A Case Study in Policy Evaluation
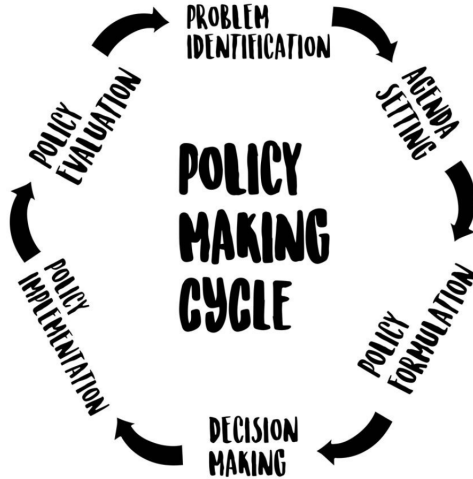
Birkland+ Model of Policy, goals, problems

- Policy Domain: what substantive problems are under consideration? This specifies:
  - The actors involved, official actors who can make decisions + **stakeholders**;
  - **Distribution of benefits/costs** $\Rightarrow$ actor organization, e.g. iron triangle, policy community;
  - The systemic agenda;

- Input-output Model;
  - Actors: **legislature, executive, bureaucrats, justices and the available levers**;
  - Inputs: **agenda setting (application of power/social construction, focusing events, indicator change driven esp by unofficial actors) sets goals**, **determines the causal model**, which specifies the institutional agenda, and leads to the **policies** on the decision agenda;
  - Black box **decision making, timing (incrementalism, punctuated eq) driven by indicators/focusing events**, choice driven by e.g. median voter thm, Arrow's thm;
    - Round 1: **works on decision agenda**, leads to outputs (e.g. statute laws, rules, court decisions);
    - Round 2: **Implementation**, leads to outcomes;

- Outcomes: **Feedback from failure and success**, learning leads to iteration and updates.

Learning

- Single loop learning: optimizing and adjusting policy;

- Double loop learning: optimizing/adjusting fundamental values/logic that leads to policy;

- Instrumental policy learning: effectiveness of policy tools;

- Social policy learning: causes of problems;

- Political learning: better arguments in policy debates.

Purpose of the paper:

- The GI bill (i.e. Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) was a large scale social entitlement program funded by federal government:
  - Access to higher education;
  - Access to vocational training;
  - Unemployment benefits (20/52);
  - Access to home ownership (low interest no downpayment mortgages);

- 51% of all returning veterans – about 7.8 million people – took advantage of it;
  - 2.2 million college attendees;
  - 5.6 million vocational/on-the-job training;

- Mettler's question: **did it work**? Does it:
  - promote citizen involvement in democracy (e.g. give something back effect or incorporation)?
  - discourage citizen involvement in democracy (e.g. we've got what we need to we're out)?
  - generate only social and economic effects?

What is policy feedback?

- **Policy feedback** is a theoretical idea – that policies can change political participation which can then change policy-making;

- So what evidence is there for these sorts of feedback effects?
    - Farmers vote at higher rates (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980);
    - SS/medicare beneficiaries get involved at higher rates (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993);

- What mechanisms explain variation in effects?
    - Program clients learn from the particular program they interact with $\Rightarrow$ distinct rules create distinct effects (Soss 1999);
    - Client background varies systematically with program (Campbell 2000).

Mettler's Theory

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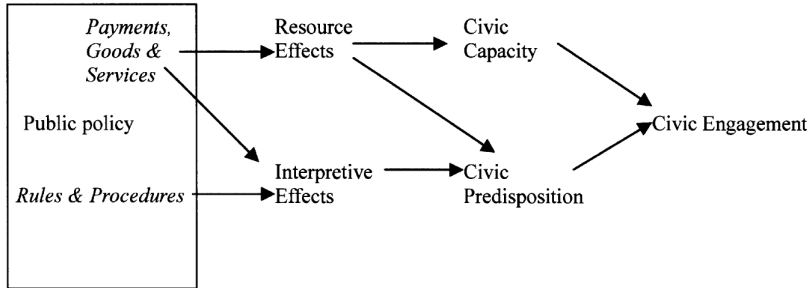
Testing the model

- Hypotheses from existing theories about GI bill:
  - **Preexisting characteristics** – omitted variables, other things cause both participation and program use;
  - **By-product explanation** – policy design is irrelevant, education promotes participation;
  - **Passivity explanation** – beneficiaries exhibit lower levels of involvement in public life than those who did not rely on government benefits to fund their education;

- Mettler's policy feedback model: GI bill had resource and incentive effects that increased participation:
  - **Reciprocity explanation** – a sense of giving back, e.g. in comparison to WWI vets;
  - **Critical effects explanation** – G.I. Bill incorporated less advantaged citizens more fully;

- Research design:
  - Mail survey to 1000 vets (four units, two Army and two Air Force) including questions on participation, military service, GI bill use, occupation, demographics;
  - Dependent variable: civic group membership (e.g. Lions clubs, PTA), political participation (e.g. campaign work, contributions).

Testing the model: results

- Participation $\neq$ SEC $\Rightarrow$ Preexisting characteristics insufficient;

- Participation $\neq$ Education $\Rightarrow$ by-product insufficient;

- Effect of GI bill positive $\Rightarrow$ passivity insufficient;

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		

Testing the model: results

- Participation $\neq$ SEC $\Rightarrow$ Preexisting characteristics insufficient;

- Participation $\neq$ Education $\Rightarrow$ by-product insufficient;

- Effect of GI bill positive $\Rightarrow$ passivity insufficient;

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		

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

Testing the model: reciprocity vs critical effects

- Nearly all respondents viewed military service as civic obligation and therefore GI bill as a privilege not a right;

- Respondents did not view GI bill use as obligating them to give back in a transactional sense;

- Results suggest reciprocity an explanation for civic membership but not political participation.

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		

Testing the model: reciprocity

- Nearly all respondents viewed military service as civic obligation and therefore GI bill as a privilege not a right;

- Respondents did not view GI bill use as obligating them to give back in a transactional sense;

- Results suggest reciprocity an explanation for civic membership but not political participation.

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		

Testing the model: critical effects

- Targeted resource effects: educational benefits were most consequential for those from low/moderate SEC (Yes);

- Targeted interpretive effects: bestowing dignity via equal treatment (Yes);

- Mettler: sign/sig on interaction term $\Rightarrow$ critical effects increased participation.

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		

Testing the model: critical effects

- Targeted resource effects: educational benefits were most consequential for those from low/moderate SEC (Yes);

- Targeted interpretive effects: bestowing dignity via equal treatment (Yes);

- Mettler: sign/sig on interaction term $\Rightarrow$ critical effects increased participation.

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		

Conclusion

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.

Some Critiques...

- Sampled units/time means only certain types enter the sample, e.g. segregation/age:
  - Excluded populations correlated with GI Bill use and civic engagement $\Rightarrow$ estimates are wrong;
  - Example: older people less likely to use GI Bill and more likely to participate in civic engagement $\Rightarrow$ overestimate of GI Bill effect;

- Differential death rates:
  - GI Bill users are overrepresented in sample;
  - Example: wealth improves lifespan, friendships (civic engagement) improve lifespan, so you might undersample poor, nonengaged people $\Rightarrow$ underestimate of GI bill effect;

- Time slice effect of GI bill:
  - Participation in civic groups at all time high immediately post WWII;
  - Effect of GI Bill on civic participation might look very different depending on time period.

More Critiques...

- Choice of variables to include is arbitrary – ≥ 64 models possible for Table 1;

- Endeogeneity – what if participation causes one or more of the explanatory variables? e.g. civic engagement or political activity could cause changes in 1960 standard of living $\Rightarrow$ estimate of variable effects will be wrong;

- Model functional form misspecification (e.g. regression instead of a count model);

- Omitted Variables – e.g. civic memberships as an explanatory variable for table 2.