P90 / Youth and public policy: political agency, institutional conditions and reciprocal effects

Topic : Citizens, Participation and Social Movements

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Youth[1] occupy a complex position in contemporary public policy processes. On the one hand, they are frequently identified as a priority population in policy agendas addressing education, employment and social inequalities, among other issues. On the other hand, they participate in shaping, contesting and implementing public policies through social movements, advocacy organizations and institutionalized participatory mechanisms. Yet their capacity to influence policy decisions remains uneven, while the policies targeting them may reshape their opportunities for political participation.

Although research on youth political participation has extensively examined activism, collective action and political engagement (e.g., Fisher, 2012; Weiss, 2020), including emerging forms of digitally mediated participation and mobilization, it has devoted comparatively less attention to their consequences for public policy processes. Conversely, public policy scholarship has developed frameworks for understanding policy change, institutional arrangements and policy feedback (e.g., Béland & Schlager, 2019; Peters & Zittoun, 2016), but young people are often approached primarily as policy beneficiaries rather than political actors capable of influencing policymaking.

This panel seeks to bridge these research traditions by examining the reciprocal relationships between youth political agency and public policy processes. It addresses two interconnected questions: Under what conditions and through which mechanisms do young people influence public policies? How do public policies, in turn, shape young people's political participation, collective identities and capacities for political action?

The panel explores three complementary analytical dimensions.

First, it examines youth influence on public policy, investigating how young people mobilize resources, build coalitions, access decision-making arenas and influence policy agendas, design, implementation and change.

Second, it investigates the effects of public policies on youth political agency, considering how policy instruments, institutional arrangements and outcomes shape young people's resources, political attitudes, collective identities and opportunities for participation.

Third, the panel explores the dynamic interactions between youth participation and public policy, examining how policy decisions generate new forms of mobilization, institutional participation or contestation, potentially contributing to subsequent policy adjustments or transformations.

By bringing together theoretical and empirical contributions from different policy sectors and political contexts, the panel aims to advance an integrated understanding of young people as both subjects and agents of public policy. It particularly welcomes both in-depth single-case studies and comparative research explaining variations in youth policy influence and interactions between political participation and institutional change.

[1] Youth are defined as individuals aged 15 to 29, following an age range widely used in youth studies and public policies targeting this population. Nevertheless, youth are recognized as a socially and historically constructed category whose age boundaries may vary across national and sociocultural contexts.

Béland, D., & Schlager, E. (2019). Varieties of policy feedback research: Looking backward, moving forward. *Policy Studies Journal*, 47(2), 184-205.

Fisher, D. R. (2012). Youth political participation: Bridging activism and electoral politics. *Annual review of Sociology*, 38(1), 119-137.

Peters, B. G., & Zittoun, P. (2016). *Contemporary Approaches to Public Policy: Theories, Controversies and Perspectives*. Springer.

Weiss, J. (2020). What is youth political participation? Literature review on youth political participation and

political attitudes. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 2, 1.

CALL FOR PAPERS

This panel invites theoretical and empirical contributions examining the reciprocal relationships between youth political agency and public policy processes. It seeks to bridge research on youth political participation and public policy scholarship, particularly debates on policy change, institutional conditions and policy feedback.

We particularly welcome papers addressing one or more of the following three analytical dimensions:

1. Youth influence on public policy

Under what conditions and through which mechanisms do young people influence public policies? This dimension examines the role of young people as political actors in policy agenda-setting, formulation, implementation and change. Contributions may explore youth movements, advocacy organizations and institutionalized participatory mechanisms, focusing on how young people mobilize resources, build coalitions, gain access to decision-making arenas and translate their demands into policy outcomes. Particular attention is given to the causal mechanisms and institutional and political conditions that enable or constrain their influence.

2. Effects of public policies on youth political agency

How do public policies shape young people's political participation, collective identities, and capacities for political action? Drawing on policy feedback approaches, this dimension investigates how policy instruments, institutional arrangements and policy outcomes affect young people's political attitudes, resources and opportunities for engagement. Contributions may examine how public interventions targeting young people encourage, discourage or transform political participation, including through unintended political consequences.

3. Dynamic interactions between youth participation and public policy

How do youth political participation and public policy processes influence one another over time? This dimension examines the dynamic and potentially recursive relationships between youth mobilization, institutional responses and policy change. Contributions may investigate how policy decisions generate new cycles of mobilization, institutional participation or contestation, and how these responses, in turn, contribute to subsequent policy adjustments or transformations. Particular attention is given to the temporal dynamics and causal mechanisms underlying these reciprocal effects.

The panel welcomes contributions across different policy sectors, geographical contexts, and methodological traditions. Both in-depth single-case studies and comparative research are encouraged, particularly contributions that identify causal mechanisms and explain variations across cases or over time in youth influence on public policy, policy feedback effects and the interactions between political participation and institutional change.