

Discussion Questions for 17.951, Political Behavior

Participation-Policy Linkages

- What effects do public policies have on the participatory factors – resources, engagement, and mobilization – that determine levels of political participation?
- What is the inherent criticism of the participation literature that this week's readings offer? (that the literature has failed to incorporate the effects of public policy designs themselves on the likelihood of mass participation; and that participation differences matter for policy outcomes)
- How has Social Security affected the participation rates of senior citizens over time? What are the mechanisms?
- How have these program effects varied across senior subgroups?
- Seniors participate in politics at higher rates than younger people – does it matter? How would we know?
- How did the GI Bill affect the political participation of veterans who received its educational benefits? How were these effects different than or similar to those of Social Security? What is the reciprocity effect that Mettler speaks of?
- What is the effect of receiving welfare (social assistance) on client participation? Why do these effects differ from those of Social Security and the GI Bill? What are the differences between AFDC and Social Security Disability, and between AFDC and Head Start, in their effects on client political participation?
- Can we make more general statements about the specific characteristics of public program designs that create these different kinds of effects?
- Methodological issues: what is the best way to study these program design effects? How can we know the effects are due to program design and not simply to the preexisting characteristics of the clients?