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The emotional constitution of welfare: a multi-level framework for Social-Affective Citizenship

Abstract

The “emotional turn” in the social sciences has highlighted deficiencies in rationalist models of citizenship, yet the institutional analysis of social policy remains largely disconnected from the study of political affect. Existing frameworks struggle to systematically integrate the formal and informal spheres of welfare provision with the lived emotional experiences of belonging and recognition. This article introduces the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, a theoretical synthesis that posits the mutual constitution of the social and the affective domains. We develop expanded conceptualisations of Social Citizenship (the Ecosystem Matrix) and Affective Citizenship (four dimensions) by integrating insights on informality, hybrid governance, affective regulation, and the politics of hope. The SAC framework is presented as a four-level dynamic process model, tracing the pathway from the ecosystem of provision, through mechanisms of mediation and affective experience, to political feedback. Furthermore, we demonstrate how this architecture is operationalised by a suite of analytical tools developed in preceding work, which

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provide the necessary diagnostics, microfoundations, and macro-dynamics. A worked example traces a conditional activation regime through the four levels; a separate discussion considers welfare chauvinism as an exclusionary feedback dynamic. The article concludes by establishing a rigorous, multi-level research programme for analysing the emotional constitution of welfare.

Keywords: social policy, emotion, social citizenship, affective citizenship, policy feedback

1. Introduction

The contemporary welfare state is an inherently emotional arena. Encounters with social policy – whether navigating the stringent conditionality of unemployment benefits, relying on informal kinship networks for eldercare, or participating in marketised healthcare systems – generate potent affective experiences: dignity or stigma, security or anxiety, hope or alienation (Ayata, 2022; Soss et al., 2011). Yet, a significant analytical gap persists between the structural analysis of social policy and the experiential analysis of political emotion. Despite the “emotional turn” (Plamper, 2010) – now well established within social policy itself, from the psychosocial analysis of welfare (Hoggett, 2000) and the politics of resentment and fairness (Hoggett et al., 2013) to studies of affective governance (Jupp et al., 2017) and the shame of poverty (Walker, 2014) – and the rise of “affective citizenship” as a critical lens (Fortier, 2010), the institutional mechanisms of welfare provision are often studied independently of the affective dynamics they generate. This disconnect results in an incomplete understanding of how citizenship is governed, experienced, and contested in the 21st century.

The limitations of traditional approaches to Social Citizenship (SC) contribute to this gap. The classic Marshallian paradigm, focused on state-centric redistribution and passive rights reception (Marshall, 1950/1992), is ill-equipped to handle the contemporary landscape. While scholars have updated this paradigm to account for the hybridisation of governance logics – incorporating marketisation and participation (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013) – these approaches often remain overly focused on the formal state. They frequently neglect the crucial insight that social rights are often primarily realised through informal moral economies, kinship networks, and transnational practices, particularly where the state is a minor actor (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022).

Similarly, the concept of Affective Citizenship (AC), while illuminating the ways states “govern through affect” (Fortier, 2010) and enforce racialised hierarchies (Ayata, 2022), remains fragmented. The literature has tended to foreground disciplinary power and resistance, and the work on solidarity, mutual care, and the persistent “hopes for the state” that drive mobilisation among the marginalised – though present since the concept’s origins – has only recently been drawn together (Mookherjee, 2005; Johnson, 2010; Roy et al., 2022). A comprehensive understanding

requires a synthesis that captures the full spectrum of affective dynamics in political membership.

This article addresses these limitations by introducing the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework. We argue that the “Social” (institutional structures of rights, obligations and welfare) and the “Affective” (emotional experiences of belonging and recognition) are mutually constitutive. All welfare provision, whether formal or informal, bureaucratic or communal, is a form of affective governance that distributes not only resources but also signals about worth, dignity, and inclusion. The SAC framework integrates expanded conceptualisations of both SC and AC into a four-level dynamic process model that traces the pathway from the ecosystem of provision, through the mediation of experience, to affective dynamics and subsequent political feedback.

This article serves as the capstone of a four-part theoretical project aimed at establishing a new research programme on emotions and social policy. The SAC framework provides the organising architecture, which is operationalised by the analytical engine developed in the preceding trilogy. This engine comprises three essential components: the diagnostic tools necessary to analyse the assumptions embedded in policy design and across the policy chain, provided by “Beyond the Rational Calculator” (BRC) (Szarfenberg, 2026a); the microfoundations explaining individual affective processing, supplied by “The Emotional-Causal Policy Actor” (ECPA) (Szarfenberg, 2026c); and the macro-dynamics explaining collective emotional shifts and feedback loops, offered by “The Emotional Life of Policy” (ELP) (Szarfenberg, 2026b). Together, this tetralogy provides a coherent, multi-level system for analysing the emotional constitution of welfare.

The article proceeds as follows. Sections 2 and 3 develop comprehensive, integrated conceptualisations of Affective Citizenship and Social Citizenship, respectively. Section 4 introduces the integrated SAC framework, detailing its core postulates and dynamic architecture. Section 5 demonstrates how the preceding trilogy (BRC, ECPA, ELP) operationalises this architecture. Section 6 concludes by discussing the theoretical significance of the integrated framework and outlining the future research agenda. Initial methodological guidelines for the framework’s empirical application are provided in Appendix A.

2. Developing a comprehensive conceptualisation of Affective Citizenship

Two distinct “turns” lie behind this development, and they are worth separating. The emotional turn in history and the social sciences revived emotions as objects of inquiry, most notably through the history of emotions (Plamper, 2010). The affective turn proper emerged from critical and cultural theory: the phrase gained currency with Clough and Halley’s edited volume *The Affective Turn: Theorising the Social* (2007), and the field is usually traced along two genealogies – a Spinoza–Bergson–Deleuze line (Massumi, 1995; 2002) and a Tomkins–Sedgwick line (Sedgwick, 2003) – consolidated by Gregg and Seigworth’s *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), with contributions from Ahmed, Berlant, Massumi, and Clough. Within citizenship studies,

this scholarship has destabilised the ideal of the modern liberal citizen as a strictly rational actor and highlighted the centrality of affect in the experience, governance, and contestation of political membership (Di Gregorio & Merolli, 2016). In navigating this terrain, we take a deliberate position in the debate over the relationship between affect and emotion. At one pole, Massumi (2002) treats affect as pre-conscious, autonomic intensity that is categorically distinct from qualified, meaning-laden emotion; at the other, Ahmed (2014) treats the distinction between sensation and emotion as only analytic. Acknowledging Leys's (2011) critique of the strong affect/emotion split, we follow Ahmed in treating affect and emotion as irreducibly entangled and intentional – that is, object-directed and meaning-laden. We accordingly employ “affect” as a broad category encompassing categorised emotions (e.g., anger, hope) and subjective feelings that are simultaneously embodied and socially constructed, rather than as a register of pre-conscious intensity set apart from meaning. However, the concept of Affective Citizenship (AC) remains theoretically fragmented, often emphasising either the disciplinary power of the state or the resistive potential of citizens, while sometimes neglecting the complex interplay of hope, solidarity, and expectations of care. To provide a robust foundation for the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, this section synthesises recent theoretical advancements into an integrated, multi-dimensional conceptualisation of AC. This synthesis integrates analyses of affective governance (Fortier, 2010), racialised boundary-making (Ayata, 2022), and the politics of hope and solidarity (Roy et al., 2022).

Affective citizenship has a genealogy that predates its recent prominence in citizenship studies. Mookherjee (2005) coined the term, theorising affective citizenship as a normative model of recognition in which autonomy is formed not through a single set of affective bonds but through commitments to multiple, intersecting communities. Johnson (2010) developed it for political membership and the welfare state, supplying the working definition that later scholarship adopts. Isin (2004) and Fortier (2010) gave the concept a governmentality edge – “governing through neurosis” and “governing through affect”, respectively – while Ayata (2022) systematised the differential-belonging strand and Di Gregorio and Merolli (2016) consolidated the field. The four dimensions developed below order this lineage rather than describe a fragmented literature for the first time.

We define Affective Citizenship as *the contested domain of political membership constituted by the interplay of emotions, feelings, and embodied experiences. It is a dynamic field where governance is exercised through the imposition of feeling rules; where hierarchies of belonging are maintained through boundary-making; and where contestation and solidarity are mobilised through hope, care, and demands for accountability.* This integrated concept is operationalised through four analytical dimensions: Governance and Regulation, Differentiation and Hierarchy, Contestation and Resistance, and Expectation and Solidarity.

The first dimension examines how the state and other institutions seek to regulate the emotional lives of their subjects. Fortier (2010) conceptualises this as “governing through affect”, whereby institutions establish “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 1983) that prescribe the appropriate emotional dispositions of a “good citizen”. This governance is not neutral; it establishes what Fortier (2010) terms a “political economy of feelings”,

where certain emotions are validated and encouraged (e.g., patriotism, self-reliance), while others are delegitimised or rendered suspicious (e.g., anger, foreign allegiance). At the macro scale, Johnson (2010) names these patterns “emotional regimes”: neo-liberal governance encourages citizens to “feel entrepreneurial and self-reliant”, a disposition increasingly contested by welfare-liberal regimes in which the citizen is “encouraged to feel protected by government” (Johnson, 2010, p. 502). This governmental use of fear and reassurance also echoes Isin’s (2004) “governing through neurosis”, warranting the dimension across three sources rather than Fortier alone.

This perspective highlights the “Janus face” of citizenship: it is simultaneously a technology of governance used to define and demarcate populations, and a site of potential contestation (Fortier, 2010). Governance through affect seeks to create compliant subjects, extending into the “psychic life of power” (Butler, 1997; Fortier, 2017) by shaping subjectivities and defining the affective codes of conduct.

The second dimension highlights how affect is mobilised to maintain hierarchies of belonging even when formal legal equality exists. Ayata (2022) emphasises citizenship as an “affective institution” central to regulating racialised boundary-making. As explicit legal discrimination has become less tenable, Ayata argues that racialised boundary-making has shifted more pronouncedly to the affective domain. Fortier’s (2017) analysis of anxiety and “citizenisation” complements this, showing how differential belonging is produced through affectively charged status anxieties rather than overt exclusion.

This shift enforces a “differential regime of belonging” (Ayata, 2022, p. 48). The framework distinguishes between those perceived as “true” or “proper” citizens, whose belonging is assumed, and “quasi” or “technical” citizens, whose membership remains conditional despite their legal status. For racialised subjects, belonging requires continuous “affective performance” – demonstrating allegiance, loyalty, and the “right feelings” toward the nation-state (Ayata, 2022, p. 51). This affective regime ensures that integration remains an open-ended process for marginalised groups, reproducing hierarchies through the mobilization of desire and aversion.

Boundary-making is not only racialised but gendered and sexual. Affective citizenship has long sorted the “deserving” from the “undeserving” along intersecting lines of gender, class, religion, and ethnicity (Lister, 2003; Pateman, 1988; Mills, 1997). Sauer (2024) shows how the authoritarian populist right in Germany and Austria mobilises an “affect economy” of fear, anger, and disgust toward women, LGBTIQ people, migrants, and Muslims – while promising belonging and love on a national-ethnic basis – to contest citizenship rights and reshape the welfare state. This extends Ayata’s (2022) racialised account of differential belonging to gender and sexuality.

The third dimension focuses on how affect drives political mobilisation against disciplinary norms. Affective governance is never totalising; it is constantly met with what Fortier (2016) terms “unruly feelings” – emotions that clash with established feeling rules. These can range from anger and indignation against injustice to expressions of solidarity that challenge state-defined boundaries.

This dimension encompasses “acts of citizenship” (Isin & Nielsen, 2008), where subjects mobilise affective resources to constitute themselves as citizens and claim the “right to have rights” on their own terms. This includes radical modes of belonging

that refuse the affective and territorial logic of the state (Bagelman, 2016; Vrasti & Dayal, 2016). Affect, in this dimension, is the fuel for mobilisation, transforming individual grievances into collective political action. However, this focus on resistance *against* the state must be complemented by an analysis of the affective bonds that sustain communities and shape their demands *upon* the state.

The fourth dimension consolidates a dispersed but long-standing strand of affective-citizenship scholarship that foregrounds the affective bonds of community and the enduring expectations placed upon the state. This strand runs from Mookherjee's (2005) account of recognition across multiple, intersecting communities, through Johnson's (2010; 2019) analysis of solidarity, security, and the welfare state as an "emotional regime", to the recent intervention of Roy, Coelho, and Szabzon (2022), who argue that studies centred on difference and resistance have comparatively underdeveloped these affective bonds and expectations. Drawing on the "politics of hope" (Appadurai, 2013) among socially excluded populations, this dimension highlights "hopes for the state" (Jansen, 2014) – the persistent expectation for care and accountability.

Furthermore, it highlights the mobilisation of horizontal solidarity and mutual care as fundamental aspects of "feeling like a citizen" (Roy et al., 2022). Crucially, Roy and coworkers reframe what constitutes an "unruly feeling". In a neoliberal context that emphasises individualism and state retrenchment, they argue that demands for collective solidarity and state responsibility are the truly disruptive and unruly political affects.

These four dimensions are not only theoretical. A growing body of policy-grounded scholarship already traces them through concrete institutions and across the very levels this framework formalises. Fortier's (2017) analysis of British "citizenisation", Merolli's (2016) study of integration exams, and de Wilde and Duyvendak's (2016) account of engineered "community spirit" in Dutch neighbourhood policy show governance-through-affect operating in situ; Bassel's (2017) "politics of listening" and her work on citizenship tests tie recognition and voice to a specific naturalisation instrument; and Wiebe's (2016; 2019) "sensing policy" framework follows affective, embodied lived experience from environmental-health policy through to political mobilisation. Integrating such work shows that the SAC levels are empirically tractable, not merely conceptual – and supplies the kind of grounded case the worked example in Section 4 develops.

3. Developing a comprehensive conceptualisation of Social Citizenship

The concept of Social Citizenship, classically formulated by T.H. Marshall (1950/1992), established the right to economic welfare and security as fundamental to full membership in a community. This framework, while foundational, has been criticised for its state-centrism, its assumption of a passive citizen-recipient, and its inability to account for the complexities of globalisation, neoliberal restructuring, and the pervasive role of informality (Dean, 2015; Lister, 2003). A contemporary framework for Social Citizenship (SC) must move beyond these limitations by integrating insights

regarding the hybridisation of welfare governance and the critical role of the informal sphere.

We define Social Citizenship as *encompassing the interdependent institutional and normative arrangements – spanning formal state policies and informal community practices – that regulate access to welfare, security, and the resources necessary for membership in a community. It is realised through diverse logics operating across local, national, and transnational scales.*

In response to the restructuring of welfare states under conditions of economic openness and individualisation, scholars have called for “analytical pluralism” to capture the emerging complexities of citizenship (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013). The contemporary welfare state is no longer solely focused on redistribution; it increasingly emphasises activation, marketisation, and participation.

Johansson and Hvinden (2013) propose a “post-Marshallian” framework, adapted from Miller (2000), which identifies three co-existing logics of organisation within formal welfare systems. The first, the Socio-Liberal Logic, represents the traditional focus on redistribution and mutual rights and obligations. Within this logic, the “active” dimension is increasingly defined by conditionality and the fulfilment of duties, such as participation in activation policies. This contrasts with the Libertarian Logic, which emphasises self-responsibility, autonomy, and choice. This second logic drives the marketisation of welfare and promotes the ideal of the “citizen-consumer” operating within those markets (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013, p. 50). Finally, the Civic Republican Logic shifts the focus toward participation, deliberation, and commitment to the community, promoting institutional arrangements such as co-production, civil dialogue, and participatory governance.

Johansson and Hvinden (2013, p. 51) argue that contemporary social citizenship is a complex hybrid of these models. Their framework allows for analysis of how these logics interact (“opening up between”) and the balance between active and passive dimensions within each (“opening up within”).

While the hybridity framework captures changes within the formal state, it remains largely state-centric. A critical intervention by Nordensvärd and Ketola (2022, p. 772) challenges this bias, arguing that the Marshallian paradigm fundamentally misunderstands how social rights are realised globally, especially where the state is a “relatively minor player”. Nordensvärd and Ketola (2022) argue that formal citizenship often overshadows the crucial role of informal citizenship embedded in local and transnational spaces.

They juxtapose Formal (Modern) citizenship – which is abstract, universalist, and realised through legal bureaucracy – with Informal (Moral) citizenship. The latter is grounded in the concept of “moral economy” (Scott, 1976, cited in Nordensvärd and Ketola, 2022), which describes the informal rights and obligations that communities develop through reciprocal exchanges to mitigate risk. This logic is fundamentally distinct from formal state or market mechanisms; it is embodied, particularistic, and based on deeply held norms of reciprocity within kinship, community, or faith networks. What is also important, Nordensvärd and Ketola reject the evolutionary view that formal citizenship supersedes the informal. They emphasise the interdependence and co-evolution of these spheres, arguing that informal welfare is

not merely “gap-filling” but is integral and constitutive of social citizenship (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022, p. 774).

A comprehensive framework requires integrating Johansson and Hvinden’s (2013) analysis of governance *logics* with Nordensvärd and Ketola’s (2022) focus on the *loci* of provision. The synthesis requires recognising that the logics of organisation (Bureaucratic, Market, Community) operate across the entire welfare ecosystem, spanning both formal and informal spheres. This integration yields the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix (Table 1).

Table 1. The Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix

Logic of Organisation	Formal Locus (State/Legalistic)	Informal Locus (Relational/Moral Economy)
1. Bureaucratic/State (Socio-Liberal Logic)	Formal Welfare Rights; Activation (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013).	Mediated/Clientelist Citizenship; Patron-client relations (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022).
2. Market/Individual (Libertarian Logic)	Formal Market Citizenship; Welfare consumerism (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013).	Informal Market Exchange; Unregulated labour.
3. Community/Reciprocity (Republican/Moral Economy Logic)	Formal Participatory Governance; Co-production (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013).	Informal Moral Economy; Kinship obligations, reciprocity (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022).

This integrated matrix provides a robust conceptualisation that bridges the formal/informal divide. It moves beyond a static typology by enabling the analysis of dynamic interdependencies. It facilitates the systematic examination of how, for instance, the retrenchment of the Formal Bureaucratic state increases reliance on the Informal Community (kinship) or Informal Market spheres, or how Formal Market logics colonise informal spaces. By capturing these interactions, the matrix reveals the complex and often contested terrain where contemporary social citizenship is negotiated.

4. *The integrated Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework*

The preceding sections established comprehensive conceptualisations of Affective Citizenship (AC) and Social Citizenship (SC), highlighting the need to integrate the logics of governance and the loci of provision (SC) with the dynamics of emotional experience and political mobilisation (AC). This section synthesises these components into the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework. SAC moves beyond additive approaches (acknowledging both structure and emotion) by proposing a dynamic architecture where these domains are mutually constitutive.

The core thesis of SAC is that citizenship is fundamentally constituted at the intersection of institutional structures of welfare provision (Social) and the lived, emotional experiences of belonging and recognition (Affective). SAC argues that all institutional arrangements, whether formal state policies or informal community networks, function as inherently affective regimes that shape political identity, govern behaviour, and drive citizen mobilisation.

This framework rests on three foundational postulates that bridge the structure-experience divide. First is The Postulate of Mutual Constitution, asserting that the “Social” and the “Affective” are inseparable. Institutional designs for rights and welfare are not neutral but are carriers of emotional content (Schneider & Sidney, 2009); conversely, affective experiences are structured by the institutional ecosystems within which citizens are embedded. A welfare design literally carries affect in its rules: a conditionality or sanction regime, for example, encodes suspicion of the claimant into the procedure itself, communicating distrust before any official speaks.

Second is The Postulate of Pervasive Affective Governance. All modes of welfare provision – bureaucratic, market-based, or communal – constitute forms of affective governance (Fortier, 2010). They distribute not only material resources but also powerful signals about worth, dignity, and inclusion, thereby regulating the “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 1983) and emotional regimes (Johnson, 2010; 2019) of the political community. A means-tested benefit, a marketised “citizen-consumer” service, and a kinship-based moral economy each cultivate a distinct affective disposition – the anxious compliant claimant, the empowered chooser, the obligated reciprocator. Treating all three as affective regimes is what allows the framework to compare formal and informal provision on the same axis. This claim aligns with the emerging concept of institutional affect: “institutions are rich sites of affect (...) they mediate affects and are maintained by them” (Churcher et al., 2026, p. 121). On that account, institutions are analysed through the interplay of materialities, actors, and imaginaries, and exhibit a “second life”: the informal, normalised affective practices that run counter to an institution’s official mission and shape “the differential treatment that socio-economically disadvantaged persons experience in policing, housing, or state bureaucracy” (Churcher et al., 2026, p. 121). SAC specifies this institutional affect for the welfare domain and traces its consequences across the four levels.

Third is The Postulate of Emotional Mediation, which holds that affective experience is a candidate mediating process between institutional design and citizen response. The emotional impact of interacting with welfare structures (e.g., the experience of recognition or stigma) may influence the nature and direction of political mobilisation and feedback (Beichelt, 2022; Roy et al., 2022). Affect is therefore a potentially important, but non-exclusive, explanatory link: the same institutional design can produce divergent political responses depending on the emotional mode it engages, a mechanism specified by the ECPA component in Section 5.

The SAC framework is conceptualised as a dynamic, four-level process model that traces the pathway from the structural terrain of citizenship through affective experience to subsequent political action (see: Figure 1). This model is not linear but cyclical, characterised by continuous feedback.

The analysis begins at Level 1: The Ecosystem of Provision (Social Terrain), utilising the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix (see: Table 1) to map the structural landscape. This defines the specific configuration of formal and informal institutions – organised by bureaucratic, market, and community logics – that citizens navigate. For policy-specific analysis, this includes rules, tools, implementation arrangements, resource distributions, and embedded target-group constructions.

This ecosystem shapes Level 2: Lived Encounters and Relational Appraisals (The Nexus). This is the pivotal stage where the structural ecosystem is translated into lived experience – the nexus where the “Social” generates the “Affective”. We identify three key dimensions of relational appraisal that capture the fundamental affective needs of the citizen. First, the experience of Recognition vs. Non-Recognition, which is central to identity formation and social justice (Honneth, 1996) and may contribute to emotional shifts (Beichelt, 2022). Second, Dignity vs. Stigma, reflecting the experience of procedural justice and the symbolic burdens imposed by interactions with institutions (Soss et al., 2011). Third, Security vs. Precarity, capturing the need for “ontological security” and the management of anxiety in the face of risk (Hoggett, 2000). These appraisals may shape the affective valence of the citizen’s interaction with the ecosystem. Each dimension is empirically grounded: the stigma of means-tested receipt is documented in research on welfare encounters and administrative burden (Soss et al., 2011; Herd & Moynihan, 2018), and precarity registers the disruption of “ontological security” and the management of anxiety under conditional provision (Hoggett, 2000; Fortier, 2017).

These relational appraisals feed into Level 3: Individual and Collective Affective Dynamics. At the individual level, appraisals may activate an operative Binary, Basic, or Reflexive emotional mode; through social appraisal, emotional contagion, framing, mobilisation, and circulation through networks, experiences may also contribute to a dominant collective mode or climate. The four dimensions of Affective Citizenship operate as cross-cutting analytical lenses across the process rather than as mechanisms confined to Level 3. Their relative salience is an empirical question.

Finally, Level 4 comprises Outcomes and Policy Feedback. It includes individual action (e.g., compliance, withdrawal, or mobilisation) and collective consequences for citizen identity, political orientations, and participation. These outcomes become policy feedback only selectively, through processes that may reinforce, reform, or destabilise the Level 1 configuration.

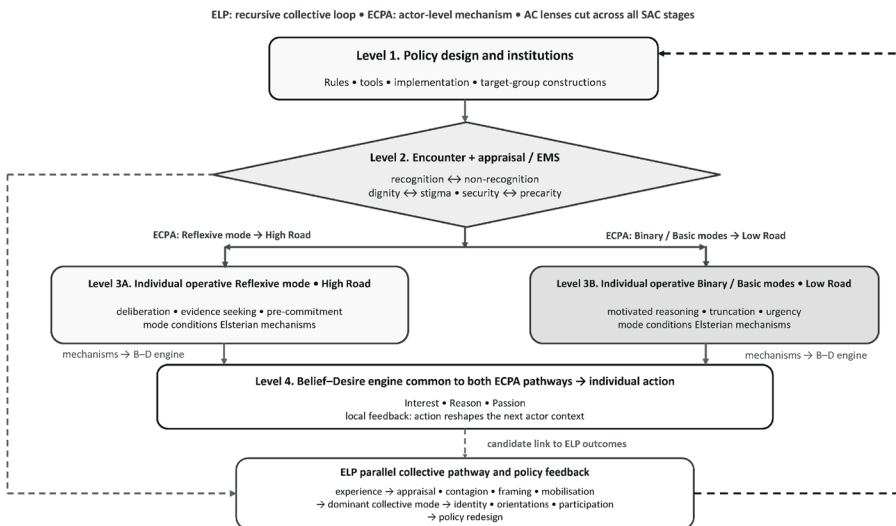
The analytical power of the SAC framework lies in its ability to systematically analyse how specific affective dynamics (Level 3) are generated within different configurations of the social ecosystem (Level 1). Table 2 illustrates this synthesis by mapping key affective dynamics onto the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix. Each cell names the dominant affective dynamic for that ecosystem and its source in the literature; the worked example below traces cell 1 through all four levels.

Table 2. The SAC synthesis matrix: mapping affective dynamics onto the Social Citizenship ecosystem

SC Ecosystem Cell (Terrain)	Key Affective Dynamics (Illustrative)
1. Formal bureaucratic (e.g., state benefits, activation)	Governance: imposition of “feeling rules” (e.g., the compliant recipient) (Fortier, 2010). Differentiation: racialised scrutiny; creation of “technical citizens” (Ayata, 2022). Expectation: “hopes for the state” for dignified treatment (Roy et al., 2022).

2. Informal bureaucratic (e.g., <i>clientelism, brokers</i>)	Governance: affective bonds of loyalty and deference to patrons (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022). Contestation: resentment against favoritism and exclusion.
3. Formal market (e.g., <i>welfare consumerism</i>)	Governance: cultivating the affect of the “empowered consumer” (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013). Differentiation: anxiety of choice; alienation of those unable to navigate the market.
4. Informal market (e.g., <i>unregulated labour</i>)	Governance: neoliberal affects (self-reliance) as survival strategy. Differentiation: extreme precarity; fear as a disciplinary tool.
5. Formal community (e.g., <i>co-production</i>)	Governance: state efforts to engineer “community spirit” (Fortier, 2010). Expectation: hope for genuine influence; potential for cynicism if tokenistic.
6. Informal community (e.g., <i>kinship, moral economy</i>)	Governance: “Feeling rules” of the moral economy (obligation, reciprocity) (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022). Expectation/Solidarity: core locus of mutual care and affective belonging (Roy et al., 2022).

Figure 1. Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC): the recursive policy-to-feedback process



ECPA traces the actor-level path from appraisal and emotional mode through mechanisms and the Belief-Desire engine to individual action; ELP traces the recursive path from policy design to collective formation and policy feedback. Dashed links mark candidate micro-to-collective and action-to-feedback transitions.

This synthesis demonstrates that the SAC framework provides a comprehensive architecture for analysing the emotional life of citizenship across diverse institutional settings. It integrates the structural insights of social policy analysis with the experiential depth of affect theory.

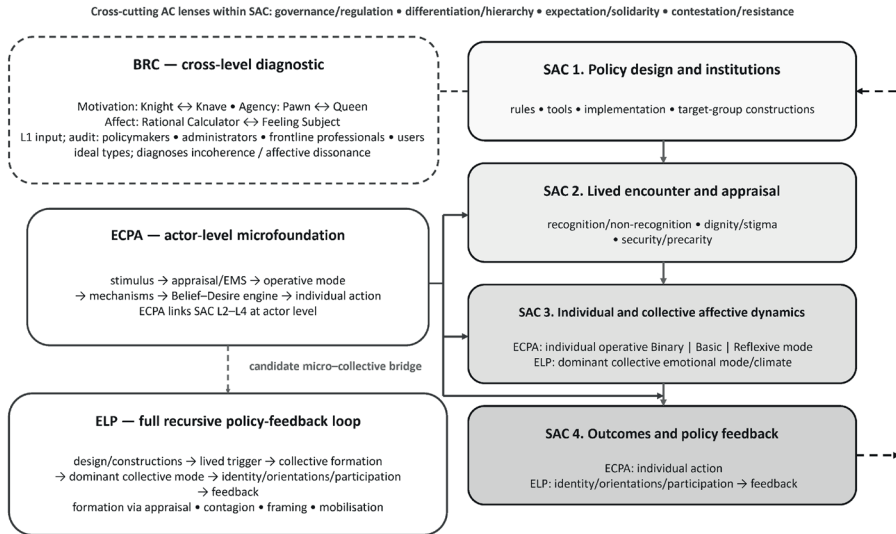
Worked example: a conditional activation regime (Level 1 – Ecosystem). Take an unemployment-assistance scheme organised by a Formal-Bureaucratic logic with strong conditionality – job-search monitoring, means-testing, and sanctions. At Level 2, frequent reporting and the threat of sanction are experienced less as support than as surveillance: the dominant relational appraisals are Stigma rather than Dignity and Precarity rather than Security, with recurrent Non-Recognition (Level 2 – relational appraisals). At Level 3, these appraisals and emotional responses may activate a Binary, Basic, or Reflexive mode and can be analysed through the four AC dimensions: Governance/Regulation is expressed in the “feeling rules” of the deserving, compliant jobseeker (Fortier, 2010); Differentiation/Hierarchy in the suspicion that marks claimants as “technical” rather than full citizens (Ayata, 2022); some respond through Contestation, while others voice a thwarted Expectation – the “hopes for the state” of Roy et al. (2022) (Level 3 – affective dynamics). At Level 4, individual responses include disengagement, non-take-up, voice, or protest; only some become policy feedback after aggregation, representation, and transmission (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). BRC diagnoses the regime’s assumptions across the policy chain; ECPA reconstructs how appraisal and operative emotional mode condition mechanisms, the Belief–Desire engine, and individual action; ELP situates these processes in a recursive design-to-feedback loop.”

5. Operationalising the SAC architecture: the explanatory engine

The SAC framework (Figure 1) provides the conceptual architecture, defining *what* constitutes Social-Affective Citizenship and mapping its terrain. However, to move from a descriptive framework to an explanatory model, we require mechanisms to explain *how* this architecture operates and *why* specific outcomes emerge. Adopting a mechanism-based approach to explanation (Hedström & Swedberg, 1998), the preceding trilogy of articles (Szarfenberg, 2026a, 2026b, 2026c; all under review) proposes candidate components of an explanatory engine. This trilogy offers the integrated diagnostic tools, rigorous microfoundations, and macro-dynamics for the empirical development and testing of the SAC framework (see: Figure 2).

The first requirement for operationalising SAC is a diagnostic tool capable of deconstructing the assumptions embedded within the Ecosystem of Provision (Level 1). The article “Beyond the Rational Calculator” (BRC) (Szarfenberg, 2026a) provides this tool. BRC argues that social policy theory has neglected the affective dimension of the human subject, relying instead on cognitive or behavioural models.

BRC integrates an affective axis (the continuum from “Rational Calculator” to “Feeling Subject”) into Le Grand’s (2003) established framework of motivation (Knight/Knave) and agency (Pawn/Queen). This three-dimensional (3D) framework allows for the systematic analysis of the implicit subjectivities assumed by different institutional logics within the SAC ecosystem. For example, Formal Bureaucratic activation policies often assume a Knave/Queen/Calculator subjectivity, while Informal Community moral economies rely on a Knight/Feeling Subject logic (Szarfenberg, 2026a).

Figure 2. Division of analytical labour among BRC, ECPA, and ELP within SAC

BRC is a cross-level diagnostic; ECPA supplies actor-level microfoundations leading to individual action; ELP spans the recursive design-to-feedback loop. Dashed connectors represent diagnostic or candidate relations rather than established causal effects.

The BRC framework is essential for diagnosing “policy incoherence” – the misalignment that occurs when the affective needs of the “Feeling Subject” (e.g., security, recognition) clash with the rationalist assumptions of the provision ecosystem (Level 1). This diagnostic layer is crucial for understanding why certain social arrangements may contribute to affective dissonance (Level 3). Within SAC, BRC is a diagnostic input at Level 1 and a cross-level audit of assumed subjectivities among policymakers, administrators, frontline professionals, and users; it is not itself a causal stage. Its Rational Calculator-Feeling Subject axis should not be conflated with the Binary, Basic, and Reflexive emotional modes used in ECPA and ELP.

The SAC framework postulates that emotion mediates the link between structure and action (Postulate 3). The article “The Emotional-Causal Policy Actor” (ECPA) (Szarfenberg, 2026c) provides the microfoundations explaining how this mediation occurs at the individual level (Levels 2 and 3).

The ECPA model integrates Elster’s (2015) causal mechanisms and Belief-Desire architecture with Beichelt’s (2022) dynamic model of *Homo Emotionalis* (Binary, Basic, and Reflexive emotional modes). ECPA posits a dual-pathway architecture where an actor’s operative emotional mode functions as a conditioning state that influences which causal mechanisms become salient in their response to a policy stimulus (Szarfenberg, 2026c).

When an interaction within the SAC ecosystem (Level 1) is experienced as threatening or stigmatising (Level 2), it may activate a reactive ‘Low Road (Binary or Basic modes). This may make mechanisms such as truncation and motivated reasoning

more salient, thereby shaping impulsive or polarised action. Conversely, experiences of recognition and security may support the Reflexive mode and the deliberative ‘High Road’, making deliberation and evidence-seeking more available. ECPA provides the precise mechanisms linking the affective experience of citizenship (Level 3) to individual behaviour (Level 4). By naming the conditions under which the same policy produces deliberation in one citizen and reactive withdrawal in another, ECPA specifies – rather than merely asserts – the framework’s Postulate of Emotional Mediation. Both pathways operate through the same Belief-Desire engine and culminate in individual action; collective aggregation and policy feedback lie outside ECPA’s microfoundational core. The actor-level pathway can be applied to policymakers, administrators, frontline professionals, and users, while action locally reshapes the context for later encounters.

Finally, SAC requires a recursive account of how policy design, lived experience, collective formation, action, and feedback are linked. ELP proposes this macro-dynamic account.

ELP integrates policy feedback theory (Schneider & Sidney, 2009) with Beichelt’s (2022) *Homo Emotionalis* to construct the Socio-Emotional Policy Feedback Loop.

This five-step model proposes how the design of social policy – particularly its embedded social constructions – may contribute to collective emotional shifts. (1) a policy design encodes a social construction of its recipients; (2) recipients experience it as recognition or non-recognition (Level 2); (3) this experience shifts their operative emotional mode (Level 3); (4) aggregated across many citizens, these shifts move the collective emotional climate toward reflexive engagement or binary antagonism; and (5) the resulting political action (Level 4) reinforces or revises the original policy design. ELP distinguishes movement towards more Reflexive versus more Binary or Basic collective modes; these are changes in emotional complexity and reflexivity, not fixed normative rankings of emotions or political outcomes.

Candidate collective-formation processes include social appraisal, emotional contagion, framing, mobilisation, and circulation through networks.

This mechanism explains the overall system dynamic of the SAC framework. It traces how collective affective experiences (Level 3) lead to shifts in the emotional climate (e.g., from reflexive engagement to binary conflict), producing political outcomes (Level 4) that feed back to reshape the institutional ecosystem (Level 1). ELP proposes the recursive loop that closes the SAC architecture; the micro-to-collective and action-to-feedback links remain candidate mechanisms for empirical testing.

These affective dynamics can also run regressively. Sauer (2024) documents a shift to a “welfare-chauvinist mode,” in which social security is granted “only to those who have earned it” – recoded as nationals – and solidarity is reserved for “national equals only” (“care racism”; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). This is the regressive path of the socio-emotional feedback loop in concrete form: affect mobilised to narrow, rather than widen, the circle of social rights.

Initial methodological guidelines for applying the framework – a five-step research cycle (puzzle → ecosystem mapping → mediation → affective experience → feed-

back) with matched mixed-methods strategies and ethical safeguards – is provided in Appendix A.

6. Discussion and conclusion: a new research programme on emotions and social policy

This article has introduced the Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, the culmination of a four-part theoretical project designed to establish a new research programme on the interplay of emotions and social policy. This concluding section synthesises the contributions of this framework, discusses the theoretical significance and limitations of the integrated SAC framework, and outlines a future research agenda.

The SAC framework offers a novel architecture for understanding citizenship in the contemporary era. It integrates expanded conceptualisations of Social Citizenship – incorporating hybrid governance logics and the critical role of informality (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013; Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022) – with a multi-dimensional view of Affective Citizenship – encompassing governance, hierarchy, contestation, and hope (Ayata, 2022; Fortier, 2010; Roy et al., 2022). The resulting four-level dynamic process model (Figure 1) traces the pathway from the institutional ecosystem to affective experience and subsequent political action.

The SAC framework is not a standalone model; it is the organising architecture for the analytical tools developed in the preceding three articles. Together, this tetralogy provides a coherent, multi-level system for analysing the emotional life of social policy. This article provides the overarching conceptual Architecture (SAC). This structure is operationalised by the Diagnostics (BRC) provided in “Beyond the Rational Calculator” (Szarfenberg, 2026a), which offers the tools to deconstruct policy assumptions. The Microfoundations (ECPA) are supplied by “The Emotional-Causal Policy Actor” (Szarfenberg, 2026c), explaining the mechanisms of individual response. Finally, the Macro Dynamics (ELP) are detailed in “The Emotional Life of Policy” (Szarfenberg, 2026b), which explains the socio-emotional feedback loops that reshape the political landscape.

The primary contribution of the SAC framework and its accompanying tetralogy is the systematic bridging of the structure-experience divide. It moves the field beyond merely acknowledging that emotions matter in social policy, providing a structured architecture and specific mechanisms to explain *how*, *why*, and *with what consequences* they matter.

This integration addresses several persistent limitations in the literature. First, it resolves the tension between institutional analysis and political psychology by demonstrating that policy designs are inherently affective regimes (Fortier, 2010) and that emotional responses are causally potent (Beichelt, 2022). Second, by integrating the insights of informal moral economies (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022) with the analysis of formal governance logics (Johansson & Hvinden, 2013), the framework achieves a global applicability often lacking in state-centric models. The SAC Ecosystem Matrix (Table 1) allows for a nuanced analysis of how formal policies

interact with, rely upon, or disrupt informal affective bonds. Third, the framework provides a sophisticated understanding of the citizen, moving decisively beyond the “Rational Calculator” to the “Feeling Subject” – an actor whose needs for recognition and security are central to their political behaviour.

The ambition of the SAC framework presents inherent challenges. The integration of multiple theoretical traditions (affect theory, causal mechanisms, policy feedback, moral economy) results in significant conceptual complexity. Future work must strive for parsimony to ensure the framework remains analytically tractable and empirically applicable; the worked example of a conditional activation regime (Section 4) offers a heuristic illustration that a single ecosystem can be traced through all four levels. Furthermore, the empirical operationalisation demands sophisticated mixed-methods designs and rigorous attention to the ethical challenges of researching affective experiences (Appendix A).

A further productive tension lies in the framework’s normative stance. The SAC framework, particularly through the ECPA and ELP components, provides tools for explaining political polarisation and regressive emotional shifts (e.g., binary antagonism), as in the welfare-chauvinist mode analysed above, where affect is mobilised to narrow rather than widen the circle of social rights (Sauer, 2024). However, the framework itself remains largely analytical. It explains why citizens mobilise through anger or fear, as well as through hope or deliberation. A critical challenge for the research program will be navigating the normative implications of these different emotional modes: Does the framework implicitly prioritise the “High Road” of reflexive deliberation, or does it recognise the democratic necessity of “unruly feelings” and disruptive mobilisation (Fortier, 2016; Roy et al., 2022)?

To address this normative challenge, the research programme can draw on the theory of affective pluralisation proposed by Zieliński and Nowakowski (2025). Their work offers a compelling avenue that reframes the dichotomy between reflexive deliberation and disruptive passion. They argue that the normative goal for a resilient democracy is not to privilege one emotional mode over another, but to cultivate “political emodiversity” – the variety and relative abundance of emotions within the political ecosystem. By this logic, a political culture dominated by any single affect, whether it be anger or even dispassionate rationality, becomes brittle and vulnerable to crises. The normative task, therefore, is to foster conditions that allow for a rich and balanced emotional repertoire, enabling citizens to express a wide spectrum of feelings – from moral indignation and constructive anger to empathy and hope – without collapsing into binary antagonism. This shifts the research focus from promoting a specific *type* of emotional politics to cultivating the *capacity* for emotional complexity and resilience.

The future research agenda must focus on applying the multi-level architecture and the methodological guidelines to pressing contemporary challenges. A primary objective should be the development of Comparative SAC Regimes, utilising the framework to create new typologies of welfare regimes based not only on their institutional design (Ecosystem of Provision) but also on their dominant affective dynamics and the emotional climates they produce. Another critical area involves analysing Digitalisation and Affective Governance, investigating how the digitalisation

of welfare services (e.g., algorithmic decision-making, digital platforms) reshapes the affective experience of citizenship, potentially influencing stigma and opportunities for recognition. Furthermore, the framework offers significant potential for investigating The Affective Impact of Climate Policy, examining how the institutional design of adaptation and mitigation policies generates affective responses (e.g., eco-anxiety, solidarity, resentment) and how these emotions shape policy feedback and mobilisation. By integrating the analysis of structure, experience, and mechanism, the SAC framework offers the analytical tools necessary to understand the complex, emotionally charged reality of contemporary citizenship, paving the way for a more humane and effective social policy.

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Appendix A. Methodological guidelines for empirical application

The Social-Affective Citizenship (SAC) framework, with its multi-level architecture bridging institutional structures and emotional experiences, demands a rigorous and pluralistic methodological approach. Operationalising SAC requires methods capable of analysing the configuration of the welfare ecosystem, diagnosing its underlying assumptions, capturing the nuanced affective experiences of citizens, and tracing the resulting political feedback. This section outlines a structured research cycle and specific methodological strategies for applying the SAC framework, strongly favouring mixed-methods research designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

We propose a five-step iterative process for researchers utilising the SAC framework. This cycle integrates the framework's conceptual architecture (Levels 1–4) with its explanatory engine (BRC, ECPA, ELP).

Step 1: Define the Puzzle and Scope the Inquiry. The research begins by identifying a specific empirical puzzle (e.g., low take-up of benefits, high polarisation around a policy reform, mobilisation of informal care networks). This involves defining the key actors (policymakers, administrators, frontline professionals, target populations) and the temporal/geographical scope of the study.

Step 2: Map the Ecosystem of Provision (Level 1) and Diagnose Assumptions (BRC). The researcher must characterise the structural terrain using the Social Citizenship Ecosystem Matrix and diagnose its embedded assumptions. Mapping the Ecosystem involves identifying the dominant logics (Bureaucratic, Market, Community) and the balance between formal and informal loci of provision (Nordensvärd & Ketola, 2022; Johansson & Hvinden, 2013). This can be achieved through institutional analysis of formal policies and expert interviews. Furthermore, institutional ethnography or Social Network Analysis (SNA) may be necessary to map informal networks and resource flows, such as remittances. The Diagnostic Application (BRC) utilises the 3D framework (Szarfenberg, 2026a) to deconstruct embedded assumptions. Researchers should employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of policy documents, parliamentary debates, and administrative guidelines to systematically code assumptions regarding the citizen's Motivation, Agency, and Affect (e.g., "Feeling Subject" vs. "Rational Calculator"), thereby identifying potential "policy incoherence".

BRC can audit assumed subjectivities among policymakers, administrators, frontline professionals, and users; this is diagnostic rather than causal.

Step 3: Analyse Encounters and Relational Appraisals (Level 2). This step analyses how the ecosystem structures the citizen experience and identifies the affective triggers (Recognition, Stigma, Security, Precarity). Analysing the Interface requires examining the contact points between citizens and the ecosystem, focusing on administrative burdens, procedural justice, and the quality of bureaucratic encounters. Methodologically, this relies on in-depth interviews focusing on "critical incidents" or policy encounters, supplemented by ethnographic observation of street-level bureaucracy. Quantitative approaches might include survey measures of perceived procedural justice and stigma, or vignette studies experimentally testing the perceived dignity of different policy designs.

This step analyses individual and possible collective affective dynamics, using the four AC dimensions as cross-cutting lenses. ECPA then traces the actor-level sequence from appraisal and operative mode, through Elsterian mechanisms and the same Belief-Desire engine, to individual action. This step investigates how citizens experience the ecosystem affectively across the four dimensions (Governance, Differentiation, Expectation, Contestation) and the psychological mechanisms involved. Diagnosing Affective Dimensions involves capturing the nuances of “feeling rules” (Fortier, 2010), affective labour (Ayata, 2022), and the “politics of hope” (Roy et al., 2022). This is often best achieved through narrative analysis of interviews and ethnography, although survey scales measuring political emotions (anger, anxiety, hope), perceived discrimination, and solidarity can also be employed. Operationalising ECPA (Microfoundations) utilises the ECPA model (Szarfenberg, 2026c) to analyse how individuals process these experiences and which Emotional Mode (Reflexive, Basic, or Binary) is activated. This involves qualitative coding of interviews to identify “High Road” (deliberative) or “Low Road” (reactive) pathways. Experimentally, researchers can use survey experiments that manipulate policy context (e.g., high threat vs. stability) to observe shifts in emotional modes and behavioural intentions.

Step 5: Trace Feedback and Political Action (Level 4) and Dynamics (ELP). The final step analyses the behavioural and political consequences of the affective experiences and closes the feedback loop. Measuring Outcomes involves analysing political behaviours such as compliance, withdrawal, civic engagement, or protest mobilisation, using methods such as political participation data analysis or protest event analysis. Operationalising ELP (Macro Dynamics) applies the Socio-Emotional Feedback Loop (Szarfenberg, 2026b) to trace how distributed experiences contribute to collective formation and action becomes policy feedback. ELP spans the recursive sequence from policy design and lived experience through contingent collective formation to identity, orientations, participation, and feedback. This requires longitudinal data, such as public opinion surveys or sentiment analysis, to track changes in the emotional climate. Comparative case studies are essential for analysing how movement towards Binary or Basic rather than Reflexive modes has context-dependent consequences for policy feedback. Mixed-methods process tracing may assess evidence for a proposed pathway by examining temporal ordering, observable implications, and rival explanations (Beach & Pedersen, 2013).

The multi-level nature of the SAC framework is best captured through integrated mixed-methods designs. One effective strategy is a Sequential Explanatory Design (Quant → Qual). This begins with quantitative analysis – for example, a survey identifying a correlation between a policy design and high levels of anger – followed by qualitative research, such as interviews or ethnography, to explain the underlying mechanisms (ECPA) and the contextual factors (Ecosystem) driving those patterns. Alternatively, a Convergent Design involves the simultaneous collection of qualitative data on lived experience (Levels 2 & 3) and quantitative data on institutional structures (Level 1) and political outcomes (Level 4). This approach provides a comprehensive, triangulated analysis of a specific SAC regime.

Finally, research on affective citizenship demands rigorous ethical attention. Investigating experiences of stigma, non-recognition, and hierarchy involves engaging with potentially traumatic narratives and vulnerable populations. Researchers should use safeguards appropriate to potentially distressing research, ensure robust confidentiality, and prioritise the well-being of participants, recognising the sensitivity inherent in sharing affective experiences of power and exclusion.