Bringing Organizations Back In: Multilevel Feedback Effects on Individual Civic Inclusion

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Policy feedback scholarship has focused on how laws and their implementation affect either organizations (e.g., their resources, priorities, political opportunities, or incentive structures) or individuals (e.g., their civic skills and resources or their psychological orientations toward the state). However, in practice the distinction between organizations and individuals is not clear-cut: Organizations interpret policy for individuals, and individuals experience policy through organizations. Thus, scholars have argued for a multi-level model of feedback effects illuminating how policies operating at the organizational level reverberate at the individual level. In this theory-building article, we push this insight by examining how public policy influences nonprofit organizations' role in the civic life of beneficiaries. We identify five roles that nonprofit organizations play. For each role, we draw on existing research to identify policy mechanisms that either enlarge or diminish nonprofits' capacity to facilitate individual incorporation and engagement. From these examples, we derive cross-cutting hypotheses concerning how different categories of citizens may need policy to operate differently to enhance their civic influence; whether policy that is "delivered" through nonprofits may dampen citizens' relationship with the state; and how the civic boost provided by policy may be influenced by the degree of latitude conferred on recipient organizations.

KEY WORDS: policy feedback, organizations, social policy, philanthropy, higher education, political engagement, nonprofits

政策反馈文献着重于研究法律及其实施如何影响组织（例如，组织的资源、优先事项，政治机会和激励机制）或个人（例如，公民技能和资源，以及他们对国家的心理取向）。然而，在实践中，组织和个人之间的界限并不明确，组织为个人阐释政策，个人通过组织体会政策。因此，*Goss*在2010年提出了反馈效应的多层次模型，它阐释了在组织层面上的政策运作如何在个人层面上产生影响。非营利组织在受益人的公民生活中扮演了某种角色，在这篇理论构建的文章中，我们通过研究公共政策对上述角色产生何种影响来发展*Goss*的模型。我们确定了非营利组织所扮演的五个角色。对于每个角色，我们利用现有的研究来确定其政策机制，这些机制可以扩大或削弱非营利组织促进受益人个人融入和参与政策的能力。从这些例子中，我们得出一系列横切假设，这些假设关注以下问题：不同类别的公民如何需要政策以不同的方式运作来增强他们的公民影响；通过非营利组织"交付"的政策是否会削弱公民与州的关系；受援组织被赋予的自由度如何影响到政策带来的公民支持。

Policy feedback refers to the notion that "new policies create new politics" (Schattschneider, 1935, p. 288). Early work on feedback effects stressed the role of policy in configuring political organizations (Lowi, 1964; Pierson, 1994; Skocpol, 1992; Wilson, 1989), but scholarship evolved to prioritize the effects of policy on individual citizens (Campbell, 2003; Lerman & Weaver, 2014; Mettler, 2002, 2005; Morgan & Campbell, 2011; Rose, 2017, 2018a; Soss, 1999; for a review, see Mettler & Soss, 2004). However, in practice the distinction between organizations and individuals is not clear-cut: organizations can interpret policy for individuals, and individuals often experience policy through organizations. In short, policies may operate on organizations to influence individuals' civic orientations and political behavior—what Goss (2010) terms multilevel feedback effects.

The insight that policy can "trickle down" through organizations to individuals is implicit in much work on political organizations, political behavior, and policy feedback. When policy creates incentives for organizations to form, for example, it also influences the behavior of individuals that these organizations mobilize. However, the mechanisms that connect policies to people, via organizations, remain underexplored. The policy feedback literature needs theory building at the organizational level. This article develops a typology of mechanisms by which policy works on or through organizations to shape the political engagement of citizens from diverse backgrounds and in varying civic roles.

One goal of this article is to motivate scholars of feedbacks to take nonprofits more seriously, and for scholars of nonprofits to take feedbacks more seriously. Much of the earliest and most influential work on policy feedbacks and civic inclusion focused on programs administered directly through government bureaucracies. By and large, these studies found that programs benefiting people regardless of socioeconomic status—such as the G.I. Bill, Social Security, and Social Security Disability Income—have positive feedback effects on beneficiaries (Campbell, 2003; Mettler, 2005; Soss, 1999). Meanwhile, encounters with means-tested programs—such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Medicaid—often produce negative feedback effects on beneficiaries' participation (Michener, 2018; Soss, 1999). However, in the United States, many social policies are implemented not by government bureaucracies, but by nonprofit organizations. Scholars have termed this system "delegated governance" (Morgan & Campbell, 2011), "nonprofits for hire" (Smith & Lipsky, 1993), and "partnerships in public service" (Salamon, 1995). Although nonprofit organizations may rely on the state for funding, they are governed and managed by private citizens and employ street-level workers who are not subject to civil-service rules. Policy feedback effects might differ based on the different institutional realities of public and nonprofit agencies.

Indeed, in an important article, Mettler and Soss (2004, p. 64) suggested that feedback scholars should do more to consider the distinction between public (governmental) and private (nonprofit) provision of public policy. They further argued that policy feedback effects depended in large part on whether policy was visible or hidden (e.g., Mettler, 2011). We pick up these insights and argue that they are linked.

Policy that operates through nonprofit organizations is more likely to be hidden from public view than policy whose benefits or costs flow directly to citizens. This observation makes it even more imperative to spell out the organization-level mechanisms that link policy to individuals.

To be sure, studies of individual-level feedback effects have taken note of nonprofit organizations, but we know little about what happens within these organizations—how they translate policy for individual beneficiaries. For example, in her study of the G.I. Bill, Mettler (2005) acknowledges the efficient implementation of the program by colleges and universities, but emphasizes the policy itself as driving veterans' enhanced civic engagement. Likewise, in her study of the Social Security program, Campbell (2003) notes how policy created a constituency group ("senior citizens") and an advocacy organization (AARP) through which program beneficiaries participate in politics; but the study does not focus on how Social Security shaped organizational dynamics themselves. The emphasis is understandable: these path-breaking works were designed to estimate policy effects on individual behavior, not to explore organizational dynamics. Yet policy clearly operates on and through nonprofit organizations. We suggest that there is much of theoretical interest to explore within the organizational black box. Further, we theorize that nonprofits might deliver different feedback effects from those delivered by public bureaucracies. Understanding how citizens experience policy through organizations will enrich theories of policy feedback.

If feedback theory has taken too little account of nonprofits, work on nonprofit organizations has taken too little account of feedback theory. Nonprofits are engines of civic participation and inclusion (Barnes, forthcoming; Berry & Arons, 2003; Boris, McKeever, & Leydier, 2017; Goss, 2013; Putnam, 2000; Rose, 2018a; Skocpol, 2003). This insight certainly holds for nonprofit organizations designed for political ends, such as social movement organizations, advocacy groups, and party committees. But the insight also holds for seemingly nonpolitical organizations (Berry & Arons, 2003; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, & Nie, 1993). If organizations are critical to participation, then we need to be much more attuned to how public policy influences them. Works on the nonprofit sector discuss how policies act on or through organizations, as organizations, and how nonprofits mobilize citizens. But these two lines of inquiry are considered separately—not as a system of related inputs (policies) and outputs (participation) mediated by organizations (Boris & Steuerle, 2017; Powell & Steinberg, 2006). As Goss (2010, p. 121) has argued, the literature on the government–nonprofit relationship has focused on the "roles and power relations between the two sectors at the elite level but has given less attention to the implications of those relationships for individual-level engagement." Policies such as constitutional liberties, funding arrangements, statutes and administrative regulations, and program guidelines all can influence individual civic participation and inclusion via the organizations of civil society. The usual feedback story portrays policy as constraining organizations, which might be hypothesized to dampen engagement in turn. In this telling, policy is a force that "bears down" on organizations and citizens (Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). We suggest that policy can also "lift up" organizations

by providing latitude and discretion to program managers. In turn, we hypothesize that uplifting policies empower individual beneficiaries and enhance their political engagement.

Delving into the role of organizations in mass-level feedback effects promises to yield important theoretical advances. But these feedback processes are also highly relevant in the real world of politics and policymaking. In an era of extreme partisan division and declining state capacity, nonprofit organizations have assumed an ever more central role in conducting public work. Civil society organizations—including service providers, social entrepreneurial ventures, and philanthropic foundations—are critical policy actors (Callahan, 2017).

Mettler and Soss (2004) created a useful typology of mechanisms by which policy feedback effects influence mass participation. This typology focused on how policy operates on organizations, or on citizens directly. We connect the two. Borrowing from Mettler and Soss's approach, we focus our theory building on the level of organizations. We elaborate on the authors' observation that policy can structure participation by creating arenas for citizens to press their claims. Nonprofit organizations constitute such arenas. We argue that policy can affect what happens inside these arenas to influence participatory citizenship. Importantly, policy can act either affirmatively—by prescribing or directing organizational behaviors—or policy can act in the breach, by supporting organizations while giving them the latitude to perform their civic functions for individuals.

This article is organized around key roles that nonprofit organizations play in preparing and mobilizing individuals for civic and political life: (i) developing civic skills and resources; (ii) fostering civic inclusion; (iii) serving as arenas for political and civic recruitment; (iv) affecting individuals' political visibility; and (v) organizing collective action. Working through each of these roles, we describe mechanisms by which public policy might either strengthen or undermine nonprofits' capacity to fulfill each. We show both *what* policy does through organizations and *how* the design of policy influences the result. We draw on illustrative findings from a wide range of literatures and our own original research, connecting the dots between policy-focused and individual-focused findings. We lay the groundwork for this organization-level analysis with an overview of how public policy has encouraged the creation and vibrancy of the nonprofit sector in the United States.

How Policy Supports the Nonprofit Sector

In the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville ([1835] 1994) famously observed that Americans are forever creating voluntary associations to conduct the public's work. However, the modern civil society sector is as much a creature of the state as it is an organic product of civic cooperation. Through constitutional protections for freedom of speech and assembly, the state creates a legal space for political, trade, membership, and charitable groups to operate. The state confers recognition on these groups through incorporation and the granting of nonprofit status. The state also supports these groups through direct grants; contracts for services; loans and loan guarantees; and tax subsidies, such as exemption from business income tax and

deductibility for certain types of contributions. Such resource-enhancing policies are well documented (Salamon, 1995; Smith & Lipsky, 1993).

Less well understood is how these resource flows shape the participation of organizations' clients and members. Scholars who examine the effects of these subsidies typically focus on the organizational recipient itself. Do government grants and contracts inhibit organizations' willingness to engage in legislative advocacy (Chaves, Stephens, & Galaskiewicz, 2004)? Do tax regulations chill organizations' willingness to engage in politics (Berry & Arons, 2003)? These studies focus on how resource flows affect organizations as political actors, but stop short of asking the next question: How does public policy affect the political behavior of organizations' *individual beneficiaries*.

Table 1 provides an overview of five roles that organizations play in the civic life of individuals. For each role, we offer illustrative organizations and outline policy mechanisms that operate via these organizations on the individuals associated with them. These individuals may be founders, leaders, supporters, members, enrollees, clients, beneficiaries, or some combination thereof. This categorization scheme is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather merely suggestive—a starting point for building theory about the intersection of the state, organizations, and individual civic actors.

The next five sections elaborate on the five roles laid out in Table 1 by exploring how policy shapes organizations' influence on the civic life of individuals.

Developing Civic Skills and Resources

The influential civic resource model of political participation developed by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) demonstrates how churches, universities, unions, and voluntary associations foster political engagement. These organizations, particularly

Table 1. Policy Feedback Through Organizations, With Illustrative Mechanisms

Nonprofit Role	Illustrative Organizations	Policy Mechanisms
Developing civic skills and resources	Colleges/universities	State funding
	Child-care centers	Participation requirements
Fostering civic inclusion (or exclusion)	HBCUs, community colleges	State funding, nondiscrimination laws
	Nonprofit providers	Incentives to value clients
	Commercial providers	Latitude to prioritize profits
Serving as arenas for political recruitment	Private schools	Deliver prospective political participants
	Community nonprofits	Encourage constituency building
	HBCUs	Fund leadership development
Affecting political visibility	Donative organizations	Permit hidden influence
	HBCUs	Subsidized media
	Nonprofit providers	Incentivize representation of poor
Structuring collective action	AmeriCorps	Fund service, constrain advocacy
	Membership associations	Funding, subsidies
	Unions	Bolstering/undermining member base

churches, even enhance participatory equality by compensating for civic skill defi-
cits arising from socioeconomic disadvantage (Verba et al., 1993). Policy plays a role
in enabling these organizations and other types of nonprofits to develop individu-
als' civic skills and resources, including the ability to organize, communicate, and
persuade. Several types of policy levers are especially important.

First, policy can allocate financial resources to organizations that encourage
beneficiaries to acquire skills useful for public engagement. Colleges and univer-
sities constitute a critical category of such organizations. The state provides them
with both direct financial support in the form of appropriations and grants, as well
as indirect support through student aid programs like Pell Grants and federal stu-
dent loans. These funding streams help higher education institutions to relay civic
knowledge to students and develop their civic skills in preparation for engagement
in public life (Anft, 2018; Mettler, 2005; Rose, 2017, 2018a). Research shows that poli-
tics-oriented courses influence the nature of young citizens' political engagement in
the years following college graduation (Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt,
& Nikolova, 2002; Beaumont, Colby, Ehrlich, & Torney-Purta, 2006; Hillygus, 2005;
Niemi & Junn, 1998). Moreover, colleges use a variety of programs—including ser-
vice learning opportunities, internships, voter registration efforts, and loan forgive-
ness—to equip and enable students to participate in public-oriented activities (Anft,
2018; Bowman, Denson, & Park, 2016; Hoffman, 2015). Without the support of gov-
ernment programs, nonprofit colleges, and universities (and their public counte-
parts) would not be able to deliver citizenship-enhancing resources and civic skills
that foster political engagement among students and graduates.

Second, policy can mandate that organizations engage clients and other bene-
ficiaries in participatory activities (Bruch, Ferree, & Soss, 2010; Leroux, 2009, 2011;
Small, 2009; Soss, 1999). In her ethnographic study of after-school programs for
low-income children, for example, Barnes (forthcoming) demonstrates how policy
guidelines may outline formal participatory roles for parents. By designating that
parents become volunteers, leaders, or employees, guidelines such as these enhance
disadvantaged parents' civic skills and political efficacy (Barnes, forthcoming;
Bruch et al., 2010; Soss, 1999). In another study of child-care centers, Small (2009)
similarly finds that government funding encourages civic-skill–building roles, such
as parent volunteering and leadership opportunities. With these skills, low-income
parents are equipped to participate more fully in public life than they otherwise
might have.

Fostering Civic Inclusion

Public policy can work directly to determine which individuals are members of
the polity and who is entitled to first- and second-class citizenship (Mettler & Soss,
2004; Schneider & Ingram, 2005). But organizations, too, shape people's civic identi-
ties and orientations (Mayer, 2014; McAdam, 1990; Munson, 2009). Policy can operate
through organizations to enlarge or limit their role as engines of civic inclusion.

One mechanism by which policy fuels these engines is by channeling resources
to them. Here, the case of higher education is again illustrative. After the Civil War,

as African Americans focused on taking up their roles as citizens in the United States, many sought education and the citizenship-enhancing knowledge, skills, and status that it promised. Federal lawmakers had provided for the creation of flagship land grant colleges in every state under the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, but these institutions routinely discriminated against African Americans who wished to enroll. In 1890, as they passed a second land grant policy to provide additional financial assistance to public colleges, policymakers chose to support the creation of separate black colleges, rather than to require the 1862 land grant institutions to integrate.

Although the proliferation of historically black colleges and universities during the late nineteenth century was driven by a policy of *de jure* segregation that barred African American students from attending publicly supported white colleges, the 1890 Morrill Land Grant Act supported the creation of black colleges that were built with the central mission of investing in African Americans and promoting their movement toward full, first-class citizenship (Rose, 2018b). In addition to the land grant policies that contributed to the creation of a number of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) during the nineteenth century, policies created since the mid-twentieth century also have supported these institutions' distinct, citizenship-enhancing contributions. Financial aid provided by programs like the Higher Education Act of 1965 has reached a significant proportion of students attending historically black colleges. Moreover, Title III of this policy provides targeted funds for HBCUs that have helped sustain these organizations and their efforts to correct for the historical injustices and disparities wrought by slavery and segregation (Brown & Davis, 2001, p. 33).

By providing support for HBCUs, public policy has contributed to their crucial work in helping African Americans to gain knowledge and skills that have translated into the social, economic, and political capital that are part-and-parcel of full citizenship. For example, some HBCUs integrate civic engagement into their curriculum through service learning requirements (Albritton, 2012, p. 323). Others offer voter registration drives as well as various social services to their communities, like adult learning programs, day care, and food pantries (Gasman, Spencer, & Orphan, 2015, p. 359). Some of these organizations even formally incentivize professors to incorporate service into their courses by looking favorably on such efforts when making tenure and promotion decisions (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 351). By supporting HBCUs with public policy, lawmakers have contributed to feedback effects that have been important to the progress that African Americans have made since the mid-twentieth century and to the strides that they have made as members of the polity.

Besides directing public dollars to organizations that incorporate marginalized groups, the state can mandate that state-subsidized institutions maintain policies of inclusion. Just as government-sanctioned discrimination engendered the creation and proliferation of historically black colleges and women's colleges during the nineteenth century, federal nondiscrimination policies made college desegregation an imperative in the twentieth century. For example, the 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawed race-based discrimination at colleges and universities. Eight years later,

Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments prohibited sex discrimination in college admissions (see, e.g., Rose, 2018a). In both cases, lawmakers used regulatory policy to require all colleges and universities to dispense with discriminatory admissions practices.

Community colleges provide another important example of government-supported organizations through which public policy promotes a mission of inclusion. Enrolling approximately 40 percent of all U.S. postsecondary students, community colleges—which can be government, tribal, or nonprofit organizations—receive the bulk of their funding from local property taxes, state funds, and tuition and fees paid by students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; Zeidenberg, 2008, p. 56).[1] These organizations use mechanisms such as open admissions policies, low-cost tuition, and provision of remedial coursework to democratize access to higher education. These practices are particularly important for expanding the citizenship-enhancing benefits of postsecondary education to students who may be less prepared to transition into 4-year higher education institutions (Garcia & Garza, 2016, pp. 41–42; see also Jurgens, 2010, p. 257). By supporting community colleges with tax dollars, public policy plays a central role in these institutions' capacity to promote civic inclusion.

Finally, policy can create incentives for organizations to treat clients as either valued or devalued citizens. Federally funded after-school programs offer an example of how policy can confer valued status on individuals. These programs tie grant funding to organizations' ability to recruit and retain students. Because children bring resources, parents are more akin to customers than to clients, and staff members treat parents as "partners" in their children's academic development (Barnes, forthcoming). Staff members routinely communicate with parents about their children's program and elicit informal feedback about the quality of services. In such empowering relationships lies the possibility of cooperation for mutually beneficial ends (Barnes, forthcoming). Similar customer-empowering mechanisms are at work in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance to Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, where funding for WIC offices depends on retaining beneficiaries (Barnes & Michener, 2017). This power dynamic differs from that typical of means-tested programs, which diminish recipients' autonomy and voice by structuring staff–client interactions around determining eligibility and monitoring compliance with program rules (Barnes & Henly, 2018; Brodkin & Madjumar, 2010; Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2014; Soss, 2000).

These examples demonstrate how policy can direct funding to organizations that foster civic inclusion. But policy also can direct funding to organizations that lack such a civic mission. Florida devolved some welfare-to-work programs to for-profit agencies, which answer to shareholders and seek to minimize costs and maximize profits. Compared to nonprofits, these businesses are more prone to serve clients considered likely to succeed while discouraging harder-to-serve clients from participation in the program (Soss et al., 2011, pp. 212–216). It is reasonable to infer that the discouraged clients receive negative lessons about their worth as citizens.

The federal government also has allowed federal student loans and grant funds to be used at for-profit colleges and universities. They rely heavily on these state

subsidies, which allow the institutions to charge high tuition rates. Students who attend for-profit universities are disproportionately likely to drop out, and those who graduate often end up saddled with massive educational debt and default on their loans (Mettler, 2014). While the civic ramifications of this situation are unclear, theory tells us that the cycle would bode poorly for several reasons. Students who drop out fail to gain the full set of civic skills associated with higher education; these institutions themselves are less likely than traditional universities to offer a rich menu of participatory opportunities for students; and the practical and psychological toll of debt and joblessness is not conducive to feelings of civic inclusion.

Serving as Arenas for Political Recruitment

Organizations mobilize citizens indirectly by giving them the skills, resources, and civic orientations that facilitate political participation, and citizens with these attributes make appealing prospects for recruitment (Brady, Schlozman, & Verba, 1999). In turn, research tells us that recruitment—"being asked"—is a powerful predictor of political and civic participation (Gerber & Green, 2000; Hahn, 2014; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Verba et al., 1995). Organizations serve as arenas for political recruitment (Leighley, 1996; see also Pollock, 1982). Policy can influence the nature and extent to which organizations serve as loci of political organization and mobilization. This influence occurs through several mechanisms.

First, policy can enlarge organizations' role as mobilizers by delivering resource-bearing individuals to nonprofits that encourage public engagement. For example, studies have found that school-choice policies, which provide vouchers to families to use outside the public school system, can raise the level of volunteering, civic skill building, and voting likelihood among students (Fleming, Mitchell, & McNally, 2014). This association likely arises from the fact that voucher students often opt to enroll in nonprofit religious schools, which may be more likely to require community service (Fleming et al., 2014). The participatory effects may spill over to parents of students in school-choice programs (Cox & Witko, 2008; Schneider, Teske, & Marschall, 2000).

A second way that policy can act is by recruiting beneficiaries into politics through service delivery. Nonprofit organizations have assumed a role once played by political parties in low-income communities by taking on the "electoral organizing role at the neighborhood level" (Marwell, 2004, p. 269). Nonprofits engage in a "patronage" exchange with local residents in which organizations provide government-funded services to build constituencies for local elected officials. By educating voters on the implicit political contract, nonprofits can transform beneficiaries from "clients" to "organizational adherents" who understand the politics of funding and "reliable voters" who will support the elected officials delivering resources to community-based organizations (Marwell, 2004, pp. 280–281). Simply stated, nonprofit service providers can recruit beneficiaries into politics by using services as a means to build constituencies for local elected officials.

Finally, policy can directly support organizations that cultivate political leadership and mobilize individual action. HBCUs illustrate these roles. In the early

twentieth century, HBCUs produced and sustained many of the black intellectuals who helped to shape the nation's thinking on issues of race, equal opportunity, and citizenship (Gasman & Geiger, 2012; Ray, 2012). When the civil rights movement arose at mid-century, its leadership was dominated by HBCU graduates, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Thurgood Marshall, and Diane Nash (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Allen, Jewell, Griffin, & Wolf, 2007; Palmer & Young, 2010). At the ground level, HBCUs also served as arenas for recruiting participants in mass challenges to Jim Crow—notably the 1960 sit-ins at segregated lunch counters and the 1961 "freedom rides" to integrate public transportation facilities in the South (Morris, 1984). Well into the twenty-first century, HBCUs had educated a disproportionate share of the nation's African American political elites, including 40 percent of black members of Congress, 50 percent of black lawyers, and 80 percent of black judges (Thurgood Marshall College Fund, 2016). Emerging from racial segregation, these institutions were created as a result of, and sustained by, public policy. They became critical to political action that dismantled legal racial apartheid in the United States, helping to advance African Americans toward full citizenship (see, e.g., Brooks & Starks, 2011; Lovett, 2015; McClure, 2013; Rose, 2018b).

Affecting Political Visibility

Operating on and through organizations, public policy can raise the political visibility of citizens or allow them to exercise influence without drawing attention. For marginalized groups, greater visibility may be an advantage, while people of wealth may find political advantage in operating under the radar.

The laws that govern political and philanthropic giving provide one example of how policy works through organizations to facilitate the under-the-radar participation of elite individuals. Certain organizational vehicles—such as donor-advised philanthropic funds, limited liability corporations (LLCs), and social welfare groups organized under section 501(c)(4) of the tax code—afford wealthy political actors extra levels of secrecy. For each of these three categories of organizations, policy allows donations to flow to recipient organizations and causes without being traced back to the donor. The latter two organizations, LLCs and social-welfare groups, may use non-traceable "dark money" to lobby and influence elections (as long as the organizations do not coordinate with candidates or parties). Elite individuals are already especially empowered to participate in public life by virtue of their exceptional civic skills and resources (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012; Verba et al., 1995). Policies governing the donative organizations used by elites provide an extra civic boost by allowing them to exercise power over public policy without public scrutiny or constraint (Goss, 2016). Indeed, Page, Seawright and Lacombe (2018) argue that billionaires pursue influence through "stealth politics," meaning they remain publicly quiet on policy issues while channeling large sums of money to favored candidates and causes (see also Mayer, 2016).

Even professionally staffed foundations, which public policy subjects to more disclosure requirements compared to other organizations, allow elites to operate in relative secrecy. Foundations, which can be overseen by living donors or staffs

carrying on the legacy of donors who have died, must disclose detailed information about their finances and governance on an annual basis through the Internal Revenue Service Form 990-PF, which typically becomes publicly available during the following tax year. However, the form provides no information on important questions of elite influence, such as how the donors or staffs design their grant-making strategies or choose beneficiaries. These questions are both matters of great public concern.

While elites may prefer stealthy participation, marginalized citizens often seek to raise the visibility of their public engagement. Policy can work through organizations to help them do so. Research shows that policy-favored nonprofits function as nonelected representatives of disadvantaged communities in local politics and public affairs (Berry & Arons, 2003; Levine, 2016) and low-income citizens view them as good and legitimate representatives of their interests (Mosley & Grogan, 2012; Park, Mosley, & Grogan, 2018).

HBCUs, which federal policy helped to create and sustain over many decades, provide an interesting example of this function. During the 1950s, several of these institutions used radio and television media to communicate with their communities, to expose them to political issues, and to encourage efforts to fight for civil rights. Talladega College, for example, aired a radio show that grappled with voting rights, workplace segregation, and other controversial topics (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 364). This program was particularly noteworthy given that the mainstream media offered African Americans little encouragement to vote or otherwise participate in the polity. As Gasman et al. (2015, p. 364) note, "the role of HBCUs was crucial to the civic engagement and political activity of black citizens." Another HBCU, Bethune-Cookman College, offered African American community members information on the importance of voting, promoted efforts to combat voter disenfranchisement, and actively supported the pursuit of civil rights for black Americans (Gasman et al., 2015, p. 366). As such examples illustrate, HBCUs have helped to empower the African American community by providing enhanced visibility on the social and political landscape.

However, public policy also can dampen and shift the nature of nonprofits' advocacy. In the case of nonprofit human service agencies, Mosley (2013) suggests that government's increased reliance on nonprofits to deliver policy creates reciprocal relationships between the state and nonprofit organizations that change the message and avenues of advocacy. Rather than rallying for substantive policy change on behalf of their clients, nonprofit human service agencies advocate to protect the government funds on which these groups depend. Given their close relationships with government, they may do so through less elaborate participatory means such as phone calls to government administrators. Thus, policy can raise the visibility of the disadvantaged but also shape the way nonprofits advocate for the poor, dampening calls for policy change and shifting advocacy tactics away from participatory and conflictual strategies.

Structuring Collective Action

Civil society groups are engines of collective action. Citizens make claims on government through mass membership associations, political interest groups, and social movement organizations (Goss, 2013; Morris, 1984; Skocpol, 2003). Citizens also work through civil society organizations to produce goods for mutual benefit and to provide services to others. Public policy often operates directly or indirectly on organizations to shape the scope and nature of these communal activities. The state sponsors, subsidizes, and constrains collective action.

The federally and state-funded AmeriCorps program provides a good example of how public policy sponsors collective action in collaboration with nonprofit organizations. Established through the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, AmeriCorps encompasses a nation-spanning network of hundreds of nonprofit organizations that engage individuals in a substantial commitment to community service. Some one million people have served as members, contributing 1.4 billion hours of service (AmeriCorps, 2018).[2] AmeriCorps includes a full-time, team-based residential corps, AmeriCorps NCCC, and serves as a key funder of nonprofit corps, such as City Year and Teach for America.

These programs organize young people to work collectively through service to their communities, with civic ripple effects over time. A longitudinal study of the AmeriCorps program found that program participants were more likely to be volunteering three years afterward than were members of a carefully matched control group (Frumkin et al., 2009). These participants also were more involved in community-based activism both three and eight years after their AmeriCorps term had ended (Frumkin et al., 2009). The program recruits disadvantaged young people who might not otherwise have been embedded in civic institutions, and in so doing may be narrowing the participation gap between less privileged and more privileged people (Finlay, Flanagan, & Wray-Lake, 2011). The AmeriCorps program provides a nationally salient example of how policy sponsors collective civic participation.

If not directly sponsoring collective action, public policy can subsidize it. Indeed, some of America's most successful mass-mobilizing associations illustrate the pivotal role of state subsidies at critical junctures in their development. The National Rifle Association, which claims several million members and has effective veto power over gun policy nationally and in many states, benefited for many decades from a law that required individuals to become members if they wanted to buy cut-rate surplus arms from the military (Goss, 2006). AARP, the senior citizen lobby that made Social Security the "third rail" of American politics, received nearly one-fifth of its operating revenue from federal grants in the early 1990s, freeing up other sources of revenue that could be used to mobilize members as threats to entitlement programs arose (Campbell, 2003). Hundreds of nonprofit anti-smoking groups and coalitions received millions of dollars from the federal government, making it a major patron of this successful social movement (Goss, 2006; Wolfson, 2001). Veterans' groups receive an especially favorable bundle of policy subsidies under the Internal Revenue Code, including exemption from income taxes, deductibility of donations, the prerogative to distribute benefits to individuals, and the latitude

to engage in legislative advocacy and electoral politics (Berkovsky, Lieber, & Barrett, 1999). The gun lobby, the senior lobby, the antismoking movement, and veterans' groups have been among the most successful examples of collective action in recent history (Goss, 2006), and each has enjoyed important subsidies from the state.

Just as the state might encourage collective action, laws and regulations can also narrow and dampen citizen engagement. AmeriCorps illustrates how such constraining mechanisms can operate. When Congress passed the national-service act, it barred certain types of politically engaged nonprofits—including political parties, unions, and issue advocacy groups—from hosting AmeriCorps volunteers (Goss, 2010). Regulations further barred AmeriCorps participants from engaging in certain types of political activities through sponsoring organizations. Prohibited activities included organizing boycotts, petitions, protests, strikes, or labor unions and trying to influence lawmaking (Goss, 2010). Labor laws illustrate another way that policy can constrain collective action. Here, the policy levers are not direct regulations on activity but rather measures that indirectly undermine unions' leverage over employers. Unions serve as places where workers can develop civic skills and as platforms for the exercise of political voice. Skills and attitudes developed through union activity may spill over into deep engagement in other venues, such as children's schools (Terriquez, 2011). Yet the capacity of unions to fill these roles for workers depends on supportive public policy, and policy has become less friendly in the postwar era. The 1947 Taft-Hartley Act allowed states to bar unions from requiring covered workers from paying dues, contributing to a decline in union membership (Ellwood & Fine, 1987) and encouraging capital to relocate to states with weaker union protections (Hacker & Pierson, 2010). Policies that encourage the distribution of health and pension benefits through employers, rather than the state, also have weakened unions' power (Hacker & Pierson, 2010). The decline of unions as organizations softened the voice of everyday citizens in politics: "As unions shifted from involvement in politics to embattled defense of their ever-smaller pocket of the workforce, they also ceased to be able, or always willing, to play the role of champions of the broad middle class they had carved out in their heyday" (Hacker & Pierson, 2010, p. 142).

Crosscutting Hypotheses From the Cases

This theory-building exercise suggests several testable hypotheses. One hypothesis is that policies that operate through organizations may perform different functions for different categories of beneficiaries. Less advantaged people on average have fewer civic skills, resources, or opportunities to exercise political voice. For these groups, policies may empower nonprofit organizations to mitigate the demobilizing effects of disadvantage and to provide an alternative to the stigmatizing effects of means-tested social programs. The effect may be to elevate beneficiaries' civic voice by conferring dignity, inculcating political skills and efficacy, and providing opportunities for political action. In other words, policies may operate through organizations to make less visible citizens more visible. For more advantaged groups, already blessed with politically relevant resources, skills, and

opportunities, policies allow organizations to serve a different role. Here, policies facilitate the concentration and replication of advantage by encouraging both the elevation of civic status and the masking of political influence. Policy helps these organizations make visible citizens less visible when working quietly suits their political needs.

Another hypothesis turns on the question of *policy* visibility (Mettler, 2011; Mettler & Soss, 2004). In the United States, government benefits are often delivered indirectly in ways that distance citizens from their government—what Howard (1999) calls "the hidden welfare state" and Mettler (2011) terms "the submerged state." When feedback effects are mediated by organizations, policy may not change citizens' relationship to the state because the causal chain from policy to beneficiary is difficult to observe (on policy traceability, see Arnold, 1992). The obscuring of government's role in empowering citizens may diminish their sense of obligation to take part in public affairs.

Our discussion also raises the possibility that less restrictive policies that devolve discretion to organizations and empower individual beneficiaries may have unusually positive feedback effects on political engagement. Policies that provide supportive, flexible resources coupled with minimal regulation allow organizations to tailor their services to individual beneficiaries. This effect is magnified when policy also empowers individuals directly—for example, through market mechanisms in the case of parents seeking childcare, financial aid in the case of students seeking education, and tax advantages and privacy protections in the case of philanthropists. This discussion calls our attention to the distinction between resource effects, the idea that policy conveys money and other tangible goods to individuals, and interpretive effects, the idea that policy conveys information and meaning to individuals (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Pierson, 1993). To the extent that policies structure individuals' relationships with organizations, including funding relationships, in ways that provide citizens with tangible goods and feelings of civic empowerment, the distinction between resource effects and interpretive effects tends to dissolve.

Finally, we suggest that there are differences across types of organizations in the level of policy mediation that they perform. In some cases, notably social service agencies operating as arms of the welfare state, the mediation level appears to be high. These agencies are not simply "passing policy through" to the beneficiaries. The agencies are making choices that affect the beneficiaries' experience of the policy and by extension their political engagement. Other kinds of organizations may perform less of a mediating role. Philanthropic foundations constitute such a category. While they certainly make choices that can shape the civic image of donors, foundations may provide less of a civic boost to wealthy people—beyond what their elite status already provides—than social service organizations provide to disadvantaged beneficiaries. The civic value-added of organizations may vary depending on the starting point of the target group and the extent to which members of the target group must operate through these organizations.

Conclusion

Policy feedback scholars have developed rich theoretical frameworks and case studies to understand how policies expand or constrain individuals' civic inclusion and political participation. Meanwhile, scholars of nonprofits have illuminated how civil society organizations empower, organize, and mobilize beneficiaries. These literatures are concerned with the same outcome—civic engagement—and would benefit from greater theorizing at their intersection. This article begins to do so. We argue that the literature on policy feedback has paid too little attention to organizations as mediators between the state and the individual, while the literature on nonprofit organizations has paid too little attention to public policy in shaping organizations' role in the civic lives of individuals. We suggest that feedback effects trickle down through multiple levels—from the state to the organization to the individual.

This article uses existing literature by other scholars, along with findings from our own work, to make the case for the centrality of organizations in mass-level policy feedback effects. We identify five roles that nonprofit organizations play in individuals' civic engagement and describe ways that policy shapes these roles. The larger point is that civil society does not operate in a vacuum. The state powerfully influences the context in which civil society organizations do their work and the activities they undertake. The state can provide resource flows to organizations that enlarge individuals' capacities and opportunities for civic engagement, or the state can direct resources toward organizations that lack such a civic mission. The state can allow nonprofit groups broad latitude to engage beneficiaries, or it can constrain these groups' ability to do so. The state can structure its policy relationship with nonprofits in ways that empower, or disempower, citizens.

This article is meant to open a conversation, not to test a theory. We suggest that revealing analytical insights can be gained by rereading the policy feedback literature with an eye toward the hidden hand of organizations and by rereading the nonprofit literature with an eye toward the hidden hand of public policy. Our preliminary effort to do so suggests research questions that merit investigation. Do the dynamics that we notice in this review extend to other organizations and their beneficiaries? Are further mechanisms at work? What features of policy or organizations determine the extent to which organizations empower their beneficiaries? What are the major challenges associated with investigating feedback effects operating through organizations? How do we determine whether organizational leaders are acting autonomously or in response to policy cues?

Other questions draw our attention to policy design. In an era of great political inequality, perhaps democracy demands that public policies be designed to incentivize or even require organizations to magnify the voices of the politically marginalized (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). Perhaps policy should demand greater transparency around the political participation of the already powerful (Callahan, 2017). These ideas ask us to consider how policymakers are to balance competing goods, such as freedom of speech and association and privacy rights, with the imperatives of equality and accountable governance. These and other questions underscore the insight

of feedback scholars (Mettler & SoRelle, 2018; Schneider & Sidney, 2009) that policy should be evaluated not simply on cost-benefit grounds, but also according to how it contributes to, or undermines, widely shared norms of democratic governance.

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Notes

1. For the purpose of this study, we consider community colleges to be more akin to nonprofit organizations than to government bureaucracies.
2. The service commitment varies across programs. One program, AmeriCorps State and National, requires 300–1,700 hours; AmeriCorps VISTA requires 1 year (AmeriCorps, 2018).

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