

Policy Feedback in a Racialized Polity

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American public policy is and has always been profoundly racialized. Yet, the literature on policy feedback lacks cohesive theorization of how race matters for feedback processes. This article offers a conceptual road map for studying policy feedback in the context of racialized politics. Drawing together the substantial (but largely disconnected) work that already exists in the fields of public policy and racial politics, I develop the racialized feedback framework to provide theoretical guidance on (i) when race should be a core focus of policy feedback research and (ii) how race structures the relationship between policy and polity. I argue that both the scope of the questions that scholars ask and the nature of the answers they find are altered when race is afforded an appropriately central role in research on policy feedback.

美国的公共政策一直带有强烈的种族色彩。然而，关于种族如何影响政策反馈过程的文献仍缺乏系统性的理论整合。本文提出了一种概念性分析方法，以用于研究在种族化政治背景下的政策反馈。结合公共政策和种族政治领域内已经存在的大量研究，本文提出了种族化反馈框架（RFF），并为以下问题提供了理论指导：1) 种族何时应成为政策反馈研究的核心焦点；2) 种族如何构建政策与政体之间的关系。本文认为，当种族在政策反馈研究中发挥适当的核作用时，研究学者所提出的问题的范围以及他们所发现的答案的性质都会发生变化。

The United States “has been pervasively constituted by systems of racial hierarchy since its inception” (King & Smith, 2008, p. 80). As a result, American public policy is (and has always been) profoundly racialized.¹ Here is what that means: race has been an enduring fulcrum around which elites and masses have arranged institutions, oriented discourse, and made decisions about how to prioritize, design, implement, and evaluate public policy in the United States (Brown, 1999; Edsall & Edsall, 1991; Hero & Tolbert, 1996; Katznelson, 2005, 2013; King & Smith, 2005, 2008; Lieberman, 1998, 2005; Lowndes, Novkov, & Warren, 2008; Mink, 1990; Murakawa, 2014; Orloff, 2002; Quadagno, 1994; Roberts, 2002; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011; Weaver, 2007; Williams, 2003). In this article, I explore what the centrality of race in American politics means for understanding processes of policy feedback. Scholars have now amassed robust evidence that public policies are not only the products of politics, they are also crucial inputs that *feed back* into the political system by affecting the attitudes and behavior of citizens, families, organizations, social groups,

and political elites (Barnes, 2018; Barnes & Hope, 2017; Campbell, 2003, 2010; Goss, 2013; Lerman & Weaver, 2014a; Mettler, 2005a; Michener, 2018; Morgan & Campbell, 2011; Pierson, 1993; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1992; Soss, 2000). As the literature on feedback has gained prominence, the theoretical infrastructure undergirding studies of feedback has developed significantly (Béland, 2010; Campbell, 2012; Mettler & SoRelle, 2014; Mettler & Soss, 2004; Patashnik & Zelizer, 2013; Weaver, 2010). Still, scholars have offered scant theorization of how race matters for policy feedback. Even valuable and well-cited meta-analyses have overlooked race (Béland, 2010; Campbell, 2012; Mettler & SoRelle, 2014). In the succeeding pages, I present a framework that fills this important void, laying the groundwork for new directions in the study of policy, politics, and race.

I begin with an overview of the places that race has emerged in the policy feedback literature and offer observations about the ways it has been neglected. Then, I propose a *racialized feedback framework* (RFF) that clarifies how race is germane to policy feedback. Finally, I illustrate the usefulness of the RFF by highlighting two examples of how it can inform our research agendas.

Race and American Public Policy

Social scientists have interrogated a wide spectrum of policy domains with an eye toward race. They have studied welfare, health, education, labor markets, criminal justice, voting rights, and much more (Brown, 1999; Bruch & Soss, 2018; Cohen, 1999; Harris & Lieberman, 2013; Hero & Tolbert, 1996; Katznelson, 2005, 2013; Matsubayashi & Rocha, 2012; Michener, 2016; Mink, 1990; Murakawa, 2014; Pager, 2007; Soss et al., 2011; Soss & Weaver, 2017; Tolbert & Hero, 2001; Weaver, 2007; Western, 2006; Williams, 2003). Time and again, such research has confirmed that race is (and has long been) a fundamental factor in explaining policy development, implementation, outputs, and outcomes. This body of work reveals the ever evolving, multidimensional, and quite unrelenting force with which racism and White supremacy have pervaded social, economic, and political institutions in the United States.² The racial ordering of American politics has generated deep inequalities in public policy (King & Smith, 2005; Lieberman, 1998, 2005).

Notwithstanding some disagreements (Davies & Derthick, 1997), most scholars now accept the profound significance of race in American political life. The challenge, however, is to produce research that reflects this acknowledgment (Soss & Weaver, 2017). The need for such congruence is apparent in the literature on policy feedback.

Race and Policy Feedback

A substantial and growing body of research has shown that the structure and design of government programs (and the organizations to which they delegate) can influence political decision making across a broad spectrum of actors by *channeling resources, generating interests, and shaping interpretive schemas* (Barnes, 2018; Béland, 2010; Campbell, 2003, 2012; Goss, 2013; Mettler & SoRelle, 2014; Mettler & Soss, 2004;

Michener, 2018; Morgan & Campbell, 2011; Pierson, 1993; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Skocpol, 1992; Soss, 2000). In the United States, each of these mechanisms implies a role for race. Policies often *channel resources* unevenly and inequitably across racial groups³; racial stratification is a key determinant of the advent, alignment, and power of *interest groups*; and race is a fundamental prism through which experiences of policy are understood and *interpreted*. Given these observations, one might intuit that race is a key part of policy feedback processes. That proposition would be difficult to evaluate based on the current literature. Though race sometimes emerges as a pertinent factor in work on policy feedback, it is generally addressed in a sporadic, piecemeal fashion that makes it hard to understand how much and in what ways it matters. This is troubling because public policy is one of the primary institutional purveyors of racial inequity. If the bridge from policy to polity does not account for race, then scholars (and those who draw on our knowledge) will be blind to what public policy means for race-based disparities in political participation, representation, and power.

Where Race Emerges

Before I address what is missing from the policy feedback literature with regard to race, it is instructive to take stock of what exists. Numerous scholars have made notable contributions. In *Soldiers to Citizens*, Suzanne Mettler (2005a) assessed how the educational provisions of the G.I. bill affected civic and political participation among WWII veterans. Importantly, Mettler devoted a book chapter (and a subsequent stand-alone article) to studying “the causes, nature, and consequences of black veterans’ usage of the G.I. Bill’s education and training provisions”⁴ and to considering, “how the G.I. Bill influenced political participation in the lives of black and white” veterans (Mettler, 2005b, p. 37). In this seminal research, Mettler identified feedback effects among both Black and White veterans, but she also carefully considered how racial differences in veterans’ experiences produced divergence in the mechanisms underlying feedback processes for each group. By analyzing racial patterns, Mettler discovered that, “the same program that prompted white veterans to become especially active in civic fraternal organizations and mainstream political activities appears to have helped encourage, enable, or provoke black veterans to mobilize against existing political structures, demonstrating and marching for change” (2005b, p. 47). These findings are substantively important and they validate that key insights can derive from investigating how and why policy feedback differs across racial groups.⁵ In more recent work, Garcia-Rios, Lajevardi, Oskooii, and Walker (2018), Maltby (2017) and Rocha, Knoll, and Wrinkle (2015) similarly consider how policy feedback effects vary across racial groups.

In *Arresting Citizenship*, Amy Lerman and Vesla Weaver (2014a) probe the racial dimensions of policy feedback even further. Exploring the participatory upshot of the carceral state, they “shed new light on the role of criminal justice in the political life of the nation” (p. 18). Along the way, Lerman and Weaver often afford race a central position, investigating the distinct contours of “Black custodial citizenship,” describing the racial narratives that often accompany carceral contact, and showing

how the criminal justice system operates as a “race-making” institution by organizing racial knowledge and promoting racial learning (pp. 157–59). Imperatively, Lerman and Weaver go beyond examining differences across racial groups to consider the deeply embedded institutional practices that construct racial differences. Bruch and Soss (2018) apply a similar approach to their study of the feedback effects of educational institutions. Surveying students’ educational experiences, Bruch and Soss (2018) employ an intersectional analysis that accounts for how race, class, and gender shape the association between school authority relations and the political engagement of young adults.

Taking a somewhat different tack, Soss and Schram (2007) investigate mass attitudinal feedback processes by asking, “how and when we should expect governing elites to be capable of using policy actions to reshape beliefs and preferences in the citizenry” (p. 111). They focus on the case of welfare reform and assess whether the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) achieved (some) Democrats’ tacit goal of “deracializing” anti-poverty policy and thereby improving public views of welfare beneficiaries and people living in poverty.⁶ Soss and Schram posit “deracialization” as one mechanism through which welfare reform might have mass feedback effects on public opinion. PRWORA would do this by rendering the (false) stereotypical image of a “handout to lazy blacks” moot in the face of a policy design that required work and stressed personal responsibility. Ultimately, Soss and Schram find mixed evidence for the deracialization hypothesis (2007, pp. 117–18). The essential point of note here is that they constructively embed race into their theorization of the mechanisms via which public policy might transform public opinion.

The above-referenced authors assess differences across racial subgroups (Mettler, 2005a), examine the institutional practices that generate divergent racial outcomes (Bruch & Soss, 2018; Lerman & Weaver, 2014a) and consider how race defines the mechanisms that account for feedback effects (Soss & Schram, 2007). These assorted approaches are indicative of the multiple ways that policy feedback scholars can incorporate race into their research agendas.

Notwithstanding this menu of options, most studies of policy feedback do not straightforwardly address race. To be sure, scholars recognize the importance of race. In some work, race is not the dominant aspect of the main findings but it is a core feature of the social and political world that scholars consistently foreground in their research (Michener, 2018; Soss, 2000). In other cases, race is acknowledged but included to a more limited extent (Bruch, Ferree, & Soss, 2010; Goss, 2013). I do not wish to suggest that *every* study of policy feedback make race its chief focus. Indeed, heterogeneity in the extent to which scholars stress race is appropriate. However, vexingly underlying this heterogeneity are two questions: First, when is race vital to studies of policy feedback? Second, how should race be incorporated into policy feedback research? Scholars presently lack a clear theoretical basis for organizing, understanding, and conceptualizing the consequences of White supremacy, racism, and racial ordering for policy feedback. This is in part due to the limited overlap between scholars who study policy feedback and those who study racial and ethnic politics (REP). With these research camps frequently remaining in their own corners,

the discipline of political science has too easily elided confronting the racial dimensions of policy feedback. This has left us underequipped to think in broad or deep enough terms about the status of race in feedback processes.

Below, I present the racialized feedback framework (RFF) as a first step in reversing this course. The RFF is two-tiered. The first facet addresses *when* race should be a dominant feature of feedback studies. I argue that conditions of disproportionality and decentralization are crucial indicators that race is an imperative part of policy feedback. The second facet tackles *how* race can be incorporated into research on feedback. I assert that one useful approach is to map feedback types (attitudinal, behavioral, non-feedback) and levels (elite and mass) to prevailing research on race, ethnicity, and politics (REP).

The RFF is not exhaustive, but it is a foundation for more comprehensively and intentionally theorizing race and policy feedback. The goal of this article is to illuminate new pathways for policy feedback research and to bring scholars of feedback into deeper, more synergistic engagement with REP researchers (and to a lesser extent, vice versa).

When Is Race Central?

In the United States, race is arguably *always* central to policy processes. King and Smith (2008, p. 84) best capture why in observing that,

the internal developments, clashes, and broader impacts of American racial orders have been and remain so central that *all scholars of American politics ought always to consider how far “racial order” variables affect the phenomena they examine*. Analysts should inquire whether the activities of institutions and actors chiefly concerned either to protect or erode white supremacist arrangements help to account for the behavior and changes in the nation’s political institutions, coalitions, and contests they study. Any choice *not* to consider racial dimensions requires explicit justification. (emphases added)

I agree with this logic. Yet, it is both overwhelming and underwhelming to note that race always matters,⁷ and it is critical to explicate the conditions under which one should expect race to be a determinative force. To that end, I propose two such conditions: *disproportionality* and *decentralization*. These factors correspond to two straightforward observations. First, policies vary widely with regard to how evenly they distribute benefits and burdens across racial groups. Second, policies vary in the degree to which the mechanisms for distributing such benefits and burdens are centralized. My key argument is that scholars should be more compelled to embed race in their analyses of policy feedback when the policies under consideration are heavily disproportionate and/or significantly decentralized. At the very least, when a policy exhibits stark disproportionality or marked decentralization, the “choice not to consider racial dimensions requires explicit justification” (King & Smith, 2008, p. 84). To support this claim, I’ll elaborate each factor in turn.

Disproportionality

Disproportionately concerns variation in the ways policies allocate benefits and burdens to particular racial groups. Disproportionality can take myriad forms. It can involve imbalances in the racial distribution of policy beneficiaries, incongruences in the proportion of a particular racial group affected by a policy, disparities in benefit size and take-up, and differences in the share of policy benefits that some racial groups receive relative to others. Such racial disproportionalities can affect how policy is constructed by political elites (Benson-Smith, 2005), perceived among the public (Gilens, 1999), experienced by beneficiaries (Lerman & Weaver, 2014a), implemented by bureaucrats (Michener, 2016), funded by government (Garrow, 2012), and made salient by media (Clawson & Trice, 2000; Gilens, 1996). Disproportionality can affect the mechanisms through which policy feedback operates: it funnels policy *resources* unevenly, serves some *interests* better than others and influences *interpretations* of policies.

To give form and content to the concept of policy disproportionality, I offer a three-pronged typology hinging on the level of analysis I emphasize: (i) beneficiary/“burdenfiary” disproportionality; (ii) benefit/burden disproportionality; and (iii) policy system disproportionality.

Beneficiary/“burdenfiary” disproportionality has to do with racial disparities in the composition of the populations that either benefit or are burdened by policy. One obvious indicator of beneficiary disproportionality is the distribution of policy beneficiaries across racial groups (see Figure 1). Take Social Security for example. Though roughly 61 percent of Americans identify as White, Whites account for 83 percent of all Social Security (OASDI⁸) beneficiaries, 86 percent of Social Security retirement recipients, and 72 percent of Social Security Disability (SSDI) beneficiaries.⁹ As illustrated in Figure 1, other policies exhibit similar patterns (e.g., 81 percent of Medicare beneficiaries identify as White compared to only 43 percent of Medicaid beneficiaries). Both across and within prominent divides in the policy literature (means-tested versus universal; cash benefits versus in-kind benefits) racial disproportionality in the composition of beneficiaries is prominent.

While Figure 1 displays beneficiary disproportionality based on *distributional* configurations (i.e., the extent to which particular racial groups are reflected among policy beneficiaries), one might also consider beneficiary disproportionality based on *density* (i.e., the extent to which policy beneficiaries are represented among particular racial groups). For example, while 19 percent of all Medicaid beneficiaries are Black, 31 percent of all Black Americans are Medicaid beneficiaries (compared to 16 percent of Whites). The density of Medicaid beneficiaries in Black communities is more striking than suggested by the overall distribution of African-Americans across all beneficiaries. This is not simply hair splitting. Density has significance for policy feedback due to the divergent ways policies can be understood and experienced in contexts where lots of people rely on them (Michener, 2017). Density can also shape the social construction of Medicaid beneficiaries (Pierce et al., 2014).

Looking beyond beneficiaries, disproportionality also applies to actual benefits and burdens. A simple indicator of *benefit disproportionality* is the relative size

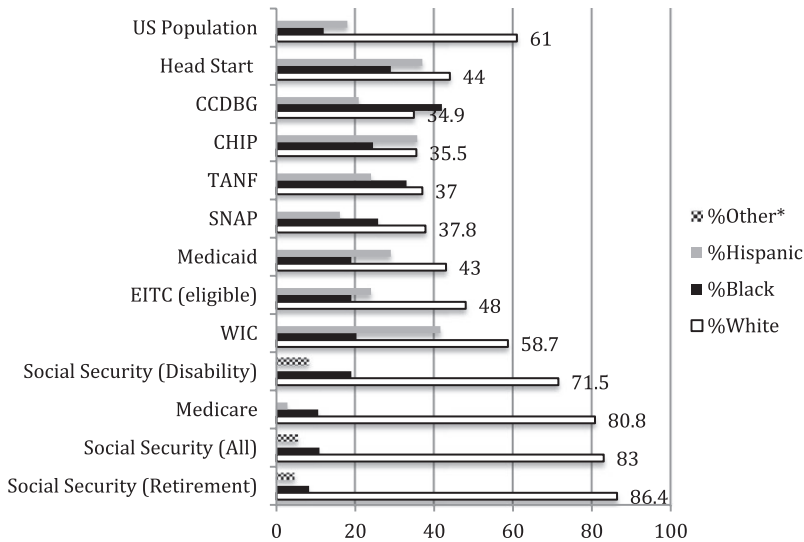


Figure 1. Distribution of Policy Beneficiaries by Race.

Note: Bars represent the proportion of policy beneficiaries from a particular racial or ethnic group. Numerical labels correspond to the proportion of White beneficiaries. *The “Other” category does not reflect my preferred language. It is taken directly from the Social Security Administration (SSA) and only applies to the bars representing Social Security. The SSA data is split into three racial/ethnic groupings (Black, White, and “Other”). No further breakdown is provided. According to SSA, “Other” includes, “Asians and Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Alaska Natives, and a subset of the total number of beneficiaries of Hispanic origin.” For more information see: <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2010/5a.html>.

of policy benefits. For example, in 2010, the average monthly benefit of White SSDI recipients was \$958 dollars compared to \$827 for Black recipients. A similar logic holds for policy burdens. In Florida, African-Americans face prison terms up to twice as long as Whites when they commit the same crimes under similar circumstances (Salman, Le Coz, & Johnson, 2016). Another metric of benefit disproportionality concerns how policy benefits accrue differentially relative to costs. As shown in Figure 2, considering the ratio of Social Security OASI benefits (the old age and social insurance components of Social Security) received to taxes paid, shows that Whites receive a disproportionate share of benefits relative to the taxes they pay. Alternatively, looking at a different component of Social Security (disability insurance) reveals a different pattern: Blacks receive a disproportionate share of DI benefits relative to their tax inputs (Figure 3). Still other metrics for benefit disproportionality could include disparities in benefit take-up rates or incongruences in benefit eligibility across racial groups.

The third category of disproportionality—*policy system disproportionality*—shifts our focus beyond any particular policy to consider imbalances in how policy systems distribute benefits and burdens and the racial arrangements that follow. This requires assessing configurations of policies relative to one another. For instance, government often faces a trade-off between investing in policies that widely (even if unequally) benefit or burden many groups or devoting resources to policies that benefit or burden fewer groups. Such governance strategies are not mutually exclusive and there

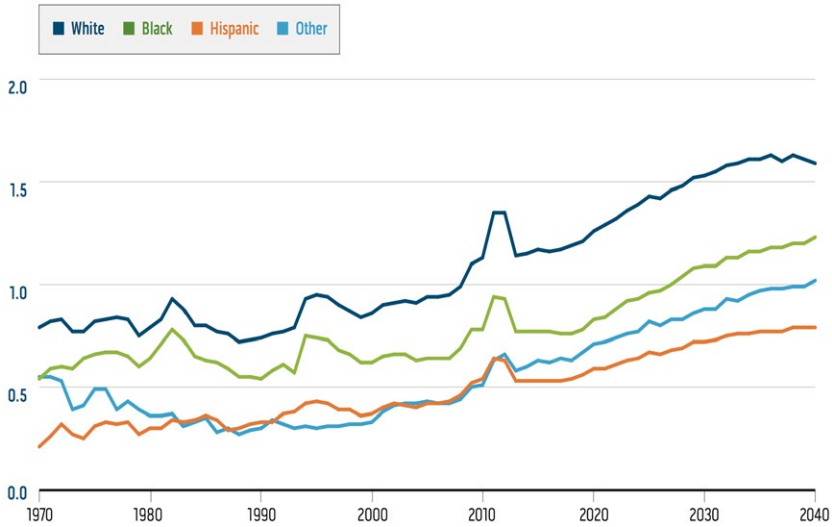


Figure 2. OASI Benefit-to-Tax Ratio by Race/Ethnicity.

Source: Steuerle, Smith, and Quakenbush (2013). OASI = Old Age and Survivors Insurance. “Other” includes, “Asians and Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Alaska Natives, and a subset of the total number of beneficiaries of Hispanic origin.”

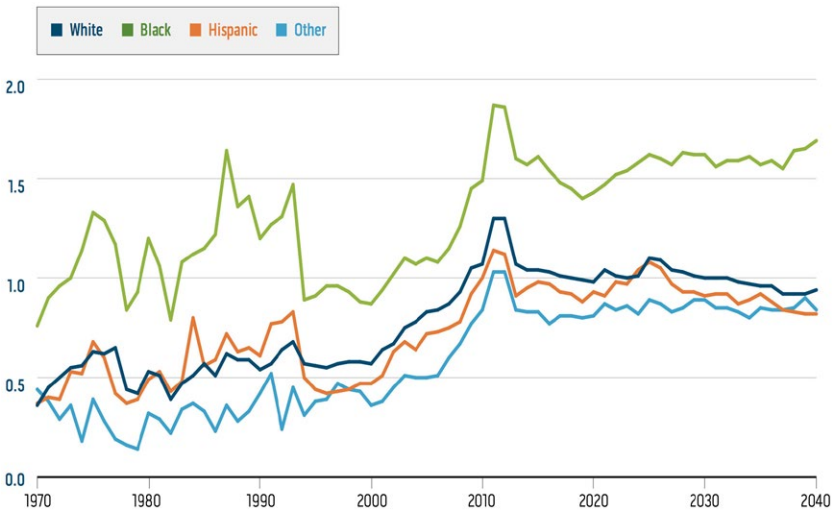


Figure 3. DI Benefit-to-Tax Ratio by Race/Ethnicity.

Source: Steuerle et al. (2013). DI = Disability Insurance. “Other” includes, “Asians and Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Alaska Natives, and a subset of the total number of beneficiaries of Hispanic origin.”

are advantages and disadvantages to either choice, but overarching policy configurations often reflect systemic emphases that affect racial disparities across many kinds of outcomes. Consider the difference between national investments in education and incarceration (Figure 4). In 2010, states invested (on average) nearly three times as much into prisons than they did into primary and secondary education. This prioritization of policy prerogatives matters for the questions that feedback scholars ask and the ways they interpret their findings. For instance, connecting research that indicates the demobilizing force of carceral institutions (Burch, 2013; Lerman & Weaver, 2014a) to studies that highlight the targeted dampening of political engagement among Black and Latino students who occupy educational spaces with the most stringent authoritative relations (Bruch & Soss, 2018), then a broader policy picture emerges, indicating that two core American institutional pillars (schools and prisons) are aligned in directions that do not bode well for the full incorporation of people of color into the polity. While meta-analyses like this are not common among policy feedback scholars, they are useful for more comprehensively grasping the web of relationships linking race, policy, and democracy in the United States.

In the preceding sections, I proffered three categories of disproportionality and multiple metrics corresponding to each. But if disproportionality can take on so many forms, how can it be a valuable criterion for equipping scholars to decide whether to put race at the center of their analyses? The answer is that disproportionality is not a silver bullet capable of mapping the entire theoretical terrain for a given research topic. Instead, the relevant metrics for gauging disproportionality and the corresponding suggestions about how to position race in one’s research depend upon the policy (or policy system) under investigation, the concerns motivating the enquiry and the existing knowledge. Even more generally, since racial classifications are “collective phenomena that emerge from ongoing social processes and patterns of practice,” understanding the work that race does in the context of policy feedback necessarily entails looking beyond any single marker of disproportionality to incorporate measures that denote the extensive “organized field of race relations and the ways that racial groups are positioned vis-à-vis one another and dominant social

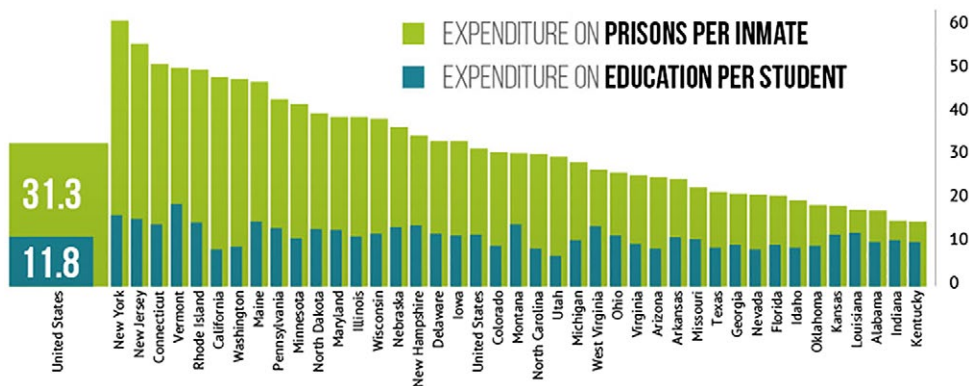


Figure 4. Prison Versus Education Spending in the United States (2010).
 Source: Vera Institute for Justice, U.S. Census Bureau.

institutions” (Soss & Bruch, 2008, pp. 4, 14). Identifying disproportionality in this “organized field” of race relations does not, by itself, necessitate that a given policy feedback story be centered on race—nor does it suggest any one-size-fits-all hypotheses about specific feedback effects or processes. Instead, racial disproportionalities sensitize us to the likelihood that race is imperative and bid us to think more intently about what that means for our ideas and theories.

Decentralization

Policy decentralization chiefly concerns the level of government via which a given policy benefit or burden is designed and/or implemented. Another facet of decentralization encompasses the delegation of authority to non-governmental actors (Morgan & Campbell, 2011; Soss et al., 2011). Under the American system of federalism, both the national government and the states have substantial, constitutionally rooted authority that grants each the power to affect a wide variety of political and material outcomes (Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, & Ansolabehere, 2017). Moreover, though the Constitution does not specifically delegate power to localities, sub-state geographic units (e.g., cities and counties) are nonetheless part of an architecture of federalism that extends “all the way down” in substantive and pervasive ways (Anton, 1989; Gerken, 2010; Michener, 2018; Zimmerman, 2008). In distinct but related processes of delegation and devolution, governments across levels also grant significant bureaucratic and implementing power to nongovernmental actors (Johnston & Romzek, 1999; Milward & Provan, 2000; Morgan & Campbell, 2011). Vitaly, federalism and delegation have striking consequences for racial inequality and public policy (Brown, 2003; Fording, 2003; Fox, 2012; Michener, 2018; Soss et al., 2011). On the one hand, prevailing wisdom suggests that federalism “has been one of the chief bulwarks of racial domination in the United States” and that “African-Americans have always understood that a decentralized welfare state would only sustain the color line” (Brown, 2003, pp. 54, 56). At the same time, federalism can act as a protective or empowering institution in the face of national political elites that fail to protect or help people of color (Gerken, 2010). Regardless of the valence one attaches to it, federalism is a racialized institution that underwrites decentralized policy designs in ways that are relevant for policy feedback (Bruch et al., 2010; Mettler, 1998; Michener, 2018). Decentralization is thus an essential indicator of when race is most significant for policy feedback.

Certainly, it is no straightforward task to determine a policy’s degree of centralization. Programs like Social Security (retirement) and Medicare are largely centralized and administered at the national level. Supplemental Nutrition (SNAP) benefits are centralized as far as funding but decentralized in terms of administration. Many regulatory policies (e.g., regulations on smoking, water quality requirements) are largely left to states and localities. Policies fall along this continuum in ways that one cannot flawlessly chart but can feasibly designate.

Like disproportionality, decentralization does not have predetermined consequences for the relationship between race and policy feedback. I would aver that

a reasonable baseline prediction is that more decentralized arrangements allow for discretion that breeds inequality (Fox, 2012; Mettler, 1998). Even during times when the federal government has been either uncommitted to securing the well-being of people of color or blatantly acting to oppress them, the decentralization of policy administration has been the primary channel through which the national government has enacted such partiality. While Gerken (2010) is correct to point out that decentralization creates opportunities for people of color to exercise more power, the broader historical record intimates that decentralization is more likely to be a force of inequality than an incubator of power for people of color.

Still, it is valuable to think about whether that logic holds across policy domains and how decentralization operates differentially across policies with respect to race. To feasibly answer those questions, scholars must first recognize decentralization as crucial and integrate it into our reasoning about whether to emphasize race in studies of policy feedback.

The Full Picture: Disproportionality and Decentralization

Decentralization and disproportionality are conceptually distinct. The former points to institutional processes that shape mechanisms of policy design and implementation, while the latter underscores outcomes that can result (intentionally or inadvertently) from policy design and implementation. These dynamics are connected insofar as decentralized policies are often more disproportionate.¹⁰ Figure 5 presents a stylized illustration that locates policies in a common space with regard to both decentralization and beneficiary disproportionality.¹¹ In the upper left quadrant are

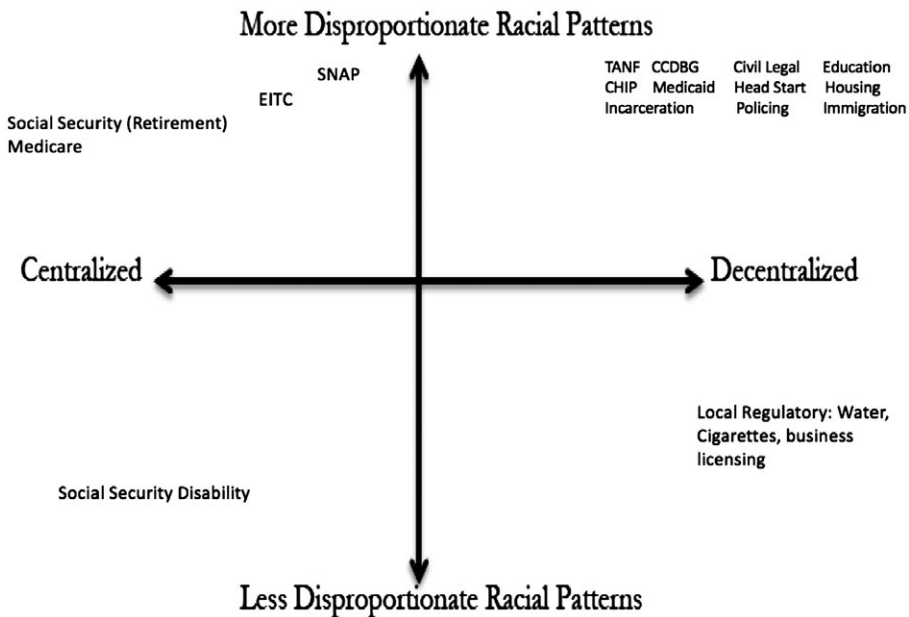


Figure 5. When Race Is Central: Beneficiary Disproportionality and Decentralization.

policies with racially disproportionate patterns and a centralized design. Medicare and Social Security retirement are leftmost in this quadrant because those benefits are most centralized (i.e., funded and administered by the national government). Since Medicare and Social Security retirement beneficiaries are disproportionately White relative to the general population, these policies are placed in the upper half of the quadrant. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are placed in the same quadrant but moved farther upward—because people of color are disproportionately overrepresented as beneficiaries—and slightly rightward—because the policies are less centralized (states play a crucial role in administering SNAP and sometimes boast their own state level EITC programs).

Policies with disproportionate beneficiary racial demographics and decentralized policy designs are placed in the upper right-hand quadrant. This is where many of the social programs in the American polycscape fall. The list of disproportionate, decentralized policies includes Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Children’s Health Insurance Programs (CHIP), criminal justice policies, Head Start programs, Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) subsidies, and more. That this quadrant is so heavily populated suggests that institutional process (decentralization) is often related to outcome (disproportionality), though the precise nature and strength of the relationship is an (unanswered) empirical question.

The lower left quadrant reflects policies with less disproportionate racial patterns and centralized design. Social Security disability is a relevant example. Finally, the lower right quadrant captures policies with less disproportionate racial distribution and decentralized design. To my knowledge, there is no major social policy that fits easily into this category. Still, it may reflect regulatory policy structures (such as those related to drinking water requirements or smoking bans).¹²

Placement in a specific quadrant does not simplistically designate a policy as one for which race does or does not matter. Instead, this framework suggests axes along which race is especially prominent and a basis for conceptualizing *when* racial disparities should figure into theories and models of policy feedback (and the policy process more generally). Disproportionality and decentralization capture a wide range of policy elements. Such scope precludes me from detailing every relevant aspect of each factor or making concrete predictions about what these factors mean for policy feedback. But it is precisely such scope that valuably builds elasticity into the framework, making it more useful for scholars who would take up the issues that I lay out here.

How Race Matters: Levels and Types of Policy Feedback

Looking beyond *when* race should be a central focus of policy feedback research, I now turn to understanding *how* race shapes the relationship between policy and polity. To this end, I propose that scholars build on the broad structure of existing feedback literature in terms of its emphasis on *types* (behavioral, attitudinal, non-materializing) and *levels* (elite, mass) of feedback. At the same time, I insist on extending the panorama of this literature by linking it to research on race.

Figure 6 charts the substance of these suggestions. The larger dashed boxes that stretch horizontally across the graphic correspond to *types* of policy feedback. Scholars who work in this area emphasize behavioral feedback (Campbell, 2003; Mettler, 2005b; Michener, 2018; Soss, 2000), attitudinal feedback (Breznau, 2016; Kreitzer, Hamilton, & Tolbert, 2014; Pacheco, 2013; Soss & Schram, 2007), and feedback that never materializes, which I call non-feedback (Béland, 2010; Patashnik & Zelizer, 2013). Each of these feedback types can occur at different *levels*. Policy feedback at the “mass” level includes the general public, the targets of policy, or specific subgroups of either the general public or target populations. Policy feedback at the “elite” level includes political officials; the media; the wealthy; or other groups with significant status, influence, or power.

Partitioning feedback processes this way enables conceptual clarity by creating defined arenas that scholars can connect to racial processes in American politics. To illustrate most simply, let’s consider behavioral feedback at the “mass” level (Figure 6, box 1a). Existing research demonstrates that racial group membership affects mass political action (there is too much evidence to cite on this point, but a few classics include Barreto, Segura, & Woods, 2004; Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Cohen, 2010; Dawson, 1995; Gay, 2001; Jones-Correa, 1998; Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Shingles, 1981). Connecting the basic fact of subgroup heterogeneity to work on policy feedback highlights the importance of scholarship that explores differences in feedback processes across racial subgroups. To produce such work, it is essential to go beyond viewing race as a confounding variable that must be “controlled” and to instead treat it as a primary feature of the participatory equation. Approaching race in this way may not be appropriate for every study of policy feedback, but once one decides that race is imperative given the processes under investigation (by drawing on Figure 5), the widespread research on racial variation in political participation reveals that registering subgroup differences in political behavior is crucial (Mettler, 2005b).

Another valuable insight from the political behavior literature is that mass participation is shaped by contexts like states, counties, and neighborhoods

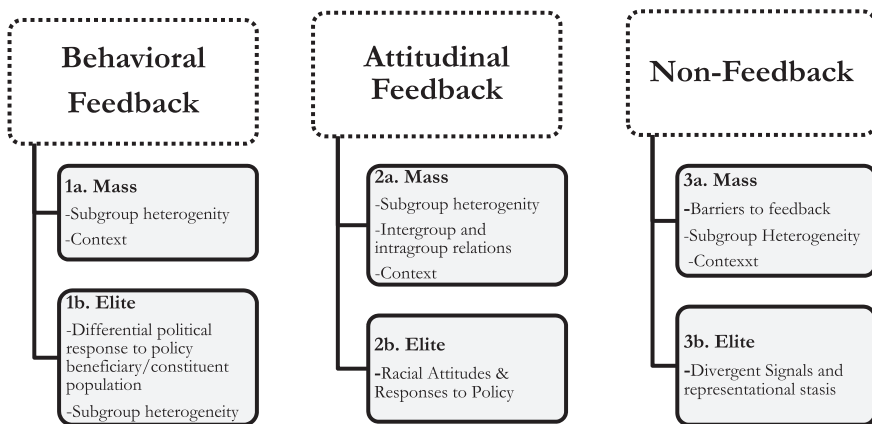


Figure 6. Conceptualizing Race, Policy Feedback, and the Political Process.

(Alex-Assensoh, 2001; Cohen & Dawson, 1993; Gay, 2004, 2012; Lerman & Weaver, 2014b; Michener, 2013). This is the second factor noted in Figure 5, box 1a. Put simply, economic and social contexts are a main channel through which participatory differences flow. What's more is that since nearly every context one can speak of in the United States is structured by racial inequality, contextual effects on political participation are moderated by racial dynamics (Alex-Assensoh, 2001; Cohen & Dawson, 1993; Gay, 2004, 2006; Newman, Velez, & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2016; Posey, 2017; Rocha & Espino, 2009). If contexts are crucial for understanding political behavior—both generally and in terms of racial differences—then they likely also factor into the processes that link policy to politics. This means that another key way to account for how race matters to policy feedback is to be attentive to the contexts in which policy is designed, implemented, and experienced.

Here is my overarching point: across levels and types of feedback, scholars can draw on existing literature in the discipline to develop theoretically grounded and substantively meaningful linkages between policy feedback and race. What I have included in Figure 6 is a springboard for thought, meant to prompt relevant questions. So, for example, one might ask whether elite political responses to policy dynamics (box 1b) vary based on the racial profile of policy beneficiaries or constituent populations (Broockman, 2013; Butler & Broockman, 2011; Cohen, 1999) or based on racial identity of elites themselves. Another pertinent question is whether attitudinal feedback processes at the mass level (box 2a) are shaped by the vast differences in racial attitudes and public opinion that have long permeated American political life (Hutchings & Valentino, 2004). In addition, scholars of race and ethnic politics have long been attentive to intergroup relations and the attitudes that racial groups have toward one another (Gay, 2006; Kaufmann, 2003; McClain et al., 2006; Meier, McClain, Polinard, & Wrinkle, 2004; Newman, 2013) as well as intragroup differences along axes such as sexuality, age, gender, class, conservatism, and more (Cohen, 1999, 2010; Dawson, 1995; Jones-Correa, Al-Faham & Cortez, 2018). Unsettled questions include how intergroup and intragroup attitudes shape policy feedback effects. Are Blacks who have positive orientations toward Latinos more likely to have negative attitudinal responses to strict immigration policies? Will Latinos who have negative views of Blacks respond less favorably to policies that disproportionately benefit African-Americans? Are attitudinal feedback processes gendered in policy arenas that differentially affect men and women of color (e.g., domestic violence or criminal justice)? Coupling the REP literatures on inter- and intragroup differences with inquiries about attitudinal feedback is just one example of the fruit that might be borne from more intentionally drawing on work in REP to inform feedback research.

Scholarly gain can also come from attending to elite attitudes and policy feedback (box 2b). For example, recent research suggests that technology entrepreneurs are wealthy and privileged, but have unique attitudinal dispositions that incline them toward more racially liberal viewpoints (Broockman, Ferenstein, & Malhotra, 2017). Given this attitudinal profile, how do such elites respond to policies that promote racial equality but may regulate businesses or undermine corporate interests (e.g., more strict antidiscrimination policies)?

Finally, there is much to learn about when and why feedback *does not* occur (boxes 3a and 3b). As feedback scholars venture further onto this turf, racial institutional structures, attitudinal patterns, and social relations are potentially key explanatory factors. Racial dynamics may contribute to the erection of barriers to feedback by motivating elites to pursue voter suppression tactics (Bentele & O'Brien, 2013; Hajnal, Lajevardi, & Nielson, 2017), generating support for such tactics among the public (Wilson & Brewer, 2013) or simply making it less likely that policy meant to facilitate feedback will be implemented (Michener, 2016). Further still, policies perceived as benefitting racial minorities may spur positive feedback among people of color but spark negative feedback among Whites, canceling out net measures of feedback in the aggregate and hiding important subgroup heterogeneity (Abrajano & Hajnal, 2015; Delmont, 2016; Hughey, 2014). To boot, if people within racial groups exhibit distinct preferences, then they may send divergent signals to political elites about policy favorability and create a ripe environment for status quo bias and representational stasis. At present, these are all conjectures that scratch the surface of the possibilities that spring from marrying policy feedback and research on race.

New and Missed Opportunities

By addressing the questions of *when* race matters to policy feedback (Figure 5) and *how* race matters for policy feedback (Figure 6), I aim to guide scholars toward new opportunities for asking research questions that might have otherwise have been neglected. I proffer some questions in the preceding section and illustrate more still in the sections to follow. My main point concerning the development of new lines of scholarly inquiry is that the issues of *when* race matters and *how* it matters are distinct but connected. I have presented Figures 5 and 6 separately in order to maintain analytical clarity, but the richest insights will come from thinking about them in relation to one another. For example, certain configurations of disproportionality and decentralization (Figure 5) seem to make certain types and levels of feedback (Figure 6) more likely. Looking at Figure 5, one might surmise that decentralized and racially disproportionate policies are those most likely to produce behavioral feedback because many policies in the upper right-hand quadrant (TANF, Medicaid, incarceration, immigration, education, housing) have been shown to affect (usually negatively) political participation among at least some beneficiaries (Bruch & Soss, 2018; Gay, 2012; Lerman & Weaver, 2014b; Michener, 2018; Rocha et al., 2015; Soss, 2000). Yet, scholars know comparatively less about the other quadrants in terms of what types and levels of feedback they produce. Perhaps the reason why the lower right quadrant (decentralized and less racially disproportionate) is not salient in the feedback literature is because it contains many instances of non-feedback. The policy feedback literature has not produced the research necessary to know. Indeed, formulating specific predictions about what kinds of policy arrangements produce which kinds of feedback processes is imperative, but premature given the state of the field. One purpose of this article is to encourage the kind of research that facilitates more comprehensive thinking about the connections between Figures 5 and 6 and thus generates new questions (and ultimately new knowledge) about policy feedback.

In addition to the new opportunities that might emerge from uniting REP and policy feedback, there are also chances to grasp missed opportunities. Scholars of race already produce work relevant to policy feedback; but because they do not always employ the same terms as feedback scholars and (even when they do) because there is precious little overlap between fields, this work is often overlooked. For example, in a recently published book entitled *Takeover*, Domingo Morel explores the political consequences that flow from state takeovers of local school districts. Morel (2018) shows that policies around state takeovers have complex and differential effects on racialized communities: empowering them under some conditions and disempowering them under others. Though Morel does not frame his work in terms of “policy feedback,” he meticulously investigates the ways (disproportionate and decentralized) policies around state takeovers affect political empowerment. The insights he develops contribute to policy feedback research by highlighting the value of attending to local contexts, studying forms of power that extend beyond the realm of voting, and considering how relationships between states and localities shape feedback processes.

Similarly, in his book *Latino Mass Mobilization*, Chris Zepeda-Millán (2017) shows that anti-immigrant policies can provoke backlash in the form of mass protests. Though Zepeda-Millán situates his work the fields of REP and social movements, the book nonetheless holds important lessons for policy feedback scholars—not the least of which is to more closely and consistently examine feedback effects in the context of social movements.

Some REP scholars who study public policy have begun to explicitly incorporating policy feedback into their work. Rocha et al. (2015) examine how immigration enforcement policies affect Latino immigrants, native-born Latinos, and Whites. They find that higher removal rates are associated with decreasing political trust among Latinos (both native and foreign born). At the same time, they find that Whites living in high immigration enforcement contexts are most trusting of government. Overall, Rocha et al. demonstrate that strict immigration enforcement policies “shift valued psychological resources away from already-disadvantaged groups to already-advantaged groups. The result is a feedback effect that loudens the voice of Anglos and mutes the voice of Latinos” (2015, p. 908). Despite the direct connection between this work and policy feedback, scholars of policy feedback have virtually ignored it.¹³ Unless feedback scholars more intentionally keep race in their intellectual purview, they can too easily overlook research by scholars in the field of REP.

Two Illustrative Cases: Social Security and Civil Legal Representation

The points I have made thus far are broad and draw on a wide range of research. My objective—offering a framework for evaluating and guiding policy feedback research vis-à-vis race—necessitates such generalization. However, abstraction can obscure in the absence of a connection to something real. To clarify, I offer two illustrative cases. First, the classic policy feedback case of Social Security. Second, the less familiar case of civil legal representation. I intentionally select an example that is well known as well as an example that treads ground less common to many

political scientists. Approaching both old and new terrain with an eye toward the RFF demonstrates the direction and insight the framework can provide.

Social Security and the RFF

In her seminal book *How Policies Make Citizens*, Andrea Campbell (2003) deftly assessed the policy feedback process for a pillar of American policy: Social Security. Campbell convincingly argued that Social Security (retirement) has “tremendous material effects, fundamentally enhancing seniors’ participatory capacity above what they could have achieved in the absence of the program” (p. 6). Campbell was attentive to class, showing that Social Security “is especially important for poorer seniors ... boosting their participation and working against the usually positive income-participation gradient” (p. 63). However, race was not a primary factor that emerged in Campbell’s analysis. Is Social Security a policy domain where scholars can advance useful knowledge by paying attention to race? If so, how does one study race in the context of this policy arena? Social Security is a policy that many scholars are familiar with and one for which (thanks to Campbell) there is a well-accepted and empirically grounded policy feedback story. Nevertheless, a focus on race opens up unexplored questions that researchers can miss by ignoring the disproportionalities endemic to Social Security as a redistributive mechanism. A turn to race does not take anything away from the strength of Campbell’s contribution, it only makes space for other important contributions.

At its origin in 1935, Social Security/OAI (Old-Age Insurance) excluded domestic and agricultural workers from receiving benefits. This meant that the program disqualified most African-Americans (Gordon, 1994; Lieberman, 1995; Mettler, 1998, 1999). Despite these racially exclusionary beginnings, OAI coverage was gradually extended. In 1948, excluded domestic workers were incorporated and in 1950 agricultural laborers were included (Goldberg, 2014). Eventually, OAI developed into “the closest thing to a race-blind social program the United States has ever known” (Lieberman, 1995, p. 513). Perhaps this is why contemporary policy analyses of Social Security can so easily omit race from the discussion. Yet, examining policy disproportionalities alerts us to the continued pertinence of race for Social Security.

In terms of the racial distribution of beneficiaries, Social Security retirement remains one of the whitest (86 percent) social policies in the United States. Similar disproportionality exists for benefits themselves. Despite Social Security’s progressive formula (lower earners receive a higher proportion of their pre-retirement earnings) raw benefit amounts are still lower for Blacks and “other minorities” because they have lower incomes and spend more years out of the work force. Notwithstanding these disproportionalities, Social Security plays an outsized role in the economic lives of retired people of color. In part, this has to do with policy system disproportionalities. A constellation of historical and contemporary policies has given Blacks and Latinos less access to retirement income from other sources (e.g., pensions and investments). As a result, Social Security income comprises a larger proportion of

their income relative to Whites and has a more substantive poverty reduction effect among people of color (Hendley & Bilimoria, 1999).

Though rarely considered by policy feedback scholars, these racial distributional patterns matter for politics and have implications for feedback. For example, because Social Security affects people of color differently than it does Whites, proposed changes to the program have racially disparate repercussions. This fact has not gone unnoticed by political elites seeking to strategically leverage policy feedback processes (Schneider & Ingram, 2018).

In the early to mid 2000s, President George W. Bush endeavored (but failed) to partially privatize Social Security. One strategy that President Bush and other advocates of privatization employed was appealing directly to Black communities, attempting to sway their attitudes and generate support by arguing that the traditional design of Social Security disproportionately disadvantaged African-Americans. In a 2005 speech, President Bush asserted that, "African-American males die sooner than other males do, which means the system is inherently unfair to a certain group of people" (Krugman, 2005). This invocation of race sparked controversy and discourse about racial patterns in Social Security (Krugman, 2005; Manjoo, 2005; Spriggs & Furman, 2006). Many analysts took issue with the factual accuracy and ethical implications of the President's arguments (Kaufman-Waldron, 2006; Krugman, 2005; Manjoo, 2005; Spriggs, 2004; Spriggs & Furman, 2006). Critiques hinged on contextualizing and explaining the policy disproportionalities.

The Social Security privatization push in the 2000s was a striking example of how policy disproportionalities can be made salient for political purposes. President Bush and privatization advocates accentuated racial disparities in an effort to bolster support of their preferred policy goal while a host of analysts, journalists, and academics attempted to undermine Bush's claims, and thereby retain strong public support for Social Security among African-Americans. The failure of the privatization effort reflected the core logic of Andrea Campbell's work: interests group like the AARP undergirded by politically active and powerful seniors ardently defended Social Security (Galston, 2005; Zuckman, 2005). By late 2005, public disapproval for Social Security privatization grew to the point of political infeasibility (Galston 2005; Zuckman, 2005). Though this general pattern reflects feedback dynamics that political scientists have come to expect, scholars are not nearly as well positioned to explain, assess, or understand the attitudinal or behavioral responses of African-American seniors whose unique positioning vis-à-vis Social Security had been especially highlighted by Bush and others.

The RFF framework can shift the policy feedback lens on Social Security in several useful ways. First, it sensitizes us to racial disproportionalities in terms of beneficiaries, benefits, and policy systems. For Social Security, these each have distinct but important implications that warrant close thinking about how people of different races experience and understand government in relation to their Social Security benefits. Second, the RFF gives a basis for assessing the significance of these policy disproportionalities in relation to policy feedback and the policy process. Recall Figure 6. One might think about the Social Security privatization debate about in terms of behavioral feedback at the elite level (box 1b). The racial contours of the

design of Social Security gave political elites like President Bush leverage for targeting a specific constituent population (African-Americans) with a particular racialized message. This raises questions about how policy design affects the strategic behavior of political elites toward racial subgroups. Turning to non-feedback at the mass level (box 3a), still other questions emerge. Quadagno and Pederson (2012) find that between 2000 and 2010, public attitudes toward Social Security shifted, with more Americans reporting that government is spending “too much” on the program. However, support for Social Security was measurably higher among African-Americans (relative to Whites) across this time period and did not shift significantly (Rockey Moore & Maitin-Shepard, 2010). What were the barriers to the kind of feedback that President Bush sought to achieve when he targeted African-Americans in his push toward privatization (box 3a)? What was the role of partisanship among African-Americans? How (if at all) did the racial rhetoric around Social Security affect other groups within the American populace? These questions only scratch the surface. The RFF can widen the scope and nature of questions that scholars of policy feedback ask about race, policy, and politics.

Civil Legal Representation and the RFF

Turning to a less familiar policy domain, I'll lay out my own reasoning process as I draw on the RFF to think through a new research project that I (along with a collaborator¹⁴) am embarking on. The project focuses on understanding the causes and consequences of policies related to civil legal institutions (CLI). In the United States, civil statutes protect crucial economic, social, and political rights. Some of the functions of civil law include preventing illegal evictions, ensuring that public assistance beneficiaries have due process, protecting borrowers in disputes with debt collectors, safeguarding women from abusive relationships, resolving child custody disputes, adjudicating deportation proceedings, and much more. Such legal protections are especially critical to low-income women. An important subset of the questions about the consequences of CLI concern policy feedback. How do experiences with civil legal institutions affect the political attitudes and actions of low-income Americans? How do CLIs more broadly affect the contours of American politics (e.g., by helping advocates, activists, and bureaucrats to identify problems with policies? By providing an avenue for holding government institutions accountable? By quelling the impetus for wider political engagement via meeting more immediate short-term legal needs)? These inquiries are the tip of the iceberg; others are sure to emerge as the research progresses. Most apropos for our purpose here is to consider this: How much attention should my collaborator and I place on race?

This is an imperative question for us. Much of my research is oriented toward race and it is a factor that always looms large in my understanding of the political world. My collaborator also recognizes the importance of race and cares about it. Without any broader theoretical guidance, our options would be as follows: (i) to proceed without any assumptions about the role of race, but remain attentive to if

and how it emerges in our data; (ii) to assume race matters (usually a safe assumption), but risk investing undue time in discerning racial dynamics without sufficient theoretical guidance on how and where to look; and (iii) to ignore race and see what happens, if it slaps us in the face, pay attention to it. Otherwise not.

These options are clearly not exhaustive. But they do reflect a set of choices that scholars often face—and that's only if they stop to explicitly consider what kind of theoretical work they should be doing at the front end of research projects to ensure that race does not fall to the wayside. My collaborator and I want to do such work. The RFF offers some guidance.

To begin, let's consider the three forms of disproportionality outlined earlier. Descriptive data from the Legal Services corporation (LSC is the largest and most significant legal services organization in the country) indicates that in 2016, 45 percent of LSC clients identified as White, 28 percent as Black, 18 percent as Hispanic, 3 percent as Asian, 3 percent as Native American, and the rest as "other." Compared to national population estimates, this suggests *beneficiary* disproportionality (specifically with the overrepresentation of Blacks and Native Americans in the ranks of clients of legal services). In addition, there is evidence of *benefit* disproportionality in terms of take-up because low-income African-Americans are less likely to seek legal help despite being more likely to have need for it (Greene, 2016). Finally, there is the issue of *policy system* disproportionality. In the case of civil legal access, this stems in part from the overwhelming emphasis on and investment in the criminal justice system compared to limited attention paid to the civil legal system (Greene, 2016). This policy configuration appears to generate self-reinforcing patterns: Black Americans are reluctant to pursue rights protections via the civil system (to some extent) due to their direct or proximate experiences with rights violations in the criminal system (Greene, 2016).

The indications of beneficiary, benefit, and policy system disproportionality in the civil legal realm mark it as an arena where race may be crucial. Turning our lens to decentralization only amplifies that signal. Hundreds (though there is no formal count) of separate and independent legal service providers supply civil legal aid in the United States. The national civil legal aid infrastructure is, "the output of many public-private partnerships, most of them on a small scale" (Sandefur & Smyth, 2011, p. V). States differ markedly in the resources available to support civil legal assistance, the types of services available, and the groups served (Sandefur & Smyth, 2011, p. V). Essentially, "geography is destiny: the services available to people from eligible populations who face civil justice problems are determined not by what their problems are or the kinds of services they may need, but rather by where they happen to live" (Sandefur & Smyth, 2011, p. V). Figure 7 illustrates. The number of legal aid attorneys available per ten thousand persons below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level is low nearly everywhere, but varies dramatically across the country. This is largely a consequence of heterogeneous state and local expenditures, which reflect policy decisions. Of note is that many of the states that make the paltriest investments in civil legal resources are also states with significant Black populations and long-standing histories of institutional racism (South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, and Arkansas are among the bottom 10).

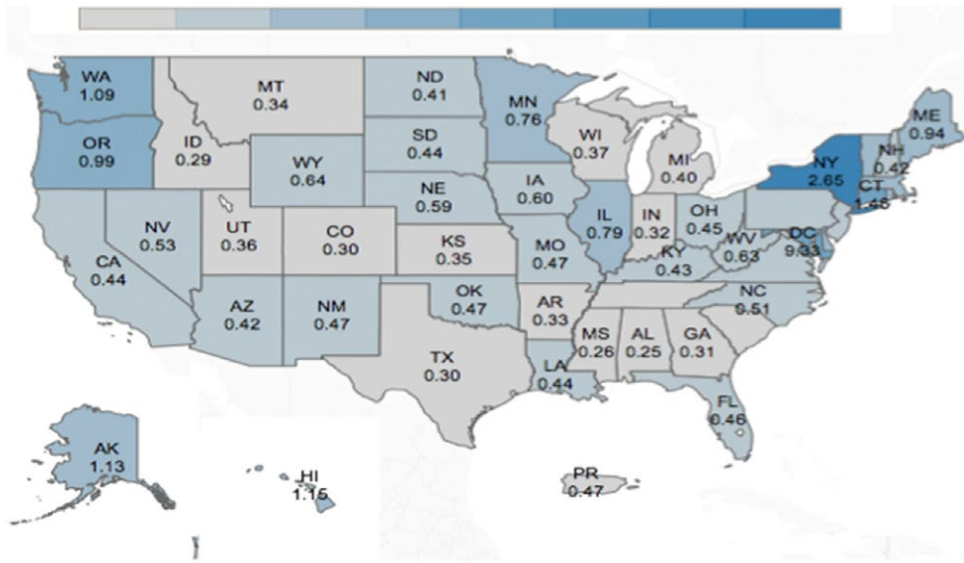


Figure 7. Civil Legal Aid Attorneys Per Ten Thousand People Under 200 Percent FPL.
 Source: The Justice Index 2016, National Center for Access to Justice.

The abovementioned indicators of disproportionality and decentralization place civil legal representation in the upper right-hand quadrant of Figure 5 and suggest a *prima facie* case for approaching our study of civil legal representation with a presumption that race is a central part of the policy processes being investigated. These indicators also give us clues about what aspects of the policy landscape one should be especially attentive to (e.g., federalism, inter-policy connections to the criminal justice system). For further guidance in charting our theoretical course, it is also beneficial to evaluate policy feedback processes across *levels* and *types* in ways that build on existing research in REP. That means thinking about behavioral feedback, attitudinal feedback, and non-feedback at both the mass and elite levels. Of course, a single project cannot tackle all of these facets. But grasping the range of possibilities and considering them in relation to existing understandings of race is a productive way to illuminate research routes that might have otherwise been obscured.

One might traditionally begin with a focus on mass level feedback by assessing whether people who have sought and received civil legal assistance have unique attitudes toward courts, government, or politics—and whether the orientations of such people are different from those who sought civil legal assistance but were turned down (nearly half of all people seeking assistance are turned down). The RFF would push us to also consider differences in political attitudes that predate legal problems (e.g., political trust) to account for why African-Americans are less likely to seek legal assistance in the first place (Greene, 2016; Nunnally, 2012), it could prompt us to consider how racial differences in attitudes toward courts might shape the experiences of seeking and receiving civil legal services (De la Garza & DeSipio, 2001; Longazel, Parker, & Sun, 2011), and it might prompt us to consider how racial

representation among elites (judges and lawyers) shapes experiences with civil courts. Similar insights can be mined by thinking across levels and types of feedback with an eye toward the important work that has already been done by scholars of race and ethnicity. To be sure, scholars' pre-existing interests, expertise, and skill sets will determine what kinds of questions emerge and how they are framed. The RFF framework is meant to complement this mix so that scholars have a theoretical infrastructure upon which to develop research about race and policy feedback.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that race is a foundational aspect of American political life; the significance of race to American public policy is virtually a truism. Yet, this reality does not align with the research foci represented in the policy feedback literature. Policy feedback scholars study processes that are shot through with racial implications—but too often do so without enough theoretically grounded consideration of race. My goal here was to provide a conceptual basis for rerouting this state of affairs. Policy feedback scholarship is too important to suffer the consistent omission of race from our theories. In a complex context where race is likely always important, the RFF posits disproportionality and decentralization as conditions that can help us to decipher when it is most essential to the processes being studied. Going further, parsing the policy feedback literature to identify relevant levels (mass/elite) and types (behavioral/attitudinal/absence) of feedback opens up key questions at the intersection of race, feedback, and American politics.

As the feedback literature continues to develop, it has become more intertwined with the literature on inequality (Soss, Hacker, & Mettler, 2007). This essay signals an important next step, which is to think carefully and systematically about a crucial facet of inequality: race. The insights developed here are specific to race, but the broadest takeaway applies to other axes of structural inequality like gender and class: to advance our understanding of the relationships between structural inequality, public policy, and democracy, policy feedback research must examine the core elements of such inequality (race, class, gender) with more deeply rooted theoretical grounding that draws on a wealth of perspectives from both within and outside of the conventional policy feedback cannon.

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Notes

1. The main strength of the concept of racialization is that it emphasizes process and correspondingly, structure. Both are especially valuable given my focus here on public policy. At the same time, one potential weakness of the concept of racialization is that it can obscure the role of racism and white supremacy, concealing them in amorphous language, masking relevant actors, and/or making the production of racial inequality appear more incremental, anodyne, or even natural than it actually is. These issues of language are tricky. They are also important. While I acknowledge the downsides of relying on the concept of racialization (and its cognate, "racialized"), I maintain that it is fitting given

my emphasis on policy structures and processes. I also readily use the language of racism and white supremacy, highlighting and naming those phenomena as appropriate.

2. While many of these insights apply elsewhere, in this essay I focus on the United States.
3. Though I talk in terms of “racial groups” I do not presume that such groups have any essential genetic or biological basis. Indeed, I follow Omi and Winant (1994, p. 71) in asserting, “race has no fixed meaning, but is constructed and transformed socio-historically.” I thus understand “racial groups” as being defined by prevailing social and institutional norms.
4. For a perspective that is different from Mettler’s as far as the nature of the G.I. bill’s education and training components, see Ira Katznelson’s *When Affirmative Action was White* (2005) as well as an illuminating co-written exchange between Katznelson and Mettler (2008) entitled, “On Race and Policy History: A Dialogue about the GI Bill.”
5. For insight on differences within racial groups, see Christopher Parker’s, *Fighting for Democracy: Black Veterans and the Struggle Against White Supremacy in the Postwar South* (2009). Unlike Mettler, Parker does not focus exclusively on the G.I. bill. Instead, he broadly emphasizes the difference between Black veterans and non-veterans, pointing to heterogeneity *within* racial subgroups stemming from military experience (and by extension, the policies shaping that experience). Instructively, Parker is a scholar of race who does not cast his research in terms of policy feedback and policy feedback scholars do not generally engage his work. Such a disconnect is part of what motivates this article.
6. The deracialization of welfare policy was one aspect of what Soss and Schram (2007) call a “progressive revisionist thesis” rooted in the (then prominent) belief that the image of the Democratic party needed to be realigned such that it was not perceived as the party that was primarily focused on getting free goodies to non-Whites and people living in poverty (pp. 112–13).
7. Importantly, King and Smith (2008) elaborate further and say much more than this in their work.
8. OASDI stands for Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance; it is an acronym that describes the array of insurance provisions under the banner of Social Security.
9. See: <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/supplement/2010/5a.html>.
10. This does not denote causality. The relationship between disproportionality and decentralization raises empirical questions that I do not answer here, but the RFF makes them more salient.
11. Recall that I outlined several types of disproportionality. Figure 5 emphasizes beneficiary disproportionality, which is the most salient and observable kind. This stylization would look different if I instead highlighted benefit disproportionality or policy system disproportionality. For simplicity, I focus on one type of disproportionality. However, scholars should and can reimagine this graphic in light of whatever facet of disproportionality is most relevant to their own research agendas.
12. Admittedly, this is the quadrant political scientists are least equipped to assess because the policies in question are less salient and not comprehensively examined in terms of racial outcomes.
13. Citations of the article have largely come from scholars of Latino politics and immigration (e.g., Casellas & Wallace, 2018; Cruz, Nichols, LeBrón, & Pedraza, 2018; Sanchez, Vargas, Juarez, Gomez-Aguinaga, & Pedraza, 2017).
14. I am working on this project with Mallory SoRelle, Assistant Professor of American politics and policy in the Government and Law Department at Lafayette College.

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