether the G.I. Bill's policy design had critical interpretive effects among those from low or moderate socioeconomic backgrounds. When I asked interview subjects about program administration, those who used the higher education provisions were unanimous in emphasizing the uncomplicated routines involved in qualifying for benefits. Explained George Josten, a University of Illinois alumnus, "We had to apply,... it was processed through some regional office that we lived near and then we simply got a check. I got a check for $75.00 and the school was paid (for tuition) directly. It was an extremely convenient arrangement." Said Anthony Miller, who attended Xavier University and Fordham University, "You just enrolled. I didn't have to do anything. I got $75.00 a month in addition to that. Pretty good!" Several lauded the program as "very well administered." Some who used the vocational training benefits suggested a more cumbersome process. Kermit Pransky, who used the vocational training benefits to learn about motors and subsequently opened his own business in Boston, recalled, "There was a lot of paperwork involved.... It was a lot of red tape, a necessary evil." While the higher education provisions were administered smoothly through the nation's well-established colleges and universities, the vocational provisions necessitated the instantaneous creation of numerous new programs, making implementation more complicated (U.S. Congress 1950, 9, 44–50). Even so, a few mild comments about bureaucratic processes constituted the most negative remarks any veterans made about program administration, and none implied that beneficiaries were stigmatized in any way.

These comments contrasted sharply with veterans' portrayal of social programs targeted for the poor. When asked, "During the Depression, did any New Deal programs affect your family directly?" some who grew up fairly poor stressed how their families attempted to avoid reliance on such programs. Colosimo, who was a first-generation American, commented, "My father did not want to take welfare. He didn't want people to say, 'That foreigner had to come here and take welfare.'" Richard Werner's father had lost his job in the Depression, causing the family to lose their house on Long Island and forcing them to move to a "cold-water flat" in New York City. He explained, "We were pretty proud. We may have been poor but nobody wanted any of the home relief or any of that." Later, when these same individuals used the G.I. Bill, they experienced a program administered according to standardized, routinized procedures applied uniformly to all veterans regardless of socioeconomic background.[21] The absence of invasive procedures and the universality of coverage elevated the status of less privileged beneficiaries, rather than stigmatizing them in the manner associated with targeted programs for the poor. The highly positive interpretive effects of the G.I. Bill for veterans from less advantaged backgrounds could be expected to have augmented their psychological predisposition most dramatically.

[18] Disabled veterans were covered by Public Law 16, which extended education and training benefits comparable to those in the G.I. Bill.
[19] Respondents could also answer "no opinion," but those 15 veterans who did so were eliminated from this analysis.
[20] Here and in subsequent analyses, the medium–high and high standard of living categories are combined, given the small number in each.
[21] While administration did not discriminate by socioeconomic background, racial discrimination was commonplace. African Americans experienced treatment unequal to that of white veterans, especially in the South, where both institutions of higher education and the new vocational training programs were segregated. See Caudill 1945; Herbold 1994–95; Jenkins 1947; and U.S. Congress 1950, 170–83.

TABLE 6. Critical Effects Model of Determinants of Civic Memberships, 1950–64: Results of Interactive Equation, Ordinary Least-Squares Regression

Variable	*b*	*β*	Significance
Level of education completed	0.09	0.13	0.02
Parents' level of education	0.00	0.00	0.95
Low standard of living 1920 * G.I. Bill use[a]	0.35	0.05	0.36
Low–medium standard of living 1920 * G.I. Bill use	0.47	0.11	0.05
Medium standard of living 1920 * G.I. Bill use	0.47	0.13	0.05
Medium–high or high standard of living 1920 * G.I. Bill use	0.71	0.12	0.08
Parents' civic activity	0.28	0.21	0.00
Standard of living, 1920	0.01	0.01	0.93
Standard of living, 1960	0.24	0.10	0.06
R^2	0.14		
Adjusted R^2	0.12		
Sample size	393		

[a]This interactive dummy variable was constructed by multiplying standard of living in the 1920s, where low = 1 and all other values = 0, by G.I. Bill use (coded 1 for use, 0 for nonuse). The three subsequent variables were constructed similarly, in each case with the named standard of living level coded 1 and all others 0. The missing dummy variable features nonuse of the G.I. Bill; this would intersect at the intercept.

Would these resource and interpretive effects of the G.I. Bill boost the civic involvement of those from low to moderate socioeconomic levels? Investigation of this claim, the critical effects hypothesis, requires an interactive version of the civic model. Four dummy variables are included to examine the interaction between each of the separate levels of standard of living in the 1920s, from low to high, and use of the G.I. Bill for education.[22] The results, presented in Table 6, show that the G.I. Bill had an especially significant positive effect on rates of joining civic organizations among veterans whose childhood was spent at a low–medium and a medium standard of living. G.I. Bill users from the medium–high and high standard of living backgrounds were also more likely to join, but the relationship registered a lower level of significance. Other results replicated the noninteractive model.

These results suggest that the G.I. Bill had its greatest impact on participation levels among veterans from low to moderate socioeconomic backgrounds. The resources the program extended were likely to have been especially instrumental in enhancing the well-being of such individuals, ameliorating the deterrents to civic activity they experienced in childhood and thus enhancing their civic capacity most dramatically. In addition, the interpretive effects of the G.I. Bill were especially powerful for such veterans, conveying to them a sense of an elevated status in the polity. As a result, they gained a sharper sense of civic duty, feeling that they owed something back to American society. They proceeded to participate in civic organizations at significantly higher levels than would be predicted, becoming a leaven for the vibrant civic associational life Putnam has identified with the 1950s and 1960s.

Conversely, these dual explanations also shed light on why the G.I. Bill did not enhance participation levels more strongly among beneficiaries from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The resources and skills that promote civic involvement had already been bestowed upon those who grew up in families with a medium–high or high standard of living. The G.I. Bill did not change their life course; it only meant that they did not have to pay tuition that they could otherwise have afforded on their own, anyway. Without the power to alter the life circumstances of these beneficiaries, the G.I. Bill had less potential to bestow interpretive effects. Because of their socioeconomic status, these veterans already viewed advanced education as their right.[23] With its power to alter these citizens' rights diminished, the G.I. Bill was less capable of altering their civic identity in terms of participation.

In the case of beneficiaries from the lowest standard of living level, it is likely that the effects of the G.I. Bill were not powerful enough to make up for having had a childhood impoverished of factors that lead to civic activity. Advanced education is likely to have improved their lives in socioeconomic terms but still to have proven inadequate to foster heightened participation. The success of the G.I. Bill in democratizing participation should not rest, however, on whether it completely overpowered the factors that typically influence participation in early adulthood. To expect it to do so would underestimate the considerable power of childhood poverty in deterring subsequent involvement. Further research will be required to understand more precisely how the educational benefits affected such veterans.

Finally, we evaluate the ability of the critical effects hypothesis to explain heightened political participation among G.I. Bill beneficiaries. Table 7 presents an interactive version of the political model with dummy variables combining the effects of having grown up in a certain standard of living stratum with G.I. Bill use. The results show that G.I. Bill use by those who grew up with a low–medium or medium–high to high standard of living in the 1920s had significant effects on political involvement. Once again, parents' political activity also proves highly significant.

Strikingly, as in the case of civic memberships, G.I. Bill users from the low–medium standard of living background received a great boost in political activity.

[22] While I have retained the "standard of living in the 1920s" variable in the model, "use of the G.I. Bill for education" has been dropped. The reason for this is that the theoretical proposition being tested is that the program had effects for specific socioeconomic groups.

[23] This is evidenced by the difference in mean levels of agreement with the statement presented to G.I. Bill users in the survey, "I grew up expecting to go to college." Generally, the higher respondents' standard of living in childhood during the 1920s, the more likely they were to agree with this statement.

TABLE 7. Critical Effects Model of Determinants of Political Participation, 1950–64: Results of Interactive Equation, Ordinary Least-Squares Regression

Variable	*b*	*β*	Significance
Level of education completed	0.02	0.03	0.61
Parents' level of education	0.00	0.00	0.97
Low standard of living 1920 * G.I. Bill use[a]	0.17	0.04	0.57
Low–medium standard of living 1920 * G.I. Bill use	0.40	0.13	0.03
Medium standard of living 1920 * G.I. Bill use	0.27	0.10	0.13
Medium–high or high standard of living 1920 * G.I. Bill use	1.22	0.28	0.00
Parents' political activity	0.19	0.18	0.00
Standard of living, 1920	−0.04	−0.03	0.71
Standard of living, 1960	0.09	0.05	0.36
R^2	0.11		
Adjusted R^2	0.09		
Sample size	379		

[a]This interactive dummy variable was constructed by multiplying standard of living in the 1920s, where low = 1 and all other values = 0, by G.I. Bill use (coded 1 for use, 0 for nonuse). The three subsequent variables were constructed similarly, in each case with the named standard of living level coded 1 and all others 0. The missing dummy variable features nonuse of the G.I. Bill; this would intersect at the intercept.

The enhancement of participation among those from the medium–high and high standard of living backgrounds reflects what scholars already know about determinants of political participation: They tend to be strongly biased toward the better-off. What stands out as most impressive in these results is that the G.I. Bill had effects besides the commonplace pattern of bestowing more privilege on already privileged individuals. Strikingly, the program enabled individuals who grew up in less advantaged circumstances to participate more fully in public life.

INCORPORATION: FROM SOCIAL RIGHTS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In recent years, matters of citizenship have received considerable attention in academic and public debate. Two separate conversations have ensued: a rights-oriented variant, which focuses on the social, civil, and political guarantees extended to citizens by the state through law and public policy, and a participation-oriented variant, which is mindful of the extent to which citizens take it upon themselves to participate in civic and political life.

Some political theorists have suggested that social rights and participation may be related, connected through the dynamics of incorporation. Incorporation refers to the extent to which citizens, through the bestowal of rights, are included, consolidated, and organized as members of the community. It is a fundamental task of state building, synonymous with what Judith Shklar (1991) terms "inclusion." The extension of social rights may assure citizens not only of some modicum of well-being, but also of a measure of dignity and value as members of the community (Walzer 1983). If coverage is broad and inclusive, it may promote a shared sense of civic identity and solidarity (Beiner 1995; Kymlicka and Norman 1995), with important consequences for civic and political activity.

As such a policy, the G.I. Bill fostered an incorporation dynamic among World War II veterans and, thus, served as a stimulus for the high levels of civic and political involvement that characterized the postwar era. In keeping with the theory of policy feedback for mass publics, the educational benefits of the program had positive resource and interpretive effects. Through these dynamics, it enhanced beneficiaries' socioeconomic circumstances and skills in ways that heightened their capacity and predisposition for civic involvement. In addition, the program had interpretive effects that altered beneficiaries' sense of obligation to the polity. It did this by offering people a highly positive experience of government and public provision, one that provided them with access to education and treated them with dignity and respect in the process. Thus, the G.I. Bill incorporated recipients more fully as citizens, intensifying their predisposition to participate by joining civic organizations and engaging in a wide range of political activities.

The case of the G.I. Bill illustrates how a public policy can function, like any institution, in promoting norms; in this case, it fostered participatory norms and the development of social capital. In contrast to most determinants of participation, the G.I. Bill promoted civic participation among groups that were somewhat less advantaged in the typical prerequisites for participation. As beneficiaries became more fully incorporated through social rights, they responded through more active forms of participatory citizenship.

NEW DIRECTIONS

The civic consequences of G.I. Bill usage warrant further inquiry. Given that vocational education users are underrepresented in the data utilized here, subsequent analysis must be attentive to how program effects might vary by educational benefit type. A cursory examination reveals that while use of either type functioned as a positive determinant of enhanced civic memberships and political memberships and activity, in fact civic engagement increased most significantly among vocational education users.[24] This suggests that, to the

[24] These results came from variants of the civic and political models in Tables 1 and 2 in which the G.I. Bill use variable was replaced by a pair of dummies: a vocational education G.I. Bill use dummy variable and a higher education G.I. Bill use dummy variable. (The omitted dummy variable is nonuse of the G.I. Bill). In the civic version of this model ($R^2 = 0.14$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.13$), vocational training

extent that survivorship rates and other factors bias the data used here, the analysis understates both the civic effects of the G.I. Bill and the explanatory power of the critical effects thesis.

Scholars should also examine how the enhanced participation stimulated by the G.I. Bill shaped the character of mid-twentieth-century civic and political life. As individuals became more active in public life, for example, did they participate in cross-class organizations or in groups that reinforced class divisions? Were they more active in widespread, federated organizations that bind members of a nation together through shared ideals and sustain vast leadership networks, or were their affiliations primarily local (Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000)? Finally, given that the generation that came of age with the G.I. Bill appears to have exhibited high levels of civic engagement throughout their lives (Putnam 2000, chap. 14), it is worth examining whether the G.I. Bill had long-term effects beyond the 1950–64 time period. Conceivably, the direct effects of the program for civic involvement may have dissipated over time. They may have been replaced, however, by secondary effects resulting from the greater likelihood of beneficiaries to participate in social institutions that stimulate political activism.

The analytical framework developed here can be used to investigate how the policy designs of a variety of government programs affect civic engagement. Future studies might examine the implications of contemporary approaches to policy design, such as privatization and devolution. Scholars might consider the extent to which the visibility and traceability of government programs affect their civic consequences (Arnold 1990, 47–51; Pierson 1993). Given that tax expenditures constitute a "hidden welfare state" (Howard 1996), does the policy design of generous benefits such as home mortgage benefits, for example, undermine their potential to promote civic activity? Similarly, do federal grants and guaranteed student loans for higher education make recipients more inclined to engage in civic life, or does their delivery system obscure their public origin and weaken their interpretive effects? How do the civic effects of Social Security and Medicare compare to those of market-based pension and health insurance plans? How have the diverse models of welfare reform implemented in the states under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act in 1996 affected citizens' sense of their role and place in the political community? Studies of recent programs may allow for more powerful tests of the theory because data can be collected without the constraints posed by issues related to memory, recall, and survivorship. This will permit scholars to rely more on attitudinal data, permitting a fuller analysis of the dynamics underlying policy feedback.

G.I. Bill use has a standardized β coefficient of 0.12 ($p < 0.05$), and higher education use, 0.15 ($p < 0.10$). In other regards, the results resemble those in Table 1. In the political version of the model ($R^2 = 0.07$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.06$), vocational training has a coefficient of 0.14 ($p < 0.05$), while the coefficient for higher education is insignificant; other aspects of the model were consistent with those in Table 2.

The lively debates over civic engagement have focused, to date, too exclusively on social determinants of participation. It is time to "bring the state back in" to the study of civic life. Government fosters political learning among citizens through a myriad of policies. The question is, What kinds of lessons and messages do public rules and provisions convey, and through which mechanisms of policy design? This study shows positive effects of one generous program organized by universal principles; scholars should turn their inquiry to a host of other programs to specify more clearly which programs enhance and which deter social capital and why and how such dynamics occur.

APPENDIX A: DEALING WITH MEMORY AND RECALL CONSTRAINTS

Some of the primary potential sources of error in a study of the World War II 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" (Mangione 1995, 34–6; Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000, 67–91). It is not important for this study to ascertain specific details from the past, such as the number of Lion's Club or Parent–Teacher Organization meetings a person attended in a given year or the particular elections in which they voted. Rather, I wanted to know whether the subjects were, generally, active participants 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 (Fowler 1984, 92–3; Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000, 94). Veterans could respond at their leisure, taking time to remember past activities. Several additional precautions were taken to reduce errors of recall as much as possible. First, I decided against asking respondents much about past attitudes, given that responses would likely be affected by intervening circumstances. Second, 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 was 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; the questions about the immediate postwar years in the survey should have had a cumulative effect.

APPENDIX B: REPRESENTATIVENESS OF THE SAMPLE

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

Death rates may account, in part, for these different response rates. Nearly two-thirds of World War II veterans were deceased when the survey was conducted in 1998 (*New York Times* 2000.) Studies show that in the United States, being better educated is associated with better health and, hence,

a longer life expectancy (Ross and Wu 1995). Demographers report a recent increase in longevity among American males that some consider attributable to the effects of the G.I. Bill, inasmuch as it enhanced individuals' socioeconomic well-being. Differential death rates may also be explained by the age disparity of G.I. Bill users and nonusers. Use of the G.I. Bill was inversely related to the age of returning veterans, and those younger veterans are more likely still to be alive and to have responded to the survey (U.S. President's Commission on Veterans' Pensions 1956b, pt. A, 315).

Nonetheless, for the purposes of this study, it is unnecessary for either the ratio of G.I. Bill users to nonusers or the ratio of higher education users to vocational training users to reflect the original population of World War II veterans. Meaningful results are still attainable as long as each group reflects characteristics of the same group in the original population, and effects for both higher education users and vocational training users are considered separately. Determinations about the original population cannot be ascertained from U.S. Census data because it does not include questions about the G.I. Bill. It is possible, however, to compare the sample used here with that from a government survey conducted shortly after G.I. Bill use and drawn from a nationwide random sample of veterans.

The veterans who used the G.I. Bill for programs below the college level in this survey resemble those in the earlier study very closely, suggesting that they closely mirror the original population (U.S. President's Commission on Veterans' Pensions 1956b, pt. B, 32). In terms of premilitary education, 28% of both samples had completed elementary school or less and 4% of both samples had four or more years of college. In the new study, 57% had completed high school, compared to 60% in the government study, and 11% had one to three years of college, compared to 8%.

A comparison of veterans who used the G.I. Bill's higher education benefits in both studies revealed that the respondents in the new study had more education prior to military service than those in the 1956 survey. Only 1% had elementary school or less education, compared to 4% in the government study; 47% had finished high school, compared to 68%; 45% had one to three years of college, compared to 21%; and 6% had four or more years of college, compared to 7% (U.S. President's Commission on Veterans' Pensions 1956b, pt. B, 26). The higher levels of premilitary education among subjects in this study suggests that they may have been from more advantaged backgrounds, on average, than the original universe of veterans who used the G.I. Bill benefits for higher education. This would imply that the findings of this study err on the conservative side: The G.I. Bill may have had stronger salutary effects than the findings here suggest.

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