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## **The Effect of Welfare Policies and Hardships on Participation Rates Among the Poor**

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The Effect of Welfare Policies and Hardships on Participation Rates Among the Poor

Matthew W. Cain

Honors Thesis

Eastern Illinois University – Political Science Department

May 2014

Dr. Kevin Anderson, Advisor

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## **Abstract**

For several decades, a new political perspective has emerged in the Political Science literature – Policy Feedback Theory. Put simply, Policy Feedback Theory looks at the way public policy affects politics. Existing policies can define the political environment, shaping the capacities, interests, and beliefs of political elites and states, which in turn influence the next round of policy-making. However, does public policy only change the politics of elites and states? Can public policy also change the politics of mass publics? Recent Political Science researchers are now examining this question.

Even though much ground has been gained in examining this question, some outstanding problems still remain. Specifically, much of the research on policy feedbacks deals with targeted populations of the citizenry, e.g. the elderly, the poor, and veterans. Of grave importance to political scientists, and policy feedback researchers specifically, is the political participation of low-income Americans, particularly those afflicted with serious economic, personal, or health related hardships. Though Policy Feedback Theory can help explain much of how and why populations affected by policies engage politically and civically, it is important to consider other factors that can increase and decrease political participation. In addition to traditional Policy Feedback Theory, can other factors like serious economic, personal, or health related hardships help explain political participation, or the lack thereof, among targeted groups?

In this paper, I will expand on the Political Science literature by examining this important question. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a national, longitudinal study that follows the lives of families on welfare and documents their hardships, welfare usage, and political activities, I will examine the political participation of low-income Americans who experience economic, personal, or health related hardships, as well as examining

their political beliefs and experiences to further shed light on how the poor participate politically in America. By also testing policy usage among the poor, I will also add to the policy feedback literature as well as the literature on political participation. I find that the three tested public policies do indeed influence political and civic participation, and that some hardships affect participation rates while others do not.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my family, Randy, Tammy, and Brittany Cain, whose love helped to foster my educational curiosity and provided me with much more than I could have ever asked for, and for having to put up with my political rants. I would also like to thank my grandparents, Ron and Bev Cain, whose tireless efforts and love helped me get through college and this thesis.

## **Acknowledgements**

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To my thesis committee members Drs. Richard Wandling and Melinda Mueller, I would like to thank you for your notes and support. Your guidance throughout this thesis and my undergraduate degree did not go unnoticed.

I would also like to show my gratitude to my Mother, Father, and Grandparents, who helped finance a major portion of my higher education. I appreciate everything you have done for me and hope to repay you tenfold.

Matthew Cain



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Politics touches every part of our life – the social, the financial, and the personal. As the government is likely to remain active in the lives of its citizens, it is nearly impossible for someone to not have any governmental contact. With government activities growing over the decades into massive systems designed to extract, deploy, and distribute resources to and from its citizens, such extensive activity makes it highly likely that not only will the politics of the day influence present and future public policy-making, but that as political scientist E.E. Schattschneider noted in the 1930s, “new policies will create new politics” (Pierson 1993, 595). It is these existing policies, some of which have been in place for many decades, that can define and change the political environment, shaping the interests and beliefs of political elites and states, and as a result, change or alter the outcomes of the next round of policy-making (Campbell 2012). Within Political Science, Policy Feedback Theory developed to explain such an idea. Throughout its scholarly history, Policy Feedback Theory has garnered a significant foothold in the Political Science literature, helping to explain how political elites and political states are influenced by the existing policies of its government. Recently however, scholars have looked into how existing policies can influence mass publics, which can have dramatic consequences for policy outcomes. Because public policy is now being studied as a source of political acquisition, policy feedbacks have been added to the list of factors influencing behavior and attitudes among elites and the public (Campbell, 2012). Bruch et al. (2010) performed a study analyzing such questions on how existing policies might influence mass publics. Specifically, the authors looked into how experiences with public policies affect levels of civic and political engagement among the poor. To further the Political Science and policy feedback literature, Bruch et al. (2010) looked into three outstanding questions related to the study of

policy feedbacks: selection bias, the distinction between universal and targeted programs, and the types of authority relations most likely to foster engagement among the poor. By using the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study, the authors answered the three outstanding questions by showing how policies' effects are not an illusion created by selection bias; the effects of targeted programs can both promote and discourage engagement; and such effects tend to be more positive when a policy's authority structure reflects democratic rather than paternalist principles. Using Bruch et al. (2010) as a model, I will expand on the Political Science and policy feedback literature by examining how particular hardships – whether economic, personal, or health related – can affect political participation. Of importance is the way that hardships could act as “blocks” to political participation, even though Policy Feedback Theory would suggest that those who experience a particular policy should either be more likely to participate or less likely to participate. By examining questions related to how hardships can impact political participation, further evidence can show not only how policies affect mass publics' political participation, but how other factors can promote or hinder political participation in the disadvantaged. To analyze such questions, I will use the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study. The Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study, as Bruch et al. (2010) have shown, is an excellent longitudinal study that follows low-income adults and their children and contains a myriad of variables that will allow for the measurement of political and civic engagement as well as economic, personal and health-related hardships. This study also contains additional demographic controls, allowing for a more robust analysis, and a wealth of data on public policy use among low-income adults, allowing for policy feedback studies. However, it must be noted that the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study has a restricted age range – young parents of very young children – suggesting a need for caution when generalizing the findings to older

cohorts. In my study, I will look into low-income use of three public policies: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Head Start (including Early Head Start), and public housing assistance. Also of importance is the data on Americans' own personal experiences with government programs and demographic variables that allow for the examination of the poor's political participation. By using this study, I will shed light on low-income Americans' political participation, particularly when many low-income Americans face severe economic, personal, and health related hardships.

## Chapter 2: Background and Context

### Policy Feedback Effects

What is Policy Feedback Theory? How do feedback effects affect mass publics? Put simply, Policy Feedback Theory looks at the way public policy affects politics. Existing policies can define the political environment, shaping the capacities, interests, and beliefs of political elites and states, which in turn influence the next round of policy-making. The key concept in Policy Feedback Theory is that policy feedbacks create a loop that both *alters* the policy environment and *affects* constituent behavior. A first notable trait of policy feedbacks is their dichotomous nature; that is, policy feedbacks have either negative or positive feedback effects. Positive feedback effects are those effects that increase the likelihood of an individual engaging politically or civically. Conversely, negative feedback effects are those that decrease the likelihood of an individual engaging politically or civically (Campbell 2012). Each of these characteristics are essential to understanding how a policy affects a targeted groups of citizens. Aside from the basic dichotomy of policy feedback effects, scholars have also found two just as important characteristics that define feedback effects: resource and interpretive effects. The early claim among policy feedback researchers was that governmental programs, particularly welfare programs, create constituencies with an incentive to protect their benefits (Pierson 1994). Further research on this claim showed various pathways through which policies could affect targeted constituencies: by affecting politically relevant resources, affecting attitudes toward political engagement, and affecting political mobilization (Campbell 2012). Scholars (Campbell 2003; Mettler 2005) have shown that by providing targeted constituencies with politically relevant resources, the constituencies feel a need to give back to the community – what scholars have called the reciprocity effect. Based on the early claim made by Pierson (1994), the reciprocity

(also known as the interpretive effect) was initially seen as being driven by self-interest – that is, the constituencies needed to protect their benefits and thus participated in society. However, further research shows that the reciprocity effect is not always based on self-interest. Thus, policy feedbacks can be positive or negative, by either providing or restricting a politically relevant resource and, if positive, can cause a reciprocity effect among its constituency.

Using the framework provided above, scholars of policy feedback studies have looked into what types of policies would produce feedback effects. A first finding among feedback scholars was the possible differing feedback effects that universal programs have over targeted programs. Based on the findings, scholars (e.g. Skocpol 1991, Wilson 1987) have extolled the virtues of universal programs over targeted ones, particularly because of the nonstigmatizing way that universal programs give out resources. Further evidence from studies on the policy feedback effects of Social Security and Medicare – being universal programs – compared to targeted, means-tested programs like AFDC/TANF supports the claims of positive feedback effects of universal programs and negative feedback effects of targeted programs (Campbell 2012). However, further research by scholars of political behavior (e.g. Bruch et al. 2010) have shown that it is possible for other factors to contribute to a targeted policies' negative feedback effects, and that targeted programs can also have positive feedback effects. Just as the type of program can affect political behavior, other factors can also foster policy feedbacks. One of the primary resource effects that policy feedback scholars have found through their studies is how a program goes about giving out their benefits. When programs have a large benefit size it can have a measurable political effect on behavior. A recent example of such benefit size is Social Security (Campbell 2003). Conversely, if a programs benefit size is too small, it can decrease political participation (e.g. AFDC/TANF). However, programs can also have a null effect on

political participation. Scholars (Howard 2007; Patashnik & Zelizer 2007) expected to see positive feedback effects in some acts of Congress, but instead found null effects. Aside from size, benefit visibility, traceable, proximity, and duration can contribute to feedback effects. When a benefit is visible – the public is aware of what the benefits are – and traceable – the public can trace where the benefits come from, the program is more likely to increase participation. Benefit proximity – whether the beneficiaries geographically near each other – can have an effect by enabling greater interest group mobilization. A benefit's duration tends to have a powerful effect on feedback effects. Programs of long duration like Social Security and Medicare tend to produce greater mobilization. All of these factors – universal vs. targeted programs, benefit size, visibility, traceable, proximity, and duration – can produce noticeable feedback effects that can either increase or decrease political participation.

### **Political Participation Among the Poor**

According to the United States Census Bureau, roughly 16 percent or 50 million Americans live in or near poverty in 2012. This figure is up from 46 million Americans in poverty in 2010 and 49.7 million in poverty in 2011. Even worse among the Census numbers, nearly 20 percent of American children live in poverty (CBS 2012). Also among these high numbers, Americans and policy researchers are now comfortable with low-income Americans not participating in American politics. As research has shown, low-income Americans are less likely than middle or upper-income Americans to have the skills and resources that lead to political participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Aside from the skills needed to lead a political life, low-income Americans typically do not belong to civic or political organizations that recruit people into politics (Radcliff and Davis 2000). One would also assume that possibly because low-income adults have access to governmental services, they would care about their



benefits and engage civically and politically in activities like voting. However, the case is less straight forward as research has shown that even though low-income adults might have governmental contact, they still are less likely to engage civically and politically (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Because low-income Americans are less likely to participate in political life, this poses a serious concern as individuals best represent their own interests, and even secondary organizations that have a broad interest in all citizens lives or a specific interest in the lives of the poor fail to compensate for direct political participation (Lawless and Fox 2001). Due to these low levels of political participation, the poor are less likely to be represented in government, and as a result can lead to legislation that may not be in the interest of the poor (e.g. 1996 welfare reform). The question remains, though, why do low-income Americans participate less civically and politically?

Explanations for why low-income Americans are less likely to participate in American politics come in many different types. Conservative analysts typically see governmental assistance as a suppressor of personal motivation and a fosterer of dependency, all of which are traits that are not likely to lead to political participation (Mead 1997). However, the most compelling argument made for why the poor do not engage politically comes from the landmark American Citizen Participation study done by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995). According to their explanation of why low-income Americans do not participate politically or civically, those Americans that live in poverty often do not have the resources (financial and otherwise), free time, skills, or level of motivation necessary to participate in political life or be recruited for political action. All political activities require time or money, or some combination of the two, and it is these very foundational requirements that many low-income Americans lack. Also, certain political activities such as contacting a public official or working on a campaign, require

“civic skills,” many Americans can pick up in a non-political setting and then put to use in a political setting. However, according to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), low-income Americans are so significantly lacking these factors that they have just become a very inactive group. Ultimately, having or not having resources becomes the focal point for which low-income Americans choose to either participate or not to participate.

Even though Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s (1995) explanation for why the poor fail to participate politically is the most popular among political scientists, scholars (Wilson 1991; Cohen and Dawson 1993; Massey and Kanaiaupuni 1993; Massey, Gross, and Shibuya 1994; Soss 1999; and Lawless & Fox 2001) have also added to the traditional lack of resources explanation by also providing empirical evidence for the role of political learning. According to these scholars, traditional demographic and economic variables are not the only necessary criteria needed to explain the lack of political mobilization among the poor. Specifically these scholars contend that the conditions of foster poverty create living environments of a distinctly harsh character; that is, these areas are in high concentrations of crime, violence, welfare dependency, family disruption, and educational failure. Accordingly, interaction with social workers (Soss 1999) and police officers (Lawless and Fox 2001) also lead to political learning that can have a measureable effect on political participation. All of these factors – demographic and economic variables and the lack thereof to political learning situations – provide ways for low-income Americans to participate politically in society, and typically, produce a situation that leads to less political activity.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

The literature on policy feedbacks and political participation among Americans has come a long way from its beginnings. Not only has the research on policy feedbacks and political participation been validated by study after study, it also provides a myriad of data for politicians and policy experts that allows for real world applications of the research. Much of the previous research on policy feedback effects and political participation is useful to understanding how economic, personal, and health-related hardships can impact political and civic participation among low-income Americans. The existing literature provides a foundation for my research on political participation among the impoverished by providing insight on the theoretical foundations of policy feedback effects, case studies of policies and their policy feedback effects, political participation, and the model study for my paper.

### **The Theoretical Foundations of Policy Feedback Effects**

The place to begin the literature review is with Paul Pierson's (1993) *When Effect Becomes Cause*. In this foundational work, Pierson (1993) laid out mechanisms for how policy feedbacks can have "resource" and "interpretive" effects that guide how an individual reacts to a policy. According to Pierson (1993), policies extract, deploy, and distribute resources to and from targeted segments of the population. By giving or taking away resources, this leads to an interpretive effect. Essentially, the individuals who are affected by the resource allocation or extraction will react to the policy. This interpretive effect, Pierson argues, guides much of policy feedback studies. Ever since Pierson (1993), his hypotheses on resource and interpretive effects have guided much of the later research. Also key to the early foundational work of policy feedback effects is the work by Schneider and Ingram (1993). Schneider and Ingram (1993) contend that central to policy feedback studies is the Social Construction Theory. This theory

contends that social constructions influence the policy agenda and the selection of policy tools, as well as the rationales that legitimate policy choices (Schneider and Ingram 1993). As such, Schneider and Ingram (1993) find that the designs of public policies can generate the social construction of targeted populations, which is defined as “the cultural characterizations or popular images of the persons or groups whose behavior and well-being are affected by public policy” (334). These characterizations can then influence the next round of policy making by influencing the behavior of government officials toward these targeted groups. In part, Schneider and Ingram (1993) were reacting to the culture of poverty literature – which asserted that the poor have a value system that undermines their ability to move up financially – that the authors felt did not adequately fit the whole picture. Instead, Schneider and Ingram (1993) found that group characteristics are shaped by public policy itself. Using these basic theoretical foundations, Kristin Goss (2010) expanded on Policy Feedback Theory by providing a multi-level theory of policy feedbacks. Goss’s (2010) multi-level theory of policy feedbacks expands on the traditional policy feedback model in several ways. According to Goss (2010), policy feedback models tend to focus on two areas of engagement: organizational (e.g. interest group lobbying) and individual (joining associations), with each form of political engagement treated as a separate, discrete form of political phenomenon. Goss (2010) however, lays out a theoretical framework for the integration of these two key phenomena. The author suggests that laws and administrative rules operate on voluntary organizations to structure the resources, capacities, strategies, and ideals of individuals (Goss 2010). In the work, Goss (2010) argues that public policy structures the political orientation of society by stimulating certain groups and constraining others, and subsequently altering the resources and political learning of mass publics. Goss’s (2010) work is the most recent theoretical work on policy feedbacks.

## **Policy Feedback Case Studies**

Soss (1999) examined the links between welfare participation and broader forms of political involvement. Using a political learning perspective, Soss (1999) found that policy designs could structure a client's experiences about that program in ways that can teach alternative lessons about the nature of government. Specifically, Soss (1999) points out that through an individual's experiences under a certain policy design can create program-specific beliefs about the wisdom and efficacy of asserting themselves. The author focused on welfare policy and found that clients of welfare programs interpret their experiences with the respective bureaucracies as evidence of how government works generally, and thus their beliefs about the welfare agency and client involvement become the basis for broader political beliefs. He concludes that the views that citizens develop about governmental programs through participation in those programs can explain broader patterns of political actions and quiescence (Soss 1999).

In 2007, Joe Soss again tackled policy feedback effects of a specific public policy: welfare reform. Soss and Schram (2007) looked into how welfare reform could have influenced the opinions of mass publics not receiving welfare. Soss and Schram (2007) points out that "progressive revisionists" of the 1990's argued that, by reforming welfare, liberals could free the Democratic Party of a significant electoral liability, reduce the race-coding of poverty politics, and produce a public more willing to invest in anti-poverty efforts. The author found that welfare reform did not produce measureable, positive changes in mass opinion on welfare (Soss and Schram 2007). The author contends that the 1996 welfare reform bill did not produce positive policy feedback among the mass public, as progressive revisionists had hoped. Just like Soss and Schram's (2007) analysis of policy feedback effects among mass publics, Mettler and Stonecash

(2008) continue to expand on this area of policy feedbacks cumulative program usage among individuals or how it may influence their political attitudes or behavior. The authors found that direct experience of social programs is fairly common and widespread across the population, but the beneficiaries of social programs have differing assessments of the programs compared to non-beneficiaries (Mettler and Stonecash 2008). After controlling for demographic factors, the authors find that the greater the number of universal programs citizens have used, the greater the likelihood that they vote, and conversely, the greater the number of means-tested programs they have used, the lower their likelihood of voting. They contend that experiences of social programs may influence voter turnout and may help explain why young and less advantaged citizens vote less than older citizens.

Just as policies can create feedbacks, there are limitations to what a policy can do. Specifically, policies can produce weak or no policy feedback effects at all. Patashnik and Zelizer (2010) looked into how policies may not produce feedback effects. The authors found three common reasons why feedback effects, or at least positive ones, might not arise after a law is enacted: weak policy design, inadequate or conflicting institutional supports, and poor timing (Patashnik and Zelizer 2010). They contend that these conditions may be an unintended byproduct of the lawmaking process or they may stem from deliberate attempts by opponents to prevent a new policy from durably reshaping governing possibilities for the future. When it comes to weak policy design, the authors find three ways that policy design can inhibit feedbacks. The primary and most important way is policy designs may simply not provide enough material resources to facilitate an interpretive effect among a constituency to defend the policy. A second way that the authors note is informational; that is, when there are problems with the law, key segments of the public are unable to perceive what a policy does for them, and thus

no support for the law is given. A final way shown by Patashnik and Zelizer (2010) is when benefits are distributed too slowly or too broadly. This can weaken the building of a strong constituency and doom the possibility for feedback effects. The second primary problem that can inhibit feedback effects is conflicting or inadequate institutional supports. In the simplest terms, when institutions within government are not equally conducive in promoting positive reinforcement of a bill, feedback effects can fail to turn up. The final problem noted by Patashnik and Zelizer (2010) is that of poor timing. When legislation is passed during perceived inauspicious times, this can leave a permanent lack of feedback effects among the public. All of these factors, as Patashnik and Zelizer (2010) have shown, can inhibit the development of feedback effects.

Not all policy feedback studies are confined to American politics. Ewig and Kay (2011) looked into policy feedback effects of Chile's health and pension reforms. Through a comparison of three periods of health and pension reform in Chile, the authors develop a policy feedback reasoning as to why mediated, slow social change took place in place where the rise of leftist governments should show more pronounced social change. The authors describe "post-retrenchment politics," which constitutes realignment in the way politics plays out in countries that have undergone social policy retrenchment where the strengthened position of private business interests, combined with political learning legacies and lock-in effects generated by reforms, results in incremental political change, despite renewed efforts by left parties to address inequality (Ewig and Kay 2011). Following Ewig and Kay's (2011) example, Jordan (2013) looked into policy feedbacks and welfare support in 17 advanced countries. Jordan (2013) predicts that highly inclusive welfare institutions will generate larger bases of public support by shifting the focus away from redistribution and toward common market insecurities felt across

classes, while more selective strategies erode support by highlighting the conflicts of interest imbedded in clearly redistributive social programs. After controlling for both individual and cross-national factors, the analysis by Jordan (2013) suggests that universal programs build larger bases of support for the welfare state than more targeted strategies. Such evidence from Ewig and Kay (2011) and Jordan (2013) show that policy feedback effects are not just American political phenomena, but can occur in a variety of political settings.

### **Political Participation**

Political and civic participation may be one of the most important aspects of being a citizen in any country. As such, the study of political participation is as important to Political Science as it is to larger society. The place to begin a review of political participation is with the landmark study by Verba, Schlozman, Brady, and Nie (1993) on political participation in the U.S. Using responses to a large-scale national survey designed to sample political activists, the authors investigate the extent to which active participants are representative of the population as a whole. The authors' analysis shows that although their preferences may be similar as measured by standard NES attitude questions, citizens who are active and those who are not are quite different in their demographic attributes, their economic needs, and the government benefits they receive (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, and Nie 1993). These disparities are exacerbated when the authors move away from the most common political act, voting, to acts that are more difficult, convey more information, and exert greater pressure. For example, with respect to the volume of activity, the disparity is especially great for electoral contributions where the advantaged account for the overwhelming share of the dollars donated to campaigns. When we examined the issues that foster political participation, the authors found that while all groups bring diverse concerns to their activity, the particular mixture differs substantially among groups. Issues that concern the



economically disadvantaged are usually about basic human needs, and they speak with a distinctive voice. Not only do such issues weigh more heavily in their lists of concerns, but when they communicate about these matters to public officials, they are more likely to be discussing issues that touch their own lives and more likely to be prescribing greater public attention to these needs (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, and Nie 1993). This study provides the first such study of political participation among advantaged and disadvantaged groups of Americans.

For much of the literature, social scientists have concerned themselves with how race, geographic area, and government restrictions influence political participation. Bobo and Gilliam (1990) looked into the issue of race and political participation. Using a national survey sample oversampled with African Americans, the authors examined black and white American differences in sociopolitical participation. They hypothesized that increases in black empowerment would affect the level of black sociopolitical participation and change the nature of black and white American differences in political behavior. The results show that blacks in high-black-empowerment areas – as indicated by control of the mayor's office – are more active than either blacks living in low-empowerment areas or their white counterparts of comparable socioeconomic status (Bobo and Gilliam 1990). Furthermore, the results show that empowerment influences black participation by contributing to a more trusting and efficacious orientation to politics and by greatly increasing black attentiveness to political affairs. Cohen and Dawson (1993) presented a study looking into whether neighborhoods – particularly African American neighborhoods – that are devastated with poverty and stricken with social isolationism can foster political isolationism. Using a 1989 Detroit Area study, the authors found several results that add to the literature of race and political participation. Their results suggest that there are, indeed, significant differences between persistently poor neighborhoods and other less

impoverished neighborhoods. They found evidence that African Americans living in the most impoverished neighborhoods held different political attitudes and exhibited different political behavior, apart from the impact of individual poverty. The researchers also confirmed the hypothesis that social isolationism can foster political isolationism. Further, there exists an identifiable impact of neighborhood poverty on perceptions of the effectiveness of political acts, community efficacy, and group influence, with residents of the poorest neighborhoods demonstrating the most consistent effect. Ironically, the results of the study also suggest that African Americans who live in the poorest neighborhoods are more likely to believe in the efficacy of some types of political action even though they are less likely to engage in such actions. Leighly and Vedlitz (1999) applied political participation models to assess their accuracy in predicting participation rates among White Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans. The authors concluded that three of the models – the socioeconomic status model, the psychological resource model, and the social connectedness model – are the strongest in explaining overall participation across each of the four racial groups (Leighly and Vedlitz 1999). However, the final two models – the group consciousness model and the group conflict model – fail to support predictors across all four racial groups. Their work is essential to the political participation literature as it was the first to test specific models of political participation across ethnic groups.

Leaving the variable of race behind, Lawless and Fox (2001) looked into political participation among the urban poor. The authors investigated variations in economic hardship, political attitudes, and interactions with government agents of a sample of 462 low-income men and women in one of the poorest congressional districts in the country. By working from their own theoretical perspective of how urban poverty affects the willingness to participate in the

political system, the authors found important differences in factors that affected political behavior among citizens living in poverty. Their research reveals two key findings relating to political participation: first, material resources and the demographic attributes usually associated with a propensity to participate politically fostered political activism even among urban poor; and second, and more importantly, severe economic hardship, as well as formative contact with government agents whom citizens living in urban poverty routinely face, served as significant experiences that bolstered the willingness to participate in the political system (Lawless and Fox (2001). Ultimately, the authors conclude that the decision to participate in the political system cannot be separated from the very specific manner in which citizens encounter government. Tam Cho, Gimpel, and Dyck (2006) looked into neighborhood and social context and their influence on the decision to vote. They find that neighborhood context does have a socializing influence on voters, sometimes mobilizing them while at other times demobilizing them. Notably, this effect is separate from the effect of individual-level socio-demographic influences on participation. They also found that geographic patterns matter, primarily because of its influence over information flow. They conclude that a threshold effect exists where the more compacted and numerous ethnic groups are in a given geographic area, the more likely they are to vote. Lastly, Avery and Peffley (2005) looked into government restrictions and how that factors into political participation. The authors note that the 1990's saw some of the most dramatic changes in the American social welfare system at both the national and state levels. In particular, states were granted, and took advantage of, much wider latitude in deciding that is eligible to receive welfare benefits. The authors wanted to know if the composition of a state's electorate influenced that state's restrictiveness of the welfare eligibility requirements. They found that in states where lower-class voter turnout was comparable to that of the upper class, lawmakers were

less likely to pass restrictive welfare eligibility rules. However, electorates in states with restrictive voter registration laws are much more likely to be biased toward upper-class turnout. Thus, they conclude that lower-class voter mobilization can affect the ability of the disadvantaged to achieve policies consistent with their interests, but state voter registration laws pose a substantial barrier to such mobilization.

### **Model Study**

The principle inspiration and basis for my paper comes from the work done by Bruch et al. (2010). The authors investigated how experiences with public policies affect levels of civic and political engagement among the poor. Among the questions the authors looked into was whether or not certain policy designs and universal vs. targeted programs are more likely to promote political participation among the poor. The authors point out that most studies reporting positive feedback effects focus on universal policies serving broad constituencies, such as the G.I. Bill (Mettler 2005) and Social Security (Campbell 2003). By contrast, the most negative feedback effects are associated with programs targeted to the poor, such as AFDC (Mettler and Stonecash 2008; Soss 2000). Thus research tends to promote the benefits of universal programs over targeted programs (Campbell 2007; Skocpol 1991). As Nelson (1990) analyzes, social welfare policies can be split roughly into two areas, social insurance programs on top and targeted public assistance programs on the bottom. So for Bruch et al. (2010), the question of whether social policy designs must be universal to have positive feedback effects on political behavior still remains. As to their other question, the authors illustrate two areas of argument suggesting that means-tested programs can advance civic and political incorporation. However, these arguments rest on the types of authority structures that should produce positive effects. New paternalists, such as Mead (1986, 2005), argue that social disorder and weak self-discipline

leave the welfare poor unable to shoulder the burdens of civic obligations (Bruch et al. 2010). Civic and political incorporation are thus ill-served by “permissive” rights-oriented welfare programs and are better served by programs that impose order on recipients’ lives and enforce civic obligations through directive and supervisory methods (Mead 1986, 2005; Bruch et al. 2010). Other scholars (Schneider and Ingram 1997; Soss 2000) argue that policies tend to promote engaged citizenship when they reject paternalist authority relations and position recipients as secure and equal citizens engaged in participatory processes. These scholars continue to argue that policy designs serve democracy best when their authority structures reflect democratic principles and convey the value of engagement (Bruch et al. 2010). The authors find that targeted programs can in fact promote political participation. In this work, the authors find that Head Start and Public Housing Assistance produced a positive and null feedback effect respectively. This is in contrast with the previous research on the benefits of universal programs and the failings of targeted programs. The finding also lend more credit to the idea that positive feedback effects tend to be more positive when a policy’s authority structure reflects democratic rather than paternalist principles, countering the ideas of the New Paternalists such as Mead (1986, 2005). Drawing on such findings, Bruch et al. lay out a framework for how to proceed to in studying political participation among the poor. Specifically, how to go about looking into how policies can influence political participation, even in the face of serious hardships.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

This study is based on previously published work by Bruch et al. (2010). They used the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to produce a convincing argument for the role that public policies play in influencing the civic and political participation of the poor. They used regression analysis to demonstrate how three different public policies play a significant role in the poor's participation in politics. This paper will attempt to create a similar argument for how public policies affect the civic and political participation of the poor while dealing with significant economic, personal, and health related hardships. Bruch et al.'s (2010) study contained some variables that measured hardships, but I will further the research by not just examining economic hardships, but also personal and health related.

Bruch et al. (2010) used various analytic strategies, such as binary logistic regression, to measure how a particular policy affects participation. This paper will attempt to replicate some of those strategies. However, every effort was taken to add to the literature by not only examining how policies affect participation, but also how hardships influence civic and political participation. While Bruch et al.'s (2010) work is the inspiration, it was important to add to the Political Science literature.

The first step was to find an appropriate data set to study political participation among the poor. The data set would have to include not only variables on participation in a number of political and civic activities, but also variables measuring economic, personal and health related hardships. Since Bruch et al (2010) used the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, I started by looking into this data set. Upon further examination, I found the Frangible Families data set to be well suited for my research. The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study provides longitudinal datasets that follows cohorts of parents and their newborn children in 20 U.S. cities

with populations over 200,000 (Reichman et al. 2001). The study intentionally chose cities to provide variation in labor markets and welfare policy usage. The Fragile Families sampling strategy was designed to achieve a nationally representative sample of non-marital births in large U.S. cities; the sample also includes a subsample of births to married parents. Between February 1998 and September 2000, births were sampled from hospitals in the selected cities, and baseline interviews were conducted with mothers and fathers. Mothers and fathers of the child were re-interviewed when the child was 12 to 18 months (Year One Follow-up) and 3 years old (Year Three Follow-up). The data include measures of participation in a variety of public assistance programs and civic and political activities. In addition to providing a large sample of disadvantaged persons, the data includes a rich collection of items describing individuals' backgrounds and life conditions, such as measures of domestic violence experiences, substance abuse histories, mental health status as well as economic, personal, and health related hardships. These measures make the Fragile Families data ideal for exploring citizen political and civic engagement in a population known to have low participation rates and a variety of hard-to-measure life conditions that might suppress participation.

The Fragile Families Baseline sample consists of 4,898 families, including 3,712 unmarried couples and 1,186 married couples. Over the three interview periods (Baseline and Years One and Three Follow-ups), 86 percent of fathers were interviewed at least once, and 82 percent of mothers were interviewed at all three waves. The overall response rate for the Year Three Follow-up was 77 percent (86 percent for mothers and 67 percent for fathers). I restricted the analysis sample to the 82 percent of mothers who were interviewed in the Year Three Followup, equaling a total of 3031 respondents. This restriction was to better ascertain how health and personal hardships impact participation as mothers in the study were asked questions

relating such hardships and the fathers were not. It must be noted that the Fragile Families sample is not representative of the United States. Rather, it draws its sample only from large metropolitan areas and the study over-samples unmarried births; as a result, the sample is younger and more highly disadvantaged than the general population. Within these features, however, the sample should represent the inclination for political or civic participation among low-income users of public policies who deal with hardships.

My analysis will be based on three outcome measures: voting, political participation, and civic participation. Voting indicates whether a respondent reported voting in the November 2000 election. This variable is a dichotomous variable coded 1 for voting in the 2000 November election and 0 for not voting in the 2000 November election. Political participation indicates that the respondent has participated in a political demonstration in the past year. This variable is a dichotomous variable coded 1 for participating in a political demonstration and 0 for not participating in a political demonstration. Civic participation indicates a respondent has participated in a community organization within the past year, and is also a dichotomous variable coded 1 for participating in a community organization and 0 for not participating in a community organization. The separation between political and civic participation was assessed by whether the type of participation is overtly political. So, for the political participation variable, being active in a demonstration is an overt type of political participation. On the other hand, being involved in a community organization – while not absent of local politics – is not overtly political or partisan in its nature.

The independent variables include several demographic and control predictors: whether a respondent's mother and father graduated from college, marital status, and poverty. For the respondent's parents having graduated from college, two variables were created. One of the



variables indicated whether a respondent's mother had graduated college and is coded 1 if the respondent's mother graduated college and 0 if the respondent's mother did not graduate college. The final parental education variable indicated whether or not the respondent's father graduated college and was coded 1 if the father did graduate college and 0 if not. The variable marital status was included as a dichotomous variable coded 1 if the mother was married at the time of interview and 0 if not. The final demographic variable indicates whether or not the respondent at the time of interview is above the federal poverty line or below it. To ascertain this, I made a variable that was coded 1 if the respondent was above the poverty line at the time of interview and 0 if the respondent was not in poverty at the time of interview.

A second set of measures indicates receipt of public aid. The first public aid program was the Temporary Aid for Needy Families program. The variable for this measure was set up to ask whether or not the respondent had ever received TANF aid and was coded dichotomously with 1 as having received aid and 0 as not. The second public aid variable measured whether or not the respondent lives in a public housing project. This variable is coded 1 for yes and 0 for no. The final public aid variable measures whether or not the respondent had a child in Head Start in the child's lifetime. Likewise, this variable is coded 1 for having a child in head start and 0 for not having a child in head start.

The third and final set of measures examined economic, personal, and health related hardships. I will break the three hardship categories into sections, starting with the economic hardships. In the economic hardship category, there are four variables that measure differing degrees of economic hardship. The first variable measures whether or not the respondent can count on having a secure place to live. This variable is primarily economic as it measures whether or not the respondent has affordable housing and can rely on their economic situation to

provide them with secure housing. The second economic variable measures whether or not the respondent has the means to provide emergency child care. Again, this variable measures the respondent's ability to respond to an emergency with their child, which is directly related to the economic situation of the respondent. The third variable is the primary economic measure as it measures whether or not the respondent has a job or not. This variable is of importance as it measures a key economic characteristic. The final economic variable measures whether or not the respondent owns a vehicle. This variable is also of key importance as it can be inferred that a lack of a vehicle will hinder one's ability to participate politically and civically. All of these variables are coded dichotomously with 1 being an affirmative response and 0 being the opposite.

In the personal hardship category, there are four variables that measure differing personal hardships. The first personal hardship variable looks at whether or not the respondent has had a past conviction. The definition of conviction is not limited to being in jail, but also to any minor conviction such as traffic violations. The second variable measures a family aspect of the respondent. This variable asks whether the respondent's current partner – this could be a husband, boyfriend, or girlfriend – has a drug or alcohol problem that creates problems with their job, family, or friends. The final two variables measure the relationship between the mother and their current partner. The first one of these variables measures whether the mother has a good or bad relationship with the partner. The final variable measures abuse. The question asks whether the respondent has ever been hit by the father or current partner. All of the personal hardship variables are coded dichotomously with 1 as being an affirmative answer and 0 being not.

The final hardship category examines health related problems. These include seven variables that measure different health problems of different members of the family. The first

variable measures whether the current partner of the mother has a condition that limits their ability to work. This is the only variable that measures the health of the mother's partner. The next five variables measure the health of the mother. The first one of these variables measures the mother's health. This is reported by the mother as either good or bad. The next variable measures whether the mother has a condition that limits the mother's ability to work. This variable is followed by another that measures whether the mother takes medication for some disease. These diseases included, but are not limited to: diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiac disease, etc. The next variable measures whether the mother reports being depressed for more than two weeks before. The final variable measuring the mother's health and asks whether the mother has a history of drug abuse. The final health hardship variable measures the health of the child. This is reported by whether the child has some condition that is in need of medication. All of these variables have been coded dichotomously with a 1 being an affirmative answer and 0 being not.

The actual analysis for this paper is done with a binary logit regression, which was chosen for a couple of reasons. First, the inspiration for this study used a similar method to analyze public policies and their effect on participation (Bruch et al. 2010). However, because of this paper is using different variables there are some differences. Bruch et al. (2010) only briefly described the coding that was used in their study for the independent variables. As a result, most of the coding procedures were developed just for this paper. Because, the ultimate goal to explain whether economic, personal, and health related hardships are a useful predictor of voting, political participation, and civic participation is somewhat the same as Bruch et al. (2010), there are similar, but not identical procedures used. Logit regression was also selected because of the

dichotomous nature of the dependent variables. The results of the regression are available in Table 1.

## Chapter 5: Hypotheses

The intent of this paper is to discover the role of hardships in political and civic participation of low-income Americans. While some of the low participation rates among low income Americans have been attributed to sociological arguments (Marshall 1964; Piven and Cloward [1971] 1993), new scholars (e.g. Pierson 1993; Svallfors 2007) have fought hard to support the claim that policies are not just political outcomes, but are also factors that set political forces in motion and shape political motivation in the citizenry. Running a regression analysis that does not include variables relating to hardships – especially health and personal hardships, instead only including the policy measurements will show a degree of prediction as can be seen in Bruch et al. (2010). If the policy measurements remain significant after the inclusion of hardship variables such as mother’s health, child’s health, and demographic characteristics then, it can be argued, with a higher degree of certainty that the policies played a role in the decision to participate politically and civically. **(Hyp.1)** it is expected that the policy variables will be a significant predictor of political and civic participation, in line with previous research. Because previous research argues that policies affect participation, it is also expected that once the equation is controlled using demographic and hardship variables the policies will remain significant.

Because certain policies are designed differently from each other, then it can be argued that certain policies will either decrease or increase participation rates among the poor. Major research has identified several types of policy structures that could hinder or increase participation rates: paternalistic, bureaucratic, and incorporating designs. In my analysis, each of the three types of public policies is matched with one of the three types of policy designs.

Head Start – a national program that seeks to advance the social and cognitive

development of low-income children from birth to age five and provides educational, health, nutritional, and social services to low-income children – Head Start includes a significant parental involvement component. The emphasis on parental participation in local site councils and parental involvement in local programs makes Head Start an *incorporating* policy design. Temporary Aid for Needy Families TANF – a means-tested program for families with children – has a very different policy model. The program was remade in 1996 to emphasize work requirements, time-limited aid, and a more directive and supervisory orientation toward clients (Mead 2004; Weaver 2000). Client experiences in this program are structured to focus on relationships with caseworkers that hold substantial power to define obligations and distribute benefits, services, and punishments (Schram et al. 2009; Soss 2000). Because of these reasons, TANF exemplifies a *paternalistic* policy model. The final program is public housing. While public housing policy is complex, there is formal bureaucratic oversight provided by the federal government. Interactions between officials and recipients of public housing are more limited than in the other programs, emphasizing neither participation nor supervisory power (Bruch et al. 2010). As such, public housing is characterized as a *bureaucratic* policy model. The following hypothesis relates to these different policy models. **(Hyp. 2)** TANF and public housing will decrease political and civic participation rates among low-income Americans while Head Start will increase civic participation rates. Again, this hypothesis is based on previous research (Bruch et al. 2010).

Hardships – whether economic, personal or health related – can have profound effects on an individual’s life. There is evidence that participating in civic activities, such as working with community groups, is related to positive health outcomes (Weitzman and Kawachi 2000). While studies have examined health outcomes from social and economic situations, there are relatively

none that examine policy outcomes from certain situations. For example, economic inequality has been increasing in nearly all of the advanced industrial democracies over the past two decades (Smeeding 2005). The consequences of this economic inequality for the politics of these countries, however, have gone almost completely unexamined in the literature. As the APSA Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy from 2004 concluded, “we know little about the connections between changing economic inequality and changes in political behavior” (661). Given this situation, the following hypothesis was developed to ascertain the effect of economic hardships on political and civic participation. **(Hyp. 3)** Economic hardships will have a negative effect on the political and civic participation of low-income Americans while the absence of hardships will be associated with greater participation rates. For this hypothesis, the four variables associated with economic hardships are all expected to produce greater participation rates among low-income Americans. For example, the variable measuring whether the respondent has a job or not is expected to be positively associated with participation rates as the variable has been coded 1 for having a job. All the economic variables – as well as the health and personal hardships – have been coded to easily interpret the results.

Measures of health and personal hardships are much rarer to find in the Political Science literature. As such, the hypotheses for these hardships are relatively new. **(Hyp. 4)** personal hardships are expected to be negatively associated with political and civic participation rates among low-income Americans. For this hypothesis and unlike the economic hardships, the variables for personal hardships are coded as to indicate whether the respondent has the hardship (as opposed to the economic hardships which were coded to indicate a lack of the hardships). So for example, if a respondent reports having a conviction record, it would be expected that the results would show a negative association with political and civic participation. The only

discrepancy is the relationship status variable, which is coded 1 to indicate a good relationship and 0 otherwise. (**Hyp. 5**) health related hardships are expected to be negatively associated with political and civic participation rates among low-income Americans. For this hypothesis and like the previous hardship measures, the variables for health related hardships are coded as to indicate whether the respondent has the hardship. For example, if a respondent reports having a health condition that limits his or her work ability or takes medication for some disease, it would be expected that the results would show a negative association with political and civic participation.

Similar to Bruch et al.'s (2010) study, binary logit regression analysis will be used to test the hypotheses. The hope is that the data will indicate that public policies differing in policy designs will affect political and civic participation in different rates, and that economic, personal, and health related hardships will hinder participation. The more variables that are found to maintain their significance, the easier it will be to claim a link between policies and hardships. Furthering the scope of this study, a confirmation of hypotheses three through five will show that not only do policies matter in participation rates, but also that hardships can be used as a useful predictor. Also, a confirming result for hypotheses one through two will confirm previous research on the topic of policy feedback effects.



## Chapter 6: Analysis

Public policies can have an effect on the participation rates among those the policies affect (Bruch et al. 2010). Given that certain polices have different policy models, it would be expected that polcies with differing models would affect participation rates at differing rates. Table 1 presents the participation rates for respondents participating in TANF, public housing, and Head Start programs as well as for the full damples. Those individuals in the study that relied on public assistance in the form of TANF, public housing, and head start were less likely to vote then the full sample. For TANF, roughly 38.7 percent of the sample voted in the 2000 November election. For public housing, 41.6 percent of the respondents who received public housing assistance reported voting in the 2000 November election. Finally, 48.4 percent of the respondents who received Head Start assistance reported voting in the 2000 November election. The full sample, compared to the three public assistance programs, shows a greater precentage (64%) of respondents that reported voting in the 2000 November election.

Political participation rates among the low-income Americans that reported using the public assistance programs also were lower when compared to the full sample. However, there are some differences that deserve attention. For the full sample, roughly 7.5 percent of the repondents reported participation in a political demostration. Public housing and Head Start users also participated in rates that would be expected. For public housing assistance, 4.2 percent of the respondents reported participating in a political demostration, while 6.5 percent of the respondents that reported using Head Start reported participating in a political demostration. However, respondents that reported using TANF had a higher reported political participation rate than the other two public assistance programs as well as the full sample. Roughly 10.7 percent of those respondents reported participating in a political demostration. This higher rate when

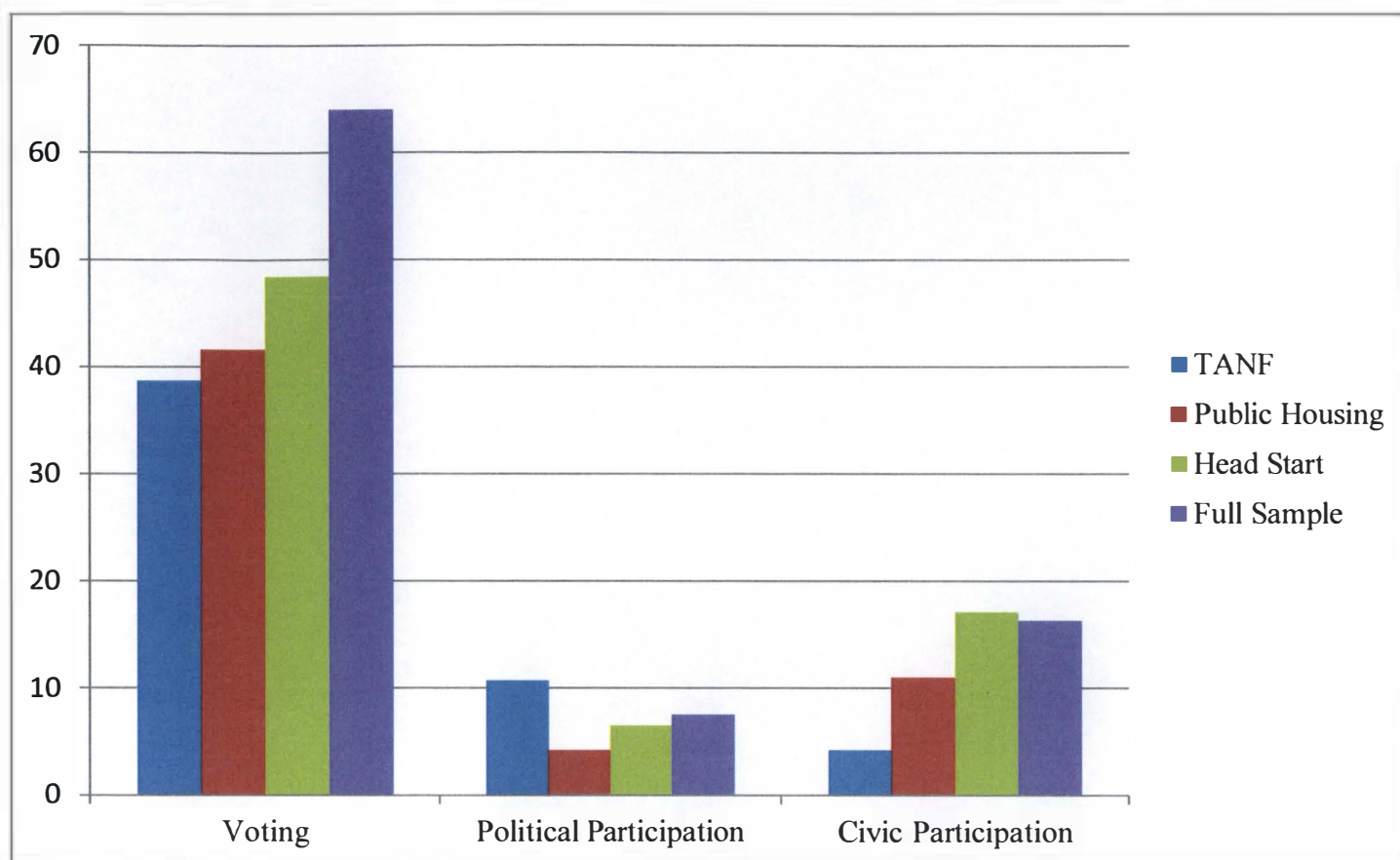
compared to the full sample and the two other programs, which were expected to be higher than TANF, may be because of the higher reported number of respondents that receive TANF compared to those that do not receive any aid. The Fragile Families Study was meant to examine those low-income Americans that participate in assistance programs and as such, more the study sought out more respondents that belonged to public aid programs. To fully understand the effect that TANF has on political and civic participation, a regression analysis was needed and will be discussed later.

Finally, civic participation rates among the low-income Americans that reported using the three public assistance programs also were lower when compared to the full sample. For TANF, roughly 4.2 percent of the sample reported participating in a local community organization. For public housing, 11 percent of the respondents who received public housing assistance reported participating in a local community organization. Finally, 17.1 percent of the respondents who received Head Start assistance reported participating in a local community organization. The full sample, compared to two public assistance programs – TANF and public housing, shows a greater percentage (16.3%) of respondents that reported participating in a local community organization. When the full sample is compared to Head Start, the reported rate among low-income Americans is higher (17.1 percent for Head Start to 16.3 for the full sample). This helps confirm the claim that Head Start bolsters participation rates among its users.

### **Regression Analysis**

Figure 1 shows the total number of respondents who received each of the three public assistance programs versus the full sample. Figure 1 also creates predictions about whether or not a respondent would participate politically or civically. While it is nearly impossible to say conclusively that respondents will participate politically or civically due to hardships or the type

**Figure 1**



*Note:* N = 3031

of public assistance received, it is possible to look for evidence that would suggest they do. This is what the logistic regression is designed to do. A finding of significance for any of the public assistance programs or hardship variables included in the analysis would suggest that the type of program and the appearance or lack of hardships a respondent has helps determine their likelihood to participate politically or civically. The inclusion of controls will only strengthen the finding by removing the possibility that the significance could be attributed to unmeasured factors. Because the dependent variable is dichotomous, the preferred method of analysis is Logit. This type of regression is designed for dichotomous variables and provides the best vehicle for testing. The drawback of this type of test is that the results are more difficult to

interpret. Because of this, I have included the results as odds ratios for ease of interpretation. The following analysis will focus on the regression.

In Table 1, the Logit analysis is split into three separate models. Model 1 performs with some very interesting results. Each group of policies and hardships will be treated separately for individual analysis. Taken alone, these results should be used with some caution. Because many of the responses to political and civic participation are going to be predicted by many factors, one cannot definitively say that public assistance policies and hardships determined political and civic participation. The real test is to see whether the levels of significance can be maintained despite the inclusion of controls.

Examining the three public assistance programs, Model 1 performs as expected. The analysis shows that both TANF and public housing assistance have a negative impact on voting likelihood. With TANF, the likelihood of a respondent voting is decreased by 54.9 percent and with Public Housing, the odds of the respondent voting is decreased by 7.5 percent. Consistent with previous research, Head Start recipients have a positive likelihood of voting by 18.2 percent. However this positive likelihood of voting was not significant. Though Head Start was not significant, its positive odds of voting coupled with the significance of TANF and Public Housing likelihood adds support to hypotheses one and two. However, an analysis of the political and civic participation variables will be needed to conclusively confirm the two hypotheses.

Economic hardships proved to be highly consistent with the third hypothesis. Examining the results show that for all five variables, each was highly significant. The first variable indicating whether a respondent had a secure place to live indicates a positive likelihood of voting. Since the variable was coded as to show whether the respondent did have a secure place

to live, we can see that if a respondent replied yes to the question of having a place to live there was a 30.2% greater likelihood of them voting. The second variable measuring whether or not the respondent had a means to provide emergency childcare also showed positive odds of voting by 40.5 percent. This variable too was coded as to indicate an affirmative answer to the question of having the means to provide emergency childcare, thus the results are expected. Having a job was also significant in model one. For the fourth variable measuring whether the respondent had a vehicle or not, we can see that there were positive odds of them voting by 6.3 percent. The final economic hardship measures whether or not the respondent has a conviction record and shows a lower likelihood of voting by 5.7 percent. Each of these variables' odds ratios and significance level provide support to hypothesis three.

The three public assistance programs for model two perform as expected. The analysis shows that both TANF and public housing assistance have a negative impact on participating politically likelihood: TANF at 32 percent and Public Housing at 5.4 percent. Head Start recipients also have a positive likelihood of participating politically by 8.9 percent. However this positive likelihood of voting was not significant. Though Head Start was not significant, its positive odds of voting coupled with the significance of TANF and Public Housing likelihood adds support to hypotheses one and two.

The three public assistance programs for model three perform as expected. The analysis shows that both TANF and public housing assistance have a negative impact on civic participation likelihood: TANF at 12.3 percent and Public Housing at 9.8 percent. Head Start recipients also have a positive likelihood of participating civically by 73.7 percent. This high positive likelihood of participating civically was very significant. The positive odds ratios and significance levels for model three add support to hypotheses one and two.

Economic hardships proved to be consistent with the third hypothesis. Examining the results shows that all, but one was significant. The first variable indicating whether a respondent had a secure place to live indicates a positive likelihood of participating civically of 25.8 percent. The second variable measuring whether or not the respondent had a means to provide emergency childcare also showed positive odds of participating civically at 29.5 percent. Having a job showed a positive odds ratio of 6 percent. For the fourth variable measuring whether the respondent had a vehicle or not, we can see that there were positive odds of them participating civically by 4.9 percent. The final economic hardship was non-significant and shows a lower likelihood of participating civically by 0.4 percent. Since most of these variables' were significant, hypothesis three gains some support.

Examining the four demographic and control variables, it can be seen that the respondent's parents' educational background have positive odds ratios, indicating a greater likelihood to vote. However, the respondent's parents' educational background was not a significant predictor of a greater likelihood to vote. This was somewhat surprising as previous research suggests that educational background increases the likelihood to vote. However, since the variable measured the parents' educational background and not the respondent educational background, the results might be more fitting to the conclusion that educational background of respondent's parents might not influence the likelihood to vote. The third demographic and control variable measured whether the respondent is married. This variable had a positive odds ratio. This variable was also highly significant indicating it was a good predictor of the independent variables. The fourth and final demographic and control variable measured whether or not the respondent was in poverty. This variable's odds ratio was negative and indicated a decrease in the likelihood of to vote and participate politically and civically.

**Table 1.** Odds Ratios of All Outcomes

Predictors	Model 1: Voting	Model 2: Political Participation	Model 3: Civic Participation
Respondent's Mother Graduated College	1.046 (.027)	1.010 (.046)	1.045 (.030)
Respondent's Father Graduated College	1.040 (.029)	1.018 (.047)	1.054 (.031)
Respondent is Married	1.075*** (.012)	.992*** (.021)	1.054*** (.015)
Respondent is in Poverty	.369*** (.093)	.218*** (.173)	.405*** (.102)
TANF	.551*** (.088)	.680** (.180)	.877 (.118)
Public Housing	.925*** (.017)	.946** (.024)	.902*** (.019)
Head Start	1.182 (.129)	1.089 (.218)	1.737*** (.151)
Secure Place to Live	1.302*** (.078)	1.070 (.133)	1.258* (.113)
Means to Provide Emergency Child Care	1.405*** (.086)	1.044 (.161)	1.295* (.129)
Respondent Has a Job	1.063*** (.154)	1.051** (.022)	1.060*** (.015)
Respondent Owns a Vehicle	1.059*** (.017)	1.025 (.020)	1.049** (.015)
Conviction Record	.943*** (.020)	.939 (.032)	.996 (.026)
Partner Has Drug or Alcohol Problem	.997 (.040)	.989 (.070)	.892 (.061)
Relationship Status	1.177 (.144)	1.037 (.053)	1.011 (.040)
Respondent Reported Abuse	.993 (.032)	.995 (.023)	.953** (.017)
Partner Has Condition that Limits Work	.959 (.040)	.959 (.040)	.502** (.117)
Mother's Health	.714*** (.110)	.921** (.034)	.798 (.148)
Mother Has Condition that Limits Work	.980 (.137)	.996 (.263)	.727** (.080)
Mother Takes Medication for Condition	.991 (.023)	.921** (.034)	.956 (.029)
Mother Reports Being Depressed	.926 (.072)	.720 (.146)	.964 (.076)
Mother Has History of Drug Abuse	.958 (.147)	.126*** (.211)	.960 (.182)
Child Has Medical Condition	.868** (.046)	.896 (.106)	.987 (.057)
LR Chi <sup>2</sup> (df)	176.107*** (22)	51.871*** (22)	113.701*** (22)

*Note:* N = 3031. Values represent odd ratios for ease of interpretation. Standard errors are in Parentheses. Data from Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001 (two-tailed tests).

This variable was also highly significant across all models and lends greater credence to the idea that those in poverty are much less likely to vote and participate politically and civically.

Personal hardships indicated much less expected results. Each of the personal hardship variables was not significant. Three of the personal hardships indicated a negative likelihood to vote (i.e. Partner reports drug or alcohol problem at 0.3 percent less likelihood to vote, respondent reports abuse at 0.7 percent, and partner has a condition that limits work ability at 4.1 percent) and one variable has a positive likelihood to vote (i.e. relationship status at 17.7 percent). Since the variables were not significant, the results are against hypothesis four.

The final group of variables measures health related hardships. Only two variables from this category were significant. These variables (mother's health at 29.6 percent decreased likelihood to vote and child has a medical condition at 13.2 percent decreased likelihood to vote) are directly related to the respondent's ability to get out and vote, so their significance was expected. However, the other variables being non-significant were a surprise. It was hypothesized that most of these variables would be significant. Although they all show a decreased likelihood to vote, the results for model one on health hardships help disconfirm hypothesis five.

The final group of variables measuring health related hardships shows three variables from this category were significant. These variables (mother's health at 7.9 percent decreased likelihood of participating politically, child has a medical condition at 7.9 percent decreased likelihood of participating politically, and mother's history of drug abuse at 87.4 percent decreased likelihood of participating politically) were expected to be significant. It was hypothesized that most of these variables would be significant. Since they all show a decreased likelihood of participating politically and three are significant, the results for model two on



health hardships help confirm hypothesis five.

Personal hardships also show some expected results. Two of the personal hardship variables were significant. Three of the personal hardships indicated a negative likelihood to participating civically (i.e. Partner reports drug or alcohol problem at 10.8 percent less likelihood to vote, respondent reports abuse at 4.7 percent, and partner has a condition that limits work ability at 49.8 percent) and two variables have a positive likelihood to participating civically (i.e. relationship status at 1.1 percent). Since half of the variables were significant, the results are mixed for hypothesis four.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

The failure of personal and health related hardships to remain significant (Hyp. 4 and 5) in the Logit regression was counter to expectations. Had all the hardships remained significant, it would have allowed a broader claim that hardships influence one's ability to participate politically and civically. Models one and three for economic hardships being only partially confirmed (Hyp. 3) was also unexpected. The results for hypothesis three show that even though one may not have the means to vote or participate, it does not mean they will not. All of the variables in models one through three show the expected sign, which supports the hypotheses. The lack of significance in some of the models weakens some of the hypotheses to an extent. However, it does not refute the hypotheses completely. The public policies findings confirm hypotheses one and two. These findings reinforce Bruch et al. (2010) and others' work by showing that the public policies and their policy designs influence political and civic participation.

One fault of this study is the restricted age range of the Fragile Families sample, which measures young parents of very young children. Given this we cannot generalize the results to older adults. It is important to ask, do policies affect older adults differently than younger adults? For example, do we see more feedback effects when individuals experience policies during their younger, impressionable years? This question and others need to be answered and are important for explaining political behavior over the course of life.

Political participation of low-income Americans, particularly those afflicted with serious economic, personal, or health related hardships, is an important topic for political scientists. Though Policy Feedback Theory can help explain much of how and why populations affected by policies engage politically and civically, it is important to consider other factors that can increase

and decrease political participation. This study lends some support to the idea that hardships influence the likelihood of low-income Americans participating politically and civically. In some cases, hardships can lower participation rates, while public assistance policies with paternalistic and bureaucratic designs significantly lower participation rates. Politicians and policy experts can take note of these results and give greater attention to these problems as to alleviate this low rate of participation in American political and civic life.

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