

המחלקה לפוליטיקה וממשל

הסמינר המחלקתי

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Can we make a difference? Citizen participation and policy change

Does citizen participation impact on policy outcomes? Leading political scientists have often answered this question affirmatively, such as V. O. Key, Jr.'s assertion that unless mass views have some place in the shaping of policy "all the talk about democracy is nonsense." Yet, the question of whether and how individual-level participation impacts on policy outcomes has remained a fundamental "black box" question in the field, and is notoriously difficult to research empirically. In this seminar, I present a forthcoming, article that investigates three broad questions: (1) Does citizen participation impact on social policy? (2) Does social policy impact on citizen participation? (3) How does country context matter for the causal relationship between citizen participation and social policy? This article, entitled "Trade union density and social expenditure" (Marc Hooghe & Jennifer Oser, forthcoming, Journal of European Public Policy) examines these questions through a longitudinal analysis of 30 OECD countries between 1980 and 2010. The findings show that union membership affects social expenditure—but only in coordinated market economies (such as Sweden) and not in liberal market economies (such as the U.S.). The findings also point to a "policy feedback" loop, whereby social expenditure has a strong positive effect on union membership. In the seminar, I discuss the implications of this study for citizens' capacity to influence policy in varied contexts