

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

Authored by Suzanne Mettler

Presented by Enfa George



1. **Motivation**
2. **Research question**
3. **Literature or theory.**
4. **Case context**
5. **Drawing a Conclusion**

Motivation

American Civic Engagement peaked in 20th century. *Why did that happen?*

Was it because of *uptick in government sponsored social opportunities* or is this just a coincidence?

If not, how did the government programs encourage people to be more active citizens?

We know very little about **how major social programs have shaped civic participation.**

How did the G.I. Bill's educational provisions affect veterans' participation in civic organizations and political activities during the postwar era?

The G.I. Bill significantly **increased** veterans' civic and political participation, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, by enhancing their civic capacity and predisposition for involvement.

This effect stems from both the resources provided by the program and its design as a universal, non-stigmatizing policy

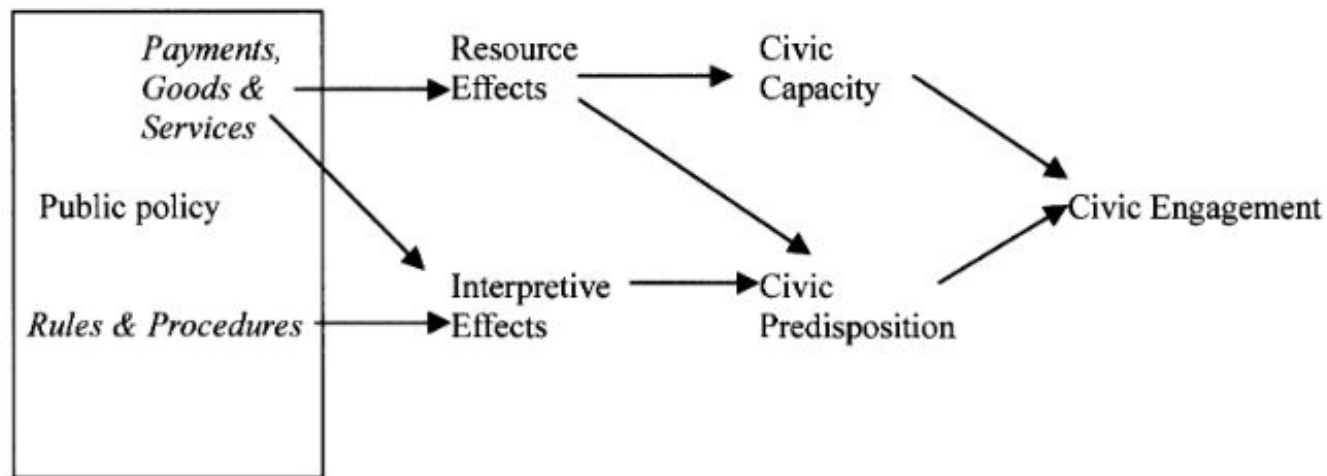
Literature/ Theory

Policy Feedback Approach views public policy as an independent variable with consequences for politics.

Two dynamics:

1. Resource effects → How the resources and incentives that policies provide shape patterns of behaviour
2. Interpretive effects → How policies convey meanings and information to citizens

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



Hypothesizing Effects of G.I Bill : Previous Theories

Preexisting characteristics :

Any differences in the participation levels of program users and nonusers must emanate from endogenous factors, differences in the prior personal attributes and experiences of those from each group.

In this case : Bills educational provisions was likely used by people from better socio-economic background. Hence increased civic participation.

Hypothesizing Effects of G.I Bill : Previous Theories

Byproduct:

The goods or services rendered through public programs have effects on participation but considers policy design to be irrelevant to such outcomes.

In this case : Higher education tends to lead to higher civic participation. GI bills provides a means to obtain higher education, the policy design had nothing to do with the civic participation.

Hypothesizing Effects of G.I Bill : Previous Theories

Passivity Explanation:

Social programs are responsible for undermining active participation.

Data Collection

Participants were sourced from members list of major veteran organisations.

Quantitative

- 716 respondents to written survey
- 10 page survey asked detailed questions on background such as education, standard of living etc

Qualitative

28 participants for in-depth, open-ended interviews.

Data Collection

Independent Variable :

Usage of GI Bill for Education.

Dependent Variable :

1. Civic participation
2. Political participation.

Modeling Variables

Civic Participation

Sum of each individuals memberships in four organisation types

- i. Fraternal groups
- ii. Neighbourhood or homeowners associations,
- iii. PTA or school support groups
- iv. Other civic organizations.

Political Participation

Composite of participation in a range of political activities between 1950 and 1964.

- i. Joining political organizations.
- ii. Contacting officials to voice concerns.
- iii. Volunteering for election campaigns.
- iv. Serving on local government boards or councils.
- v. Donating to candidates, parties, or supporting organizations.
- vi. Participating in protests, marches, or demonstrations.

Rate of joining political engagement

- People who used the provisions joined more civic organizations than those who didn't.
- Veterans with civically active parents were more likely to join organizations (as was expected).
- Education level and living standards in the 1960s also encouraged participation.
- Childhood socioeconomic factors had little impact on membership.

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

Variable	<i>b</i>	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		

Rate of joining civic engagement

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

Variable	<i>b</i>	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		

- People who used the provisions joined more political organizations than those who didn't.
- Veterans with politically active parents were more likely to join organizations (as was expected).
- Education level and standard of living had very little effect on participation.
- Childhood socioeconomic factors had no impact on membership.

Policy Feedback : The Reciprocity Thesis

Is it true that

G.I. Bill fostered among beneficiaries a sense of obligation that led to higher levels of civic participation?

Policy Feedback : The Reciprocity Thesis

Veterans saw GI Bill as privilege and not a right.

Question : Indicate, on a four-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), their level of agreement with the statement,

**"It is fair to say that after benefiting from the G.I. Bill,
I felt I owed something back to American society."**

Avg : 2.9 ~ Agree

Policy Feedback : The Reciprocity Thesis

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

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

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

Variable	<i>b</i>	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		

Reciprocity model offers a partial explanation for civic engagement but not political engagement

Policy Feedback : The Critical Effects Thesis

Is it true that

G.I. Bill had a pronounced impact on civic engagement among veterans from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds?

Policy Feedback : The Critical Effects Thesis

"If the G.I. Bill or Public Law 16 had not existed, I could not have afforded the education or job training that I acquired after military service."

Responses were coded 1 to 4

Policy Feedback : The Critical Effects Thesis

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

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

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

**The lower the veteran's standard of living in the 1920s,
the greater the likelihood that he agreed or strongly agreed**

Policy Feedback : The Critical Effects Thesis

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

Variable	<i>b</i>	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		

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

The G.I. Bill had its greatest impact on participation levels among veterans from low to moderate socioeconomic backgrounds.

Policy Feedback : The Critical Effects Thesis

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

Variable	<i>b</i>	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
<i>R</i> ²	0.14		
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.12		
Sample size	393		

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

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

Variable	<i>b</i>	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
<i>R</i> ²	0.11		
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.09		
Sample size	379		

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

The G.I. Bill had its greatest impact on participation levels among veterans from low to moderate socioeconomic backgrounds.

Conclusion

The G.I. Bill, through its universality and ease of access, not only provided resources but also promoted a sense of civic obligation, leading to increased civic engagement among veterans, especially those from less privileged backgrounds.