P15 / Policy Feedback in Low- and Lower-Middle-Income Countries: Diverse Mechanisms, New Contexts, and Varied Experiences

Topic : Policy Process Theories

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The literature on the policy feedback theory has long established that public policies are not just outcomes of politics, but they also reshape subsequent politics. Foundational works on policy feedback show that policies can redistribute resources, structure incentives, create or weaken constituencies, and provide interpretive messages about governance, citizenship, legitimacy, and political efficacy (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Pierson, 1993). The related scholarship entails feedback among mass publics, organised interest, elites, institutions, and policy development, including self-reinforcing or self-undermining processes (Béland et al., 2022; Béland & Schlager, 2019; Jacobs & Weaver, 2015).

However, the empirical foundations of this scholarship remain disproportionately concentrated in the United States, broadly North America, and other advanced industrial democracies (Béland & Schlager, 2019; Hern, 2017a). This geographical concentration is theoretically consequential. Many established expectations presume comparatively stable programmes, recognisable state authorship, programmatic delivery, and institutionalised channels connecting citizens and organised interests to government (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021; Hern, 2017b). These conditions cannot be assumed across low-income countries (LICs) and lower-middle-income countries (Lower-MICs), although income classification itself is not treated as a proxy for state capacity or regime type. The categories instead define an intentionally underrepresented empirical domain within which feedback theory can be tested under wider institutional variation.

In LICs and Lower-MICs, policies may be implemented unevenly and encountered through frontline officials, local brokers, community organisations, NGOs, donors, private providers, or through digital infrastructures (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021). Benefits can increase material resources while political credit flows to an intermediary; policy experiences can generate efficacy, claims-making, and collective organisation, but also stigma, dependence, distrust, or countermobilization (Mettler & Soss, 2004; Moynihan et al., 2015). Emerging studies from Zambia and Ghana, together with comparative work on social protection under low and uneven state capacity, show that feedback may be attenuated, redirected, or self-undermining rather than uniformly reinforcing (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021; Hern, 2017b; Ibrahim, 2023; Wireko et al., 2020).

The panel's central question is: *How do public policies reshape politics in LICs and lower-MICs, through which mechanisms, under what institutional and social conditions, and with what consequences for political participation, state-citizen relations, organised interests, and subsequent policy development?* It advances three expectations.

• **Expectation 1.** Reliable provision is more likely to strengthen resource effects, while visibility and traceability to public authority strengthen interpretive effects and political attribution; fragmented or brokered delivery may attenuate or redirect both (Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021; Campbell, 2012; Pierson, 1993).

• **Expectation 2.** Exclusionary design, administrative burden, stigma, and discretionary implementation can generate differentiated or self-undermining feedback, with effects shaped by state capacity, decentralisation, regime type, party competition, and inequalities of gender, caste, class, ethnicity, and place (Jacobs & Weaver, 2015; Moynihan et al., 2015).

• **Expectation 3.** Policies embedded in associations, self-help groups, unions, or participatory institutions are more likely to generate organisational and relational resources for sustained mobilisation than individually delivered benefits (Bruch et al., 2010; Flavin & Hartney, 2015).

By comparing these mechanisms and scope conditions, the panel will assess what travels from established theory, what requires modification, and what LIC and Lower-MIC cases contribute to a genuinely comparative policy-feedback research agenda.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite theoretical, empirical, and methodological papers that use policy-feedback theory to explain how

enacted policies reshape politics in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Submissions must identify a policy or policy experience, specify a feedback mechanism, and analyse a political consequence and, where possible, its implications for subsequent policy development. Eligible cases should concern an economy classified by the World Bank as low income or lower-middle income during the policy period under study; authors should state the classification basis clearly.

We particularly welcome papers examining canonical resource and interpretive mechanisms and their interaction with organisational, relational, learning, and administrative mechanisms. Moderating or mediating factors may include, but are not limited to, policy visibility and traceability, provision reliability, frontline experiences, administrative load, policy intermediaries and policy brokers, clientelism, donor involvement, decentralisation, digitalisation, and formal or informal organisations. Papers may focus on social protection, health, education, livelihoods, infrastructure, climate, energy, gender, or digital public services. Unique focus areas are welcome as long as they enrich the policy feedback scholarship, especially in the context of the LIC and Lower-MICs.

Political or institutional outcomes may include trust, legitimacy, political efficacy, electoral or non-electoral civic behaviour, individual or group organisation, identity and belonging, policy constituencies, elite strategies, and administrative or organisational capacity. Policy-level outcomes may include durability, expansion, extension, redesign, retrenchment/termination, displacement, or path-deviation. We welcome positive, negative, null, heterogeneous, reinforcing, or self-undermining feedback effects. We also invite papers on any new type of effects that the scholarship on policy feedback does not establish yet.

Single-country, subnational, cross-national, and cross-regional studies are welcome, as are comparisons across policies, groups, sectors, or time. Quantitative, qualitative, comparative-historical, experimental, ethnographic, mixed-method, and conceptual approaches are welcome. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses can also be submitted as long as they shed some light on policy feedback patterns in LIC or Lower-MICs.

Abstracts should state the country and policy; relevant design and implementation features; actors and level of analysis; proposed feedback mechanism; political or policy outcome; temporal sequence; and method or evidence used to assess the relationship. Studies focused only on programme performance, implementation success, service uptake, or socioeconomic outcomes fall outside the panel unless they demonstrate how those effects reshape politics or subsequent policymaking. We especially encourage submissions by scholars based in, or with sustained research engagement in, the countries studied, and welcome early-career researchers.

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