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Special Issue: Volunteering and Social Activism
Guest Editors: Lars Skov Henriksen & Lars Svedberg

ARTICLES

Volunteering and Social Activism: Moving beyond the Traditional Divide
Lars Skov Henriksen & Lars Svedberg 95

The Dynamic Processes of Volunteering in Civil Society: A Group and Multi-Level Approach
Thomas Janoski 99

Civil Society and Civic Engagement: Towards a Multi-Level Theory of Policy Feedbacks
Kristin A. Goss 119

Citizen Participation and Civic Activism in Comparative Perspective
Marilyn Taylor, Joanna Howard & John Lever 145

Institutionally Individualized Volunteering: Towards a Late Modern Re-Construction
Lesley Hustinx 165

COMMENTARIES

On Correlations, Organizational Structure and the Need for Cross-Level Analysis
Dag Wollebæk & Per Selle 181

Incentives and Conditions Shaping Civil Society
Lars Trägårdh 185

Participatory Democracy, Active Citizenship, and Civic Organizations—Conditions for Volunteering and Activism
Thomas P. Boje 189

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Civil Society and Civic Engagement: Towards a Multi-Level Theory of Policy Feedbacks

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ABSTRACT *Scholars are increasingly recognizing that design of a public policy influences the scope and nature of political engagement around that policy. Such 'policy feedback' models typically focus on organizational engagement (such as interest group lobbying) or on individual engagement (such as joining associations), with each form of participation treated as a discrete phenomenon. Here, drawing on US laws and regulations surrounding civil society and civil rights, I develop a multi-level model of policy feedbacks that integrates organizational and individual participation. Specifically, I suggest that laws and administrative rules operate on voluntary organizations to structure the resources, capacities, strategies, and ideals of individuals. To develop the model, I draw on policy feedback mechanisms identified by Suzanne Mettler and Joe Soss to derive empirically grounded hypotheses about feedback effects. I suggest that public policy (1) structures the political orientation of civil society by stimulating the development of certain types of groups and strategies, while constraining others, with implications for the range of participatory opportunities afforded to individuals; (2) alters the capacity of civil society groups, including resources and political learning, to channel civic engagement towards non-political strategies of social improvement; (3) affects the framing of strategies in a way that might influence mass attitudes about the optimal form that civic engagement should take; (4) defines civic membership; and (5) forges political community in ways that encourage rights-based advocacy over communitarian notions of public service. I conclude with thoughts on how the theories and hypotheses put forth in this conceptual article might be evaluated empirically and incorporated in practice.*

KEY WORDS: Policy feedbacks, civic engagement, non-profit advocacy, US tax code, national service, women's rights

When legislators make policy, they not only respond to political forces but they also influence the scope, direction, and power of those forces in the future. The recognition that 'new policies create new politics', in the words of Schattschneider (1935, p. 288), has

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given birth to the concept of 'policy feedback'. Skocpol (1992) defines policy feedback as the process by which 'policies, once enacted, restructure subsequent political processes' (p. 58). Scholars have argued that feedback effects operate on myriad political actors occupying distinct roles in the policy-making process. This article is concerned with two sets of actors—citizen organizations and the mass public. I argue that feedbacks operate in little-understood but important ways at the organizational level to affect behaviour at the individual level.

Much of the early, influential work on policy feedbacks focused on organizations. Typically these studies were concerned with the effects of policy design on the configuration of interest groups that mobilized to influence policy debates. Lowi (1964) observed, for example, that distributive, redistributive, and regulatory policies activate different types of interests and produce distinctive arenas of conflict. Wilson (1973) argued that the relative concentration of costs and benefits conferred by a policy structured the nature of interest group engagement. Using these insights, Pierson (1995) argued that policy feedbacks on interest group capacities helped to explain the different paths that a particular policy development—welfare-state retrenchment—took in the USA and Britain.

More recently, scholars have argued that feedback effects also operate on individuals by altering their political identity and behaviour (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Pierson, 1993). By and large, studies of policy feedbacks on mass engagement have been based on cases in which individual citizens interact directly with government spending programmes and have examined how that interaction alters the individual's participatory calculus. For example, feedback scholars have identified the powerful role that veterans' educational benefits, Social Security pensions, and anti-poverty welfare payments have played in shaping recipients' participatory habits (Campbell, 2003, 2009; Mettler, 2002; Soss, 1999, 2000). Recognizing the effects of policy design on mass behaviour in the electoral arena, Arnold (1990) suggests that legislators tailor their political strategies in anticipation of such feedback effects. Insights from these and other studies have led Mettler and Soss (2004) to argue that the feedback perspective constitutes a 'coherent and distinctive approach' to understanding mass political behaviour and that this approach can account for phenomena that traditional sociological, economic, and psychological models of political behaviour cannot.

Feedback studies have treated organizational and individual participation as largely discrete objects of study. In this article, I make the case that they need to be considered jointly. Following the insight of Frederick Mayer (1998) that political dynamics are best understood by examining dynamics at more than one level of analysis, I propose a multi-level, interactive model of feedback effects. This perspective incorporates core insights from the organizationally and individually oriented studies of policy feedbacks, while arguing that neither approach has appreciated how the behaviours of groups and people are influenced by public policies operating at both levels in tandem.

At the organizational level, I take from the early feedback literature the finding that organizations mobilize and direct individuals to expand and protect policies and that policy design—for example, the conferral of benefits and costs around a given issue—affects these political dynamics. However, while these studies focus on issue-specific policies (e.g. agriculture, trade, etc.), I suggest that American political behaviour is influenced by a generic category of policies cutting across substantive issue realms. These policies include tax laws and administrative rules that structure the activities and strategies—charitable, educational, political, and so forth—that civil society organizations may

pursue. These policies define the parameters of what organizations may legally do in the public realm and, I argue, have the potential to produce important feedback effects at the individual level.

From the more recent studies of feedback effects on individual participation, I take the insight that public policies shape individuals' ideas, behaviours, and capacities. I argue, however, that by focusing on direct, individual-level interactions with government, the new generation of feedback studies has not fully appreciated the importance of the superstructure of policies that govern and shape the civic universe in which much individual participation takes place. Civil society groups mediate between individuals and the state (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977), so it is logical to examine what kinds of policy-induced opportunities and constraints lie inside that mediating 'black box'.

In sum, the feedback literature embodies distinct sets of arguments that should be in closer dialogue. At the risk of oversimplification, organizational studies do not sufficiently appreciate the ways in which the state (policy) may 'trickle down' to shape individual behaviour. Meanwhile, individually oriented studies, which recognize the connection between policy and mass behaviour, have paid insufficient attention to the ways in which policy operates on organizations to shape the scope and nature of individual participation. I suggest that policy feedbacks on organizational politics and policy feedbacks on individual participation are not wholly distinct dynamics. Rather, policies operating on civil society *groups* affect the resources, capacities, strategies, and ideals of *individuals*. Put another way, feedback effects may influence individuals not only directly, through their interactions with government programmes, but also indirectly, through interactions with civil society groups. By setting the rules of the game at the organizational level, policies may feed back to participation at the individual level.

This essay picks up the decades-long call that law-makers and administrators consider the effects of policy design on civic engagement and civil society (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Goss, 2000; Ingram & Smith, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Schneider & Ingram, 1997; Wichowsky & Moynihan, 2008). An equally important goal of this article is to introduce the concept of feedback effects to the growing and lively literature on government-civil society relations, which has focused on the roles and power relations between the two sectors at the elite level but has given less attention to the implications of those relationships for individual-level engagement (for a review, see Smith & Grønbjerg, 2006). While scholars have studied state restrictions on civil society operations, they have not deeply explored how laws, regulations, and rulings affect individual participation (Berry & Arons, 2003; Brody, 2006; Chisolm, 1987; Simon, Dale & Chisolm, 2006). Because the intent of policy is to shape behaviour, it is reasonable to investigate how state-constructed incentive structures surrounding civil society may have altered the political orientation of non-profit groups and those who participate through them.

This article is organized according to five policy feedback mechanisms identified by Mettler and Soss (2004). First, I provide an overview of the myriad ways that US public policies structure civil society by *stimulating* its development. I then explore a second structuring effect: how the US tax code and embedded practices of the welfare-state provision advantage the development of certain types of organizations while *constraining* others, with implications for participatory opportunities facing individuals. Third, I examine *capacity* effects, both the resources that policy conveys to certain types of civil society groups and more importantly the political learning that has channelled civic engagement towards increasingly non-political strategies of social

improvement. Next, I turn to *framing* effects by considering ways that charitable service might influence mass attitudes about the optimal form that civic engagement should take. Finally, I examine the closely related mechanisms of *defining civic membership* and *forging political community*, using the evolution of the US women's movement to suggest that public policy can encourage orientations that favour the rights-based advocacy over communitarian notions of public service. I conclude with thoughts on how the theories and hypotheses put forth in this conceptual article might be evaluated empirically and incorporated in practice.

Multi-Level Feedback Effects: Five Mechanisms and Hypotheses

Pierson (1993) and Mettler and Soss (2004) have persuasively argued that feedback effects operate in myriad indirect and nuanced ways, constituting a far more pervasive driver of individual civic participation than scholars have appreciated. Because civil society organizations are so vital to notions of individuals' place in the polity, it makes sense to examine how policy feedbacks operate through these structures. In an important review of decades' worth of feedback studies, Mettler and Soss (2004) argue that feedbacks operate through five categories of mechanisms. This article applies each mechanism to civil society organizations, then goes on to suggest ways in which feedback mechanisms operating at the organizational level might be expected to reverberate at the individual level. The mechanisms and their corresponding hypotheses are taken in turn.

Hypothesis 1: Structuring Effects

The rules and regulations governing civil society favour certain types of organizations and approaches to social problem-solving. Thus, the regulatory regime stimulates certain types of civic participation and stalls, or more precisely *constrains*, others. Tax laws provide systematic incentives for the creation of certain types of voluntary associations, namely public charities, over others, namely advocacy organizations. This legal regime subsidizes and thereby encourages certain types of participation, namely charitable giving and service-oriented volunteering by external supportive constituencies. At the same time, the legal regime constrains overtly political activity by withholding public subsidies for groups that perform it and by limiting the ability of the most generously subsidized organizations (charitable and service organizations) to mobilize grassroots participation. Evidence for this hypothesis, presented below, includes differential rates of growth for favoured *vs.* non-favoured non-profit organizations and trends in different types of civic participation.

Hypothesis 2: Capacity Effects

Public policy influences civic capacity by extending incentives and resources for participation; distributing civic skills; and shaping citizens' relationship with the government through political learning (Mettler & Soss, 2004). Studies of political learning go back decades. Simon (1957), Lindblom (1959), Heclo (1974), and March (1978) all observed that experience with existing policy constrained elite decision-making (Pierson, 1993). Pierson (1993) and Mettler and Soss (2004) argued that such learning effects might also operate at the level of mass publics. Here, I hypothesize that policy learning, by policy-making elites and civil society organization professionals, has reinforced the privileged

position of service-oriented participation and undermined more political forms of engagement.

Hypothesis 3: Framing Effects

Public policy has the power to influence not only whether people participate in public life, but also their psychic orientations towards their engagement. As Mettler and Soss (2004) note, policies can frame 'public perceptions of public problems, agendas, or actions', including normative ideas about the causes of public problems and whether they are an individual or a societal responsibility (see also Hacker, 2001; Pierson, 1993). These perceptions may shape individuals' choices about how to deploy their civic resources—through charitable service or state-focused political advocacy, for example. Individuals do not develop these orientations in a vacuum: Their choices are shaped by the manner in which civil society organizations define public problems, provide opportunities for action, and assemble policy agendas. Those organizational 'choices', in turn, are influenced by interactions with the state. I hypothesize that regulatory regimes have underscored political-cultural predispositions to frame public problems as originating in individual circumstances and solutions as matters of private voluntary action.

Hypotheses 4 and 5: Defining Membership and Forging Political Community

Public policy acts on groups. But, as scholars have noted, it also helps to constitute them. Ingram and Schneider have observed that, in defining 'target groups' for policy interventions, the state assigns normatively relevant characteristics to those groups—deserving, undeserving, advantaged and disadvantaged, and so forth (Ingram & Schneider, 1993; Schneider & Ingram, 1997). These policy effects 'can influence how group members perceive and evaluate one another' (Mettler & Soss, 2004). In assembling civically relevant groups, policies also help set the parameters of civic membership by shaping 'the ways mass publics perceive the nature of their civic obligations and the priority of such obligations relative to rights' (Mettler & Soss, 2004, p. 61). In constituting civically relevant groups, I hypothesize that public policy orients the conceptions of civic rights and responsibilities held by civil society organizations representing those populations. The civic orientation of those organizations, as embodied by their strategies and policy agendas, in turn directs the participatory energies of individual participants.

Figure 1 captures a model of how these hypothesized feedbacks might operate at multiple levels interactively. In the model, policy initiates the set of interactions through its influence on the composition, strategies, capacities, and identities of civil society organizations. In turn, these policy effects trickle down to individuals whose behaviour is mobilized, shaped, and directed by the organizations through which they participate.

In the following sections, I explore the five hypotheses above, where possible providing suggestive evidence in support or refutation of them. To be clear: This essay is intended to push the theoretical envelope, not to construct and rigorously test propositions about policy effects on civic life. Rather, my more modest aim is to suggest testable hypotheses that might form the core of a research agenda on multi-level policy feedbacks on civic participation.

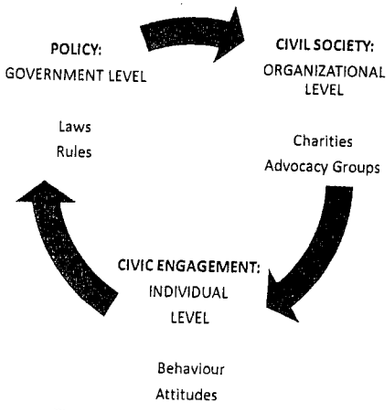

Figure 1. Multi-level policy feedback process.

Structuring Effects: Stimulating Charitable Participation

The visiting Frenchman de Tocqueville famously noted in the 1830s that Americans were exceptionally prone to mutual voluntary assistance. 'Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations... Wherever at the head of some new undertaking you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association' (de Tocqueville, 1994, Part 2, p. 106). To Tocqueville, associationalism was a logical adaptation to American political culture, which valorized liberty, individualism, and equality. However, the role of public policy was also evident. Most importantly, since 1781, the First Amendment to the US Constitution had barred Congress from abridging people's freedom of speech, petition, and assembly—creating a legal space for civil society to flourish.

Since then, public policies have continued to encourage voluntary participation, contributing to a normative expectation that citizens acting collectively can surmount challenges and solve problems. Civic participation in the form of colonial citizen militias prosecuted a successful revolution against the British, thereby creating the USA.[1] Government policies encouraging westward expansion led to practices of self-help—barn raisings, posses, sewing circles, and so forth—that were fundamental to nation building.[2] Recent social science work has raised questions about whether America is losing the civic spirit that was so central to its nation-building narratives. Putnam (2000) has identified a generation-long decline in social capital—the collective activity and norms of reciprocity that allow people to get things done; and Skocpol (2003) has documented the decline in membership and influence of scores of nation-spanning voluntary associations.

Putnam and Skocpol identify important and troubling trends, but an entrenched public policy regime provides a solid foundation for the formation and maintenance of civil society in the US State, and federal tax laws allow non-profit corporations to avoid taxes on income arising from their programmatic activities, on the full value of their property, and on purchases. Individual donors to charitable and veterans' organizations may receive a rebate, in the form of a federal income-tax deduction, on their gifts. In addition, receiving charitable status pre-clears organizations to receive grants from philanthropic foundations; such grants totalled US$39 billion in 2006.[3] Mailings sent by many non-profits receive federal subsidies. And government buttresses civil society by providing loans, loan guarantees, corporate tax credits, grants, and contracts to support an array of non-profit-run programmes, from building housing for the poor to educating college students to conserving wetlands.

Shored up by this policy regime, the US civil society sector counted more than 1.6 million non-governmental organizations in 2000—roughly 1 for every 175 people (Boris & Steuerle, 2000, p. 69). Salamon and his colleagues estimate that the non-profit sector workforce constitutes a larger share of the total workforce in the USA than in all but three countries.[4] Since 2000, charitable giving has totalled 2.45–2.60% of national income (Wing, Pollak & Blackwood, 2008, p. 72), making the USA #1 in the world in giving as a share of GDP.[5] About 13% of American giving comes through philanthropic foundations, which number 70,000, up 75% in the past decade, and hold US$682 billion assets, roughly the GDP of Poland. If US foundations were a country, they would rank as the 22nd wealthiest.[6] Finally, volunteering in America is vibrant and growing. Approximately 25–30% of Americans report volunteering in any given year (Wing, Pollak & Blackwood, 2008, p. 99). In general parlance, volunteering includes a range of distinct activities, including one-on-one service delivery, service on a board of directors, fundraising, participation in a stipend-providing government programme, and so forth.[7] The USA ranked eighth in the value of volunteer time as a share of GDP.[8]

Besides creating policy incentives for civil society to flourish, the US state also encourages, and sometimes requires, individual civic participation. In the 1960–1970s, the federal government created service programmes for young people, such as the Peace Corps and Volunteers in Service to America (Wofford, 2003), and for older people, including Foster Grandparents, Senior Companions, and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program. Federal, state, and local laws also created formal advisory boards, mandates, and other mechanisms to increase community participation in policy-making and policy implementation (Berry & Arons, 2003; Berry, Portney & Thomson, 1993). State-sponsored civic participation underwent a second wave of institution-building in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Congress created funding streams to support community service programmes for young people in elementary and high schools, in colleges and universities, and in community-based non-profit organizations. The most visible programme created in this time frame was AmeriCorps, a Clinton Administration proposal enacted by Congress in 1993, in which young people engage in a year of service with a non-profit organization and in return receive a modest living stipend and help with college tuition. AmeriCorps has engaged 500,000 young people so far, with dramatic expansion planned for coming years. Through the Corporation for National and Community Service, which runs most federal volunteer programmes, the federal government was slated to spend US$1.15 billion in 2010 (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2009).

During the 1980–2000s, an expansive programme of government-mandated service quietly took root at the sub-national level, as schools, school districts, and occasionally local and state governments instituted policies requiring students to perform community service as a condition of graduation. By 1999, 83% of public high schools recognized or arranged for community service, and more than half of all public schools (elementary, middle, and high) required students to participate in community service (Skinner & Chapman, 1999). One state (Maryland), along with the District of Columbia, required students to perform community service as a condition of graduation, and eight other states allowed community service to count towards graduation (Kawashima-Ginsberg, Marcelo & Kirby, 2009). These programmes were encouraged by the National and Community Service Trust Act, which, besides establishing AmeriCorps, created a funding stream for school-based community service learning programmes.

In sum, throughout American history, public policy has created the enabling conditions to make America 'a nation of joiners' (Schlesinger, 1944). In the next sections, I argue that public policy innovations also have restructured the US civic universe, framed the dynamics of civic engagement, and shaped definitions of participatory citizenship in the post-War era. The analysis suggests that policy feedbacks have structured participation in ways that are more patterned and nuanced than reductionist, neo-Tocquevillian arguments about the flowering of civil society assume. The sections that follow offer a series of testable propositions that policy feedbacks have constrained, channelled, and helped to construct civic orientations at both the organizational and individual levels.

Structuring Effects: Constraining ('Stalling') Participation

Federal tax and social welfare policies influence the composition of the civic universe by providing more favourable incentives for the establishment and maintenance of certain types of organizations over others, thereby privileging certain approaches to public problem solving. The regulatory and social-welfare laws operate in complementary ways to shore up charitable organizations at the expense of more politically oriented legislative advocacy and grassroots-mobilizing organizations. This top-down structuring of the civic universe has testable implications for the amount and direction of individual-level civic engagement.

In the USA, the federal tax system plays a role in regulating non-profit organizations that 'is unmatched in other lands' (Simon, Dale & Chisolm, 2006, p. 267). Tax laws privilege two categories of non-profit groups—public charities [organized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code] and veterans' groups [501(c)(19)]—by allowing individuals to take a federal income-tax deduction for donations to these groups. Such deductions are not allowed for donations to fraternal membership associations [501(c)(8)], legislative advocacy groups [501(c)(4)], business groups [501(c)(6)], or labour unions [501(c)(5)]. Federal, state, and local social policy also favours charitable organizations by making available hundreds of millions of dollars each year in grants and contracts to provide services authorized or guaranteed by the state (Salamon, 1995; Smith & Lipsky, 1993). On the other hand, unlike with other 501(c) organizations, federal laws and regulations limit the strategies that charities may utilize for social, economic, and political change. For example, the law restricts the amount of lobbying and grassroots legislative mobilizing charities can pursue; bars their use of federal funds for such advocacy; and prohibits their engagement in electoral politics. In sum, public policy restrains charities from using politics to challenge the basic forces that structure American democracy.

Table 1 provides two views of the evolution of key elements of the civil society sector in the USA over the past 35 years. The first columns show the growth in organizations filing informational tax returns with the federal government (which are groups with at $25,000 in income, excluding houses of worship).[9] The final three columns show the number of organizations registered with the Internal Revenue Service, regardless of filing status. The chart presents at least circumstantial evidence that the policy regime affects the growth rate of non-profit organizations in a predictable direction: Those who are eligible to receive tax-deductible gifts (charities and veterans' groups) or deliver social welfare services under government grants and contracts (charities) posted the strongest growth from 1975 to 1995. Although veterans' groups posted a small decline from 1998 to 2008, probably because of the dying off of the World War II generation, charities continued their rapid growth. Charities grew by 63%, compared with an average 8% *decline* for other categories of groups.

By affecting the relative growth of different types of groups, public policy alters the composition of civil society and the distribution of participatory opportunities. By implication, I suggest two mechanisms by which such structuring effects might feed back to

Table 1. Growth in select categories of US non-profits (*gifts deductible in italics*).

Type	1975 (Filing)	1995 (Filing)	% Change	1998 (Registered)	2008 (Registered)	% Change
501(c)(3): Charitable, religious, educational scientific	82,048	180,931	*+120*	596,160	974,337	*+63*
501(c)(4): Civic leagues, social welfare (advocacy)	28,064	21,983	−22	125,504	110,924	−12
501(c)(5): Labour, agricultural, horticultural	28,258	21,242	−25	61,444	55,629	−9
501(c)(6): Business leagues, chambers of commerce	17,530	25,460	+45	69,734	71,887	+3
501(c)(7): Social, recreational clubs	18,228	15,919	−13	56,452	55,838	−1
501(c)(8): Fraternal beneficiary societies	12,066	7973	−34	103,065	78,109	−24
501(c)(19): War veterans organizations	1921	5941	*+209*	34,272	32,592	*−5*

Notes: Figures for 1975 and 1995 reflect organizations filing informational tax returns with the Internal Revenue Service; houses of worship and organizations with less than $25,000 in gross receipts are not required to file.
Sources: Meckstroth & Arnsberger (1998, p. 171). Figures for 1998 and 2008 represent organizations registered with the IRS, regardless of filing status. Data obtained from National Center for Charitable Statistics, http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/PubApps/profile1.php?state=US (accessed 4 April 2010). Private foundations are excluded from counts of 501(c)(3) groups.

individual participation: by influencing the relationships among individuals in participatory roles and by channelling their participatory strategies into activities that do not challenge the state. Public policy is hypothesized to affect inter-personal relations in civic settings by granting more favourable treatment to organizations that serve others in a charitable capacity than those that bring people together as equals for collective action. Charities provide educational, health, job-training, housing, and emergency assistance programmes to needy individuals, as well as conducting research, analysis, and public education on an array of public issues and policy concerns. Increasingly, they are professionally managed quasi-governmental enterprises that have no individual members but represent an important locus of organization for difficult-to-mobilize populations, such as disadvantaged people and diffuse publics (Berry & Arons, 2003, p. 26; Chisolm, 1987; Skocpol, 2003). Charities have come to occupy a civic space filled in earlier decades by organizations that are less advantaged by public policy, such as federated fraternal associations (Skocpol 2003), social movement organizations (Piven & Cloward, 1979; Zald & McCarthy, 1987), political parties (Aldrich, 1995; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993), and labour unions (Putnam, 2000). As the table shows, these latter groups—which, except for parties, generally would have been exempt under sections 501(c)(4), (c)(5), and (c)(8)—declined in number by roughly 20–30% in the 1975–1995 period and witnessed a further, if more modest, winnowing from 1998 to 2008.

This move 'from membership to management' (Skocpol, 2003) has implications for civic engagement and representation more broadly. Horizontally run mass-membership associations—such as fraternal lodges, unions, women's clubs, denominational associations, social movement organizations, and old-time political parties—demanded deep participation of members through an array of rituals, offices, and community-service opportunities. These organizations were powerful schools of democracy, promoting cross-class fellowship, teaching civic skills and values, educating members about public issues, and connecting individuals to translocal networks through which political advocacy could be organized on a mass scale (Skocpol, 2003). Charitable organizations allow individuals to serve as board members and direct-service volunteers, but the largest among these organizations empower senior executives, whose role is to manage professional service workers and partnerships with government-funding agencies (Smith & Lipsky, 1993, p. 211). Rather than 'doing with', charities more often than not 'do for' (Skocpol, 2003).

Second, policy feedbacks affect the socio-political strategies that people aligned with civil society groups can pursue. Chisolm (1987, p. 204) draws a valuable distinction between 'client-oriented' strategies, meaning direct service to individuals, and 'systems-oriented' strategies, which seek to improve individuals' lives by raising public awareness of social problems, advocating for policy changes to address them, and holding the government accountable for results. Historically, efforts by civil society groups to shift from client-oriented to systems-oriented change provoked a defensive backlash from the state in which 'restraints on system reform activity' multiplied (Chisolm, 1987, pp. 205–206).

The client orientation of public charities has implications for individual participation in both direct and indirect ways. Directly, charities recruit individuals for service-focused volunteering and charitable giving, as opposed to political organizing and attempting to press claims on the state. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the growth in the charitable sector since the mid-1970s, per-capita giving and volunteering constituted anomalous

countertrends in Putnam's (2000) study of civic and political disengagement in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Indirectly, policies create relationships between charity workers, on the one hand, and clients, on the other, that reinforce clients' role as passive beneficiaries of services. By limiting the right of charities to mobilize those beneficiaries to press their claims on legislators, or even to act on behalf of clients, the tax laws arguably deprive these individuals of 'effective representation in the political system' (Berry & Arons, 2003, p. 4).

Capacity Effects: Resources, Skills, and Civic Orientation

Public policy creates civic capacity in straightforward ways, most notably by offering financial and organizational resources for voluntary activity. For example, the US federal government since the 1960s has allocated billions of dollars to state- and non-profit-administered volunteer programmes that offer what Wilson (1973) has termed solidary, purposive, and material incentives for participation. However, public policy has the potential to influence civic capacity in indirect ways. Here, I develop an argument that public policy has operated on political and civil society elites, through a feedback process of political learning and lesson drawing, to shape their beliefs about the proper orientation of non-profits towards the state. These lessons have become embedded in law and practice in a way that, I hypothesize, constrains individual participants' repertoire of civic engagement.

Heclo (1974) argues that policy-makers, faced with uncertainty and incomplete information, will 'respond by analogizing' (Heclo, 1974, cited in Pierson, 1993, p. 612). This intuition underlies the concept of political learning: that policy-makers utilize experience with the existing policy to inform the design of future policy. Rose (1993) notes that political learning often takes the form of 'lesson-drawing', in which policy-makers react against negative experiences with the existing law. As with structuring effects, learning effects typically are portrayed as operating solely at the level of decision-making elites. Here, using two examples of history-based lesson-drawing at the organizational or programmatic (i.e. elite) level, I suggest that such political learning might also feed back to influence the scope and nature of participation at the individual level.

Lesson-Drawing among Policy-Makers: Federal Civic Participation Programmes

At least since the 1960s, governments at all levels, but especially the federal government, have facilitated public participation. This facilitation has come in many forms: volunteer programmes; community decision-making and distribution agencies; advisory commissions; and public consultation requirements (see, e.g. Bass, 2004; Berry, Portney & Thomson, 1993; Fung, 2004; Moynihan, 1969; Pass, 1976; Waldman, 1996; Wofford, 2003). Although these programmes developed in complex ways, the core evolutionary narrative is one of successive generations of policy-makers attempting to redress the perceived political excesses of voluntary service through increasing levels of regulation. Here, I consider an important and illustrative case, the federal domestic volunteer programme VISTA, and its successor (and absorbing entity), AmeriCorps.

Created in 1964 as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, VISTA had a relatively radical mission. It would recruit idealistic young people to work with grassroots groups to organize self-help projects for the poor and mobilize them to make collective demands on

the government for policy change. Although small in numbers, VISTA volunteers threatened political elites from the outset, touching off a nearly uninterrupted, 30-year effort to depoliticize the programme by directing participants' energies towards 'safe' service projects. President Johnson faced immediate complaints from local elected officials and consequently asked aides to tamp down the volunteers' political efforts (Bass, 2004). Two years later, the Congress stepped in and brought VISTA volunteers under a federal law banning government employees from getting involved in elections, or even from taking a public stand on a partisan political issue. In 1968, the Republican Nixon Administration came to power and moved VISTA into a new agency designed to encourage non-political volunteerism.

The programme was briefly reinvigorated in the late 1970s, under Democratic President Jimmy Carter, whose administration refocused the programme on organizing communities and being a voice for the poor. But when Republican Ronald Reagan entered office in 1981, his VISTA director publicly declared his intent to end the programme. The director of federal volunteer programmes created a list of 39 VISTA projects that were to be eliminated because they used suspect terms such as 'community organizing' and 'advocacy'; the Reagan administration also prohibited VISTA volunteers from participating in protests (Bass, 2004, p. 222). While VISTA survived the Reagan Administration, it was reoriented towards 'safe' charitable services, such as teaching people to read and helping drug abusers to kick the habit (Bass, 2004, pp. 185–186).

Even though VISTA had been politically neutered by the mid-1980s, the political scrapes of VISTA's first two decades loomed large in Congress's imagination. That political learning fed back into the design of VISTA's successor, AmeriCorps, which was created in 1993, the first year of the Clinton Administration. At the behest of the Senate, the AmeriCorps legislation excluded politically engaged organizations—such as political parties, issue advocacy groups, and labour unions—from hosting AmeriCorps volunteers. Shortly thereafter, the agency that runs AmeriCorps barred participants from organizing protests, petitions, boycotts or strikes; from promoting or helping to organize labour unions; and from seeking to influence legislation in the context of their AmeriCorps service.[10] Thus, AmeriCorps, like VISTA before it, illustrates what has become government's settled view of state volunteerism: It is to be altruistic, charitable, and non-threatening to the political structure. Even those who opposed the advocacy ban believed that it was necessary to maintain the broad political support required to sustain the fragile programme over the long term.

Lesson-Drawing among Charities: The Chilling Effect on Advocacy

A second case of lesson-drawing involves civil society elites—the board members and executive directors who determine organizations' strategies for addressing public problems. The case of the Sierra Club both illustrates the quandaries faced and factors centrally into the learned narrative itself. In 1963, the US Congress began discussing building dams in one of the most spectacular and oft-visited parks—the Grand Canyon, a 446-km long gorge in northern Arizona—to generate much-needed hydroelectric power for California and other fast-growing western states. The move outraged the Sierra Club, one of America's oldest continuing volunteer organizations, which moved to stop Congress's proposal by placing newspaper advertisements that encouraged citizens to mobilize politically against the bill. The day after the ads appeared, the Internal

Revenue Service, which enforces the tax laws, suspended the organization's ability to receive tax-deductible donations and, 6 months later, revoked its standing as a public charity. The revocation of the Sierra Club's charitable status was roundly criticized at the time—the *New York Times* called it 'an assault on the right of private citizens to protest effectively against wrongheaded public policies'—and had a chilling effect on other charitable groups (Berry & Arons, 2003, p. 76; *New York Times*, 1966).

Berry and Arons (2003, p. 77) argue that the Sierra Club ruling, which came during a period of political turbulence in American history, 'was symptomatic of policy-makers trying to figure out to what degree they wanted to facilitate the participation of liberal groups who seemed fundamentally hostile to the conventional practices of government'. With the arrival of the conservative Reagan Administration in 1981, the collective puzzling turned into a commitment to 'defund the left' by cutting federal spending on social programmes, many of which were carried out by liberal non-profits. These tactics included proposing (then having to withdraw) a rule that would have barred recipients of federal money from lobbying, as well as cutting citizen participation programmes tied to federal agencies (Berry & Arons, 2003, pp. 82–83). Charities faced further advocacy-chilling threats in the 1990s. Beginning with the Sierra Club case, then, charity leaders have learned that government officials will move politically against non-profits that wade into political controversy (Jenkins, 2006), reminding them how fragile their legal status is and how few political protections they have.

In 1976, in part as a consequence of the Sierra Club case, the Congress moved to clarify the rules concerning direct and grassroots lobbying by charitable groups. Under the law at the time, charities were permitted to do certain politically oriented activities, such as conducting research or 'public education' that advances a point of view, seeking to change policy through the courts and administrative agencies, and doing an insubstantial amount of lobbying of legislative bodies. In 1976, the Congress passed a law allowing charities to opt in for a clearer set of rules for legislative advocacy (called the 'H Election'). These rules provide a mathematical formula that charities use to determine the amount of money they can legally spend on lobbying.

In an important survey, conducted in 2000–2001, Berry and Arons assessed the impact of this history on the beliefs and orientations of charity leaders. In the theoretical construct of this article, their study tested the feedback effects of political learning on this element of civil society. These scholars found that, among politically inactive charities,[11] nearly 50% did not know they were allowed to take a stand on federal legislation. More than two-thirds of groups wrongly thought that groups receiving federal funds could not lobby. The fraction of charities answering correctly was much higher among those that have opted to operate under the clearer 'H Election' rules. But only 2–3% do so (Berry & Arons, 2003). The vast majority of charities operates under the older, vaguer rules and often opt to play it safe. Summarizing the role of how policy feeds back through learning effects, Berry and Arons (2003) conclude that 'nonprofits are socialized by their understanding of the law to believe they should not be politically active' because 'the safest path is to be uninvolved' (pp. 147, 25).

Policy feedbacks also operate on charities through their financial relationships with government. Non-profit organizations deliver a large portion of American welfare-state services making them 'partners' with the government in public service (Salamon, 1995). Non-profit advocacy often is oriented around negotiating professional standards and practice, as opposed to deeper policy issues such as poverty and healthcare.[12] Although

individual board and staff members and non-profit providers may wish to speak out more on substantive issues, the imperative of organizational survival and maintenance channels their advocacy.[13] Smith and Lipsky argue that, even coalitions of charities—which may have the tax status to permit unlimited lobbying—operate according to a norm of 'constrained advocacy' due to funding constraints by constituents and their concerns about maintaining government funding (Smith & Lipsky, 1993, pp. 178–179; see also note 12).

On the other hand, Chaves, Stephens, and Galaskiewicz (2004) find either a null or positive relationship between charities' and congregations' receipt of government funds and their willingness to engage in politically oriented activities. It is important to note, however, that this study's design does not allow the authors to detect whether government funds might be restraining the intensity, scope, targets, or content of these organizations' political activities, or the strategies employed. Regardless, Berry and Arons (2003, p. 60) capture well the prevailing sentiment among most charitable organizations that 'their choice is between taking money from the government and having the right to speak out on issues that affect their clients'.

These works suggest that political learning, reinforced by a web of regulatory arrangements and perhaps resource dependence, has produced feedback effects on charitable decision-makers. I hypothesize that the chilling effect has had secondary implications for individual civic engagement in ways outlined above. In particular, I hypothesize that the political learning effects reinforce and amplify the 'constraining' effects of the regulatory and (perhaps) contracting regime, with the result being to channel civic engagement towards 'safe' charitable behaviour, such as giving and service volunteering, and away from risky advocacy activities.

Research has not tackled this argument directly, but the two cases of lesson-drawing suggest two different research questions. The first question, stemming from the advocacy regulations operating on charities and federal volunteer programmes, asks whether individual participants are aware of and abide by the advocacy restrictions, a question that turns largely on whether programme managers convey these policy messages to participants and enforce the legal strictures. The work of Berry and Arons (2003) provides suggestive evidence that charity leaders indeed take these regulations to heart, at times more so than is legally necessary.

The second question is whether participation in state-sponsored volunteer programmes affects patterns of individual participation outside of the programme, for example, after the service term is complete. Putnam (2000) and Goss (1999) found that the anomalous upward trend in volunteering was driven by the two demographic groups—young people and seniors—who had the greatest access to state-sponsored service, such as school-based service learning programmes for youths or federally sponsored programmes for retirees. Further circumstantial evidence comes from Zukin *et al.* (2006, p. 73), who found that 15–25 year olds had the highest rates of at least occasional volunteering, and that the charitable engagement of Generation X and the DotNet generation was greater than would be predicted based on their place in the life cycle.

For a variety of reasons, careful longitudinal studies of the effects of service programmes are difficult to design and carry out. Perhaps the most thoughtful of such studies is that of Frumkin *et al.* (2009), who examined the civic and political effects of AmeriCorps on participants 3 and 8 years out. Their findings generally support the proposition that, compared with a carefully matched control group, young people who took part in AmeriCorps' main programme, which places them in charitable groups, experienced a

marginally significant increase in volunteer participation at 3 years out but no boost in political engagement or voting participation (Frumkin *et al.*, 2009, p. 409, 410). The volunteer effect had dissipated by the time of the 8-year study. Interestingly, though, the young people experienced both short- and long-term increases in 'community-based activism', a composite measure of service and advocacy activities.

Framing Effects: The Origin of Problems and Strategies for Solving them

Pierson (1993) argues that policies have 'interpretive effects' that influence citizens' political identities, goals, and strategies. One might extrapolate, then, that policies operate through belief systems that construct or at least direct these identities, goals, and strategies. As Soss and Schram (2007) note, empirical work connecting policy feedbacks to mass belief systems has found such effects for highly visible, encompassing programmes such as Civil War pensions (Skocpol, 1992), New Deal social programmes (Piven & Cloward, 1982; Skocpol, 1995), and the War on Poverty and Great Society programmes (Kellstedt, 2003). However, Soss and Schram (2007) found no evidence of feedback effects of welfare reform on perceptions of poor recipients.

Soss and Schram hypothesize that feedback effects are more likely when policy is highly visible and proximate to individual experience. Charitable organizations and state- and school-sponsored volunteer programmes fit both conditions. Numbering more than one million, charities are prevalent in every community. They enter public consciousness in countless ways, such as through solicitations at work, in stores, in houses of worship, on campuses, through social networks, and via mail, telephone, email, and so forth; through sentimental and laudatory stories in the media; and through direct volunteer work. (Of course, advocacy organizations are also prominent on the American landscape, but they are fewer in number and often derided as 'special interests' lacking a public-spirited purpose.) The proximity to charitable endeavours received a significant boost in the 1980s and 1990s, when school- and college-based volunteer programmes proliferated. By one estimate, 71% of all US public high schools organized community service for students, and 46% sponsored 'service learning' programmes, which integrate volunteerism into the curriculum (Skinner & Chapman, 1999, p. 5). Of those sponsoring service learning, half of middle and high schools required it (Skinner & Chapman, 1999, p. 8). These programmes often link students to charities in the community, raising young people's awareness of the role of this sector of civil society.

Because of charities' prominence and scope, the public policies that favour voluntary-sector approaches might be expected to influence public attitudes about the appropriate mechanisms for social problem solving and, in turn, patterns of democratic participation. As described above, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a public backlash against government-enabled advocacy and a concomitant rise in federally and school-sponsored volunteering. By placing the government's imprimatur on service, public policy had the potential to frame perceptions of public action, specifically whether civil society or the welfare state is the preferable approach to public problem solving. These attitudes would have logical consequences for individuals' decisions about the optimal form that their civic participation should take, for example, volunteerism or political advocacy. From prior work on generational variation in feedback effects (Gusmano, Schlesinger & Thomas, 2002), we would expect framing effects to be most pronounced among members of the post-Baby Boom generations, who came of age during the

'service explosion' of the 1980–2000s. However, from a theoretical perspective, whether framing effects would result in greater, or lesser, support for charitable as opposed to welfare-state approaches is uncertain, and the circumstantial evidence for each proposition is muddled.

One hypothesis holds that, by privileging service, policy feedbacks encourage a belief in the power of civil society (volunteer service) and a scepticism about the government (voting, advocacy, petitioning, etc.). Smith and Lipsky (1993, p. 214) endorse this view, suggesting that public policies that favour service delivery through government grants and contracts with non-profit organizations have 'reduce[d] and limit[ed] popular support for government'. This hypothesis finds support in unrelated but important studies of framing and agenda setting. Iyengar (1996) found that, when the media focus on individuals to illustrate social problems, viewers tend to attribute those problems to individual shortcomings rather than structural conditions. Meanwhile, Kingdon (1995) found that political stimuli direct political behaviour when they reinforce pre-existing beliefs and values. Volunteer service both individualizes social problems and reinforces America's anti-statist, individualist political culture (Hartz, 1955). One might hypothesize, then, that by providing an array of incentives for people to support and engage in direct service aimed at the distressed individual, as opposed to collective action aimed at government and market failures, the state reinforces the perception that problems adhere to the individual, not to the collective. If true, this message would be expected to encourage a psychological and behavioural disposition towards charitable service and to devalue collective action for welfare state expansion.

A second hypothesis holds the opposite: that charitable service would encourage a cognitive and behavioural orientation towards political advocacy and claims-making on the state. Studies suggest that volunteers are often radicalized by their service, as they come to appreciate the complex political, economic, and social forces that create situations of individual distress and disadvantage (Bass, 2004; McAdam, 1988). VISTA volunteers, for example, balked at political moves to reorient the programme away from advocacy, even going so far as to sue the government for trying to turn the programme into a 'service-oriented Red Cross-type program' (Bass, 2004, p. 183). Battered women's shelters began as locally supported feminist collectives but rather quickly evolved into a professionalized national movement that has maintained a strong advocacy agenda.[14] Today's service-learning programmes often include a reflection component in which students are led to identify the structural, as opposed to individual, determinants of social problems (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Framing individual woes as the products of structural forces would suggest that politics and public policy, not service, is the appropriate approach.

Whether framing effects are at work on younger generations is an open question, and if they are at work, the circumstantial evidence is unclear on the direction. The most comprehensive recent study of generational variation in civic orientations was conducted by Zukin *et al.* (2006). Of particular interest is their treatment of Generation X (born 1965–1976), which came of age during political scandals, federal budget deficits, an anti-government ethos, and declining economic opportunities; and the DotNet Generation (born after 1976), an ethnically diverse group that benefited from increasing attention to children's development and whose lives were profoundly shaped by distrust of big government, by globalization, and by technological innovation. Supporting Hypothesis 1, Zukin *et al.* found that both Generation X and the DotNet Generation were less involved in

political activities, particularly electoral activities, than their elders, but roughly equally involved in charitable activities. The study also reported that these generations were less likely to place importance on following political affairs than previous generations were at the same age (Zukin *et al.*, 2006, p. 84). Although they attribute the findings to political, economic, and social developments shaping different generations, the authors also imply a possible role for school-based service programmes that were emerging at the time (Zukin *et al.*, 2006, p. 39). What is more, the longitudinal study of AmeriCorps found that programme participation was significantly associated with enduring beliefs in the effectiveness of community service but not with various measures of political engagement, such as learning about candidates and voting in local elections (Frumkin *et al.*, 2009, p. 409). Together, these findings suggest that, if there are feedback effects on civic engagement, they operate by increasing young people's positive feelings about the power of charity and scepticism about politics.

On the other hand, lending provisional support to Hypothesis 2, the Zukin *et al.* study finds that members of Generation X and the DotNet generation are more supportive than any other generation of government intervention. Fully 65% of DotNets and 60% of Generation X members, for example, believed that the government is necessary to protect the public interest, compared with just 54% of Baby Boomers. Likewise, roughly 30% of DotNet and Generation X members believe that the government does more harm than good, compared with 32–34% of their elders (Zukin *et al.*, 2006, p. 116). (These numbers should be interpreted cautiously, as the study does not report on whether the differences between percentages are statistically significant.) Finally, as noted, Frumkin *et al.*'s study of AmeriCorps found enduring increases among participants in community-based activism, which suggests an underlying belief that activities blending service and advocacy are effective.

There is a strong theoretical presumption that policy feedbacks frame conceptions of social problems and help define the solutions to them (Mettler & Soss, 2004). By implication, feedback effects could be expected to structure people's feelings about the relative merit of private, voluntary solutions *vs.* public, welfare-state solutions. Yet the connections between policy content and the direction of public perceptions could be better elaborated, particularly with respect to policy's preference for service over advocacy. The conflicting circumstantial evidence in the present case suggests that this would be a fruitful avenue for research.

Membership and Community-Building Effects: Orienting Advocacy Identities

The policies spotlighted thus far—revolving around tax law, administrative regulations, state-sponsored volunteerism, and social welfare policy—have privileged charity over advocacy. Here, I consider the possibility that policy feedbacks can operate in such a way as to privilege advocacy and to devalue service. To develop the argument, I consider the role of the administrative state and civil rights laws in enabling the 'second wave' American women's movement to emerge and in shaping its policy orientation. I suggest that these policies influenced women's groups' understanding of the rights and obligations implied by women's membership in the larger polity and helped to construct a political community of feminist women. In turn, these policy-influenced ideals of female citizenship, embodied in women's groups' policy agendas and rhetoric, are hypothesized to affect the nature of individual women's civic participation. To set up the argument, a

brief and necessarily oversimplified review of contemporary US women's history is in order.

The American women's movement traces its origins to policy developments in the early 1960s. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy created a national Commission on the Status of Women, which, along with pressure from women's business organizations, had spawned commissions in all 50 states by 1967 (Davis, 1999, p. 38). In 1962, The Kennedy Administration also directed federal agencies to observe non-discrimination in hiring and promotion. In 1963, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act, and in 1964, the Civil Rights Act, both of which barred employment-based discrimination (Davis, 1999, p. 22, 37). The 1964 Act also created a regulatory body, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), to enforce the laws. All of these developments occurred before the national 'second wave' feminist movement had organized.

Second-wave feminism's flagship organization, the National Organization for Women (NOW), was established in 1966 and pressed a wide range of feminist policy demands, among them the rights to equal pay for equal work, abortion on demand, and universal day care, as well as an end to discrimination in credit, divorce, and other policy arenas (Gelb & Palley, 1996). At the same time NOW sought to redefine women's traditional roles as uncompensated caregivers. Notably, the organization's members passed a resolution in 1971 'telling women they should only volunteer to effect social change, not to deliver social services' (Kaminer, 1984, p. 4). Although impossible to measure the resolution's effects on women's behaviour, a seminal study called the feminist 'attack on the volunteer principle' an important development in state–civil society relations (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977), while a leading social critic concluded that by the early 1980s volunteering had become 'not even a fashionable or respectable option for married or single women in a feminist world' (Kaminer, 1984, p. 9).[15]

While offering a new norm to govern female civic activity, NOW did not specify which issues were worthy of women's advocacy efforts or which were not. However, the message that women received was that traditional social caretaking, whether in its service or advocacy forms, was politically questionable and perhaps a setback to the cause of female liberation. Ironically, while traditional women's 'caretaking' organizations supported the feminist movement, their agenda of harnessing female benevolence towards broad public goods was suspect in some feminist quarters (Goss & Heaney, 2010). To many feminists, NOW's resolution meant that volunteering for feminist social change—namely, women's rights—was acceptable, but other forms of volunteering—whether service or advocacy—were not.[16] At the very least, the resolution contributed to a symbolic devaluing of traditional service work at a time when other forces were pulling women into the paid workforce.

The development of the women's movement illustrates a range of feedback effects operating not only to build capacity among women, but also to forge new identities and political communities. The movement's origins are rooted in capacity effects: NOW arose in response to feminists' experience with the state commissions on the status of women, which lacked political power, and with the EEOC, which was reluctant to enforce gender-equality laws (Costain, 1992, p. 45; Davis, 1999, p. 22). In the language of feedback effects, political learning and lesson drawing from negative policy experiences provided the impetus for interest-based mobilizing.

Of particular interest in the case of women's civic engagement, however, is a second feedback effect, namely that equal rights policy may have helped to define women's

political membership and forged a feminist-oriented political community. President Kennedy's early moves to advance women's rights through the Presidential Commission and the Equal Pay Act helped to revive feminism as an organizing principle around which group identity was formed. These early policies, and those enacted in the decades to follow, shaped public ideas about women's social roles and relationship to the state. By elevating the idea of women's equality, these policies had the potential to diminish the idea of women's 'difference', the notion that women had an ethic of care that formed the basis of their volunteer service. NOW's anti-volunteering statement is a manifestation of that emerging rights-oriented identity.

Thus by the 1970s, the government and associational policies were defining the parameters of a new feminist identity. I hypothesize that these policies influenced women's groups' understanding of the rights and obligations implied by women's membership in the larger polity and thereby helped to construct a new feminist-oriented political community. In turn, I hypothesize that these policy-influenced ideals of rights-based citizenship, embodied in women's groups' policy agendas and rhetoric, structured the opportunities for and direction of individual women's civic participation.

Two types of evidence lend provisional support to the reorientation of women's citizenship. First, in the wake of the feminist movement, surveys detected a slight shift in women's participation towards groups advancing political or occupational interests. The 1994 General Social Survey, for example, found a decline over two decades in women's memberships in fraternal and church groups and a rise in professional memberships. (However, the survey also detected a rise in service-group memberships, suggesting that volunteerism was perhaps shifting from traditional locations to other types of nonprofits.) A landmark civic engagement survey found that, by the late 1980s, women's rate of political-organization affiliation exceeded their rate of charitable volunteering, but was lower than their rate of affiliation with a non-political organization (Schlozman *et al.*, 1995).

The idea that national public policies can affect individual women's patterns of political participation receives support in McDonagh's important new cross-national study of women's rates of public office-holding (McDonagh, 2010). In a series of works (McDonagh, 2002, 2009, 2010), she argues that women fare best in states that simultaneously enshrine individualist principles of equality *and* embody maternal public policies, such as gender quotas for political offices, caring public welfare programmes, and hereditary rights of queens. Policy regimes can empower women's participation both directly (through gender quotas and the right of queens) and indirectly, by symbolically incorporating women's central role in the state. In short, when the state 'acts like a woman', while affirming core democratic principles, women's political behaviour is altered, and their fortunes rise.

A second line of evidence for policy feedbacks comes from a recent set of studies of women's organizations' policy agendas. Throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, US women's groups were focused on performing civic work on behalf of politically disadvantaged or underrepresented people of both genders. The rationale extended back to the 'doctrine of spheres', developed during industrialization to assign women responsibility for family caregiving, and to a Progressive Era adaptation, 'municipal housekeeping', which held that communities were simply extensions of the family and therefore that women's domestic skills and sensibilities were readily transferable to public affairs (Cott, 1987; Goss & Skocpol, 2006; Scott, 1991; Skocpol, 1992).

However, by the 1980s and 1990s, studies found that women's groups were increasingly focusing on narrower issues of women's rights, status, and well-being. For example, in a study of women's groups from the early 1960s through the early 1990s, Goss and Skocpol (2006) document a sharp decline in the fraction of US women's associations that worked on broad policy questions (e.g. peace, environmental conservation, consumer protection) and a rise in women's organizations devoted to women's particularistic interests (e.g. breast cancer, abortion rights, and workplace discrimination). Likewise, in a study of women's organizations' presence on Capitol Hill, Goss (2009) found a sharp decline in these groups' testimony on major foreign policy issues throughout the second half of the twentieth century and a concomitant narrowing of the substance of their testimony, in foreign policy and other issue realms, to focus on women's rights, status, health, and well-being. The movement of women's groups towards feminist policy niches has altered the opportunities available for gender-based participation (Goss & Heaney, 2010).

While McDonagh (2010) argues that American women's participation as officeholders lags because the US state lacks *maternalist* policies, I suggest that America's *egalitarian* policies also have feedback effects on female engagement. By affirming women as equal-rights-bearing citizens, individualist public policies have created incentives for the formation and maintenance of women's organizations that embody particular ideas about women's proper relationship with the state. These ideas privilege advocacy for rights—feminist claims-making—over service towards others—female caregiving. Stone (2007) makes a similar argument with respect to the 1996 welfare reform law, which she argues advances the idea that women's proper place is in the workforce, thereby delegitimizing their role as family caretakers to the detriment of mothers, children, and society at large.

While tax laws and government-sponsored volunteer programmes moved in a direction that privileged charitable service, second-wave feminists issued a frontal challenge to such service on the grounds that it reified gender roles that kept women from reaching economic, social, and political equality with men. To many feminists, volunteering encouraged a relationship between the female citizen and the state that disadvantaged women. I hypothesize that the state itself, through the equal-rights policy, facilitated the development of women's organizations oriented around a view of women as rights-bearing workers who had legitimate claims on the traditionally male sphere. Such civic ideals, embodied in law, helped to orient women's groups' missions towards the protection and defence of rights, perhaps at the expense of traditional service, which had been framed as perpetuating inequality. In sum, policy has the potential to shape and reinforce patterns of civic engagement by defining groups' place in the polity.

Conclusion

Scholars have long understood that policy influences the scope and nature of political participation. Studies of policy feedbacks have tended to view individuals and communities of interest as the targets of policy-making and thus have examined their participation in the context of issues that affect them—businesses mobilize around trade policy, seniors around Social Security policy, and so forth. Here, I have argued that, by focusing on issue-specific interactions, we have not fully appreciated the way that

policy shapes the composition, mission, and strategies of civil society writ large. I have offered a multi-level model of feedback effects that understands effects on civil society organizations to trickle down to individuals who participate through them.

History and empirical social science are rich with evidence for this proposition. This article has used illustrative cases to make an argument for the underappreciated effects of federal tax policy, state-sponsored volunteerism, regulatory sanctions, and equal-rights laws on civil society and by extension, civic engagement. Drawing on Mettler and Soss's (2004) categorization of feedback effects, I have suggested that such policies have structured civil society by stimulating the growth of certain types of groups and participatory opportunities while stalling others; influenced the capacity of civil society through processes of learning and lesson drawing operating on non-profit and political decision-makers; potentially framed beliefs about the nature of social problems and the mode of political engagement that is optimal to solve them; and helped to define membership and forge political communities, with implications for those communities' policy goals and participatory strategies.

A multi-level analysis has the potential to shed new light on important questions concerning patterns of civic engagement. For example, Mettler's study of American veterans found that the GI Bill of Rights, which conferred educational and housing benefits on returning soldiers, delivered civically valuable resources to this generation of men and shaped their civic orientations, making them remarkably participatory by historical standards (Mettler, 2005). However, it is important to note that much of these men's participation occurred through veterans' groups (indeed, that is how Mettler found her survey sample), and that these groups receive the most favourable treatment under the federal tax laws. It seems reasonable to ask, then, to what extent the 'greatest generation's' civic behaviour was facilitated by public policies beyond the GI Bill. Likewise, recent studies of volunteerism and political behaviour among Generation X and the DotNet generation have attributed their engagement patterns to the economic, social, and political transformations during which they came of age. However, I would argue that civic behaviours are equally likely to be shaped by daily experiences on the ground—for example, service programmes in schools—than by political scandals in Washington.

In the spirit of the work of Pierson (1993) and Mettler and Soss (2004), this article is intended as a theoretical exploration of the possible links between policy, civil society, and individual participation. It has asked the question, How far can we push the argument for a multi-level model of civic feedbacks? To encourage a research agenda, I have offered a host of hypotheses and arguments, together with theoretical support and empirical evidence for (and in some cases against) their validity. These arguments are meant to provoke thought, reflection, and research, not to offer definitive conclusions.

The prospect that multi-level feedback effects are operating surreptitiously underscores the need for legislators, rule-makers, and other policy-makers to consider the effects that their work can have on American civic life. Although perverse feedback effects cannot always be foreseen or avoided, we are beginning to understand the mechanisms through which policy operates on individuals' orientation towards government. In some respects, the effects on civil society are more direct, visible, and predictable. Given that civic engagement occurs through and as a result of civil society, these effects deserve careful scrutiny.

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Notes

1. Skocpol (1992, 2003) has documented the transcendent effect of wars—a particularly consequential public policy—on the development of voluntary associations and, by extension, the American welfare state.
2. For example, many little girls read the 'Little House' books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, who chronicled the mutual assistance and associationalism of frontier families making their way across the Great Plains in the 1870s and 1880s. Six of the top 50 best-selling children's books through 2000 are in this series, including *Little House on the Prairie* (#12) and *Little House in the Big Woods* (#13); see http://www.infoplease.com/ipea/A0203050.html
3. Foundation Center. 'FC Stats.' http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/statistics/pdf/02_found_growth/2006/04_06.pdf (accessed 25 March 2010).
4. Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. Data available at http://www.jhu.edu/cnp/PDF/figure01.pdf
5. Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. Data available at http://www.jhu.edu/cnp/PDF/figure01.pdf
6. For foundation-giving figures, see *Giving USA 2008*; for foundation population size and assets, see http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/statistics/pdf/02_found_growth/2007/04_07.pdf. Poland's estimated GDP in 2009 was $686.2-billion. GDP rankings are available at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2001rank.html
7. I thank Steven Rathgeb Smith for this observation.
8. Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Projects. Data available at http://www.jhu.edu/cnp/PDF/figure01.pdf
9. An important caveat is in order. The numbers reflect organizations filing informational tax returns with the IRS. Groups earning less than $25,000 per year do not need to file. Because the $25,000 threshold has not changed over time, but the real value of $25,000 declined, it is in essence 'easier' for a charity to clear the reporting threshold now than it was in 1975. A more precise picture of how the sector has evolved would compare the number of $25,000+ charities in 1995 with the number of comparably sized charities in 1975, after accounting for the declining real value of the dollar. Nevertheless, our primary interest here is to compare relative growth *among different types of organizations*, all of which would be affected by the changing real value of the $25,000 threshold. The larger argument illustrated by the table, then, holds.
10. Federal Register, 'Rules and Regulations: Corporation Grant Programs and Support and Investment Activities.' 59 (56), 23 March 1994, 13772. See Sec. 2520.30.
11. These percentages apply to 501(c)(3) organizations that (a) operate under the traditional lobbying rules, as opposed to taking the 'H election' and (b) reported no lobbying on their federal Form 990 informational tax return.
12. S. R. Smith, Personal correspondence with author, 8 April 2010.
13. *Ibid.*
14. I thank Steven Rathgeb Smith for this observation. For an excellent account of the emergence of battered women's shelters, see Schechter (1983).
15. My own study of female-led associations working for gun control in the mid-1970s unearthed women who decades later still felt disparaged by feminism's apparent dismissal of their volunteer work (Goss, 2006).
16. One possible exception was opposition to the war in Vietnam, the one non-feminist issue that the women's movement embraced.

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