

Gender Policy Feedback: Perceptions of Sex Equity, Title IX, and Political Mobilization among College Athletes

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James N. Druckman¹, Jacob E. Rothschild¹, and Elizabeth A. Sharrow²

Abstract

Public policies invariably confer or deny benefits to particular citizens. How citizens respond to relevant policies has fundamental implications for democratic responsiveness. We study the beliefs of a core constituency of one of the most celebrated sex non-discrimination policies in U.S. history: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Using a novel survey of college student-athletes, we find strong support for the spirit of the policy, with the vast majority of respondents reporting the opinion that there “should” be equity. Concurrently, student-athletes also perceive maldistribution among status quo resources and opportunities and believe that redistribution is needed. Furthermore, they are willing to take political action to improve equality. Consistent with our expectations, these beliefs are particularly salient for women and those who perceive persistent sex discrimination in society. Our results reveal “positive policy feedback” among policy beneficiaries of Title IX who mobilize to seek equity in athletics. The dissatisfaction among policy beneficiaries raises questions about democratic responsiveness (e.g., to whom are policymakers and leaders in college athletics responding?) and highlights the political nature of college athletics.

Keywords

policy feedback, Title IX, public opinion, gender politics, sports politics

What do citizens think about public policies that affect them? Political scientists have addressed this foundational question when it comes to an array of policies including Social Security (Campbell 2003), the Affordable Care Act (Jacobs and Mettler, forthcoming; Lerman and McCabe 2017), welfare reform (Soss and Schram 2007), and the G.I. Bill (Mettler 2002). Yet, virtually no work explores citizens’ reactions to one of the most discussed pieces of sex non-discrimination policy in U.S. history—Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. We extend work on “policy feedback” into this domain of U.S. civil rights policy. We offer a theory about perceptions of sex inequities among one of Title IX’s most affected populations: college student-athletes. We assess our hypotheses with a survey of student-athletes from a major athletic conference.

We find that college student-athletes—particularly women and those who believe sex discrimination in society persists—perceive significant gender biases in college athletics. These student-athletes also support redistribution of athletic resources to address extant inequalities and are willing to take political action (i.e., writing letters, signing petitions, or attending protests) to address the issue. The results reveal that, from the perspective of student-athletes, the implementation of Title

IX has not yet produced the policy’s aim of eliminating sex-based discrimination. The Act may have established expectations of equality for women and men in educational institutions, but its implementation has inculcated perceptions of gender inequality within college athletics. The findings accentuate a possible representation conundrum inherent to the contemporary politics of Title IX such that those most affected by the policy are *not* the constituents to whom policy makers and college leaders fully respond.¹

Title IX, Opinions about Sex Inequities, and Policy Feedback

Passed by the U.S. Congress on June 23, 1972, in an omnibus bill to amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX states, “No person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, denied benefits of, or be

¹Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA

²University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Corresponding Author:

James N. Druckman, Department of Political Science, Northwestern University, 601 University Place, Evanston, IL 60208, USA.

Email: druckman@northwestern.edu

subjected to *discrimination* under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (20 U.S.C. §1681; emphasis added). The law applies to all educational institutions that receive federal funds and has notably impacted the lives of faculty, staff, and students.

While the initial impetus for the law focused on graduate school admissions, faculty hiring, and sex-bias in teaching materials (Rose 2015), the vast gender inequities in athletics quickly drew policymakers’ attention (Edwards 2010; Sharrow 2017). At the time of Title IX’s passage, athletic opportunities for women were extremely limited (Acosta and Carpenter 2014; Cahn 1995). How to address these inequities led to significant debate which culminated in the 1979 policy guidelines on intercollegiate athletics (Office for Civil Rights [OCR], U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare 1979). These guidelines established the expectation of sex equity in college sports (see the supplementary appendix for the details of policy requirements; all supplementary appendix material is available at the journal’s website).

Implementing Title IX substantially enhanced athletic opportunities for women (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA] 2017). At the collegiate level, women now enjoy twelve times as many athletic opportunities as they did before Title IX (Acosta and Carpenter 2014). In American high schools, half of girls experience substantial athletic participation during their high school careers (National Federation of State High School Associations [NFSHSA] 2017; Stevenson 2007), up from one in twelve in 1971 (NFSHSA 2015). Public opinion toward Title IX remains overwhelmingly supportive of the law’s aims (Connelly 2011; YouGov 2017), and journalistic coverage of Title IX increasingly frames the policy as a great success (Whiteside and Roessner 2018). Yet, scholarly assessment of the policy’s achievements lacks a clear consensus. Many point to uneven and incomplete implementation (see Supplementary Appendix Table A2, which details inequities in the distribution of opportunities and expenditures; also see, for example, Kane and Ladda 2012; National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education [NCWGE] 2017; National Women’s Law Center [NWLC] 2012; U.S. Department of Education, Secretary’s Commission on Opportunity in Athletics 2003).² The most recent U.S. Department of Education (2012) report on Title IX finds that athletic issues comprised the largest number of Title IX discrimination complaints in 2010 and 2011, illustrating that activists continue to demand more robust enforcement.³

Within this evolving landscape of Title IX’s politics, we know very little about what average college student-athletes—one of Title IX’s central beneficiary groups—believe about sex-based resource discrimination.⁴ Do student-athletes believe men’s and women’s sports are treated equally (i.e., without sex discrimination)? What

factors determine these beliefs? These questions matter when it comes to “policy feedback,” which posits that public policy implementation and concomitant social change may beget new forms of opinion and mobilization (Campbell 2003, 2012; c.f., Jacobs and Mettler, forthcoming; Patashnik and Zelizer 2013).⁵ The feedback concept suggests that public policy can reformulate the capacity of the state by affecting administrative capabilities, and/or by impacting the political goals and/or identities of social groups (Skocpol 1992). Policy “feedback” can either reinforce past policy trajectories, inspire civic participation, and mobilize political engagement—what scholars call “positive feedback” (e.g., Mettler 2005; Pierson 1993)—or undermine democratic processes, unravel existing policy regimes, and demobilize constituent groups—what scholars refer to as “negative feedback” (e.g., Patashnik 2008; Soss 2000; R. K. Weaver 2010).⁶ Given the relative stability of Title IX’s regime (i.e., policy interpretations in athletics have remained largely consistent since 1979) and the public nature of accountability under the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act, we argue that “positive” feedback is more likely among those affected. That is, those who believe policy implementation is incomplete will continue to push for gender equity via resource redistribution (i.e., reallocation toward greater gender equity) and political action.⁷ Policy imbues student-athletes with rights, increasing the likelihood that they will mobilize to seek equity.

To be clear, we recognize that isolating the direct effect of a forty-five-year-old law on contemporary attitudes would be a challenging, if not impossible, task given the simultaneous societal shift in gendered attitudes (see Jacobs and Mettler, forthcoming).⁸ Our goal is to “audit” beliefs about the law’s stated goal of ending discrimination. Even though many social forces and experiences shape relevant beliefs, the existence of the policy—particularly a policy designed to address historical discrimination toward a marginalized group—likely still plays a role in shaping opinions. It could do so by establishing normative expectations of resource allocation. Moreover, it is entirely possible that current beliefs among recipient populations not only reflect assessments of the past and present but also suggest prospective thinking about future policy modifications and political mobilization (e.g., Campbell 2003 in the realm of Social Security policy). Our study of the extent to which policy objectives have been achieved illuminates the degree to which opinion may serve as important positive feedback into *future* iterations of relevant policy around Title IX.

Hypotheses

To assess beliefs about the intent of the policy, we focus on the stated target of Title IX’s policy intervention: sex-based

“discrimination.” We follow Pager and Shepherd’s (2008) operationalization: “discrimination” under current policy occurs when one group (in our case, men or women student-athletes) is advantaged relative to another.⁹ Policy guidelines provide a similar, if more capacious, metric which is employed by the OCR in Title IX investigations as discussed in the supplementary appendix. Do student-athletes perceive discrimination, and if so, which student-athletes?

We expect two factors to drive perceptions of discrimination among student-athletes: respondent sex and attitudes about societal sex discrimination. Objectively, men’s sports remain advantaged in college athletics (NCAA 2017; Yanus and O’Connor 2016); for example, in the NCAA’s Big Ten Conference, men received roughly 10 percent more participation opportunities, 37 percent more expenditures for recruiting, and an extraordinary 43 percent more in overall expenditures during 2015–2016 (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education 2016; see the supplementary appendix for details and additional data). These figures mean that women student-athletes experience relative “losses” from a purportedly equal status quo, and it is well established that individuals recognize and weigh losses more than gains (e.g., Baumeister et al. 2001). We therefore hypothesize that women should perceive these inequities to a greater extent than men, all else being constant (Hypothesis 1).¹⁰

In addition, we hypothesize that as individuals perceive greater (or lesser) sex discrimination in society writ large, they will believe there is more (or less) inequity when it comes to college sports (Hypothesis 2). This expectation follows from research on motivated reasoning which suggests that those who perceive broader inequalities will be more likely to observe disparities when assessing specific situations. In contrast, those who believe that the status quo is equitable will be less likely to recognize objective inequalities (e.g., Taber and Lodge 2006).

In line with the (positive) policy feedback model (Campbell 2003; Mettler 2002), we also hypothesize that these same individuals who tend to be *less* satisfied with the current state of policy implementation will be *more* likely to support a redistribution of resources so as to align more closely with full equity (e.g., move resources from men’s sports to women’s sports to achieve greater equality; Hypothesis 3). Because they are also more likely to view the policy itself as necessary to compel colleges and universities to pursue equitable treatment, they will therefore also be more likely to advocate for robust enforcement (i.e., they will support the policy and take action on behalf of it, exhibiting evidence of “positive feedback”; Hypothesis 4). This expectation follows from the positive feedback model, which suggests that those dissatisfied with a relevant policy will be more likely to

advocate for their rights (e.g., Campbell 2003; Gusmano, Schlesinger, and Thomas 2002). Our predictions suggest that the very people meant to benefit from Title IX (e.g., women) are less likely to perceive it as a success and more likely to mobilize in light of this perception.

Survey

We tested our hypotheses using a survey in which we solicited participation from NCAA Big Ten Athletic Conference student-athletes (i.e., our population is Big Ten student-athletes). We emailed an invitation to current student-athletes on March 30, 2016, asking them to take part in a survey on college athletics. A total of 1,615 student-athletes completed (at least a portion of) the survey. Survey implementation details, explanation and justification for our sampling approach (as well as a discussion of limitations), and weighted sample demographics are provided in the supplementary appendix.

To gauge perceptions of (in)equality, we asked respondents how they believe their university, across all sports, *actually* distributes athletic resources and opportunities between women and men. We asked this on twenty-four distinct items and practices relevant to college athletics (e.g., athletic scholarships, coaches); respondents rated each item on a 5-point scale ranging from “women extremely advantaged” (1) to “men extremely advantaged” (5). We also asked them to rate the same items with regard to how they think their university *should* distribute each item between women and men athletes. These two batteries allow us to explore perceptions of inequality and attitudes about redistribution (i.e., the difference between one’s perception of status quo distribution and one’s belief about what it should be). The twenty-four items map onto four distinctive areas, for which we created index measures: overall resources (a single item, non-indexed), opportunity (e.g., to participate, have an athletic scholarship, practice), personnel (e.g., full-time coaches, medical staff), and equipment (e.g., locker rooms, facilities, training).¹¹ We assessed policy opinions and political mobilization by asking (1) the extent to which the respondent disagrees or agrees with Title IX’s requirements (on a 7-point scale with higher scores indicating greater agreement), and (2) the respondent’s likelihood of taking seven different actions to express an opinion about gender (in)equity in sports (e.g., talking to the athletic director or a coach, protesting, signing a petition, etc.). For the action items, we created a single indexed variable ($\alpha = .87$).¹²

We measured respondent’s sex with a straightforward self-report question; to capture general attitudes about sex discrimination, we used a four-question battery ($\alpha = .71$) that resembles one used in prior work (e.g., Swim et al. 1995; similar items also appeared in the 2012 American

National Election Study).¹³ In addition, we included measures of ethnicity, familial income, ideology (with higher scores indicating greater conservatism), year in school, whether the respondent attended high school in the United States (thereby capturing internationally recruited athletes), whether the respondent has an athletic scholarship, the university the respondent attends, and in what sport(s) the respondent competes.

For our analyses, we include four dummy variables to indicate if the respondent competes in men's basketball, men's football, men's or women's track and field/cross-country, and men's wrestling. The former two sports are commonly referred to as "revenue producing" sports at the NCAA Division I level, and policy critics sometimes suggest they should, therefore, be treated separately when it comes to Title IX (Boyle 2016; Suggs 2005). Track and field and cross-country stand out as high-participant, low-cost sports, and thus, those participants may have distinct perceptions of resource distribution.¹⁴ Wrestling has been central to equity policy discussions due to claims that colleges defunded and disbanded a number of men's wrestling teams in pursuit of Title IX compliance (e.g., Ridpath et al. 2009). We also include variables to identify respondents attending the University of Iowa and the University of Minnesota because, during the time of our data collection, both schools were in the midst of public Title IX controversies.¹⁵

Finally, following extant work on participation (e.g., Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), we include variables we expect to affect our action items, including measures of internal university efficacy (i.e., perceived ability to understand university affairs), external university efficacy (i.e., perceived ability to have a say in what the university does), and trust in the university. Full details about the wording of questions on the survey instrument are in the supplementary appendix.

Results

We expect perceptions and behaviors to depend, in part, on gender, sport, and university. As is true in virtually any survey, our sample did not perfectly represent the population on these important factors. Thus, we follow common practice, and, for all analyses, we weight the data based on gender, sport, and university. This facilitates generalization to the population of Big Ten student-athletes (see the supplementary appendix for weighted sample comparisons with the population).¹⁶

We start by evaluating opinions on how respondents believe resources and opportunities *should* be distributed between women and men. Remarkably, the vast majority of respondents believe that there should be near exact equality. Throughout, a score of "3" on each scale indicates the opinion that "neither women nor men [should be]

advantaged." The respective averages in each domain are overall resources, 3.09 ($SD = .41$; $N = 1,287$); opportunity, 3.06 ($SD = .33$; $N = 1,289$); personnel, 3.03 ($SD = .33$; $N = 1,281$), and equipment 3.04 ($SD = .34$; $N = 1,288$). As indicated by the low standard deviations, most respondents believe that equality *should* be the norm.¹⁷ These results suggest a diffusion of the ideology of sex equality within Title IX's policy mandate, as both women and men student-athletes report normative attitudes toward equal treatment of women and men. Under Title IX's contemporary policy regime, our results suggest that student-athletes' *beliefs about how resources should be distributed* are in concordance with the expected implementation outcome of equity established by policy guidelines. This suggests that Title IX (and/or the current social climate toward equity) establishes an expected baseline of equity from which athletes may evaluate the practices of their athletic departments.

When it comes to perceptions of *actual* resource distribution, we observe a very different story. The mean scores for all four domains veer toward the perception that men are advantaged. Indeed, all scores on the perceptions of actual distributions are statistically significantly higher than the scores on how respondents believe resources *should* be distributed. The respective mean scores (and tests of significance) are as follows: overall resources, 3.31, $SD = 0.79$, $N = 1,342$; $t(2627) = 8.91$, $p < .01$, for a two-tailed test; opportunity, 3.20, $SD = 0.56$, $N = 1,347$; $t(2634) = 7.78$, $p < .01$; personnel 3.21, $SD = 0.48$, $N = 1,328$; $t(2607) = 11.12$, $p < .01$; and equipment, 3.30, $SD = 0.59$, $N = 1,341$; $t(2627) = 13.77$, $p < .01$.

To test our hypotheses regarding the impact of respondent's sex and attitudes toward sex discrimination, we regress each of our distribution perception variables on respondent's sex and sex discrimination attitudes along with the aforementioned controls. We display the results in Table 1.¹⁸ Across all four measures, consistent with our first hypothesis, the sex of respondents has a significant and large effect. To get a sense of the substantive impact, consider that, holding all other variables at their means, the predicted mean values for women respondents, on overall resources, opportunity, personnel, and equipment, are 3.62 ($SE = 0.04$), 3.49 ($SE = 0.03$), 3.34 ($SE = 0.03$), and 3.59 ($SE = 0.03$), respectively.¹⁹ These sharply contrast the respective predicted values for men which are 3.13 ($SE = 0.04$), 2.97 ($SE = 0.03$), 3.12 ($SE = 0.03$), and 3.09 ($SE = 0.03$).

We additionally find strong support for our second hypothesis on sex discrimination attitudes. Those who perceive broader patterns of sex discrimination in society also observe disparate treatment in their athletic departments. Substantively, for example, holding other variables at their means, there is a 10 percent increase in perceptions of inequality on our overall resource measure

Table 1. Determinants of Distribution Perceptions (Probability-Weighted OLS).

	(1) Resources	(2) Opportunity	(3) Personnel	(4) Equipment
Female	0.486*** (0.056)	0.516*** (0.040)	0.217*** (0.031)	0.504*** (0.038)
African American	-0.066 (0.125)	-0.136 (0.085)	-0.124* (0.071)	-0.073 (0.094)
Asian	-0.023 (0.114)	-0.050 (0.068)	-0.123** (0.050)	0.021 (0.068)
Hispanic	-0.146 (0.133)	-0.238** (0.105)	-0.064 (0.120)	-0.192** (0.095)
U.S. high school	-0.172** (0.085)	-0.134** (0.060)	-0.038 (0.064)	0.005 (0.059)
Year	0.050** (0.022)	-0.010 (0.018)	0.012 (0.017)	-0.001 (0.017)
Familial income	-0.021 (0.025)	-0.042** (0.020)	-0.012 (0.019)	-0.017 (0.019)
Ideology	-0.010 (0.019)	0.006 (0.014)	0.004 (0.014)	0.005 (0.015)
Discrimination perceptions	0.205*** (0.044)	0.123*** (0.032)	0.079*** (0.030)	0.091*** (0.031)
Athletic scholarship	0.022 (0.059)	0.006 (0.047)	0.041 (0.045)	0.009 (0.047)
Wrestling	0.248* (0.137)	0.213* (0.111)	0.009 (0.103)	-0.016 (0.103)
Football	0.595*** (0.122)	0.578*** (0.108)	0.262** (0.106)	0.418*** (0.103)
Men's basketball	0.397*** (0.138)	0.310*** (0.055)	-0.020 (0.038)	0.059 (0.048)
Track and field/cross-country	-0.109* (0.059)	-0.170*** (0.038)	-0.001 (0.033)	-0.050 (0.043)
Iowa	0.156 (0.096)	-0.080 (0.060)	-0.008 (0.057)	0.015 (0.054)
Minnesota	0.174** (0.085)	0.073 (0.058)	0.029 (0.052)	0.122** (0.058)
Constant	2.429*** (0.215)	2.741*** (0.165)	2.819*** (0.154)	2.729*** (0.151)
Observations	1,137	1,139	1,138	1,138
R ²	.200	.296	.103	.218

Standard errors are in parentheses. OLS = ordinary least squares.

Statistical significance is denoted by * $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

when one compares a respondent who scores one standard deviation below the mean discrimination score with a respondent who scores one standard deviation above it.

Otherwise, interestingly, male student-athletes from sports often at the heart of Title IX debates—the well-resourced sports of football and men's basketball and the wrestlers who are often described as suffering cuts due to Title IX—also perceive distribution biases (at least on some of the measures). It may be that participating in a sport that intersects with Title IX debates generates more awareness of the aforementioned objective inequities. Track and field/cross-country student-athletes perceive

less inequality when it comes to overall resources and opportunity, perhaps reflecting that they experience more equality between women and men within their sport. We find that Minnesota student-athletes are also more attuned to inequities in two cases (likely due to the aforementioned public attention on Title IX). Otherwise, we find variables such as ideology, familial income, and other demographics do not matter in any systematic, predictable way.²⁰

Our data also allow us to evaluate the effects of beliefs about resource redistribution in athletics. To assess this, we calculate the difference between each respondent's answer to the "should be" items and their perceptions of

actual, existing distributions. We present our findings in the supplementary appendix (Table A7). Not surprisingly, given that virtually all respondents reported a normative view of equal distribution, women and those who perceive more sex discrimination in society exhibit greater support for redistributing resources in a more equitable manner across all measures (consistent with Hypothesis 3). For example, as compared with men, women, on average, believe there should be a 6 percent reallocation in overall resources to make the distribution more sex-equal. This is persuasive evidence that one of the main targets of Title IX—women college student-athletes—believe both that sex-based discrimination remains a problem and that redistribution is needed. This finding suggests that women college athletes hold opinions *more* aligned with scholars and activist groups who remain focused on Title IX's unfulfilled implementation promise (e.g., Buzuvis 2014; Sharrow 2017; Yanus and O'Connor 2016) and *less* aligned with common media portrayals of relative policy success (Whiteside and Roessner 2018). The finding also means that the NCAA's own "definition of gender equity" has not been met insofar as they dictate the following: "An athletics program can be considered gender equitable when the participants in both the men's and women's sports programs would accept as fair and equitable the overall program of the other gender" (NCAA 2017, 3).²¹ Our results suggest that women, in particular, do not accept their programs as fair and equitable given that they view redistribution as necessary.²²

Public opinion feedback among student-athletes on Title IX's application to college athletics is that the law has not met its full potential. Another step in the policy feedback model is to assess whether affected individuals, particularly those who may not be fully satisfied, mobilize. We thus next test whether the individuals who perceive more mal-distribution also are more likely to become politically mobilized to advocate for a policy solution to address inequity—that is, more robust enforcement or implementation of Title IX itself. Table 2 displays the models which evaluate support for Title IX specifically, and mobilization as measured by several action measures. The results provide evidence in support of Hypothesis 4, in that those most likely to believe the policy has not eliminated inequality are also relatively supportive of Title IX specifically and more likely to take action to address inequality. Clearly, these individuals believe policy solutions (like better enforcement or more thorough implementation) are still required and they are willing to politically mobilize on the issue.²³ We also find that football players express significant support for Title IX, consistent with the prior results; however, they are not more likely to mobilize to action around gender equality concerns and in fact are nearly significantly less likely to do so (as are men's basketball players). These

well-resourced athletes likely feel less compelled to mobilize because the status quo already benefits their interests (and redistribution of resources may indeed hurt their current standing in the status quo). Track and field/cross-country student-athletes are more likely to mobilize, which may result from their own experiences of having to advocate for their sport that receives scant resources.²⁴

We see variables that typically affect political participation matter here, in predictable ways when it comes to internal efficacy and trust. Surprisingly though, increased external efficacy significantly lowers the likelihood of taking action. This could reflect a belief among athletes that the university will be responsive to student-athletes in general, and thus, their extra-systemic action is not needed. Taken as a whole, these results support a positive feedback model for understanding the contemporary politics of Title IX in college athletics—those dissatisfied with the policy's extant implementation support more aggressive policy implementation and demonstrate a likelihood to take political action in response to perceived injustices within their university athletic environment.²⁵

We previously noted that the beliefs and intentions we study here surely reflect a host of experiences, beyond the mere presence of the law itself. Indeed, we positioned our study as one that audits the feedback on the law's intent. One could even go so far as to ask whether the Act itself is relevant for these reactions—that is, is the Act playing any role in the responses we study—is this actually "feedback" on the Act? There is clear evidence that it is, on three counts. First, we investigated whether respondents had "heard of" Title IX and 91 percent responded affirmatively. Thus it seems likely that, as we suggested previously, Title IX is on the minds of student-athletes and *sets the normative expectation of equality*—for which we find such strong evidence. Second, that the same factors (i.e., gender and discrimination perceptions) drive views of equality *and* support for the Act suggests that these student-athletes connect inequities to the specific policy.

Third, our survey asked respondents whether they knew if Title IX applies only to athletics, only to education, both athletics and education, or neither (the correct answer is both; see Druckman et al. 2014).²⁶ We find that, relative to offering the correct answer, women student-athletes, all else constant, are significantly more likely to believe the Act only applies to athletics. In contrast, those with stronger societal discrimination perceptions are less likely, albeit not to the point of statistical significance, to hold that incorrect belief (the full results are in the Supplementary Appendix Table A10). These findings cohere with our theory insofar as we argued that women's beliefs stem from their experiences in the domain of athletics, and so, they may think of Title IX strictly in that sense. The dynamic behind our discrimination perception

Table 2. Determinants of Title IX Support and Actions (Probability-Weighted OLS).

	(1) Support	(2) Action
Female	1.630*** (0.132)	0.193** (0.081)
African American	0.080 (0.211)	0.226* (0.127)
Asian	-0.744*** (0.198)	0.153 (0.156)
Hispanic	-0.027 (0.285)	0.084 (0.232)
U.S. high school	0.164 (0.183)	0.197 (0.176)
Year	-0.044 (0.042)	-0.016 (0.025)
Familial income	-0.075* (0.044)	-0.082*** (0.029)
Ideology	-0.080** (0.036)	-0.031 (0.023)
Discrimination perceptions	0.623*** (0.085)	0.158*** (0.054)
Athletic scholarship	0.122 (0.107)	-0.041 (0.066)
Wrestling	-0.033 (0.257)	0.038 (0.152)
Football	0.631*** (0.196)	-0.223 (0.137)
Men's basketball	-0.137 (0.335)	-0.479** (0.225)
Track and field/ cross-country	-0.079 (0.125)	0.160** (0.078)
External university efficacy		-0.096*** (0.033)
Internal university efficacy		0.161*** (0.060)
University trust		-0.085** (0.037)
Iowa	0.176 (0.203)	0.221* (0.125)
Minnesota	-0.105 (0.165)	0.101 (0.093)
Constant	1.925*** (0.427)	2.335*** (0.421)
Observations	1,129	1,099
R ²	.396	.135

Standard errors are in parentheses. OLS = ordinary least squares. Statistical significance is denoted by * $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

expectation though was one of motivated reasoning, which tends to occur with greater frequency as knowledge increases (Taber and Lodge 2006); increased knowledge also reflects the concerns about equity across the domains

to which Title IX applies. Thus, these knowledge findings are consistent with our theoretical expectations about the formation of beliefs regarding Title IX. Future work is needed to pin down mechanisms. For instance, it could be that instead of merely experiences in college, women student-athletes perceive greater inequalities due to particular personal qualities or experiences (see Knifsend and Graham 2012). These attributes may lead women both to select into pursuing a collegiate athletics career and to perceive sex inequities. Untangling the role of experiences in college versus other individual-level factors (e.g., by comparing similar student-athletes with non-student-athletes) is a question for future work.²⁷

Conclusions

There is little doubt that Title IX altered the landscape of athletics by vastly expanding opportunities for girls and women. Yet, to date, we are not aware of any work that has studied whether one of the primary target populations actually believes that the policy has fully worked to eliminate discrimination “on the basis of sex.” We show that college student-athletes strongly support the spirit of the policy, with nearly all reporting that there “should” be equity. Still, a sizeable and important population also believes mal-distribution exists among resources and opportunities, thinks redistribution is needed, and is willing to take political action to improve equality. This provides evidence of positive feedback where those who perceive that the policy has not fully succeeded are apt to seek change consistent with the policy’s principles. We further offer some evidence that existence of the policy itself plays a role in reactions. An interesting next step would be to explore which types of inequities student-athletes view as more or less problematic (e.g., are they less concerned with scholarship or equipment inequalities, given the large size of the football team, than with facility inequality?).

Regardless of such possible tradeoffs, our results suggest an overall uneven landscape for sex equity politics in college athletics. On one hand, Title IX is *not* an unmitigated implementation success; women and those who believe there are sex-based inequities in society continue to perceive, and indeed question, the dramatically unequal practices endemic to college sports. On the other hand, when this circumstance is viewed as an extension of recent studies showing the benefits of melding theories of opinion formation with policy feedback, we find some evidence of policy success. First, the evidence of widespread support for sex equitable practices suggests that the *norm of equity* embedded in Title IX has, via various social forces and policy implementation, diffused and impacted how athletes think athletics *should* be organized. Second, the diffusion of this norm may inspire the broad-based demands needed to achieve better policy enforcement. Very little

evidence, to date, has demonstrated that when student-athletes see these equity norms being violated, they are willing to take action. In this sense, our findings suggest that there exists among current student-athletes a potential for mobilizing social movement demands that could impel policy change. Such a movement, on a local or national level, will likely be necessary to enact broad-based policy change (e.g., Weldon 2002, 2011).

We also isolate an important problem concerning democratic responsiveness. Public policies typically affect a targeted subset of the broader population—in this case, college student-athletes. Yet, policymakers and those who implement the policies often must consider the effect of the policy on less directly impacted populations (e.g., taxpayers). Within the landscape of Title IX such indirectly impacted populations might include fans of college athletics and alumni who consume the product of college sports, especially men's basketball and football. Consequently, efforts to redistribute resources may go unanswered, in part, because the less directly affected constituencies have more power. This is a particularly perplexing situation when it comes to college sports given that student-athletes' lives are highly regulated at the same time as many of their rights are far from clear.²⁸ Democratic responsiveness to the less-empowered stakeholders in college athletics may ultimately be attenuated by the ascendance of an economic model for college sports (Clotfelter 2011; Lanter and Hawkins 2013). So long as athletic departments in the most competitive conferences remain committed to a central goal of producing revenue, sex equity concerns may continue to receive short shrift.

This analysis of the “feedback” politics at stake in Title IX suggests that the future of college sports is potentially complicated by student-athletes—women athletes, in particular—who accurately perceive themselves as rights-bearing citizens with civil rights protections. The economic model for college athletics may, our results suggest, be forced to grapple with civil rights protections afforded to the athletes who comprise college sports. How politics and law intersect with college athletics is a topic that has received scant attention from political science despite the inherently political nature of college sports. Our results suggest that scholars of policy should take seriously the domain of athletics because it overlaps with the domain of civil rights. With women athletes poised, in particular, to see themselves as rights-bearing policy leaders, athletic departments may have no choice but to reckon with the still-evolving debate over gender politics.

Authors' Note

Authors are listed in alphabetical order and contributed equally to this paper. Data used in this paper and replication code are available at <http://faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~jnd260/publications.html>.

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Notes

1. Such “feedback” between citizens and policymakers is posited as evidence of responsive governance (i.e., Campbell 2003); its absence raises serious questions about inequalities in citizen's voices (Campbell 2012).
2. There is notable variation in the impact of Title IX based on geography, race, and other individual characteristics (see, for example, Sharrow 2017 for discussion).
3. That said, other issues (i.e., non-athletic) have risen to prominence among the types of federal discrimination complaints in recent years (Reynolds, forthcoming).
4. Other studies focus on Title IX-specific policy knowledge and support among the mass public (Sigelman and Wilcox 2001), athletic administrators (Staurowsky and Weight 2013), and college athletes (Druckman et al. 2014). There are also large literatures on legal aspects of Title IX (see Brake 2010) and the long-term consequences of policy implementation on the lives of girls and women (e.g., Kaestner and Xu 2010; Stevenson 2010).
5. While much of the feedback literature focuses on political structures and policy development, recent work has turned to citizens' opinions (Mettler and Soss 2004, 64) in such areas as health care policy (e.g., Campbell 2011; Jacobs and Mettler, forthcoming; Lerman and McCabe 2017), welfare reform (Soss and Schram 2007), and criminal justice policy (V. M. Weaver and Lerman 2010). We seek to add to this recent work.
6. The most positive mobilizing effects extend from policies that promote democratic authority structures (Bruch, Ferree, and Soss 2010) instead of paternalistic ones (Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011).
7. Other feedback scholars acknowledge that Title IX exists among the population of policies which “expand and underscore citizens' rights” (Mettler and Soss 2004, 61) and that “decisions on equal protection and Title [IX] have encouraged, and in some cases created, populations” (Norton 2004, 58).
8. Policy implementation of Title IX co-evolved with the widespread shift in attitudes around gender equality and gender roles (e.g., Aronson 2003; Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Burns and Gallagher 2010; Sigel 1996).

9. For a more detailed discussion of how the policy constitutes men and women as distinct groups, see Sharrow (2017).
10. High school girls who participate in athletics tend to perceive greater levels of discrimination relative to girls who do not (e.g., Knifsend and Graham 2012); thus, we may see an especially pronounced effect of sex given our focus on athletes.
11. The overall resource item is a single, non-indexed variable, while the other measures average multiple items, as detailed in the supplementary appendix. As there are a large number of items on our survey instrument, we list descriptive statistics here and report all details in the supplementary appendix. The respective alphas for opportunities, personnel, and equipment are .84, .83, and .90. These metrics are meant to capture a holistic assessment of the multi-faceted domain of college athletics. Some of our measures are detailed in the 1979 Title IX Policy Interpretation, which governs implementation, and others are items that are annually reported by athletic departments to the federal government under the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA). We discuss the details of both the Title IX regulations and the EADA metrics in the supplementary appendix as the two do not directly map onto each other (although athletic programs must be responsive to both).
12. These actions are partially derived from standard measures of political mobilization used by the American National Election Study (e.g., attending a protest) and created to reflect specific action options available to athletes (e.g., talking to a coach). We recognize our measures involve intent rather than actual behavior; in so doing, we follow a large literature that relies on similar intention measures. For example, Ajzen and Fishbein (2005, 188) explain that an “intention to perform a behavior . . . is the closest cognitive antecedent of actual behavioral performance . . .” Furthermore, O’Keefe (2002, 128) states, “there is good evidence that voluntary actions can be successfully predicted from intentions” (also see Lubell, Zahran, and Vedlitz 2007; Sears et al. 1978).
13. See http://www.electionstudies.org/studypages/anes_timeseries_2012/anes_timeseries_2012_userguidecodebook.pdf. General gender discrimination attitudes tend to be quite stable as they reflect fundamental values and ideology; in discussing the related gender traditionalism scale (i.e., which includes more overt items than we use), McThomas and Tesler (2016, 35) state that it is “quite stable over time at the individual level. Moreover, stable predispositions, such as gender attitudes, rarely change in accordance with mass assessments of well-known political figures (Tesler 2015)” [or in our case, we presume issues]. Thus, we are confident that the causal direction flows from this general battery to perceptions of equality in sports (and not vice versa) and that the inclusion of the latter did not substantially impact answers to the former. The general scale was also placed later in the sequence of the survey.
14. In the Big Ten, track and field/cross-country has more participants than any sport other than football (see the supplementary appendix). Yet, among the schools in our population their average expenditures are \$13,506 per athlete whereas the average expenditures for football are \$227,352 (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education 2016). These numbers are calculated using EADA statistics that report expenditures and participation numbers across, rather than within, track and field/cross-country teams. The number reported here for track and field/cross-country averages per athlete expenditures on both women and men.
15. Minnesota was under official investigation by the federal government for spending inequities in athletics during the year before our survey was in the field (Lerner, Browning, and Nelson 2015; Rayno 2015) and Iowa faced a March 2016 Title IX lawsuit regarding discrimination against women’s coaches (Associated Press 2016).
16. Specifically, we apply inverse probability weights to our sample (see Steinmetz et al. 2014); for population statistics, we relied on the information we gathered to obtain the sample, which involved identifying the population of student-athletes from available schools (see the supplementary appendix). We did not record and were unable to identify data on other demographic attributes of the population; however, the three variables on which we weight are clearly the most relevant to our hypotheses.
17. The modal score for each item is 3.0 with an overwhelming number of respondents registering these scores—for each respective measure, the percentages who score 3.0 are 90 percent, 74 percent, 88 percent, and 86 percent. The average scores for men are overall resources 3.15 ($SD = 0.50$), opportunity 3.12 ($SD = 0.40$), personnel 3.07 ($SD = 0.41$), and equipment 3.09 ($SD = 0.42$). The average scores for women are overall resources 3.02 ($SD = 0.26$), opportunity 3.01 ($SD = 0.22$), personnel 2.99 ($SD = 0.22$), and equipment 2.99 ($SD = 0.23$).
18. The *Ns* change due to missing responses on selected items; results are robust to multiple imputation techniques.
19. We use *Clarify* to calculate predicted values (see King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000).
20. That said, Hispanic-identified respondents perceive significantly less inequality when it comes to opportunity and equipment, and those who attended high school in the United States perceive less inequality of resources and opportunity.
21. Of course, federal law under Title IX is more binding to athletic department practices than is National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) policy. However, the NCAA offers guidance to member institutions on developing their “gender equity” practices and in responding to EADA data requests (see <http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/finances/ncaa-membership-financial-reporting-system>).
22. We asked respondents their opinion regarding whether men’s football and/or basketball should be included or excluded when considering gender equality in the overall distribution of resources. Policy makers and the courts consistently reject this argument, although the idea of isolating so-called “revenue-producing sports” from equity policy remains in circulation among Title IX’s harshest critics. Forty-three percent of respondents thought these sports should be excluded from equity considerations. We also asked about objective and normative views of overall resource distribution if men’s football and basketball were excluded. We present those results in the Supplementary Appendix Table A8.

23. In results available from the authors, we create an aggregate measure of inequality perceptions (by merging the four distinct batteries) and add it to the regressions presented in Table 2. We find this scale is significant for Title IX support but not for the action items. Even so, the scale does not seem to substantially mediate the relationship between gender/discrimination attitudes and Title IX support. That is, there is not clear evidence that gender and discrimination attitudes affect distribution perceptions that in turn affect policy support and the likelihood of taking action. Gender and discrimination attitudes appear to assert independent effects on distribution perceptions, policy support, and actions. On its face, this may seem contrary to a positive policy feedback model where perceived consequences stimulate subsequent policy support and actions. However, we suspect that the results instead reveal that policy support/mobilization among these individuals come from not merely extant perceptions but also from speculation about future possibilities that could exist sans the policy and/or actions. Policy feedback effects can be potentially prospective.
24. We also find that familial income has a negative relationship with activism which is sensible insofar as the type of activism we are studying involves extra-systemic (protest type) activities, which have been shown to negatively correlate with income (e.g., Bowles and Gintis 1982). In the Supplementary Appendix Table A9, we explore whether the relationships we find for taking actions are contingent on either income or whether the sport is more individual or team-oriented (as income and social pressure that could come from a team have been shown to impact/moderate types of political participation).
25. Although we know of no similar data recording athletic equity opinion among college athletes from the era before Title IX, the historical record captures significant mobilization by college football coaches and players (as well as the NCAA itself) *against* the implementation of Title IX in the 1970s (Edwards 2010; Sharrow 2017).
26. Overall, 22 percent believe the law only applies to athletics, 2 percent believe it only applies to education, 74 percent correctly believe it applies to both athletics and education, and 2 percent believe it applies to neither.
27. One study of post-college life outcomes among NCAA athletes suggests that athletes have distinctive outcomes from their non-athlete peers, indicating that researchers may also benefit from studying the role that experience plays in shaping athletes during college as well (Gallup 2016).
28. Staurowsky (2014, 23–24) explains, “In the netherworld that has existed for college athletes between bona fide workers and students, their ability to access their rights becomes more difficult . . . The lives of college athletes are routinely regulated in ways that distinguish them from their colleagues in the general student population . . . in an atmosphere where questioning the status quo is not welcome and with the expectation that players will not go public with their grievances for fear of damaging the program and their own prospects, there is considerable risk associated with player activism . . .”

Supplementary Material

Supplemental materials for this article are available with the manuscript on the *Political Research Quarterly (PRQ)* website.

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