

Policy Effects on Political Engagement

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Abstract

Public policies addressing societal problems typically aim to change citizens' behaviors and attitudes. While scholars frequently link cross-national differences in specific policies with individuals' attitudinal or behavioral outcomes, the specific operating mechanisms often remain veiled. The policy feedback literature provides an explanatory framework for how policies affect citizens' political orientations and behavior, which in turn has an impact on subsequent policy developments. This article provides an overview of policy feedback mechanisms, and reviews comparative empirical studies that link policy indicators and forms of individual-level political engagement. As illustrative examples, I have focused on social policies and immigrant integration policies as two widely-publicized policy areas. Since the identification of policy effects is challenging for a number of methodological reasons, I also discuss advances related to empirical design.

Keywords

Policy feedback; welfare state; social policy; immigrant integration policy; political engagement; political support

1 Introduction

Public policy can be defined as the outcome of political processes designed and implemented in order to address societal problems. Policymakers have an interest in the effectiveness of the policies that they implement, and thus try to anticipate the specific functioning and potential effects at the policy design stage (Knill and Tonsun 2012). For example, the enactment of smoking bans in the German *Länder* (states) in the mid-to-late 2000s aimed to protect workers in bars and restaurants from second-hand smoking and its deleterious effects on health. Empirical evaluations of the effectiveness of these policies indeed find evidence of improved health among non-smokers in states where smoking has been restricted in public areas, bars, and restaurants (Kuehnle and Wunder 2017). Whether intended or not, anti-smoking policies may also shape public opinion towards smokers. Pacheco (2013) finds that people in U.S. States which have implemented smoking bans (compared to those that have not) began to view second-hand smoking as more harmful and to regard smokers in increasingly negative terms. These changes in attitudes also yielded an effect on how receptive people were towards additional smoking restrictions. The way that various policies influence (political) attitudes and behaviors of individuals and interest groups, which then shape subsequent courses of policy development, is the central topic of the policy feedback literature (Campbell 2012; Mettler and Soss 2004).

This article examines how public policies influence people's political engagement, which includes policy-related attitudes, attitudes towards the political system, and political behavior such as voting. I have focused specifically on the following overarching questions: Through which mechanisms do policies affect political engagement? What conditions can be identified that reinforce or attenuate a policy impact on political engagement? Do policies affect target populations only, or the general public as well? And, how best to empirically assess policy

effects in comparative research? To illustrate these questions substantially, I focus on two policy areas that are highly publicized and can be convincingly linked to public preferences. First, I focus on social welfare policies and social security programs and relate them to the political engagement of both target groups and members of the general population. Welfare is one of most frequently studied policy areas, as corresponding social policy measures usually have a direct impact on citizens' needs and resources. Moreover, changes in social policies are widely publicized through political debate and media coverage, and a high degree of visibility enhances the potential for linking changes in policy with changes in citizens' behaviors and attitudes (Campbell 2012, p. 338).

As a second policy area, this review looks at immigrant integration policies which regulate immigrants' rights and access to participate in economic, political, cultural, and social life. Immigrant integration is a critical and timely topic that has engendered extensive empirical research on the potential for governing integration outcomes. Moreover, immigrant integration is an issue that is symbolically charged and has been widely publicized. Again, this enables the study of policy effects on both immigrants, as the target group, and the general public.

In terms of theoretical framework, I draw on the policy feedback approach and related arguments (Campbell 2012; Mettler and Soss 2004). Policy feedback posits that enacted policies influence citizens' attitudes and behaviors, which in turn "feed back" (sometimes also referred to as "feed forward" to emphasize temporal ordering) to influence subsequent courses of policy formulation and implementation. Hence, policy and citizens' attitudes and behaviors are explicitly considered to influence each other in reciprocal causal processes. While this is a theoretically plausible assumption, reversed causality represents a source of endogeneity that should be taken into account in research designs, as it potentially biases the results from empirical models.

In the remainder of the article, I first outline the theoretical framework (Chapter 2). Second, I summarize and discuss findings from comparative studies that inform debates on how policy relates to political engagement (Chapter 3). The article concludes by discussing methodological issues of comparative research and potential advancements.

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1 Theories of Political Engagement

Political engagement can be broadly defined as cognitive and emotional involvement in political matters, which manifests itself in individual political interest, political knowledge, political opinions, or political attitudes (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014, p. 6). In broad conceptualizations (e.g. Zukin et al. 2006), political engagement also encompasses forms of political participation which refers to citizens' actions aimed at influencing decisions of public representatives and officials (Brady 1999, p. 738; Verba et al. 2002). Specifically, this includes voting,¹ running for office, contacting politicians, membership in political and civic organizations, and non-conventional activities such as protesting. Applying a broad definition of political engagement entailing both attitudinal and behavioral dimensions is also suitable for a review of existing studies that differ in conceptual terms.

As explanatory approaches of political engagement, sociological, psychological, economic, and political theories can be distinguished (Druckman and Lupia 2000; Norris 2002). According to traditional sociological accounts, individual political orientations and participation are explained by people's positioning within a social structure and the influence of social networks (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948). If group interests and communication processes in social networks shape political views, then patterns of political engagement should be largely homoge-

¹ For determinants of electoral participation from the perspective of comparative political systems see also the chapters by Spies/Franzmann and Schmitt-Beck in this Special Issue.

neous within social groups, while cleavages predominantly exist between groups. Moreover, societal transformation processes (e.g. modernization, expanding educational opportunities, value change, or digitalization) have become increasingly relevant factors in explaining why and how citizens participate (Inglehart 1997; Welzel and Dalton 2014). The psychological perspective on political attitudes and behavior emphasizes the relevance of individual differences, including personality traits, education, partisan identification, and political efficacy (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960). Similarly, economic accounts conceptualize political preferences and participation as a product of individual choices, driven by self-interest, as well as rational and goal-directed behavior (Downs 1957; but see Sears and Funk 1991).

Political theories focus on the role of political institutions, organized interests, mobilization, and communications flows. A number of accounts argue that mobilization by political organizations and social groups critically determines individuals' political behavior (Verba et al. 2002). Over and above this, political actors and organizations influence political views by determining the framing of issues and communication flows that citizens receive (Nelson and Kinder 1996, Zaller 1992). The key point propounded by political accounts is that political engagement does not simply emerge from individual characteristics or social group membership, but is essentially shaped by political processes and how they are received by the public (Dalton 2014; Druckman and Lupia 2016). Such political processes refer not only to institutional rules, expressive government actions, political communication flows, mobilization efforts on the part of political actors, but also policies that implement incentives and sanctions, or convey informational content.

2.2 Classic Accounts of Policy Feedback

According to common conceptualizations, politics refers to the process that determines “who gets what, when, how” (Lasswell 1936). Policies are outcomes of politics, while the term polity refers to structural aspects of a political system and its power relations. The basic idea of policy feedback is that policies not only represent a result of politics, but also have the potential to transform the political process and thus affect subsequent courses of policy development. In short, the policy feedback literature investigates how “new policies create new politics” (Schattschneider 1935). Policies may create feedback by affecting elites and bureaucrats, mass publics, as well as specific target groups. Mechanisms through which policy effects operate include the restructuring of authority and power relations, the redistribution of resources, and the informational or normative reframing of preferences and identities.

Classic work on policy feedback has largely focused on the ways in which social policies and social security programs generate constituencies of supporters, which in turn affect subsequent policy development. In *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, Theda Skocpol (1992) examined welfare provision from a historical perspective, showing that nineteenth and early twentieth century social programs for veterans and women in the U.S. had a strong impact on subsequent developments in social welfare. In his seminal study entitled *Dismantling the Welfare State*, Pierson (1994) shows that attempts towards welfare retrenchment under the Reagan Administration in the U.S. provoked considerable mobilization among senior citizens who were opposed to scaling back pensions. Consequently, social security measures related to pensions remained largely intact. In contrast, cutbacks in the UK pension system under Thatcher were more easily accomplished, given that it was fragmented into different programs. This meant that retrenchment was not opposed by a well-organized group of beneficiaries. An important lesson to be learned from Pierson’s classic work is that each policy cre-

ates its own constraints on change by virtue of its specific structure.² This implies that, in order for policy to change, the support (or opposition) of citizens plays a critical role – in addition to the support of public officials and interest groups, and beyond mere path dependency (i.e. costs associated with policy shifts). Programs that create sufficient support among beneficiaries are likely to be left in place or even expanded, while those that do not do so might be cut.

As operating mechanisms, Pierson identifies resource distribution and symbolic politics as two major drivers in garnering public support for policies as well as political engagement. Resource effects refer to redistributive elements of specific policies and to the material self-interest of individuals and groups that benefit from them. Symbolic or interpretative effects refer to the informational and normative content of policies that influences people's attitudes and behavior. Pierson's study focuses on the retrenchment of social policies, and represents a theoretical framework rather than a comprehensive system-level theory. Nonetheless, the specified feedback conditions and mechanisms linking policy and citizens' behaviors and attitudes go far beyond earlier system approaches such as Easton's diagram of the political system. Moreover, it is a simple task to transfer the policy feedback approach to policy areas other than welfare. In this vein, Pierson's work has inspired numerous studies investigating how various policies affect preferences, demands, and the political involvement of citizens and organized interest groups (see Larsen 2018; Mettler and Soss 2004; Mettler 2015 as overviews).

² Similar conclusions were reached by Campbell (2003), who focused on age-related programs and senior citizens' political activation.

2.3 Mechanisms Linking Policy and Political Engagement

A first pathway through which policies influence citizens' political attitudes and behavior is *resource effects*. Policy enforcement mechanisms include financial incentives, payments, fines and penalties, and changes in taxation that alter the distribution of goods and services, but also burdens. Individuals who gain material profit from a policy that is implemented are expected to become interested in how to secure benefits beyond future policy change, and thus in political affairs more generally. For example, the introduction or expansion of a pension system increases the availability of financial resources for senior citizens. This, in turn, shapes their perception of government being responsive to their needs, while at the same time they become politically active when policy retrenchment may threaten their gains (Campbell 2012). As another example, training programs for the long-term unemployed may improve their work-related skills and chances of re-employment, which would then equip them with resources and improve their political efficacy and political engagement (Soss 1999). Following this line of reasoning, material resource effects have been related to citizens' political orientations and behavior (e.g. trust in institutions, satisfaction with government, and political participation), beliefs about social justice, and group-based attitudes about deservingness (Mettler and Soss 2004).

Second, laws and policies may affect citizens by conveying information and normative cues, usually labeled as *interpretive effects* (also symbolic or cognitive effects) (Pierson 1994). Individuals who are exposed to policy content may not only become engaged because of material gain, but also because policies signal that government addresses citizens' concerns. Rather than material interest, here, the main driver is the experience of government being responsive and elevating one's status. This makes individuals more likely to respond with a sense of duty and obligation, which in turn facilitates political activation, political support, and civic engagement. As an example, Mettler (2002) shows that veterans receiving welfare

benefits through the G.I. Bill³ not only profit in terms of monetary resources, but also change the perception of their social status and how government values their contributions.

Third, policy content may operate at the aggregate level as *social norms* signaling socially-acceptable and rewarding behaviors. For example, an indoor smoking ban can shape social norms with regard to smoking, and breaching this norm imposes not only a law-induced sanction (e.g. payment of a fine), but also brings on social disapproval and reputational damage as social consequences. A potential pathway through which policies shape social norms is framing and messaging in public debates and mass media content. Politicians express their support for or opposition to specific policy measures on a regular basis. Moreover, symbolic language use identifies and defines public images of societal groups and their deservingness (Stewart 2012). Socially-shared stereotypes and group-related stigmatization have real-life consequences for the self-perception of target groups and intergroup relations more generally. The social construction of target populations also affects the distribution of benefits and burdens in policy designs, as well as how members of social groups are treated by public officials (Schneider and Ingram 1993).

Fourth, *recent debates* on policy feedback mechanisms examine, for example, the degree to which policy designs motivate self-interest versus collective aims (Jacobs and Mettler 2018). As another example, studies on the link between policy and citizens' policy support have mostly focused on self-reinforcing feedback processes (i.e. positive feedback). That is, the resource or interpretive content of a policy fosters constituents' policy support, which in turn leads to policy stability or expansion. More recently, possible self-undermining effects in which policy support reduces over time have been studied more extensively (i.e. negative feedback). A basic explanation for negative feedback is that policies simply fulfill their in-

³ G.I. refers to soldiers in the United States Army. The G.I. bill (enacted as "Servicemen's Readjustment Act" of 1944) regulated a broad range of benefits for returning World War II veterans, such as compensational payments in the case of unemployment.

tended purpose, which leads to eroding public demand.⁴ Alternatively, burdens and unexpected losses, or the salience of alternative policies, may undermine public support for specific policies over time (Jacobs and Weaver 2015). Looking at a policy-opinion link as a function of time, short- and long-term effect may even diverge in such a way that the introduction of a policy stimulates opposition in the short term, which then turns into policy support in the long run (e.g. Naumann 2014).

2.4 Conditions of Policy Feedback

Policy effects might vary considerably across groups or political circumstances (Patashnik and Zelizer 2013). A broad approach to conditional policy feedback is to distinguish group-specific and mass public effects, depending on the scope and range of policy designs. *Group-specific effects* refer to a policy-induced change in orientations and behaviors of target groups. Depending on their degree of power and their social construction, Schneider and Ingram (1993) distinguish between four types of target groups. Groups that are advantaged have a relatively large amount of power and a positive social reputation; contenders are high in power, but negatively constructed; dependents are low in power, but rather positively constructed; and deviants have a low level of power and a negative public image. At the stage of policy design, the advantaged typically receive mostly benefits from a policy and few burdens. Contenders receive medium benefits and few (but highly visible) burdens. Dependents receive limited benefits and few but typically hidden burdens, while deviants receive limited to no benefits and a high share of burdens. According to this classification, the amount of power and the public image of a target group operate as conditions of policy feedback, which already

⁴ This argument is highlighted in public opinion research, such as on the thermostatic model of representation (Wlezien 1995), according to which public demands signal governments about desired policies. Policies meeting public demand then lead to an adjustment of public preferences, and would ultimately result in a long-term equilibrium of representation (e.g. Brooks and Manza 2006; Page and Shapiro 1983).

determines the design and outputs of policy measures and thus yields consequences for potential policy feedback effects.

With regard to *mass public effects*, Soss and Schram (2007) categorize policies according to the dimensions of proximity and visibility in a four-field matrix.⁵ Visibility describes the degree to which a policy is salient to the public. Political communication flows and mass media coverage are important determinants for making policy content more visible. Proximity refers to citizens' exposure to policy measures, either directly as personal experience, or indirectly via social networks or social contexts in which individuals are embedded. The more individuals and groups of a society are (potentially) affected by policy measures, the higher is the proximity of a policy. If visibility and proximity are both low, there are likely to be no policy effects on citizens' behaviors and attitudes. Under high visibility and low proximity, policy effects are likely to occur through political communication in the mass media. If both visibility and proximity are high, effects on citizens' behaviors and attitudes are likely to be driven by both media discourse and personal experience, whereas low visibility and high proximity heighten the role of personal experience (cf. Hedegaard and Larsen 2014, p. 272). Figure 1 summarizes how the conditions of proximity and visibility relate to feedback effects, and lists some illustrative policy examples.

-[Figure 1 about here]-

Additional conditions emphasized in empirical studies include attributes of persons (e.g. political interest, socio-economic status, and political sophistication), individual performance evaluations of policy measures, and contextual factors (e.g. political accountability, political alternatives, institutions, administrative efficiency, and economic contexts) (cf. Kumlin and

⁵ There are many other ways to classify policies, for example according to their consequences (e.g. generating costs and benefits) or governance principles (see Knill and Tosun 2012, Chapter 2). Nonetheless, the dimensions of visibility and proximity appear to be particularly useful when studying policy effects on citizens.

Stadelmann-Steffen 2014). To what extent the single factors attenuate or amplify political attitudes and participation depends on the specific processes under study. For example, political interest may contribute to people's opinion formation through gathering information on enacted policies. Whether this results in positive or negative evaluations then hinges upon additional characteristics such as the benefits expected to ensue from a respective policy measure.

2.5 Methodological Issues

In an overview of the state of the policy feedback literature, Mettler (2015) identifies a number of methodological limitations. First, empirical studies on policy feedback largely focus on social welfare policies, and should be extended to cover a wider range of public policies. Second, previous studies mainly look at the policy impact among groups targeted by policy design. However, the question of whether policies yield effects on other societal groups and the general public should receive more attention. For example, policies may induce unintended consequences by heightening perceptions of deprivation of groups that compete for benefits with a target group. Third, greater methodological sophistication should improve causal inference from empirical models testing policy feedback assumptions. One important issue in this regard is selection, meaning that people with specific political orientations opt into particular social security programs due to underlying and unobserved characteristics, which would obscure causal inference of program participation on political attitudes. What is more, the concept of policy feedback posits that policies generate constituencies of supporters that in turn affect subsequent courses of policy development. This implies processes of reciprocal causality where policies and public opinion affect each other. This might even reflect the political reality better than an uni-directional model would. However, reverse causality potentially bi-

ases statistical results from analyses of observational data, especially if these data are cross-sectional. Specifically, regression analysis typically assumes exogeneity of predictor variables (Verbeek 2004). This assumption might be violated through omitted variables or reciprocal causation leading to biased estimates. In terms of methodological advancement, an increasing number of studies address issues that are related to selection and reciprocal causality by using longitudinal and experimental designs (e.g. Bechtel et al. 2017; Häusermann et al. 2018; Ziller and Helbling 2017).

3. Review of Empirical Studies

The review of empirical studies focuses on social policies (3.1) and immigrant integration policies (3.2). Both policy areas are suitable for illustrating policy effects on citizens' political engagement because they are characterized by high visibility through media discourse and public debate.⁶ Integration policies are symbolically charged due to high levels of immigration into Western societies. Moreover, welfare measures such as unemployment protection, healthcare, and pensions, affect large segments of society, and thus have a high level of proximity. Within these areas of research, I have selected empirical studies that (i) link policy and individuals' political engagement,⁷ (ii) apply a comparative (cross-national) research design, and (iii) have attracted scholarly interest as indicated by a comparatively large number of citations (per-year average). To illustrate different mechanisms of policy feedback, the selected studies cover policy effects on both target populations and the general population. Rather than providing a broad-brush overview of as many studies as possible, the aim is for the selected studies to conjointly inform central debates on how (social welfare and immigrant integration) policy measures are linked to political engagement.

⁶ Larsen (2018) provides an empirical review of feedback effects and also discusses policies other than welfare and immigrant integration.

⁷ This includes policy-specific attitudes, general political support, as well as forms of political behavior.

3.1 Social Policies

Social (welfare) policies are designed and implemented to address social problems related to unemployment, poverty, family instability, inadequate healthcare, and the needs of the elderly. Depending on the range and scope of welfare systems, this includes the taxation and redistribution of wealth, labor market policies, policies and insurance related to health, family services, education, and pensions. A large number of studies investigating social policy effects have been conducted in the U.S. context (e.g. Campbell 2003; Mettler 2002; Soss 1999) or single European countries (Svallfors 1997). As a focal point, these works look at how participation in social security programs relates to participants' political support and engagement. While single-country studies typically compare outcomes of individuals' participating in different programs, comparative cross-national studies use coarsened (and thus comparative) policy indicators such as social spending (see Larsen 2018 as an overview). Kumlin and Haugsgjerd's (2017) literature review on the welfare state and political trust reveals that many comparative studies examine macro-economic country determinants (e.g. income inequality or economic growth) of political orientations, but only few investigate the role of specific social policies.

The following review covers studies addressing implications of social policy design (e.g. means-tested *versus* universal) for target groups (3.1.1). Another central debate refers to how welfare state generosity affects political support among the general public, and what role is played by anticipated benefits and costs (3.1.2).

3.1.1 Social Policy and the Role of Policy Design

Social policies and social security programs typically concern the redistribution of resources, and can be classified as means-tested or universal policies, depending on whether they aim at the entitlement of particular target groups or are widely accessible. Countries with largely means-tested or low-income-targeting welfare programs produce relatively small constituencies of beneficiaries compared to countries with universalistic measures. Since broad middle-class political support is necessary for large-scale income redistribution, countries with selective welfare measures tend to produce greater poverty and inequality than universalistic ones do – a phenomenon that has become known as the “paradox of redistribution” (Korpi and Palme 1998). Although the prevalence of this paradox has recently been contested (Brady and Bostic 2015), studies suggest that – at the level of specific programs – participants in means-tested programs respond with political inactivity rather than activation, compared to those in universal programs (Mettler 2002; Soss 1999).

In addition to the distributional characteristic of whether programs are designed as universal or means-tested, another important dimension is the degree of conditionality. Conditional programs contain a direct or indirect prescription of how to behave, and a violation of rules affects the provision of welfare. In such programs, caseworkers become paternalistic supervisors that oversee the fulfillment of obligations and enforce sanctions in case of violation (e.g. benefit reduction or removal). Bruch et al. (2010) present longitudinal empirical evidence that the authority-client relations of social security programs affect the political participation of clients in the U.S. context: The more paternalist the program, the stronger the negative effects on political participation. In contrast, in programs with a low degree of paternalism, low-income groups become more engaged in civic and political activities. These results suggest that it is authority-client relations within programs that are the critical triggers, and not the question of whether a program is means tested (e.g. it targets the poor) or universal. Focusing

on underlying mechanisms, Watson (2015) examines longitudinal evidence on beneficiaries of conditional social security programs in the United Kingdom. She finds that conditional programs suppress political participation, political interest, and political efficacy, whereas rights-based programs tend to foster political activation. Watson also finds suggestive evidence that the negative effect of conditionality is mitigated for programs that are universal rather than means tested.

Shifting the focus from specific program structures to the institutional and societal context of policy implementation, Jordan (2013) examines institutional bases of welfare state support for the policy areas healthcare, pensions, and unemployment. Linking indicators of inclusiveness (e.g. proportion of the population covered) and survey measures of social policy support, the author finds a positive and robust association when comparing 17 Western countries. Highly-inclusive welfare regimes thus appear to generate broader segments of supporters compared to redistributive or means-tested ones, which in turn is associated with higher levels of specific and general support for social policies.

Rehm et al. (2012) analyze how societal configurations affect welfare state support. Specifically, the authors argue that levels of welfare support are lower and more polarized in countries where low income and unemployment risks are strongly correlated (compared to contexts in which these factors are less closely related). The reason is that when risks are concentrated among the poor, this will shrink the circle of beneficiaries (and thus supporters) to a rather small societal segment. Using comparative macro data for 13 European countries and a survey conducted in the U.S., the authors find lower levels of welfare support in contexts with highly-interrelated disadvantage (i.e. low income) and risk (i.e. unemployment risk). Although not explicitly tested by Rehm et al., it is plausible to assume that policies addressing economic disadvantage or individual risks may contribute, at least to some extent, towards broadening the basis of welfare support among the general population.

3.1.2 Social Policy Effects Among the General Public

While universal social policies affect large segments of a society, means-tested programs are less relevant for the general population in terms of personal experience. Nevertheless, support for social policies related to health, age, and unemployment, can also be expected to ensue from individuals who are currently not benefiting, because they anticipate relying on them in the future (Andersen 1992). In other words, there should be substantially high levels of welfare state support also among the general population, while at the same time cost-benefit considerations might be relevant, especially among those who shoulder a disproportionately large share of the costs. In a similar vein, Van Oorschot et al. (2012) examine the relationship between welfare state generosity (measured as social spending) and citizens' welfare state evaluations in Europe. The authors argue that the degree of welfare state generosity not only leads to perceptions of positive effects (e.g. mitigation of individual risks, reduction of poverty, etc.), but that it also increases awareness of possible negative consequences (e.g. higher tax burden). As research design, the authors use multilevel models relating national social spending and individual-level outcomes to positive social consequences (e.g. poverty reduction), negative economic consequences (e.g. place strain on economy), and negative moral consequences (e.g. make people lazy). The results show systematic positive associations between social expenditures and all three outcomes, with the effect being greater for positive than for negative consequences, meaning that positive consequences in high spending contexts appear to outweigh negative implications.

Giger (2012) investigates the link between social policy retrenchment and government support. Drawing on the policy feedback literature, and assuming that social policies are largely popular, cutbacks should increase government unpopularity. Moreover, this should be particularly the case for individuals who regard welfare as a salient and important political issue. She tests these arguments by linking respondents' ratings of the performance of the incumbent

government (obtained from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems) with welfare cut-backs in pensions, unemployment benefits, and healthcare (obtained from data about welfare reforms from the International Social Security Association database). Using Bayesian multi-level regression models on 19 elections (18 OECD countries), the author finds no systematic average relationships among the general population. However, when looking at respondents who state that welfare is an important issue, pension and healthcare retrenchment are systematically related to lower government ratings.

Kumlin (2014) focuses on degrees of generosity of unemployment benefits and their predictive capacity for citizens' satisfaction with democracy. Comparing 11 Western countries over five points in time, the author finds support for a positive link between generosity and satisfaction with democracy. Moreover, high levels of unemployment or high salience of unemployment as a political issue attenuates the relationship. This hints at the role played by visible costs as a conditioning factor of policy feedback, especially when looking at the general public. With regard to individual risk factors, Gingrich and Ansell (2012) focus on employment protection legislation as moderator of the link between individuals' experiences of labor market risks and welfare state support. Using survey data on 19 OECD countries, respondents' social policy support in the areas of unemployment protection, healthcare, and industrial aid serve as outcome variables. Education and occupation-related skills serve as individual-level indicators of unemployment risk. Results from multilevel regression models show significant negative interactions between individual risk factors and employment protection policy. This indicates that social protection policies diminish the relevance of individuals' risk as a determinant of policy preferences. Alternatively, the results can also be interpreted in such a way that employment protection laws increase social policy support particularly for those who potentially profit from them (i.e. people with few skills or without higher education), while these laws are less conducive for those with low individual risks.

3.1.3 Summary of Core Results

The review of empirical studies focused on the role of social policy design and implications for target groups and the general public (see Table 1 as an overview). Apart from the distinction between means-tested and universal social policies, a number of studies emphasize the critical role of conditional *versus* rights-based elements of policy design as well as authority-client relations that shape recipients' political engagement. In terms of broader public policy support, the societal distribution of risks and the degree of inclusiveness (i.e. proximity) appear to operate as conditioning factors.

The reviewed studies on mass public effects included both institutional, structural, and individual factors as conditions of how social policy relates to political engagement. At the same time, social policies not only produce beneficiaries, they also imply costs for taxpayers. Applying the argument of self-interest, citizens should take into account (potential) benefits and anticipated costs. The studies reviewed tend to provide empirical support for the relevance of both cost evaluation (e.g. Van Oorschot et al. 2012; Jordan 2013; Kumlin 2014) and anticipated benefits in terms of societal and individual configurations and risk factors (e.g. Gingrich and Ansell 2012; Rehm et al. 2012). Furthermore, sociotropic *versus* altruistic orientations of citizens may reflect additional factors that condition social policy effects on political engagement (Jacobs and Mettler 2018).

In terms of methodology, the selected studies specify macro-micro hypotheses, and partly tackle potential methodological shortcomings. Studies comparing participants across different policy programs are potentially plagued by selection bias, meaning that, for example, people who are politically inactive opt into paternalistic welfare programs due to unobserved characteristics. The two reviewed studies on program participation applied longitudinal data methods in order to minimize this concern. For studies applying cross-national comparisons, unobserved heterogeneity between countries is a serious concern of potential bias. Even studies

using multiple time points do not always control for time-constant differences using country fixed effects specifications. Another methodological issue that is rarely considered in the study of policy effects among the general public is degrees of salience or knowledge of policy measures (but see Giger 2012 and Kumlin 2014). Including measures of salience and knowledge would nonetheless improve on current practices of measurement (Campbell 2012; Ziller 2014).

-[Table 1 about here]-

3.2 Immigrant Integration Policies

Immigrant integration is a process in which immigrants adopt language and cultural skills, participate in the educational system and labor market, develop social ties with members of the receiving society, participate politically, and increasingly identify with the society in which they live (Freeman 2004). Immigrant integration policies target immigrant populations by determining specific rights and obligations.⁸ In their most general form, citizenship regimes can be classified as ethnic or civic, depending on whether access to citizenship is inherited by ethnic group membership, or whether other modes of citizenship acquisition exist (Brubaker 1998). Further conceptualizations incorporate a cultural dimension and distinguish between collectivistic-ethnic, collectivistic-civic, and individualistic-civic regimes (Greenfeld 1998). The breakdown into collectivistic and individualistic thereby reflects the degree to which immigrants are expected to assimilate into the receiving society and give up distinctive cultural characteristics.

⁸ Depending on their range and scope, integration policies also address ethnic minority members, non-citizens in general, and people discriminated against based on group membership.

Similarly, the degree to which ethnic and cultural differences are politically accepted (or even promoted) is at the center of assimilationist *versus* multicultural understandings of integration (Banting and Kymlicka 2013). While classic studies cluster countries categorically into integration regimes, recent approaches allow for a continuous policy classification along numerous sub-dimensions of integration (Helbling 2013). Typically, these indicators range from restrictive (or limited rights) to liberal (or permissive rights), and contain sub-dimensions such as individual and cultural rights (e.g. ICRI – Index of Citizenship Rights for Immigrants; Koopmans and Michalowski 2012), as well as political, cultural, labor, family, and education-related domains of integration (e.g. MIPEx – Migration Integration Policy Index; Huddleston et al. 2015). In addition, anti-discrimination policies have a much broader scope, as they aim at combating unequal treatment based on group membership including gender, ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation. Similar to the distinction of assimilationist *versus* multiculturalist, anti-discrimination measures may also be distinguished into color-blind measures focused on individual rights of equal treatment and positive action measures focused on overcoming existing inequalities (Ziller 2017). Beyond the regulation of immigrant rights, further indicators on immigration policies (e.g. access to countries) exist that are beyond the scope of this review (cf. Goodman 2015).

In terms of covered debates, this review includes studies that examine how policy design (multicultural *versus* assimilationist policies) relates to immigrants' political engagement (3.2.1). Other studies focus on majority members' responses to integration policies in terms of political support and satisfaction with democracy (3.2.2).⁹

⁹ As an adjacent debate, a number of comparative studies look at the relationship between immigrant integration policies and public opinion towards immigrants and immigration (e.g. Careja and Andreß 2013; Schlueter et al. 2013).

3.2.1 Integration Policy and Political Engagement of Immigrants

A core dimension of immigrant integration is the regulation of citizenship acquisition. Becoming a citizen not only means a change in legal status and being entitled to participate in politics (e.g. voting in national elections), but may also trigger processes of social learning and identity formation that are presumably positively linked to political engagement. This implies that when people feel that they are fully-fledged members of a political community, they respond by taking a greater interest and becoming engaged in political affairs, and may even internalize the democratic ideals of active citizenship. Just and Anderson (2012) examine these contentions using comparative data on 19 European countries. Results from multi-level models and models including country fixed effects show that foreign-born populations are less likely to take part in conventional and non-conventional forms of political engagement compared to natives, while this gap in participation is particularly wide for non-citizens. Essentially, the findings suggest that citizenship acquisition promotes political engagement. But also here, the possibility of selection bias is an issue. It is quite plausible that immigrants who seek citizenship (compared to those who do not) are more highly motivated to engage in politics. To address this source of endogeneity, Just and Anderson apply an instrumental variables approach and find that their results are robust under this additional specification.¹⁰

Looking at specific integration policies, a major debate emphasizes potential negative effects of multicultural policies (compared to assimilationist approaches) on the integration outcomes of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Multicultural policies are “specific government policies designed to positively recognize diversity and help minorities maintain cultural and religious practices while integrating them into public life” (Wright and Bloemraad 2012, p. 78). Critics

¹⁰ Similarly, Hainmueller et al. (2015) aim to isolate the causal effect of citizenship acquisition on political integration by using data on close naturalization referendums in Switzerland. Their results show that obtaining citizenship has a positive impact on voter turnout among immigrants, as well as on political efficacy, and political knowledge.

of cultural rights for immigrants and ethnic minorities suggest that multicultural policies do not create sufficiently strong incentives for immigrants to acquire the language of the receiving society and develop interethnic contacts (Koopmans 2010; 2013). Empirical evidence on this contention is rather mixed. Koopmans (2010) finds higher unemployment rates among immigrants, higher rates of residential segregation, and higher rates of immigrants involved in crimes in countries characterized by implemented multicultural (rather than assimilationist) policies combined with a generous welfare state (esp. in the Netherlands, Sweden, and Belgium). Wright and Bloemraad (2012) use comparative survey data from pooled European Social Survey waves 2002-2008 and the U.S. Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy Survey, merged with policy data from the Citizenship Policy Index (CPI; Howard 2005) and the Multiculturalism Policy Index (MCP Index; Banting and Kymlicka 2013).¹¹ The authors examine immigrants' political trust, satisfaction with government, political interest, and political participation across three country clusters: countries with *restrictive* citizenship rights and *low* levels of multiculturalism; countries with *permissive* citizenship rights and *low* levels of multiculturalism; and countries with *permissive* citizenship rights and *high* levels of multiculturalism. The results show by and large that absolute levels of immigrant political engagement, as well as gaps between immigrants and natives, are similar across the three country clusters, indicating a limited influence of political context.

As another example, Goodman and Wright (2015) test whether and how mandatory integration requirements¹² – intended to promote the assimilation of immigrants – affect immigrants' political orientations. Using data from the European Social Survey merged with policy data

¹¹ The CPI index covers information on whether or not a country grants *jus soli* citizenship; the minimum years of residence required for naturalization; and whether or not naturalized immigrants are allowed to hold dual citizenship. The MCP index entails information on a variety of dimensions, including official affirmation of multiculturalism; multiculturalism in the school curriculum; inclusion of ethnic representation/sensitivity in public media; exemptions from dress codes for minorities; funding of ethnic organizations to support cultural activities; funding of bilingual and mother-tongue instruction; and affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups.

¹² Such requirements include the acquisition of political knowledge, language skills, and value orientations.

from the Civic Integration Policy Index (CIVIX; Goodman 2010), regression analysis on immigrant samples from 14 Western European countries is used to compare averages in social and political attitudes between countries of low *versus* high mandatory requirements. The results show little evidence of systematic differences across political contexts, which suggests that implemented civic integration requirements have limited impact on immigrants' political engagement and social integration.

3.2.2 Integration Policy and Natives' Political Attitudes

Beyond the scope on immigrants as target populations of integration policies, scholars are also interested in whether and how integration policies shape political attitudes and political support of mass publics. The underlying rationale here is that people who are skeptical of immigration respond with political discontent when political actors implement permissive integration policies. In contrast, citizens with a positive stance towards immigrant rights might respond with increased political support when permissive policies are enacted. Hooghe and De Vroome (2015) analyze comparative survey data from the European Social Survey merged with three different integration policy indicators (MIPEX, MCP, and ICRI). Using multilevel regression models, the authors find no empirical evidence of a systematic average relationship between integration policy indicators and political trust or satisfaction with government. Instead, they observe significant positive interactions of individual education and policy in the way that low (highly) educated groups respond with decreasing (increasing) political support to the implementation of permissive integration policies.

McLaren (2015) examines immigrant integration policy (measured as MIPEX country scores) as a moderator of the link between anti-immigrant sentiment and political trust in Europe. People with strong anti-immigrant sentiment may tend to blame political actors for failing to

protect society from any negative effects of immigration, and to respond with lower political support. Permissive immigrant integration policies will thus additionally contribute to reducing political support for societal segments characterized by high levels of anti-immigrant sentiment. Using multilevel models on data from the European Social Survey, the author finds a significant negative cross-level interaction, indicating that, in permissive policy contexts, concerns about immigration are more strongly related to lower levels of political trust than they are in restrictive contexts. Interpreted in a symmetric way, immigrant integration policies are related to lower levels of political trust for people whose anti-immigrant sentiment runs high, compared to those who have a low level of anti-immigrant sentiment. In a similar way, Citrin et al. (2016) examine anti-immigrant sentiment as a moderator of the link between multicultural policy in Europe (measured as MCP country scores) and individuals' political support (measured as political trust, satisfaction with democracy, and satisfaction with government). Using multilevel models on data from the European Social Survey and the European Values Study, the authors find that the effect of multiculturalism on political support is particularly negative for people with a high level of anti-immigrant sentiment.

Kesler and Bloemraad (2010) test an interaction between country-level immigration (measured by the share of the foreign-born population) and multicultural policies (measured by MCP data). Using multilevel models with country fixed effects on data from repeated survey waves of the World Values Survey, the authors find systematic positive interactions, especially when considering income inequality as an additional moderator. In other words, strong multicultural policies, as well as low levels of income inequality, mitigate the potential negative consequences of immigration-related ethnic diversity on political engagement.

Focusing on anti-discrimination measures as a sub-dimension of integration policy, Ziller and Helbling (2017) examine whether and how anti-discrimination policies affect political support in Europe for target groups and the general public. While an expansion of anti-discrimination laws should yield relevance for political support of individuals who actually face discrimina-

tion, effects among the general public should occur particularly for individuals who hold egalitarian values (and thus corresponding issue preferences). The authors use multilevel models on repeated cross-sectional survey data waves (Eurobarometer and European Social Survey), merged with time-varying information on anti-discrimination laws (MIPEX) and policy knowledge (aggregated country-year survey responses). Country fixed effects tackle unobserved time-constant country differences and exploit over-time variance at the country-year level. The results show that individuals who are discriminated against express particularly high levels of political support in contexts where anti-discrimination laws are expanded. Moreover, an increase in country-level policy knowledge predicts greater political support, especially for individuals high in egalitarianism.

3.2.3 Summary

The reviewed empirical studies are summarized in Table 2. With regard to the effects of citizenship acquisition, the evidence reviewed suggests a positive effect on immigrants' political engagement. With regard to the distinction between multicultural and assimilationist policies, multiculturalism appears to be less relevant to immigrants' political attitudes than is suggested by critics, and may even mitigate any negative consequences of immigration on political engagement for the general population. While the empirical evidence of the catalyst function of naturalization appears to be robust, additional research employing longitudinal or experimental research designs is needed in order to further determine the effects of multiculturalist *versus* assimilationist policies.

Studies on mass publics merely find average relationships between integration policy and political attitudes. Instead, individual characteristics appear to critically moderate how policy translates into political support. People who feel easily threatened by newcomers respond with lower rates of political support, while those who harbor few such concerns increase their sup-

port. Hence, education, sentiment towards immigrants, and egalitarian values, are group characteristics that decisively trigger how policy relates to political attitudes among the general public.

In terms of methodology, most of the studies reviewed control for confounding variables and conduct a number of robustness checks to tackle risks of endogeneity bias, while others apply longitudinal designs at the country-year level and include country fixed effects.

-[Table 2 about here]-

4 Conclusion

Policy feedback investigates “whether policies render citizens more or less engaged in politics and how public programs shape citizens’ beliefs, preferences, demands, and power” (Mettler and Soss 2004, p. 60). Drawing on this framework, this article reviewed macro-micro mechanisms on how policy content affects people’s political engagement, including resource distribution and informational and normative effects. While such mechanisms and conditions may serve as heuristic for various policy areas and outcome variables, I focused on social policy and immigrant integration policy and their implication for political attitudes and behavior as illustrative examples. Both policy areas are highly visible through public debates, and social security policies in particular concern large segments of society.

The results of a review of selected comparative empirical studies suggest that policy effects on political engagement are highly conditional upon third factors, including the policy design and features of administrative implementation (e.g. client-participant relations), the broader institutional and economic context (e.g. degrees of policy inclusiveness, distribution of risks, unemployment), and individual characteristics (e.g. individual risks, salience of policy issues,

education, anti-immigrant sentiment). What became less explicit in the reviewed studies are the potential mechanisms through which policies affect individual political attitudes and behavior, such as resource distribution, information, and norms. Another topic that should have received greater attention in the studies reviewed is how political engagement in turn feeds back and affects political processes, and how policy feedback evolves over longer periods of time, something which also entails dealing with reciprocal causality in empirical models.

Taking up Mettler's (2015) recommendation that policy areas other than welfare should be investigated, this review examined policy effects in the domain of immigrant integration. In terms of future research, it might be worthwhile to focus on sub-aspects of multicultural or integration policy in order to capture important variations in policy design, such as labor market integration policies (Kogan 2016) or family reunification (Gundelach and Manatschal 2017). As another example, Ziller (2017) finds that the policy effects of equal treatment regulations depend on their range and scope. While color-blind institutional fairness is related to increasing gaps in trust between natives and immigrants, more comprehensive anti-discrimination measures tend to help close gaps in political trust and support (see also Ziller and Helbling 2017).

In methodological terms, studies on participants in welfare programs are largely focused on citizens in the U.S. context (Mettler and Soss 2004). More recently, a number of cross-national studies examined policy effects due to increasingly available comparative country indicators. Cross-national comparisons typically apply multilevel analysis in order to assess how policy differences relate to individual outcomes, while at the same time accounting for non-independence due to the hierarchical data structure in which respondents are nested within countries (Snijders and Bosker 2012). A number of the studies reviewed apply multilevel analysis on cross-sectional data. However, results from analyses of cross-sectional observational data are prone to produce biased inference due to omitted variables. Longitudinal designs using panel data at the level of individuals and/or countries are able to control for time-

constant confounding of omitted variables, and thus increase the validity of the results. Beyond this, advanced methods such as cross-lagged autoregressive structural equation models including fixed effects would account for both reciprocal causal relationships and the potential omission of time-constant confounding variables (Allison et al. 2017; Hamaker et al. 2015).

Among the studies reviewed, only a small fraction actually capitalizes on modeling over-time variations whilst controlling for cross-country differences. One reason for the lack of cross-national longitudinal designs is related to the availability of comparative policy indicators that include a sufficient number of countries and vary over time. For example, the Migrant Policy Institute has only recently published time-series data for the MIPLEX indicator, and other scholars have launched projects collecting time-varying data on immigration and immigrant integration policies. The IMPALA (“International Migration Law and Policy Analysis”; Beine et al. 2016) and IMPIC (Immigration Policies in Comparison; Helbling et al. 2017) projects collect data on immigration policies (e.g. entry, settlement, and regulation laws) for numerous countries and over time. Similarly, the collection of data on welfare state policies as already pursued by Giger (2012) should be extended to time-series data in order to stimulate longitudinal research designs in future studies.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that cross-country comparison using multilevel analysis reflects only one analytical strategy of how the political context affects individual attitudes and behaviors. To improve on the causal identification of policy effects, recent studies employ (quasi-)experimental designs. For example, Hopkins and Parish (2018) use difference-in-differences estimation on survey data before and after the Medicaid expansion in the U.S., and find an increase in health policy support especially among low-income Americans. Häusermann et al. (2018) use conjoint experiments to evaluate conditions of social policy retrenchment, and find that compensations to the relevant opposition groups increase their willingness to accept cutbacks. Bechtel et al. (2017) use conjoint experiments in order to ana-

lyze public opinion towards different policy designs for international bailouts. Using difference-in-differences estimation on social media data from the U.S., Flores (2017) finds that the introduction of a restrictive State law directed towards immigrants negatively affects public opinion towards them. Contrasting observational and experimental studies, there is of course a trade-off that needs to be carefully taken into account between the causal identification of policy effects and the generalizability of the findings. A triangulation of empirical results using evidence from different methods and research designs can thus also be considered as a Golden Standard of research on policy feedback effects.

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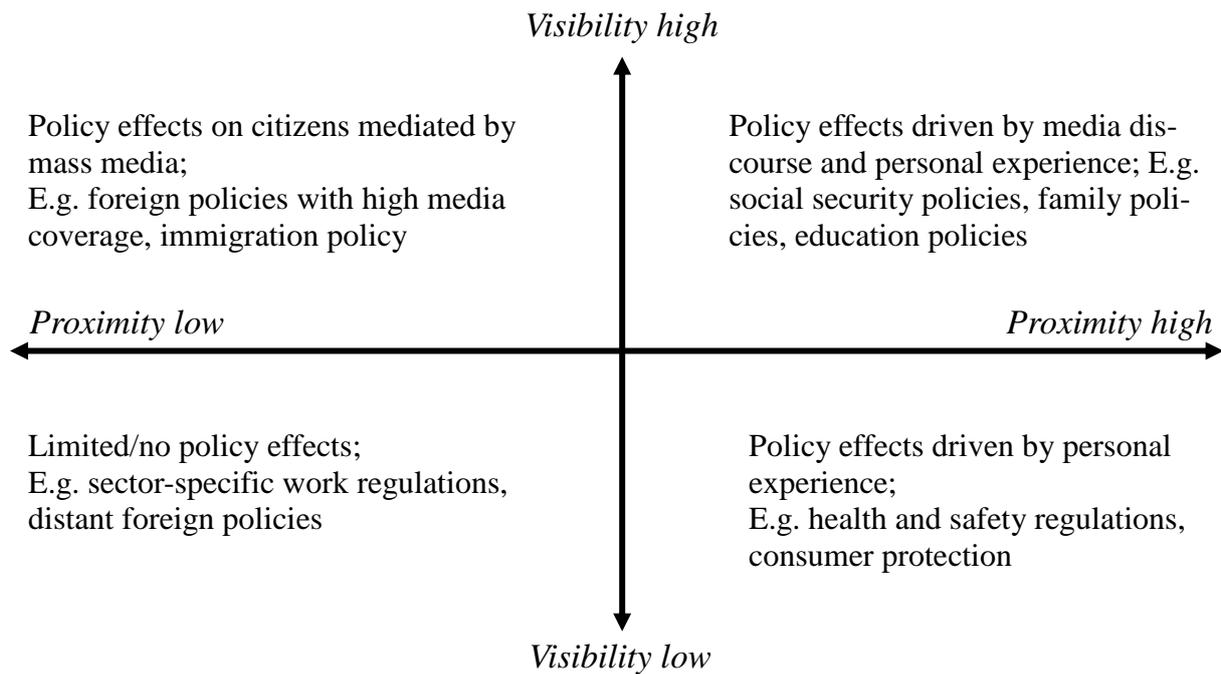
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Figure 1: Proximity and Visibility as Conditions of Policy Effects on Citizens



Note: Modified version based on Soss and Schram (2007)

Table 1: Summary of Reviewed Studies – Social Policy

Study	Countries covered	Time points covered	Macro indicators, moderator	Outcome/indicator of political engagement	Method	Main results
Bruch et al. 2010	1 (20 U.S. cities)	3	Type of social welfare programs	Voting, membership in political organizations, membership in civic organizations	Binary/ordered logistic regression	Participation in paternalist government assistance programs predicts lower levels of political engagement
Watson 2015	1	19	Structure of social welfare program: Degree of conditionality	Political participation (voting, membership in civic organizations), political interest, political efficacy	Pooled OLS and fixed effects models on panel data	Recipients of conditional welfare benefits have lower levels of political participation, political interest, and political efficacy
Jordan 2013	15-17	1	Inclusiveness of policy sector healthcare, pensions, and unemployment insurance	Support for healthcare, pensions, and unemployment insurance	Ordered probit regression with robust standard errors clustered at the country level	Degree of inclusiveness is positively associated with social policy support
Rehm et al. 2012	13	1	Country-specific correlation between income and unemployment risk	Support for unemployment benefits, support for social policies	Generalized ordered logit models to generate macro indicators; OLS with macro-level indicators	Lower welfare support in contexts where low income and unemployment risk are closely related
Van Oorschot et al. 2012	25	1	Social spending per capita	Negative economic consequences of social policy, negative moral consequences, positive social consequences	Linear multilevel regression (country random intercept, no random slopes)	Social expenditure is particularly related to higher rates of perceived positive social consequences of welfare activity
Giger 2012	18	1	Social policy retrenchment (pension, unemployment, healthcare) author's coding using data about welfare reforms from the International Social Security Association database; Moderator: issue salience welfare domain	Rating of incumbent government performance	Bayesian multilevel regression (country random intercept, no random slopes)	Pension and healthcare retrenchment are systematically related to lower government ratings, but only for those with corresponding issue salience
Kumlin 2014	11	5	Unemployment benefits	Satisfaction with democracy	Linear multilevel regression (country random intercept, no random slopes)	Generous unemployment benefits predict higher levels of satisfaction with democracy; negative moderation with salience and prevalence of country-specific unemployment
Gingrich and Ansell 2012	19	1	OECD database indicator on employment protection legislation (e.g. regulation on temporary employment); Moderators: education; occupation-related skill	Attitudes towards government spending (unemployment protection, healthcare, industrial aid)	Logistic multilevel regression with country fixed effects and robust standard errors (country random intercept, no random slopes)	Negative significant interaction between skill and employment protection policy; that is, social protection policies make individuals' exposure to risk a less critical determinant of policy preferences

Table 2: Summary of Reviewed Studies – Immigrant Integration Policy

Study	Countries covered	Time points covered	Macro indicators, moderators	Outcome/indicator of political engagement	Method	Main results
Just and Anderson 2012	19	1	Access to citizenship via individual citizenship status	Political engagement (contacting politicians, working for a political party or organization, wearing a campaign badge, signing a petition, boycotting products, protesting)	Linear multilevel regression (country random intercept, random slopes for minority status); country fixed effects and IV regression as robustness tests	Immigrants without citizenship participate less than immigrants with citizenship or natives
Wright and Bloemraad 2012	18	4	CPI, MCP	Political trust, satisfaction with government, political interest, political participation	OLS/logistic regression with cluster-robust standard errors at the country level	No substantial differences in political engagement between natives and immigrants across policy regimes
Goodman and Wright 2015	14	6	CIVIX	Political interest, political efficacy	OLS/logistic regression	No substantial differences in political engagement between natives and immigrants across policy regimes
Hooghe and De Vroome 2015	9-20	1	MIPEX, MCP, and ICRI; Moderator: education	Political trust, satisfaction with government	Linear multilevel regression (country random intercept, random slope for education)	No significant average effect of integration policies on political support; significant interaction: Lower (higher) educated groups respond with decreasing (increasing) political support to the implementation of permissive integration policies
McLaren 2015	16	1	MIPEX; Moderator: anti-immigrant sentiment	Political trust (legal system, parliament, politicians)	Linear multilevel regression (country random intercept, no random slopes)	Significant negative interaction between anti-immigrant sentiment and immigrant integration policy: The gap in political support between pro- and anti-immigrant publics is wider in contexts with permissive integration policies
Citrin et al. 2016	16	2	MCP; Moderator: anti-immigrant sentiment	Political trust, satisfaction with democracy, satisfaction with government	Linear multilevel regression (country random intercept, random slope for anti-immigrant sentiment); OLS with country fixed effects and cluster-robust standard errors as robustness test	Similar to McLaren 2015: significant negative interaction between anti-immigrant sentiment and multiculturalism: The gap in political support between pro- and anti-immigrant publics is wider in contexts with strong multicultural policies
Kesler and Bloemraad 2010	17-19	2-3	MCP	Organizational membership, non-electoral political actions (signing a petition, joining a boycott, and attending a lawful demonstration)	Logistic multilevel regression (country-year random intercept, no random slopes) with country fixed effects	Multicultural policies mitigate potential negative consequences of ethnic diversity on political engagement: Low levels of income inequality additionally mitigate negative consequences on political engagement
Ziller and Helbling 2017	21	2, 4	Anti-discrimination policies (sub-index of MIPEX); Moderators: egalitarian values, discrimination	Evaluation of public administration; satisfaction with democracy, political trust	Linear multilevel regression (country-year random intercept, random slopes for moderator variables) with country fixed effects	Anti-discrimination measures increase political support for people suffering from discrimination; significant average effect of policy knowledge on political support, which is additionally amplified for people who hold egalitarian values