

Do social policy change impact on politics? A review of policy feedbacks on citizens' political participation and attitudes towards politics

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Abstract

This article asks how the most prominent recent changes in European welfare states are relevant for citizens' political participation and attitudes toward politics, specifically citizens' political efficacy, political interest, political trust and attribution of responsibility. We consider changes in benefits, in the form of generosity levels and conditionality, and changes in modes of delivery, including both marketization and rescaling. Reviewing the policy feedback on mass publics literature, a mainly US-centric scholarship, the article suggests that the mostly negative impacts that are theoretically expected are to be qualified in the European contexts. The article thereby reflects on the contributions and limits to what can be learned from this body of research to illuminate European cases; and it derives a research agenda to study policy feedbacks on mass publics in Western Europe.

Keywords

Policy feedback; mass publics; political participation; attitudes towards politics; policy change; policy design.

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1. Introduction

In the past decades, the growing conditionality and individualization of formerly rights-based benefits, the introduction and implementation of welfare markets, the decentralization of welfare provision, as well as the lowering of generosity levels, are amongst the most prominent changes that have crowded discussions amongst students of social policy in European cases (e.g. Bonoli and Natali, 2012; Hemerijck, 2013; Pierson, 2001; Pierson, 1994; Palier and Hay, 2017). In parallel, repeated economic and social crises that have affected Western countries in recent decades have recast the debate about welfare state support amongst the citizenry, as well as party political divisions on the welfare state and its future, though in different lights (Giger and Nelson, 2011; Taylor-Gooby and Leruth, 2018). How have these changes in European welfare states impacted on individuals' political behaviours and attitudes? What are the mechanisms at play that explain these impacts? And what research questions does the study of the later in European cases raise? In this article, we bring together both strands of research on the policies and the politics of the welfare state, and shift the focus to the political outcomes of well-established policy changes, namely citizens' political participation and attitudes toward politics.

This review article draws from the scholarship on policy feedbacks on mass publics, which combines a focus on policy change and its effects on a variety of citizens' political behaviours and attitudes (Campbell, 2012; Larsen, 2019; Mettler and Soss, 2004). A core tenet of the policy feedback literature is that institutions and policies matter for the analysis of politics. Based on their specific design, institutions and policies allocate individuals with resources and build incentives, convey messages and information, and are underpinned with normative beliefs and expectations – which contribute to shaping individuals' political behaviours and attitudes (Pierson, 1993; Mettler and Welch, 2004; Svallfors, 2006). Existing research has studied the impact of welfare policy on party preferences and electoral competition (e.g. Giger, 2012; van Kersbergen et al., 2014), and support and attitudes towards specific social policies (Busemeyer and Neimanns, 2017; Kumlin and Stadelmann-Steffen, 2014; Jordan, 2013; van Oorschot and Meuleman, 2014; Garritzmann, 2015). More recently, Larsen reviewed the magnitude of the feedback effects on political participation and attitudes across a variety of social policies (2019), and Busemeyer and colleagues elaborated on a typology of policy feedbacks on policy attitudes (Busemeyer et al., 2021).

In this article, following the main focus of feedback studies on mass publics, we zero in on how the most prominent recent changes in European welfare states are relevant for citizens' political participation and attitudes toward politics such as citizens' political efficacy, political interest, political trust and attribution of responsibility¹. We consider changes in benefits, in the form of generosity levels and conditionality, and changes in modes of delivery, including both marketization and rescaling. The article aims at uncovering their main likely impacts and the feedback mechanisms through which they shape, or are likely to shape, democratic developments in Western European countries. It thereby departs from previous reviews of the policy feedback literature which are either broader-ranging as their focus is not exclusively on mass publics (Béland and Schlager, 2019; Béland, 2010), on a larger variety of

¹ We do not consider policy attitudes as we are mainly interested in the broader political effects of social policies on political behaviour and attitudes towards politics – thus not policy attitudes as such (for a recent review on feedback effects on policy attitudes, see Busemeyer et al., 2021).

feedbacks on mass publics (Campbell, 2012; Larsen, 2019), or target more specifically policy attitudes (Busemeyer et al., 2021).

Interestingly, the existing scholarship is mostly US-centric, while research on European cases is rare (for the few exceptions, see Dupuy et al., 2021b; Verhaegen et al., 2021; Dupuy and Van Ingelgom, 2014; Kumlin and Stadelmann-Steffen, 2014; Gingrich, 2019; Gingrich and Watson, 2016; Watson, 2015; Svallfors, 2010). We consider that we should cautiously draw from research on the United States to illuminate the political effects of Western European welfare states' most recent changes. First, while broad-ranging policy changes in European welfare states have gone down rather similar roads to the US (Alber, 2010), the exact policies may differ between and across the US and European welfare states – and feedback studies on mass publics have shown how specific design features are consequential. As an illustration, the degree and type of conditionality of welfare benefits differ across the main Western democracies (Knotz, 2018), suggesting diverse policy feedback dynamics. Second, as recently shown by Jacobs and Mettler (2018), the distinct political and institutional contexts of policy developments, that is, the political conditions under which policy feedback take place, are likely to affect policy feedback mechanisms and their democratic outcomes at the individual level (Alber, 2010; Taylor-Gooby, 2005). For instance, while the range of activation policy instruments is largely shared across both sides of the Atlantic, the US and European welfare states have historically developed activation policies starting from different perspectives. The US has introduced workfare largely as a regulatory strategy targeting cash benefit recipients with no requirements to change labour market policies. In contrast, in Europe, activation policies have complemented a more enabling welfare setting with a regulatory approach bringing increased conditionality (Brodkin and Larsen, 2013). Moreover, many European countries have tended to support human capital and worker flexibility, and benefits are in general longer and more generous (Brodkin and Larsen, 2013). Last, more generally, the US and Western European welfare states diverge on universalism and targeting in social policy, two important dimensions affecting the nature of policy feedback effects. Using an alternative compound index of targeting and universalism, Jacques and Noël (2021) show that the US combines a generally residual yet pro-poor targeting, while Western European welfare states are classified with a stronger universalistic component as compared to the US (with the exception of the UK) – their targeting approach diverge greatly along the pro-rich and pro-poor targeting axis. These observations suggest that policy feedbacks dynamics identified in the literature on the US case cannot be blindly applied to European cases.

Thereby, our review article contributes to the existing literature by contextualising policy feedback effects into the broader context of welfare policy changes of the last decades in Western Europe. Doing so, the article takes a first step toward integrating feedback studies on mass publics in the US and European cases, which echoes a recent call by Béland and Schlager (2019). First, we review and analyse existing research on the US and European cases, when it exists, in view of identifying the likely or existing impacts of recent and longer-standing social policy changes on citizens' political participation and attitudes towards politics in the various contexts of European welfare states. Second, we reflect on the contributions and limits to what can be learned from this body of research to illuminate European cases. Third, we derive a research agenda to study policy feedbacks on mass publics in Western Europe. While we acknowledge the diversity of European welfare states, we elaborate on research questions that are relevant for the broad European context to further expand the reach of this scholarship beyond US case.

The remainder of the review article is structured as follows. The second section presents the notion of policy feedbacks on mass publics and their main mechanisms as elaborated on in the literature. The next sections turn to major social policy changes in Western Europe: changes in benefits, in the form of generosity levels and conditionality in section three and changes in modes of delivery, including both marketization and rescaling, in section four. Both sections discuss what is to be learned from the existing American-focused research and offer forward-looking research questions to study European cases. The conclusion suggests further developments of feedback studies on mass publics in view of integrating European cases in this scholarship.

2. Policy feedbacks on mass publics and their mechanisms

The policy feedback literature is explicitly embedded in historical institutionalism and emphasizes that institutions and policies are not only shaped by electoral, interest groups and bureaucratic politics, but are also likely to structure them. Pierson's seminal article identifies three types of feedback effects which affect different types of actors: government elites, interest groups and mass publics (1993).

When it comes to policy feedbacks on mass publics, which this review article focuses on, they act through three main mechanisms affecting citizens' political behaviours and attitudes: resource, interpretative and normative effects. Resource allocation influences the well-being and life opportunities of recipients, their perception of the government's impact on their lives, as well as their capacity of political engagement through assets such as time, material resources and knowledge. For instance, Campbell's seminal work on pensioners in the US shows that the increased generosity of social security benefits and the higher dependence on Social Security among low-income seniors prompted their political participation overtime (2003). She demonstrates that seniors have become "über citizens" who have been able to influence the trajectory of pension policies through their electoral and non-electoral participation. In addition to resources, citizens use what they perceive as the 'rules of the game' embedded in policies to make sense of uncertainty and decide how to act in the democratic arena (Pierson, 1993). These perceived 'rules' are the interpretative effects that are often learned through individual direct experience of the policy. For instance, Mettler (2005) shows that a targeted educational provision, the GI Bill, increased veterans' level of political participation particularly among the least advantaged. She explains that the policy had a powerful interpretive effect: recipients felt that they were not only treated as first-class citizens, but were also given life-changing opportunities. In return, they wanted to "give back" to the community which resulted in a "civic generation". Normative effects explain how exposure to conceptions of mutual rights and obligations affects norms and expectations towards the state and public policies (Svallfors, 2010), as well as, more generally, understandings of what belongs respectively to the political domain and the realm of necessity (Dupuy and Van Ingelgom, 2019). Based on the comparison of generational attitudes towards government responsibility between East and West Germany, Svallfors shows that Eastern Germans' attitudes have converged toward Western Germans' following the reunification; thereby illuminating how institutional change may lead to attitudinal adaptation though evolving institutional and policy norms (2010).

Overall, existing works report that recipients' experiences with a policy may result in various political outcomes depending on the very features of these experiences. Hence, breaking down the constitutive elements of policy design and policy

implementation is integral to analysing the feedback mechanisms at play and the political effects of social policy changes on mass publics (Bussi and Dupuy, 2019).

3. Changes in social benefits, feedback mechanisms, political participation and attitudes towards politics

In the last decades in Western Europe, social benefits generosity has been eroded (Otto and van Oorschot, 2018), benefits coverage has been lagging behind (OECD, 2018), access remains challenging for some social groups (OECD, 2019), and rights-based benefits have become increasingly conditional on individual ‘responsible’ behaviours to comply with stricter obligations (Knotz, 2019; Knotz, 2018). These changes affect a wide range of aspects, including eligibility criteria and benefits duration. They also encourage the individualisation of service delivery with the aim of increasing efficiency while shifting the responsibility of joblessness towards the individuals (van Berkel and Valkenburg, 2007). Coupled with increased conditionality (Knotz, 2018), individualisation has taken the form of the contractualization of welfare programmes – through for instance ‘individual action plans’ – and to a new balance of individual right and duties (Hamilton, 2014). At the same time, in Europe, the new social investment paradigm (Hemerijck, 2018), while not fundamentally changing social expenditures, has partially refocused the policy and political attention towards other target groups and alternative policy mix (Kuitto, 2016); and has extended a targeting approach to groups facing new social risks. How have these changes in social benefits altered citizens’ political participation and attitudes towards politics in Western Europe?

At first glance, when each of these changes is considered in isolation, the scholarship provides insights that they would mostly result in depressed participation and sense of self-efficacy through both resource and interpretive effects. First, the lowered generosity of benefits matters for resource effects. Although no cut-point level of benefit generosity has been established, the literature shows that benefit contraction affects recipients’ relationship to government and politics (Michener, 2018). From the other side, using comparative data on European countries, Shore (2020) confirms that a generous welfare state reducing inequality has a stronger positive resource effects on political behaviour of the lower income groups and that generous early childhood matters for single mothers’ political behaviour (2019).

Second, the definition of target groups of individualized policies as (partly) undeserving is also shown to be consequential for interpretive effects. The social constructions of target groups are evaluative and they send messages, that are conveyed to recipients, pertaining to their deservingness and social worth (Schneider and Ingram, 1993). Mettler (2002) finds that an inclusive definition of the target group with broad eligibility criteria and a clearly identified group can strengthen the political participation of beneficiaries, particularly if associated with standardised and not stigmatising administrative practices. Moreover, through programme’s administrative rules, eligibility criteria and coverage, policy instruments also contribute to shaping citizens’ interpretive schemes. In England, Watson compares social programmes that vary on their degree of stigmatization and conditionality (2015). Her analysis shows that stigmatization exerts significant negative effects on political efficacy through an interpretive effect.

Third, a stronger conditionality of benefits is equally consequential for interpretive effects. In the same study on England, Watson shows that work-based conditionality of welfare, that is, reaching self-sufficiency through labour market

participation including accepting low-paid jobs, has a negative effect on political participation, self-efficacy and political interest compared to right-based benefits (2015). She explains this finding by the negative messages in terms of social worth sent by the benefits structure. She shows that conditionality increases the perception of social stigma associated to social assistance measures because the very idea of conditionality frames beneficiaries as having a low work ethics. Overall, based on the existing scholarship, there are grounds to expect that changes leading to benefits contraction and conditionality, as observed in the past decades in European welfare states, would feed back into depressed patterns of political participation and sense of self-efficacy through resource and interpretive effects.

Yet, interestingly, Watson also shows that while benefit conditionality has a negative effect on recipients of means-tested benefits, it has a positive effect on the political participation of individuals receiving contributory benefits (2015). Her findings point at a crucial point, namely that considering feedback effects in context may alter the expected political effects at the individual level. The context, as we elaborate on below, is multidimensional. It may be the policy and its many design features; it may reflect the interactions of welfare recipients with frontline workers; and it may also be composed of recipients' experiences with multiple policies. We examine each dimension in turn.

First, Watson's work suggests that considering how several design features combine in one policy, instead of studying single features, brings nuance to the established effects of single policy features. However, beyond her study, this analytical perspective is still largely overlooked across social policies and across groups of welfare recipients. Exploring the heterogeneity of policy design and their related feedback effects on a diversity of recipients would allow comparative researchers to account for the variation in social programmes' political effects across countries and policies. These observations raise a first research question:

RQ1: What are the impacts on political participation and attitudes toward politics of policies that combine heterogenous design features on distinct groups of welfare recipients?

Second, existing research reports that recipients' policy experiences are not only a function of (a combination of) design features. Their experiences, and the messages and cues they derive from them, also hinge on policy implementation and, specifically, on recipients' interactions with street-level bureaucrats. The literature demonstrates that citizens interpret cues sent by their relationship with programme providers to define whether the state caters to their needs and is responsive to their situation, thereby developing (positive or negative) attitudes towards politics and assessing the relevance of their political participation. Implementation, thereby, can trigger different interpretative effects (Soss, 1999; Mettler, 2002). Soss compares the experiences of beneficiaries of two distinct policies, a social assistance benefit targeting families with children (AFDC) and disability schemes in the US (2002). In the case of AFDC, a conditional and supervisory programme, he shows that recipients perceive their relations to state officials as being adversarial, inquisitive and partial. This generates a sense of powerlessness and triggers a depressed self-efficacy. In contrast, recipients of disability schemes, which are rights-based, consider that the process of implementation is fair and balanced, and that they are treated as full-fledged citizens. Their experience with this policy generates a sense of increased self-efficacy. In addition, Bruch et al (2010) compare three US social programmes: TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy

Family), Head Start and public housing assistance. They find that, with its strong paternalist implementation approach, stricter supervision by caseworkers, and their emphasis on direction and sanctions, the effects of TANF are much more detrimental for beneficiaries' political participation than the other welfare programmes. Watson reports findings in line with these results in her study of England (2015).

In European cases, the relationships between caseworkers and recipients have been modified by the implementation of 'contracts' and the increased conditionality of benefits. This change took place in a broader institutional context where new public management techniques have contributed to increasing street-level bureaucrats' discretion. Yet, implementation studies also indicate that professional norms contribute to shaping the scope and use of discretion (Evans, 2015), insofar as professional norms are sticky even in the face of changing formal rules (e.g. Hupe et al., 2016). In other words, street-level bureaucrats' increased discretion may not result in an actual increase in disciplinization and supervision of welfare recipients as the former may rely on older professional norms oriented toward client-support to deal with welfare recipients. Drawing from this strand of research, a second research question emerges:

RQ2: How does the layering of street-level bureaucrats' older professional norms and newer rules impact on the cues welfare recipients derive from their interactions with them, and shape their political participation and attitudes towards politics?

Third, recent research has initiated a turn toward studying policy feedbacks on mass publics in the context of citizens' multiple, and possibly contradictory, policy experiences. These works depart from the standard approach that studies the causal impact of one policy programme on specific political behaviours or attitudes. They report that the political effects of a single policy can be subverted or even inverted when examined in conjunction of recipients' other lived policy experiences. Rosenthal (2021) has explored the combined policy feedback effects of a broad range of cross-tier welfare programmes that Americans may experience throughout their lives. He reports that paternalistic means-tested benefits negatively impact recipients' political participation when experienced in isolation, but when experienced alongside universally-designed benefits, this combination of experiences has no impact on participation. Policy feedback effects interact with each other and can cancel themselves out (Rosenthal, 2021). This observation may explain why quantitative feedback studies on mass publics sometimes result in mixed evidence: rather than suggesting that '*policies do not always shape public outcome*' (Larsen, 2019: 12), it may simply point at the necessity to study feedback effects in combination with one another.

In Western European cases, accounting for the political effects of the multiplicity of recipients' policy experiences in their daily life would reflect the pervasive and visible presence of public authorities "from the cradle to the grave". As such, from the perspective of citizens' lived experiences, it is insightful to consider their diverse and broad-ranging policy experiences, rather than single policies. If we are to take policy feedback studies' insights to the core, and investigate how citizens' policy experiences have a transformative effect on politics, such an approach would certainly be rewarding (for a similar take grounded in the study of low-capacity states, see Hern, 2017). A third research question thereby emerges:

RQ3: How do recipients' experiences with multiple social policies in European welfare states feed back into their political participation and attitudes towards politics?

4. Changes in modes of delivery, feedback mechanisms and citizens' relations to politics

The literature on welfare reform highlights another set of changes affecting the modes of delivery of social policy in Europe, through its provision and the modification of the relationships between citizens and the state: marketisation and rescaling of welfare (Gingrich, 2011; Kazepov, 2010)². The mostly American-centred literature on policy feedbacks on mass publics suggests that both are likely to reshape European recipients' political attitudes and behaviours toward distancing them to politics. Yet, when considering characteristics of European contexts, these expectations need further specifications and call for additional research.

Both at the national and European level, the marketization of social services aims at improving their cost-effectiveness and allowing for market competition on previously non marketable services (Gingrich, 2011; van Slyke, 2003; Crespy, 2016). The marketisation of the welfare state has taken place with different degrees of visibility. It is particularly visible to citizens when, for instance, the welfare state contracts out publicly managed services to profit and non-profit organisations, thereby changing the type of actors involved in the delivery. It is less visible when it takes the form of fiscal advantages in favour of private welfare services which usually target middle-to-high income groups (Hacker, 2004; Lapidus, 2019). Feedback studies have long argued that policy visibility plays a decisive role in defining the presence and nature of feedback effects through interpretive effects (Pierson, 1993; Soss and Schram, 2007). Policy visibility pertains to the saliency of the policy to mass publics (Soss and Schram, 2007). Mettler found that a lack of visibility and recognizable benefits, for instance in the case of tax deductions, make citizens passive towards politics as they do not see what the state does for them (Mettler, 2011).

Other research, however, suggests that the privatization of welfare services may not result in blurring the role of public actors and distancing recipients from politics. It is quite the contrary as research reports that in some cases, political actors remain visible despite privatization and are held accountable. In a study of England, Gingrich and Watson empirically test whether citizens hold the national government accountable for changes in the performance of privatized disability benefits (2016). They find that privatization affected citizens' support for party in government because citizens assessed the service and made the link with the government (Gingrich and Watson, 2016). Also, privatization may sustain a larger turnout of recipients because of a combination of resource and interpretive effects. Studying a US state programme, Fleming (2014) shows that school vouchers, a market-based reform allowing parents to choose a private school for their children, affect parents' proximity with the government by improving their knowledge about it, and resulted in increasing their political participation through an interpretive effect.

Rather than concluding on contradictory results, this body of research raises questions about the feedback effects of the privatization of social policy in European cases and across welfare regimes. First, different types of privatization possibly feed back into distinct political effects at the individual level. Drawing from Gingrich' analysis of welfare marketization (2011), it would be illuminating to explore whether

² Note that recently another change in mode of delivery has emerged in the form of collaborative governance. It may contribute to reshaping state-citizens interactions and, thereby, may yield significant consequences in terms of citizens' relations to politics (see Dupuy and Defacqz, 2021).

distinct welfare markets assigning advantages to producers and individual responsibility for access or, in contrast expanding users' choice and adopting collective responsibility, modify policy feedback mechanisms and effects on political participation and attitudes towards politics. Second, the timeframe of privatization reforms may also be consequential. It may be that in the shorter term, politicians are held accountable when recipients are still aware of their decisions to change the delivery from a public to a private provider; while in the longer term, the marketization of welfare may feed back into distancing recipients from politics as they just witness private providers, thereby overlooking public actors' role. These observations raise the following research question:

RQ4: What are the effects in the shorter and the longer term of different types of privatization of the delivery of social services on political participation and attitudes towards politics?

Another significant change in the implementation of social policies pertains to the rescaling of welfare states (Kazepov, 2010), namely the dispersion of authority towards public authorities either at the subnational (regional or local) or supranational (European) level. Rescaling has impacted the type and efficiency of services delivered (Champion and Bonoli, 2011; Minas, 2014; Dupuy, 2020). It has also influenced citizens' lived experiences and their related political participation and attitudes towards politics. Michener (2018) investigates the impact of US federalism on Medicaid policy feedback effects, specifically beneficiaries' political participation. She demonstrates how the increased power of states in delivering Medicaid resulted in a high degree of diversity across states both in terms of benefits available to citizens and implementation practices. This policy diversity triggered diverging feedback effects on beneficiaries' political participation both due resource and interpretive effects. Specifically, "beneficiaries living in states offering a wide scope of services, fiscally equipped bureaucracies and expanding Medicaid programs are significantly more likely to participate in politics" (Michener, 2018, p. 14).

In Europe, the rescaling of welfare states has affected how some social policies are devised and implemented, and the constellation of actors involved (Ferrera, 2005). Existing research shows that regionalisation has affected not only how citizens see (social) policy provision, but also how they relate to governments at different levels (from a different perspective, see also Henderson et al., 2014). Dupuy and Van Ingelgom (2014) investigate the conditions under which citizens' preferences for the regional government may be a feedback of regional social policy-making. Based on the study of education policy in Flanders and Wallonia, they show how a policy deemed better performing and more visible to citizens feeds back into a stronger support for the regional level of government. In another research, Verhaegen and colleagues study whether regionalization has generated an adaptation of citizens' preferences regarding the attribution of responsibility to the regional level of government "either directly through processes of early age socialization (normative policy feedback), or indirectly as political-territorial identification may mediate the relationship (interpretive policy feedback)" (2021: 269). They show how the political context in both Belgian regions affect the operation of both feedback mechanism. These illustrations call for further research:

RQ5: How has the rescaling of European welfare states affected citizens' political behaviour and attitudes towards politics?

5. Conclusion

This review article illuminates how social policies, and public policies more generally, contribute to explaining political participation and attitudes towards politics – in particular citizens’ political efficacy, political interest, political trust and attribution of responsibility – in contemporary Europe. It has leveraged existing research in the mostly US-based policy feedback literature on mass publics to account for the likely or established political effects of the most prominent changes of European welfare states toward increased individualization and conditionality, marketization and rescaling. This approach does not overlook or downplay other explanatory factors, but brings back the context of individuals’ life, of which social policies are a key defining feature, in the analysis of European citizens’ relations to politics. In this regard, the review concurs with the scholarship that emphasizes the role played by the supply-side of politics to account for such developments (Hay, 2007; Mair, 2013); and suggests to include public policies in the definition of the supply-side. While discussing the contributions and limits of the American-focused literature to account for European cases, this review article has also elaborated on five research questions to guide further empirical research in European cases and theoretically broaden the reach of the literature on policy feedbacks on mass publics.

More generally, we see a challenge ahead that cuts across each of the five research questions, and echoes other strands of historical institutionalist research: integrating policy legacies in the analysis. A main thrust of feedback studies on mass publics is that the feedback effects on different groups of citizens is likely to differ because of their distinct policy experiences. This scholarship is thereby attuned to the differentiated effects of policies on citizens’ political participation and attitudes toward politics. Yet, we still miss a clear understanding of the cumulative effects of multiple policy experiences over one’s life course, particularly when policies’ philosophies and instruments are altered over one’s lifetime. There are insights that the welfare state in which citizens come of age shapes individual normative attitudes and expectations towards public policies and politics more generally (Neundorf and Pop-Eleches, 2020; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017; Svallfors, 2010; Dupuy et al., 2021b) and that policy experiences are sticky (Levitsky, 2014). Therefore, the political outcomes of social policy changes in European cases may also be differentiated based on generations, not only social groups – and these generations are built based on the shared experiences of different combinations of social policies. Addressing this challenge and accounting for generational feedback effects in addition to contributing to the five research questions outlined in the article, will certainly speak directly to the theoretical core of feedback studies – that multiple and sometimes contradictory policy experiences over one’s life course are consequential for political participation and attitudes toward politics, beyond single policy experiences at one point in time.

Overall, this research agenda yields significant methodological consequences. It calls for developing longitudinal quantitative and qualitative analyses able to grasp the changing mechanisms and effects of policy feedback overtime. It also calls for strengthening the stream of research using mixed methods (Bruch et al, 2010; Mettler, 2002; Michener, 2018; Rosenthal, 2021) where interactions of explanatory variables of policy feedback effects can be complemented with qualitative explorations of the mechanisms at play. Finally, citizens’ experiences of multiple social policies also invite future research to depart from the mainstream approach to inference-building which is

mostly based on policy-specific mechanisms – the resource and interpretive effects (Dupuy et al., 2021a). Moving feedback studies on mass publics to European cases is thereby a challenging but also a rewarding task as it has the potential to illuminate how European welfare states impact on democracy through their feedback effects on citizens' political behaviours and attitudes toward politics.

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