

Public Policy Yearbook

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The primary focus of the Policy Studies Journal (PSJ) is the study of public policy. Published on behalf of the Policy Studies Organization and the American Political Science Association's Public Policy Section, PSJ publishes individually submitted articles and symposia of exceptional quality by social scientists and other public policy researchers and leaders. The journal addresses a wide range of public policy issues at all levels of government, and welcomes a comparative approach. We accept a variety of manuscript types.

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2012 Public Policy Yearbook: Evolving Scholarship in Public Policy

Hank C. Jenkins-Smith, Sarah Trouset, and Chris Weible

The *Public Policy Yearbook* is now in its fourth iteration and continues to serve as a useful tool for examining recent changes in public policy scholarship over the past several years. The *Yearbook* itself has changed considerably over time: in addition to providing a detailed international listing of policy scholars with contact information, fields of specialization, research references,¹ and individual scholars' statements of current and future research interests, the September 2011 *Yearbook* made its debut online as a versatile web-tool. The *Yearbook's* content is now accessible, in searchable form, via the Internet—providing links to scholars' bios, articles, abstracts, and review articles. Individuals can now search for a scholar's profile according to name, geographic location, institution, or research interests. The online *Yearbook* also includes retrospective research reviews for specific theoretical and substantive policy subfields. These peer-reviewed articles summarize the most recent developments (primarily over the past two years) in scholarship in specific policy subfields. The online *Yearbook* allows for in-text citations to be activated, taking readers directly to scholars' bios and provides listings of additional scholars with similar research interests. By providing a snapshot of scholarship in particular domains, the *Yearbook* provides a quick and accessible reference to the current state of scholarship on all aspects of public policy, as well as indications of future research directions. This allows public policy scholars to gain visibility and it facilitates networking within the policy research community. The contents of the latest edition are summarized below.

Methodology and Characterizing *Yearbook* Public Policy Scholars

Since the *Yearbook's* inception in 2009, we have employed a convenience and referral sampling strategy. One of the difficulties with identifying the field of "public policy scholars" lies in the multidisciplinary nature of the field. Policy scholars work and operate within a wide range of institutional settings, making it difficult to identify the ideal sampling frame that captures the full population. Our sampling frame came from the listed members of the American Political Science

Association APSA Public Policy Section and the Policy Studies Organization. In 2012, we sent out 4758 invitations. In addition, we sent out invitations to 358 public policy and public administration departments across the United States, asking the head of each department to forward the invitation to public policy faculty members, graduate students, or affiliates. Last, our member updating system allows for current and new members to offer contact information for fellow colleagues and graduate students that should be included. Due to challenges with accurately accounting for inoperable emails, duplicated contacts, and mass-department invitations, it is impossible to calculate a precise response rate. The 2012 *Yearbook* has 662 members, giving us a tenuous response rate of 14%. As will be shown, we expect this sample to represent a decent representation of public policy scholars, particularly those active in the United States. But we are less confident about the validity of the sample of scholars outside of the United States. Although this sampling strategy depicts an incomplete picture, the documentation of trends spanning four years makes significant headway in characterizing the policy field as a whole. Furthermore, many of the research trends in the 2012 *Yearbook* parallel research patterns found within the publications of the *Policy Studies Journal* between 2004–2009 (deLeon, Gallaher, Pierce, & Weible, 2010).

Our recruiting effort took place in September 2011. Scholars received invitations to join the 2012 *Yearbook* by email. To become a member, individual scholars were asked to complete an online form that collected a broad range of information including: their contact information and institutional and departmental affiliation; three of their most recent publications; a brief paragraph that summarized their current and future research agenda; scholars' self-categorizations of their research interests according to five theoretical and eleven substantive policy subfields; and a few descriptive statistics such as gender, years of experience as a scholar, and official job title.

The 662 public policy scholars from the 2012 *Yearbook* reside in 28 countries across the globe, including: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Nepal, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, South Korea, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and the United States (see Figure 1). Since 2010, the number of international scholars has more than doubled, but approximately 80% of current members reside within the United States (see Figure 2). Twenty-eight percent of *Yearbook* members are female and the average reported years of experience in policy research was 20 years. Figure 3 shows self-reported job titles from *Yearbook* members. Most listed scholars identified as full professors.

Policy Scholarship: New Developments, Snapshots and Trends

The *Yearbook* provides users with several different indicators for evaluating current trends in policy scholarship. This includes two-year retrospective research reviews, as well as descriptive indicators reported by individual scholars that summarize and characterize their evolving research agendas. Scholars were asked both to provide a detailed summary of their research agenda and to self-identify their research according to five theoretical categories and eleven substantive focus



Figure 1. A Global Map Indicating the Residence of *Yearbook* Members.



Figure 2. Distribution of U.S.-based *Yearbook* Members.

areas. These indicators provide us with an interesting snapshot of recent research developments.

Beginning in 2011, the *Yearbook* editors sought advanced graduate students working with leading public policy scholars to write review essays that characterize the recent scholarship in selected theoretical and substantive domains. Previous essays covered topics including: agenda setting (Pump, 2011); policy analysis (Carlson, 2011); policy history (deLeon & Gallagher, 2011); policy process theories (Nowlin, 2011); public opinion (Mullinix, 2011); defense and security (Ripberger, 2011); education policy (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011); and governance (Robichau, 2011). These essays synthesize published work, interpret how the literature is developing over time, and postulate on future research trajectories. While public policy

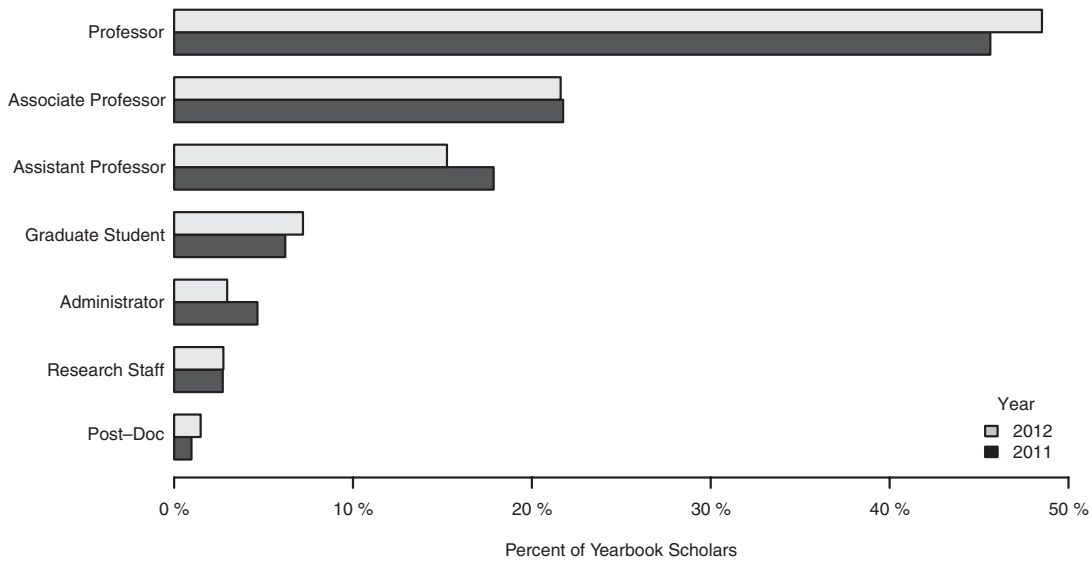


Figure 3. Official Job Titles of *Yearbook* Members.

scholars are actively producing a broad array of new and innovative research each year, this special issue contains key developments from four substantive domains, which include the following:

- **Comparative Public Policy:** Kuhika Gupta (2012) discusses recent efforts among policy scholars to use the comparative method to analyze how and why policies differ across countries. Furthermore, scholars are utilizing comparative strategies to evaluate and improve leading policy process theories. Perhaps most importantly, comparative public policy scholars are investigating how the competing process theories differ across institutional configurations.
- **Economic Policy:** Barry Pump (2012) reviews recent scholarship on American economic policymaking, summarizing the literature on income inequality, the impact of economic conditions on electoral outcomes, and institutional responses to economic developments. Pump also discusses pathways for economic policy research that may be of particular interest to policy process scholars.
- **Environmental Policy:** Meredith Niles and Mark Lubell (2012) review current scholarship in environmental policy, focusing specifically on environmental policy tools. Flexible market-based instruments, voluntary agreements, and information provision tools are being utilized for resolving current environmental issues. Niles and Lubell also discuss how scholars are adopting multidisciplinary approaches to better explain environmental outcomes.
- **Health Policy:** A timely piece given the recent changes in health policy, Simon Haeder (2012) summarizes current developments in health policy scholarship. Health policy scholars have utilized several frameworks, including pivotal politics, path dependence, and multiple streams, to explain the enactment of health reform. In his review, Haeder also discusses challenges for implementation regarding state-federal relations and cost containment.

Each of these articles (published in the *Policy Studies Journal*, as well as online in the *Yearbook*) will be updated (though with different authors) every three years to assure continuity in tracking the evolution of policy scholarship. Prior years' review articles are accessible directly from the online Yearbook.

A quite different way to illustrate current trends among policy scholars' work is to scan the "current research and future directions" summaries in the *Yearbook* entries. When updating their profile information, *Yearbook* scholars are asked to provide a short paragraph that details their current research agendas and future research projects. Scholars may be as brief or as specific as they choose. For example, sample entries included:

- "Scott W. Allard is Associate Professor in the School of Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. His primary research interests are in social welfare policy, poverty, and nonprofit organizations. To better understand the contours of social service provision in the U.S., a sector with about \$200 billion in annual expenditures, he recently completed two surveys of more than 2,000 governmental and nonprofit social service providers in seven urban and rural communities. Complementing this work, Professor Allard has several projects exploring the changing geography of poverty in America and the evolution of the contemporary safety net."
- Ann Bowman's entry included: "My substantive policy interests include environmental protection, economic development, and land use. Most of my work has focused on subnational levels of government. If viewed in terms of the policy stages framework, my research typically involves the adoption and implementation stages."

By using these summaries of public policy scholarship as data, we can track current and over-time variations in the substantive and theoretical work, as well as methodological approaches to public policy scholarship.² Figure 4 below captures the primary words employed in the summaries of current research for the 2012 *Yearbook*.³

The public policy word cloud highlights the popularity of research interests in the environment, governance, health, management, and science, as well as in analysis and process-oriented research. These trends are reflected more broadly in scholars' self-identifications across 16 subfields of public policy.⁴ The five theoretical categories include: policy process theory; policy analysis and evaluation; agenda-setting, adoption, and implementation; public opinion; and policy history. In addition, scholars are asked to self-identify their research interests across eleven substantive categories, which include: comparative public policy; defense and security; economic policy; education policy; environmental policy; governance; health policy; international relations; law and policy; science and technology policy; and social policy.

Figures 5 and 6 show the number of scholars in each of these subfields over the past three years. Scholars can be represented in more than one category. The total number of scholars in the 2012 edition (662 individuals) has grown by 22% since 2011 (545 individuals). Although there was overall growth in frequencies across all five theoretical areas, the largest growth was in scholars that study policy analysis and

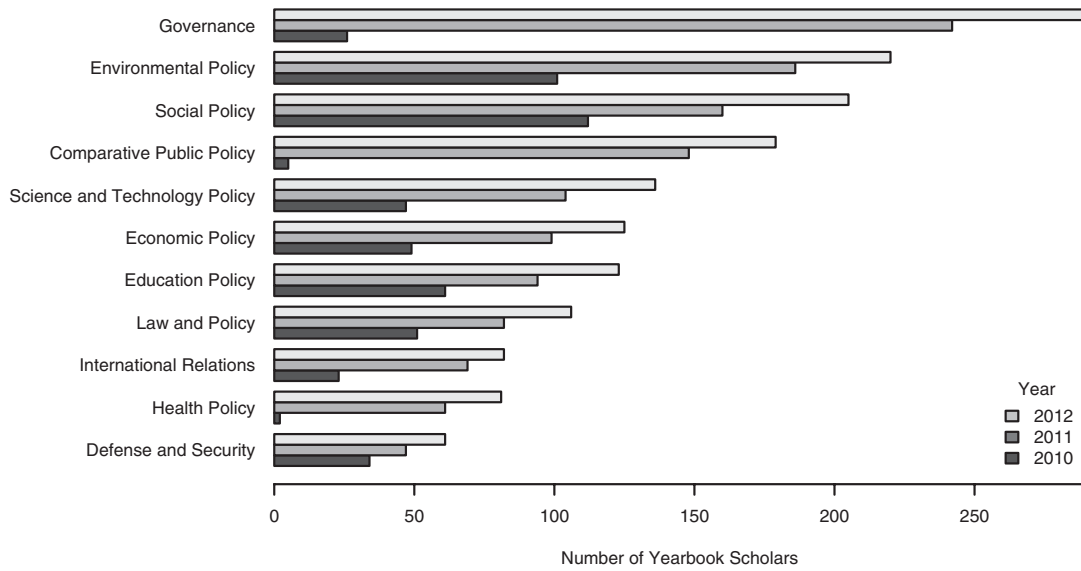


Figure 6. Substantive Focus Areas.

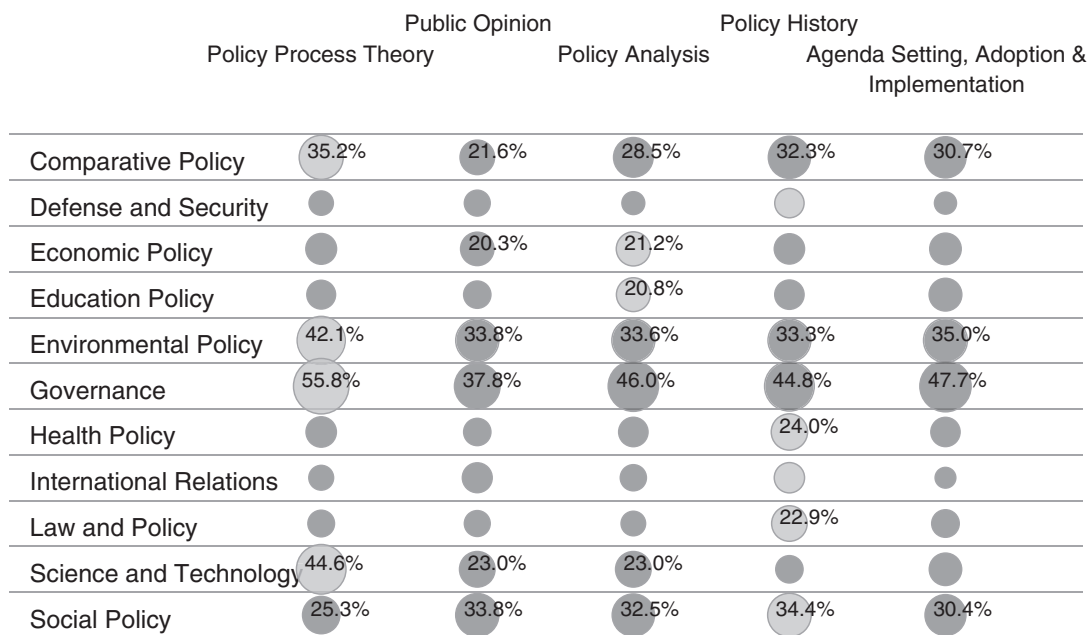


Figure 7. Proportion of Substantive Interests Identified in Addition to Each Theoretical Policy Area.

certain substantive areas in addition to each theoretical area. Because scholars can choose more than one substantive area, the columns do not add to 100%. Furthermore, for clarity, the graph only specifies percentages greater than 20%. For example, of the 278 scholars who study policy process theory, 55.8% (or 155) also study governance, 44.6% (or 123) study science and technology policy, and 42.1% (or 117) said they study environmental policy. The lighter shaded bubbles show the combination of theoretical foci and substantive area with the highest frequency of responses.

Looking across all the theoretical areas, the largest proportion that also studied comparative public policy was within policy process theories. By contrast, scholars who study economic or education policy most frequently cross-selected policy analysis as a theoretical focus area. Perhaps of particular interest are the gaps evident in Figure 7; the smaller “bubbles” indicate relatively unpopulated areas of research in public policy.

Expanding the Scope of the *Yearbook* and Scholar Updates

Our intent is to continue to broaden participation in the *Yearbook* to ensure that it remains the most broadly representative source for information on current policy scholarship across the globe. As editors of the 2012 *Public Policy Yearbook*, we are grateful to all of the respondents who took the time to respond to several emails and persistent prodding to update their entries for the 2012 *Yearbook*. To ease the process of updating profiles, scholars will now be able to access their profiles directly and make changes by visiting the *Yearbook* website. These changes will be incorporated into the full content (after editorial review) on a quarterly basis. In September of 2012, we will mount a full campaign by sending invitations once again to current and new policy scholars to update their entries in the *Yearbook*. Furthermore, we hope *Yearbook* membership continues to grow as current members provide referrals for colleagues, practitioners, and students who engage in public policy scholarship. We will continue our efforts to include faculty from public policy schools and departments across the globe, as well as reaching out to graduate students and post-docs in public policy that make up the next generation of leading public policy scholars. We ask that current members assist in this effort by forwarding our invitations to affiliate policy scholars and graduate students.

The design and production of the *Yearbook* could not have been accomplished without the help of many hands. We would like to thank Matthew Henderson for the design and implementation of the online survey that is essential for data collection, as well as the online website, web-tools, and data graphics. In addition, we thank Savannah Collins for her assistance with checking and editing entries, and Tom Rabovsky and Joe Ripberger for their assistance on data analysis and the production of graphics. Furthermore, we extend particular thanks to David Merchant and appreciation for the people at Wiley-Blackwell, especially Kivmars Bowling, Joshua Gannon, and Kris Bishop. Finally, we are especially grateful for the continuing financial support and encouragement by Dr. Paul Rich, President of the Policy Studies Organization.

We hope that you will find the 2012 *Yearbook* to be a useful resource in your work on public policy, and that you will continue to update your entries for publication in future issues. We apologize for any errors that may have escaped our quality control processes.⁵

Hank C. Jenkins-Smith, *PSJ Yearbook* Editor
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Notes

- ¹ Please note that while entries were reviewed for apparent errors, scholars' publications are listed as the participating scholars provided them.
- ² These data show trends in the research of public policy scholars who participate in the *Yearbook*, rather than the universe of policy scholars. The geographic and demographic changes in *Yearbook* scholars were described above, in the methodology section of this article.
- ³ This word cloud was constructed using the R-package "wordcloud" (accessed at: <http://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/wordcloud/index.html>). We included the complete text from each of the "current research and future directions" paragraphs from all 2012 *Yearbook* profiles. The relative size of each term represents the frequency with which that term appeared. For the final analysis, we excluded non-substantively relevant words; for example, "Dr."; "professor"; "significantly"; "currently"; etc.
- ⁴ When updating their profiles, scholars are asked to check off as many categories as they choose to describe their research agenda.
- ⁵ Such errors are undoubtedly the result of an international conspiracy that, incidentally, should be the focus of a future review article. Potential authors should contact the editors.

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Comparative Public Policy: Using the Comparative Method to Advance Our Understanding of the Policy Process

Kuhika Gupta

Public policy scholars have stressed the importance and need for “comparing” since the 1970s—including comparing different policies, inputs, outputs, and outcomes across institutional settings. Broken down into three categories, this research note highlights recent work in comparative public policy. The first type of research is characterized by its use of the comparative method to answer two primary research questions: How do policies differ across countries, and why do they diverge? To do this, scholars in this category borrow from a myriad of literatures including economics, risk analysis, and cultural theory. The second and third categories of research add to this long-existing stream of scholarly work by using the comparative method to advance our understanding of the policy process. To achieve this, research focusing on the theories of the policy process includes two emerging trends: comparing theories across institutional configurations (how differing institutional arrangements affect policies), and comparing theories to one another (how different theories of the policy process help explain certain issues). By highlighting these recent publications, the goal of this essay is to encourage scholars from all three categories to collaborate and provide a further impetus to the subfield of comparative public policy.

The subfield of comparative public policy has experienced consistent development in the last half a century. Public policy scholars have stressed the importance of and need for “comparing” since the 1970s—including comparing different policies, inputs, outputs, and outcomes across institutional settings (Cyr & deLeon, 1975; Feldman, 1978; Leichter, 1977; Rose, 1991). For example, why do the United States and Britain, despite their common history, have dramatically different healthcare policies? Alternatively, does education policy follow a similar pattern in all developing countries? Adding to this long-existing stream of scholarly work, there has been a recent push towards using the comparative method to advance our understanding of the policy process. To achieve this, research focusing on the theories of the policy process includes two emerging trends: comparing theories across institutional configurations (how differing institutional arrangements affect policies), and comparing theories to one another (how different theories of the policy process help explain certain issues).¹

This research note highlights recent work in comparative policy, focusing on three broad categories of scholarship. The first is characterized by its methodological use of comparison of differing policies across countries. The second and third types of research, those focusing on institutional configurations and theoretical comparisons, are characterized by their use of the comparative method in combination with the theories of the policy process. Broadly speaking, I argue that combining the two and building a bridge between the subfield of comparative public policy and the theories of the policy process is advantageous for two reasons. First, it encourages theoretical refinement by forcing policy scholars to think about how well the different theories can explain policy dynamics in different institutional settings. Second, it helps us to better define the boundaries and synergies associated with the theories by explicitly comparing them to one another and analyzing their ability to answer particular questions.

My discussion begins with a review of the first type of comparative public policy literature, for which the primary focus has been on comparison of policies outcomes both across nations and sub-nationally.² Following this, recent examples from two emerging trends in comparative public policy research are presented. This newer research is characterized by its focus on theories of the policy process, and how the comparative method can be applied to engender theory refinement and development. It includes work focusing on the comparison of theories across institutional configurations, as well as those that compare different theories to one another.³ I conclude by summarizing the key points made in this review of the comparative public policy literature, and by suggesting some directions for future research. Specifically, I encourage scholars from traditional comparative policy and those studying the policy process more generally to collaborate and help add to our understanding of the policy process globally.

Existing Foundations: Comparing Policies in Different Institutional Settings

Comparative public policy boasts a rich history of comparing cases across systems in order to establish general empirical connections between the characteristics of the system and the phenomenon under investigation. Based on Mill's method of difference or similarity, the logic of comparison is quite simple—if you have two systems that are similar but diverge on the dependent variable, you should look to the small number of differences in order to establish the reason for the divergence. By contrast, if you have two systems that are very different, but have experienced similar policy outcomes, you should look to the small number of similarities as a potential explanation for their similarity. Though predominantly used in order to draw inferences from small-N comparative case studies, the logic behind large-N multivariate statistics is rather similar. In both instances the research looks across systems in order to validate an inductively or deductively derived proposition about how the world works (Collier, 1993; Lijphart, 1971, 1975; Snyder, 2001).

Applying the comparative method, a large group of comparative public policy scholars study divergent policy outcomes in different countries. They generally focus on two primary research questions. First, *how* are policies different across

countries? Is healthcare policy in Germany and France the same? If not, how is it different? Second, scholars focus on *why* these policies are different. For instance, when looking at social policy in two countries, why is it that one country adopted welfare-driven policies geared towards social equity, whereas the other country favored market-driven policies? In answering these questions, scholars focus on a wide variety of substantive issues. What unites this category of scholarship is the *methodological* focus on comparing the countries to understand their divergent (or convergent) policy choices.⁴ For example, Hecló (1974) studies social politics in Britain and Sweden, specifically focusing on the development of unemployment benefits, old age pensions, and superannuation. To answer the first question of how these policies are different, Hecló traces the historical economic and constitutional development in these countries, describing and interpreting the people, processes, and events that might explain the current state of these policies. Moving on to the why question, he considers factors such as public opinion, electoral institutions, party and interest group inputs, as well as role of the bureaucracy. He finds that three interconnected forces help to explain the policy differences—cumulative historical events and choices, key people or entrepreneurs, and the activity of bureaucracy and interest groups.

Similarly, Steinmo (2003) studies the way in which policy ideas, beliefs, values and material interests interact to explain the evolution of taxation during the 20th century in the United States as well as abroad. To explain how these policies are different across countries, Steinmo traces their historical evolution and examines the way that past knowledge and decisions shape future choices. Adding substantially to the historical institutionalism literature, he explores the role of path dependence in explaining key differences in these policies. His description of the evolution of taxation policy is significant because it illustrates how these countries came to choose the path that they did. In other words, he explains how beliefs about “good” taxation policy emerged. For his second question of why these policies look so different, Steinmo presents three independent variables—ideas (problem solutions), beliefs (interpretations), and values (basic normative preferences). He argues that these three factors interact to shape the selection process between available policy alternatives as well as how past policies and institutions limit the choices at hand.⁵

Recent work in this category of comparative public policy covers a wide variety of topics ranging from more general issues like social and environmental policy to specific topics like water and nuclear energy policy.⁶ Much like the examples described above, these scholars attempt to understand how and why different governments make the choices they do. For example, Lodge (2011) studies national regulatory responses to food crisis in Denmark, Germany, and the United States. To understand why these responses differ markedly, he utilizes literature on risk regulation, exploring three possible explanations—national policy patterns (influenced by institutional structures), political panics or “knee-jerk reactions” to media coverage, and responses based on dominant characterization of the country such as regulatory, neo-liberal, and welfare state. Using a grid-group methodology derived from cultural theory (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982), the article presents an interesting comparative public policy, which can help us understand the connection between policy and risk.

Along similar lines, Okma et al. (2010) study the different healthcare policy outcomes in six mid-sized industrialized countries—Chile, Israel, Singapore, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the Netherlands. Their primary research question is why these six countries, with similar pressures and policy options, chose to reform their health care sectors so differently. The authors borrow concepts such as funding, contracting, and payment from economic theory and combine them with factors such as the history of healthcare reform in each country, its national culture, as well as unique institutional settings to explain these differences in policy outcomes. Weaver (2010) studies the evolution of public pension policies in Western industrial countries, including Sweden, Germany, the United States, Canada, and Britain. After describing how these policies differ, he analyzes why the differences came about. He argues that the survival rate of pension regimes in these countries depends on three factors—the balance between positive and negative feedback effects, incremental reform options availability, and whether there were any regime transition alternatives. Lodge and Wegrich (2010) analyze the Europeanized food safety regime in Denmark and Germany, asking what role different logics of governance—multi-level governance, the regulatory state, and performance management—play in the food safety industry. Comparing the German “legalistic” administrative culture to the more egalitarian policy style found in Denmark provides for an interesting analysis.⁷

In contrast to the kinds of studies that compare policies across nations, another group of articles is set apart by its application of the comparative methodology in a *sub-national* setting. For example, Zumeta (2011) analyzes state policies and varying private higher education models found in different states within the United States. The primary purpose of his article is to present the varying policy designs, and to then come up with a framework to categorize these differences in a coherent manner. In other words, Zumeta focuses specifically on answering the *how* question, leaving the *why* question open for future research. He achieves this goal by dividing the policies into three clusters: *laissez-faire*, central planning, and market competitive postures. What makes this project interesting is the institutional context within which the research is set up—the private higher education sector in the United States remains mainly under the purview of state governments, not the national government. Given the federal nature of the U.S. government and the high degrees of autonomy granted to the states *vis-à-vis* higher education policies, there exist a diverse variety of policy outcomes. Although this article does not ask why these policies evolve the way they do, it does answer the how question and provides a useful tool for categorizing these outcomes.

The type of comparative policy research described in this section is extremely useful for three reasons. First, it explores public policy outcomes in different contexts, providing added variation on the dependent variable—explaining policy choices. Second, this form of research methodology helps to identify crucial patterns that can then be used to draw important inferences for explaining variations in patterns—the initial step in theorizing. Finally, comparative policy research makes it possible to identify major outliers and interesting anomalies. Cases that cannot be explained by the same set of variables or that do not fit the same pattern can prove extremely valuable for a developing a nuanced understanding of the policy process.

Even though this type of research is indispensable, it does not explicitly utilize (or seek to build upon) theories of the policy process when explaining divergent policy outcomes. Rather, these scholars employ broad theoretical frameworks borrowed from various strands of literature like risk analysis, cultural theory, economic theory, and path dependence. This approach widens the gap between comparative policy scholars and those who focus on theories of the policy process to understand policy dynamics. Because different terms and concepts are used in their research, comparativists and policy scholars are prone to talk past each other, leaving the collaborative potential of their research unrealized.

The research described in the next two sections uses the comparative method combined *explicitly* with the theories of the policy process. Doing so, as the next sections illustrate, not only enhances our understanding of how and why policies are different across countries, it also advances our understanding of the policy process more generally.

Emerging Trends: Comparing Theories Across Institutional Configurations

This emerging trend in comparative public policy is different from the research presented in the earlier section in two ways: first, it tends to focus more on the why question when comparing divergent policy outcomes. Second, in doing so, it explicitly uses theories of the policy process to explain the process and the choices made in each case. For policy theory scholars, the interest in varying institutional settings originated over the past decade during which time they became increasingly interested in specifying the institutional configurations that govern policy processes. For example, ACF scholars have wrestled with questions about the extent to which their model can be applied to non-pluralistic settings. To account for these differences, they have modified the ACF to account for “coalition opportunity structures” (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). They understand that institutional configurations govern these processes, including variations in the degree of consensus necessary for policy change and the openness of the political system. Although this is an improvement, scholars have noted that future research should focus *explicitly* on the way in which these structures moderate the relationship between external parameters and coalition activity within the subsystem (Weible et al., 2011). Some scholars have moved in this direction by applying the ACF in different institutional settings. For example, Hirschi and Widmer (2010) apply the ACF to Swiss foreign policy. Similarly, Nohrstedt (2010) applies the ACF to Swedish nuclear energy policy. However, their current work focuses on a single case, and does not systematically compare that case to other countries. As researchers continue in this direction, it is critical to design our studies so as to maximize institutional variation by including multiple cases—one case limits our analytical leverage. This is where the following research, which compares theories across institutional configurations, adds to our understanding of the policy process.

In their recent article, Baumgartner et al. (2009) employ a comparative approach to study the policy process in different political systems—Belgium, Denmark, and the United States. Their main research question is whether governmental efficiency

and the level of institutional friction differs across countries based on institutional configuration.⁸ According to the authors, whether an issue gains enough attention to arrive on the political agenda is contingent upon a number of things. These range from institutional configuration, party system, and constitutional framework, to which party is in power, and how many big issues (like the “war on terror”) are on the table. Having extensively studied the impact of institutions in the United States, the authors have recently moved towards a more comparative analysis.⁹ Both Belgium and Denmark are significantly different from the United States in their political set-up, and comparing them to the United States opens up a wide gamut of comparative questions for future research. For instance, are parliamentary systems inherently built to produce less friction? Do federalism and multiple veto-points help or hinder the efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of the policy-making process?

Maximizing institutional variation in a single study allows Baumgartner et al. (2009) to more fully explore the ways in which different configurations moderate the relationship between policy inputs and policy outputs. The study demonstrates that the level of friction and punctuation in politics is applicable to countries beyond the United States, and that these punctuations are not affected by the differences in inputs. This line of research opens up several avenues for future comparative policy research—for example, why do policy cycles look so similar across different institutional configurations? It also highlights the need to focus on the political *processes* across cases rather than just static political systems. Following this article, a few scholars have launched a policy dynamics program to measure policy attention and policy action uniformly across nations (Baumgartner, Jones, & Wilkerson, 2011).¹⁰ The study includes government indicators from 11 countries, covering multiple issues, and ranging over long periods of time. Their main research question is—what factors determine “attention shifts” and the subsequent policy actions? The possible factors that may affect these shifts include elections, institutional design, information processing, and other country- and time-specific effects on policy change. The value of their comparative project lies in its ability to compare collective decision making across different institutions. They demonstrate that varying institutional and communication patterns play a big role in how collective policy decisions are made. Combined together, the relatively fixed preferences and institutional rules, along with the “moving” information flow, provide for an interesting comparative policy dynamics theory.

Another good example of this emerging trend is an article by Jones et al. (2009) in which the authors examine existing trends in public budgeting across different countries. The article studies the ups and downs in public budgets, analyzing whether they follow a consistent pattern, or whether they differ based on variations in political systems. The findings indicate that both presidential and parliamentary political systems reflect similar budgetary patterns, with shifts that are consistent with punctuated equilibrium. Still, crucial differences remain among the countries depending on the type of political system—federal and presidential systems like the United States are expected to experience higher institutional friction compared to unitary or parliamentary systems. How and why does this varying friction affect

collective decision making and policy outputs? The authors hypothesize that institutional friction decreases under parliamentary governments with a single-party majority, a unicameral legislature, and a unitary state. In contrast, presidential governments with a multi-party coalition, a bicameral legislature, and a federal state would generally experience more friction. The findings in Jones et al. (2009) are consistent with these hypotheses, illustrating that political systems with an increasing number of decision-making bodies have a “greater degree of punctuatedness in budgetary policy” (p. 869).

Similarly, Boothe and Harrison (2009) compare environmental policy making in the United States and Canada using existing lessons about the effect of institutional settings on agenda setting, as well as the Social Construction framework (SC) (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stone, 1989). In particular, the authors question why U.S. policy has become increasingly geared towards children’s environmental health and why the Canadian government has not followed the same path. Using an institutional explanation, the article argues that the difference in the two policies can be explained by the different governmental structures in the two countries. Specifically, the U.S. presidential system provides more room for entrepreneurial maneuvering while the Canadian parliamentary system is more constrained. Combining this institutional variation with lessons from SC, the authors present some interesting findings. The focus on children’s health in the United States, they conclude, is primarily a result of the entrepreneurial freedom accorded to American legislators, as well as the ability of U.S. environmentalists to reframe national environmental policy bringing the focus on children’s well-being. These incentives and opportunities were missing in the Canadian context, leaving the politicians unable to affect the tone of the national environmental policy. In other words, while institutional settings are an important factor for explaining varying policy outcomes, the authors argue that it is crucial to recognize the way in which path dependence and past ideological biases can affect issue construction.

In sum, the articles described in this section are similar in their motivation to compare policy process and outcomes across countries, specifically employing theories of the public policy process.¹¹ The next section presents a second emerging trend, which is characterized by its comparison of the different theories of the policy process to one another.

Emerging Trends: Comparing Theories to One Another

In addition to testing existing policy theories in multiple settings and studying the way in which institutional configurations influence policy dynamics, some policy scholars have begun questioning whether we have too many theories. In a recent article, Meier (2009) expresses concerns about the existing policy theories and the role they play in our current research. Among other things, he argues that policy scholars should aim to define the scope and orientation of our theories. In addition to studying specific areas of policy research, he recommends that policy scholars look towards bigger and broader theoretical questions. For example, not only should we study policy areas like taxation and environment, but also seek out what our theories can

teach us about policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy impact more generally. Doing so, according to Meier, will help determine which theories are better suited to answer which kinds of questions. In other words, in order to gain “theoretical leverage,” research should be guided towards highlighting broader patterns.

There are two approaches to solving this problem: one is to compare theories in a relatively abstract theoretical way, and the other is to compare them to one another when answering a specific question. Taking the first approach, Schlager (2007) and Real-Dato (2009) have done an excellent job of comparing the various components of existing frameworks. Schlager compares theories of the policy process to each other, highlighting the way they use such concepts as rationality, individuals, and institutions. She also illustrates how these theories differ in the way that they describe and explain policy change. Similarly, Real-Dato’s work focuses on how the theories of the policy process have evolved without much “communication across theoretical boundaries,” proposing a synthesized theoretical framework incorporating the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. However, their research remains relatively abstract in that it focuses on theoretical underpinnings of the policy process, rather than explicitly applying it to substantive questions. For example, which of the theories can better explain taxation policy in developing nations? To answer this question and fit within the category of research described in this section, scholars would have to incorporate and compare two or more theories of the policy process in their framework. Accordingly, this section focuses on a second emerging trend wherein studies compare frameworks, theories, and models to answer substantive research questions. For instance, which theory better explains nuclear energy policy in India, and why? Or, which theory of the policy process best explains health care policy in the United States, and why?

A recent article by Ness (2010) demonstrates what this form of research would look like. The research question motivating his article is—how do states determine merit aid eligibility criteria to assign college funding? To answer this question, Ness draws upon three competing theories of policy making, the advocacy coalition framework (ACF), multiple streams (MS), and the electoral connection (EC) framework. In doing so, he explicitly compares the ability of each theory to answer his research question. For example, does policy change occur as the result of external events or policy-oriented learning that lead to a shift in the core beliefs of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993)? Or, does the policy streams framework advanced by Kingdon (1995) better explain patterns in policy design? Finally, does the EC framework advanced by Fenno (1978) and Mayhew (2004)—which argues that policy results from the action of elected officials who are constantly seeking reelection—better explain merit aid criteria adopted?

To answer these questions, Ness (2010) compares merit-aid policies in three states—New Mexico, Tennessee, and West Virginia—across a number of dimensions that operationalize different elements of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks. In doing so, he finds that MS is the most useful theoretical framework to understand and explain the merit-aid policy. Specifically, Ness finds that the core elements of MS existed in each of the three cases, including the combination of problems, policies, and politics; the role of influential policy entrepreneurs; and the unpredictability of

policy windows. However, his findings do not completely disregard the other frameworks, which also offer some explanatory value. He argues that there is no evidence that advocacy coalitions in the three cases united by their core beliefs were the most important actors within the subsystem. Rather, he finds that individuals who floated in and out of coalitions were the dominant actors. Still, he finds that the ACF better accounts for the way in which states learn about merit-aid policies over time, how they are influenced by external information of policy adoptions in other states, and the broader influences like public opinion and electoral shifts. Similarly, even though the EC framework does not provide a comprehensive answer to the research question, it does help highlight the motivations of legislators in a crucial way. Ness discovered that politicians were frequently supporting merit aid policies based on their constituents' needs, hinting that re-election was their primary interest.

Integrating all of these elements from each theory, Ness (2010) designs a revised MS model for explaining merit-aid criteria adoption. In this model, the role played by individual policy actors is highlighted, especially in times when they can push their agenda forward (during open policy windows) by combining the politics and the problems of the issue. He adds the elements of external learning from the policies adopted in other states to this model, arguing that the impact of knowledge from other sources plays a big role in explaining the policy-making process. Finally, Ness stresses the value of re-election for legislators, describing how the credit claiming and position taking activities complete the picture. This revised framework better answers his research question, but more importantly, it forces policy scholars to think of these theories in a more malleable way. In other words, the theories are not mutually exclusive, and comparisons such as these help advance and refine theories. Fittingly, Ness encourages future scholarship to conduct similar comparative research, including comparisons between his modified MS model to other theories of the policy process. This emerging trend of research is crucial for a number of reasons—it helps to define the scope of each theory (which theories are well suited to answer which types of questions), it also helps to refine existing theoretical frameworks by testing them against each other in different contexts. The empirically testable hypotheses that can be derived using the comparative method facilitate theory refinement, as long as the tests are transparent, replicable, and inter-subjectively reliable. Finally, studies similar to Ness's project help to further theory development because they demonstrate each theory's abilities and highlight their weaknesses, which can then be revised and assimilated with other theories where possible.

Another study that does an excellent job of comparing different theories of the policy process to gain analytical and explanatory leverage is a recent article by Weible, Siddiki, and Pierce (2011). In this piece, the authors compare two theoretical frameworks—Social Construction (SC) and the ACF—by applying them to a case study of water and land policy in the Lake Tahoe Basin located in the United States. The authors are particularly interested in comparing intergroup perceptions in adversarial and collaborative contexts, and how well these can be explained by the two theories. Drawing from the SC (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997) framework, the authors hypothesize that intergroup perceptions will be more positively and powerfully constructed in a collaborative context as compared to an adversarial one. By

comparison, the ACF suggests that a collaborative context should result in a decrease in the number of actors experiencing a devil shift and an increase in the number of actors experiencing an angel shift. The authors find that with respect to the SC framework, the primary hypothesis holds true, i.e., respondents perceive groups positively and powerfully once a collaborative context is in place. Tests of the ACF proposition show support for a decrease in the number of actors experiencing the devil shift in a collaborative context.

This article is illustrative of the advantages of comparing two theoretical frameworks—it leads researchers toward specific observations, testing, and interpretation (Sabatier, 2007). More importantly, this article demonstrates the way in which comparing theories to one another can elucidate the often overlooked synergies that exist between competing theoretical frameworks. Both SC and ACF point to similar conclusions: intergroup perceptions are more positive in a collaborative context, everyone benefits from this shift, and collaborative contexts lead to better relations among groups through increased positivity and shared power. Furthermore, using theoretical comparisons for analyzing public policy helps to clarify the relative strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical frameworks. The authors point out that the mechanisms associated with the changes in intergroup perceptions remain underdeveloped. While the ACF would argue that the source of this shift lies at the individual level, SC posits that the shift takes place at the inter-subjective group level. Comparing the two frameworks highlights these nuanced differences, providing important and interesting research questions for future research.

Conclusion: Future Directions

As presented in this note, the subfield of comparative public policy is booming, opening up exciting avenues for new scholarship. Broken down into three sections, recent comparative policy research includes comparisons of policies across institutional settings (how is the Canadian environmental policy different from the United States'), using policy theories to compare issues across contexts (can the ACF explain the evolution of nuclear energy policy in both France and India), and comparing theories to each other (which theory—Punctuated Equilibrium (PE), ACF, MS, Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD)—can better explain healthcare policy in Germany). The first type of research is characterized by its use of the comparative method to study divergent policies across countries. It is driven by two primary research questions—*how* policies differ across contexts, and *why* they are different. To answer these questions, the scholars in this category tend to borrow from a myriad of other fields (risk analysis, cultural theory, and economics). In contrast, the latter two sections are “emerging trends” and their explicit use of the theories of the policy process makes them different from the first category of research. For example, the Comparative Studies of Policy Dynamics project launched by Baumgartner et al. (2011) uses PE, applying it to multiple institutional settings in different countries. Similarly, Ness (2010) uses three different theories (ACF, MS, and EC) to explain merit aid policies in different U.S. states.

As noted by scholars like Meier (2009), Real-Dato (2009), and Schlager (2007), there is an increasing need to recognize the ways in which theories of the policy process can be synthesized and/or refined, including an understanding of which theories work best for certain issue areas. The articles summarized in the second and third sections of the research note illustrate how using the comparative method can help us better understand the policy process and achieve these goals. Accordingly, this note encourages more scholars to jump on this bandwagon and focus their research on how to employ the emerging trends that are highlighted here. Of course, there is always a trade-off associated with combining two or more theoretical frameworks. On the one hand, the simplicity associated with using one theoretical lens lends itself to easier operationalization and greater generalizability (Waltz, 1959). On the other hand, synthesizing different frameworks can help solve complex, nuanced problems. By engaging in the latter, we run the risk of losing parsimony that some view as crucial for scientific explanations. However, an attempt to synthesize also forces us to look beyond the boundaries of any particular theory to acknowledge the possible merits of other existing theoretical frameworks. In sum, the research presented in this note is a call for more scholars from both comparative policy and the broader policy theory fields to look beyond their boundaries, borrowing from each other to promote theoretical development.

Not only are these trends a substantial addition to the existing comparative policy literature, they also serve as a potential tool to bridge the gap between the fields of comparative politics and public policy more generally. In addition to building new bridges, scholars should continue adding to the existing trends within comparative public policy, focusing on new ways to study issues across institutional settings. These valuable pieces are a constant reminder of how significant concepts such as institutions and path dependence are for explaining a country's policy adoption choices. Finally, scholars from both genres would gain a great deal from collaboration, producing research that combines the conventional wisdoms of comparative public policy with the theories of the policy process.

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Notes

¹ The two emerging trends highlighted here do not encompass all the developments in the sub-field of comparative public policy. Rather, they are used to illustrate the advantages of building a bridge between comparative policy and the existing theories of the policy process. These trends were identified by systematically reviewing last year's *Policy Studies Journal Yearbook*, as well as major comparative policy journals including *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* and *Comparative Political Studies* over the last two years. In addition, I also reviewed several recent issues of major political science and public policy journals for any relevant pieces such as *Policy Studies Journal*, *Journal of Public Policy*, and *American Journal of Political Science*.

- ² A review of recent developments in the sub-field of comparative public policy can be organized in multiple ways—it is a diverse area of research that includes comparing public policies, ranging more macro analysis of economic-structural variables in the field of comparative political economy to a more micro understanding of particular policy domains such as education policy. This research note focuses on more general studies using the comparative method to understand policy outcomes in varying institutional settings. These include both macro and micro analyses of institutional and structural variables, social belief systems, and individual factors that determine policy outcomes. The goal is to highlight the methodological commonalities that unite scholarship in this sub-field and then present the new trends that connect the comparative method to the theories of the policy process. Even though some of the big questions targeted by several comparative policy scholars—redistribution, unemployment, inequality, and state capacity—play a crucial role in the evolution of the discipline, the scope of this research note does not permit their inclusion. For more on the sub-field of comparative political economy (CPE), see Esping-Anderson (1990), Katzenstein (1985), Williamson (1985), Boix (1998), and Pontusson (1995).
- ³ This research note attempts to highlight some of the most recent and interesting scholarship on these types published in the last two years. It is by no means meant to be an exhaustive review of this literature. Rather, I use selected articles to help highlight recent trends.
- ⁴ The literature presented in this section highlights the common “methodological” focus of comparative policy scholarship. The research note attempts to demonstrate the breadth of substantive areas covered by comparative policy scholars such as health policy, welfare policy, education policy, environmental policy, and energy policy. Research focusing on issues such as representation, inequality, redistribution, state capacity is significant but not central to this review article. For example, in addition to recent research in specific substantive areas, comparative policy scholars continue to wrestle with bigger issues such as public opinion, representation, and responsiveness in various types of democracies. For one such example, see Soroka and Wlezien (2009) who examine the dynamics between public opinion and policy feedbacks in the United States, UK, and Canada. In particular, the authors are interested in the relationship between public responsiveness and policy representation, and how this differs across countries, issues, and over time. The authors use a comparative time series analysis to answer their research question, which provides them with leverage on their dependent variables—representation and responsiveness. John, Bevan, and Jennings (2011) provide another example of this type of comparative research. In order to uncover the role of institutions in the extent to which public opinion influences policy making, the authors compare the responsiveness of legislative outputs in the UK and Scotland. They find that the British devolution to the Scottish parliament in 1999 has considerably weakened the link between public opinion and policy responsiveness in the UK. In contrast, the authors do not find any evidence of a statistically significant link between the variables in Scotland. Other recent examples of comparative political economy scholarship include Ahlquist (2011), Niemietz (2010), Doyle (2010), Mintrom (2009), Gilbert (2009), and Conteh (2009).
- ⁵ For other examples of prominent comparative policy research, see Leichter (1979), Wilensky and Turner (1987), Castles (1988), Immergut (1992), and Weaver and Rockman (1993).
- ⁶ On social policy, see Del Pino and Calzada (2011) and Jacobs (2009). For research on comparative water policy, see Aubin (2011). For a recent example of comparative environmental research, see Balme (2011) and Kochtcheeva (2009), Campbell (2010), and Szarka (2010). On food safety and pharmaceutical policy, see Chaqués and Palau (2009). On healthcare policy, see Roberts (2009), Kodate (2010), and White (2010). On comparative policy performance, see Jahn and Müller-Rommel (2010). On comparative policy entrepreneurship, see Baker and Steuernagel (2009). On science and technology policy, see Rothmayr (2009), Sheingate (2009), and Ireni-Saban (2010).
- ⁷ On other recent examples of comparative policy analysis on issues surrounding the European Union, see Thatcher (2011); Fontana (2011); Callanan (2011); de Ruitter (2010); Jakobsen (2010); Di Lucia and Kronsell (2010); Lavenex, Lehmkuhl, and Wichmann (2009); Maggetti (2009) and Falkner (2010).
- ⁸ The concept of friction originated in the authors’ earlier work on politics of attention, where they argue that certain issues emerge to the political agenda while others get marginalized (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005).
- ⁹ For a similar study, also see Breunig, Koski, and Mortenson (2010), in which the authors compare budgetary systems in Denmark and the United States using Jones and Baumgartner’s (2005) model of disproportionate information processing.

¹⁰ Other contributors to this project include Mortenson et al. (2011); Jennings et al. (2011); Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011); Breunig (2011); and Chaqués-Bonafont and Palau-Roqué (2011).

¹¹ For another good example of a comparative analysis of comparative analysis using the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, see Jensen's (2009) study of welfare state theory in 18 Western countries.

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A New Normal? American Economic Policymaking After The Great Recession

Barry Pump

This essay reviews recent literature on American economic policymaking. It first asks, what light can contemporary research on economic policymaking shed on current circumstances? Second, where do policy process researchers go from here? This paper explores the extant literature under three broad themes. The first will deal with the extensive research into income inequality. The second will discuss the electoral implications of economic conditions. The third will analyze the institutional responses to economic developments. The final section will offer suggestions for future scholarship.

Introduction

To gauge the current state of American economic policymaking, one could examine the inability of the United States government to effectively deal with the myriad problems that led the ratings agency Standard & Poor's to downgrade U.S. debt in August 2011 (Standard & Poor's, 2011).¹ That action—the first time in history that a ratings agency has downgraded U.S. sovereign debt—followed intense brinkmanship over raising the statutory debt limit, a procedural mechanism that does not even directly affect U.S. debt.² While the debt limit has long been an opportunity for partisan posturing (see, for example, Kingdon, 1989, p. 182), serious doubts about a proposed increase rarely arise. The brinkmanship mirrored earlier conflicts between the Republican-controlled House of Representatives and President Barack Obama over the budget, and later in 2011, expiring tax cuts.

The gridlock and inertia that has resulted from this brinkmanship highlights the new territory that scholars and policymakers alike have entered in recent years. There has been a simultaneous failure in both ideas and institutions. The financial crisis that precipitated the recession beginning in 2007 has not only challenged the dominant ideas of economics and policy (Krugman, 2009; Ormerod, 2010), but political polarization appears to have reached levels unprecedented since the Civil War (McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006), which limits the ability of politicians to deal effectively with ongoing economic problems. These *Yearbook* articles are syntheses of recent research on theoretical and substantive policy issues. To that end, this essay first asks, what light can contemporary research on economic policymaking shed on

current circumstances? And secondly, where do policy process researchers go from here?

One way to examine the literature and challenges facing the U.S. economy is to view relatively recent developments as the culmination of nearly 40 years of economic decline, starting with stagnating middle-class wages and growing income inequality. These phenomena have been linked to growing political polarization and gridlock (McCarty et al., 2006) and reduced political efficacy (Bartels, 2008). Research also shows that ideological orientation influences individual-level economic assessments (Gerber & Huber, 2009, 2010). When taken together, this research presents the mix of politics and economics as a dangerous elixir that combats successful policy-making and undermines democratic accountability.

Another story presented in the literature presents the collapse of the U.S. economy as a failure of ideas and bureaucratic oversight. Starting with the 1998 passage of the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act that deregulated the financial services industry, the American economy became increasingly “financialized,” or driven more by banking than the production of tangible goods and services. This development caught regulators asleep at the switch (Khademian, 2009) and necessitated large-scale reform in the Dodd-Frank Act of 2010. But this attempt at reform may be doomed before it is even fully implemented due to the partisan nature of its enactment and its dearth of a sustained reform coalition (Carpenter, 2010). Moreover, many of the same policymakers who lacked the foresight to see the long-term implications of deregulation were intimately involved in crafting re-regulation. Many economists involved in the policymaking process, especially, have been forced to do much soul-searching in the face of the practical failure of their theoretical models (House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, 2008; Krugman, 2009). But some of that introspection may be short-lived (Greenspan, 2011).

In this essay, I will review the extant recent literature by dividing it into three broad themes. The first will deal with the extensive research into income inequality: its causes, effects, and efforts to combat it. The second will discuss the electoral implications of economic conditions. Electoral politics directly contour the policy debate, since as Jones and Jenkins-Smith (2009) argue, public opinion can be used as both a resource for and constraint on policy advocates. The third section will analyze the institutional responses to economic developments. The final section will offer suggestions for future scholarship.

Worth noting is that “economic policy” is amorphous. It could mean a great deal, from budgeting and distributive policy to taxation. The effects of economic policy also have ramifications on a host of other policies, from social welfare and education to defense. Throughout this paper I employ the term “economic policy” broadly to mean large-scale policy solutions that seek to alter the macroeconomy. The interconnectedness of the global economy also means that debt crises around the world, and most recently in the European Union, affect domestic markets, trade opportunities, and national economic policy. In the United States, individual states face budget crises and rely on the federal government during hard times, and state policy also influences the broader national discussion. Consistent with the *Yearbook’s* mission, this paper focuses on the published literature on American economic policymaking,

and I selected the themes of income inequality, political impact, and institutional response because of their dominant positions in that recent literature. As the last section will attest, there are plentiful avenues for future research on a host of subjects using multiple frameworks for analysis.

Income Inequality

Income inequality in the United States has been a persistent problem that has only recently been thoroughly addressed as both an economic and political problem. As Figure 1 shows, those in the top 1 percent of all wage-earners have disproportionately benefitted from economic and policy conditions since the 1970s, while those in the bottom 90 percent have seen very small changes in their income. This disparity has led to a host of social problems, especially now that the economy has collapsed. As Hacker and Pierson (2010) describe, there are three leading causes for the increase in inequality. First, technological change has skewed income toward those better positioned to take advantage of the Internet and media (particularly those with at least a college education). Second, active policy manipulation of the upper tax brackets, lowering the effective marginal rate of taxation. And third, “policy drift,” which leaves policy unchanged even when conditions change. For

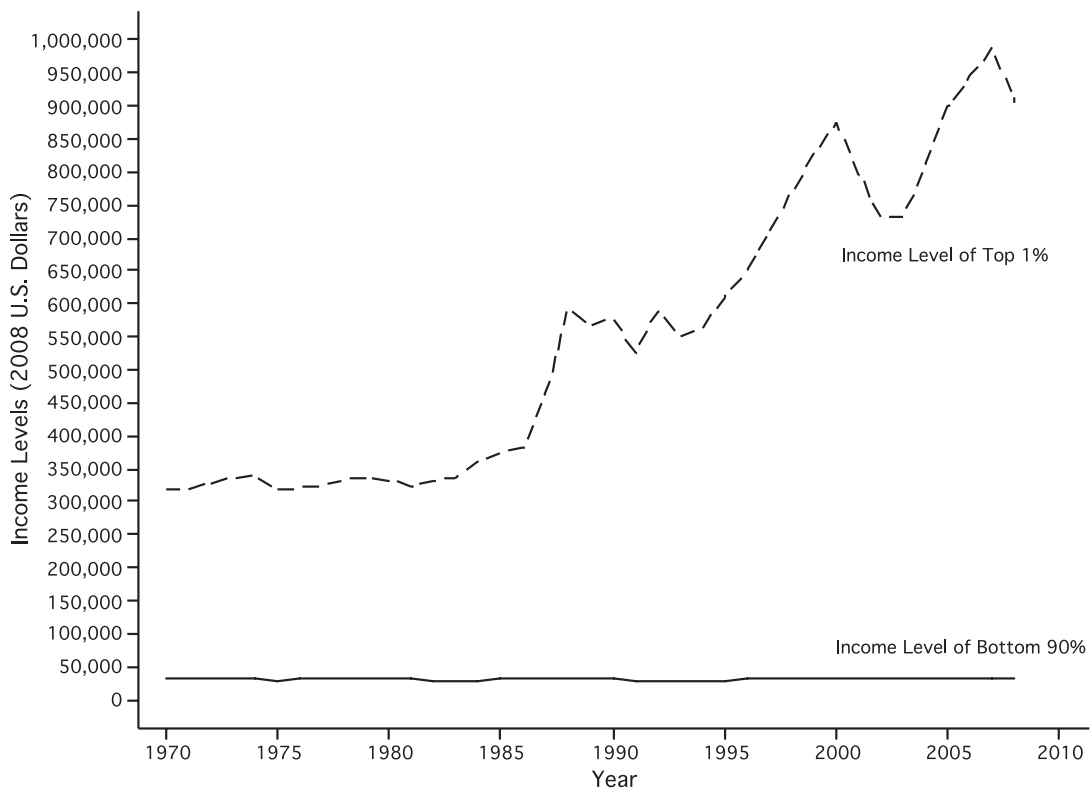


Figure 1. Income Levels of the Top 1% of Earners and the Bottom 90% of Earners, 1970–2008. Source: Saez and Piketty (2010).

example, if technological change did indeed cause the spike in income inequality, policy failed to keep up and provide opportunities for more individuals.

In a series of articles analyzing poverty and income inequality, Besharov and Call (2009a, 2009b) and Plotnick (2009) review what types of policies would be most beneficial given current circumstances. For example, fewer families in the United States are below the subsistence poverty line—the level at which basic needs such as food and shelter are met—but many suffer from a lack of income that makes them relatively impoverished. This relative poverty—the point at which a family can live “decently”—is described better by income inequality. Strategies to reduce this include the Earned Income Tax Credit, minimum wage, government-funded child care, and the like. All of these are redistributive policies in that they involve taking income from top earners and giving it to low-income individuals and families. Besharov and Call (2009a) argue that these kinds of policies do not adequately address income inequality and that resources would be better directed to improvements in job training and human capital investment. They argue that direct income transfers, however, are more politically feasible, as they are simpler than an “active welfare state.”

Plotnick (2009) does not disagree with Besharov and Call’s conclusions but argues that absolute poverty statistics provide more insight into American economic conditions. Plotnick argues that children have been particularly hard hit by a lack of poverty programs and that work-based support systems miss helping those closest to the poverty line. Plotnick argues that while universal anti-poverty programs are not politically feasible, there are changes that could be made to improve the conditions of the poor, including accurate background checks to ensure fairness in hiring and reduce statistical discrimination against African Americans in particular; automatic unemployment insurance extensions upon recessions; and better enforcement of child support mechanisms, to name a few.

While the policy solutions outlined above may help to bend the lower line in Figure 1 up with little change to the top line, any change to the social safety net will be up against harsh political pressures. And rightly, both Besharov and Call and Plotnick acknowledge that the politics of policy change will be difficult, especially as budgetary constraints increase with reduced revenue as a result of a declining tax base—a feature of most economic downturns. But the potential of recession-induced deficits are not the only political challenge to increasing the social safety net and reducing income inequality. Public support for these programs is not high, with the Americans tending to favor education spending instead (McCall & Kenworthy, 2009). Income inequality also tends to produce self-reinforcing tides of conservative mass opinion.

The obvious threat presented by income inequality to self-governance is that the wealthy will have undue influence over the government. This is the “unequal democracy” thesis presented by Bartels (2008). But this presupposes that the poor have divergent policy preferences from the wealthy, and indeed, the “economic model” of American politics promulgated since at least Downs (1957) would suggest that the poor would support policies that soak the rich with high marginal tax rates so that they could benefit from redistributive policies. But Kelly and Enns (2010) find that this divergence does not exist: greater income inequality *reduces* liberal/redistributive sentiment even among low-income individuals.

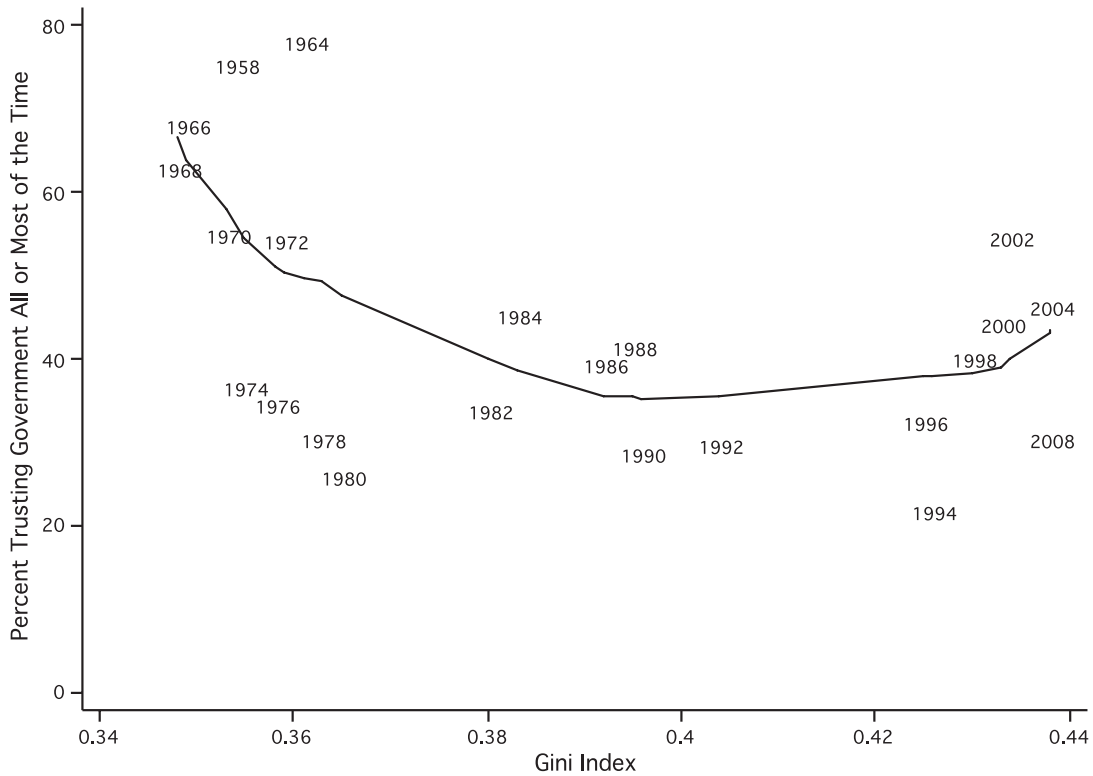


Figure 2. Trust in Government (1958–2008) and the Gini Index of Income Inequality with a Lowess Fit Line.

Sources: U.S. Census and American National Election Survey.

Kelly and Enns (2010) seek to understand the extent to which politicians respond to the policy demands of the wealthy over those of the poor or if politicians respond proportionately. With regard to their findings of similar preferences across both higher and lower income individuals, they can offer only speculation as to the relevant causal mechanisms. They suggest that media frames since the 1970s have driven public opinion toward “individualism” and against welfare policies, creating a negative link. When welfare policies are needed in hard economic times, these media frames change accordingly, but the current link is a damaging one.

There is, however, an alternative explanation not explored by Kelly and Enns (2010). Income inequality, negative change in real disposable income, and declining trust in government are correlated (see Figures 2 and 3). And as Hetherington (2005) finds, trust in government is related to support for welfare programs. When the public no longer sees the government as a trustworthy ally, it no longer views its intervention positively. Accordingly, liberal programs since the New Deal and the Great Society have been undermined with mass political support (Hacker & Pierson, 2010). Income inequality could add another fold to this story if citizens distrust government because they see it perpetuating inequality through other policies (e.g., tax cuts or bank bailouts). Citizens may take indiscriminate aim all government programs, as their distrust creates a cycle of inequality and reduced support for welfare programs.

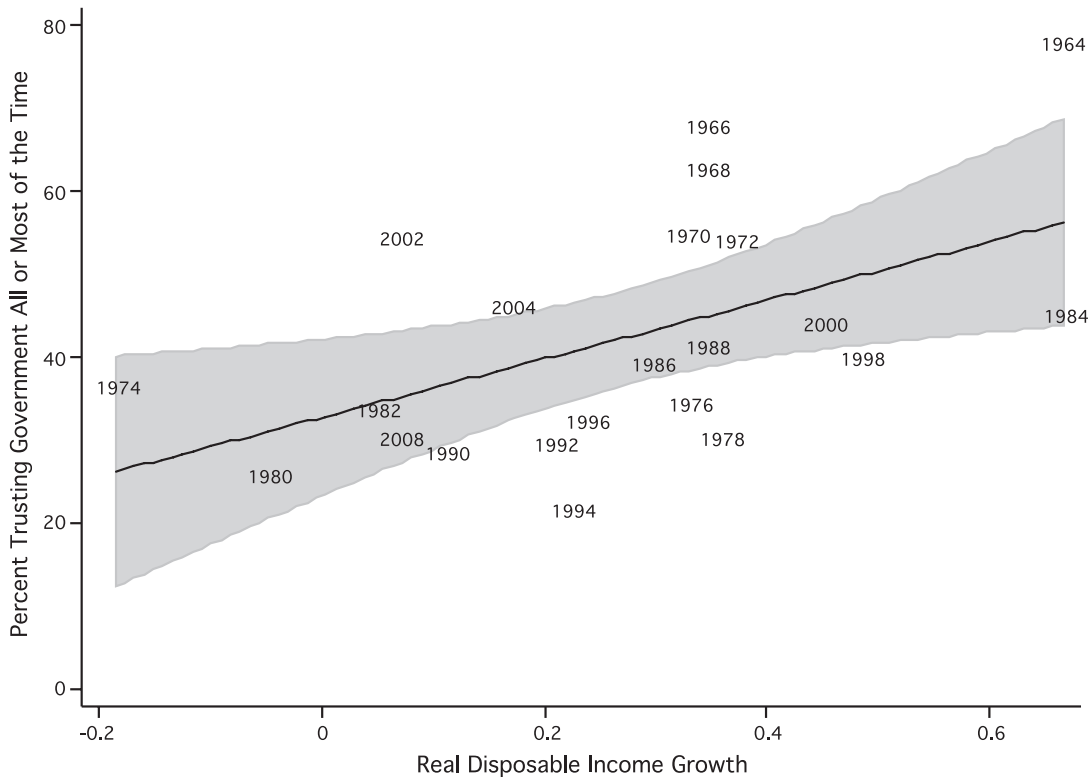


Figure 3. Trust in Government (1964–2008) and Year-Over-Year Third Quarter Percent Change in Logged Real Disposable Income per Capita (Chained 2005 dollars). The linear fit, with 95% confidence bands in gray, is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, and American National Election Survey.

There is, accordingly, a perverse feature to income inequality and negative views of welfare policies. As Figure 3 shows, trust in government rises when the economy is doing well. When real disposable income increases, citizens are more likely to trust government to do what is right. If Hetherington is correct, this means that support for welfare policies increases when they are least needed. During recessions, when income transfers such as unemployment insurance and other welfare programs are stretched, the political will to extend benefits and create government support for the hardest hit is lacking.

Income inequality highlights a central problem in economic policymaking. While government programs, such as capital gains tax cuts, have fostered inequality, government programs are likewise necessary to combat it. Recent research and analysis presented in this section show the political challenges to policies that seek to improve equality, even if there were consensus on which policy solutions would be the most effective to do so. Income inequality has fostered distrust in government and political polarization, which undermine support for social welfare programs and create institutional gridlock. Furthermore, during recessions governments bring in less money due to a shrinking tax base, and the lack of trust (which declines further in poor economic times) limits what policy options politicians can pursue.

Accordingly, there is less money and less political support for countercyclical policies. This creates a recipe for self-imposed austerity, pain, and even greater income inequality. Highlighting these types of self-reinforcing cycles has been a common theme in recent research.

Electoral Implications

In April 2011, Gallup published a poll indicating that more than half of Americans still thought the United States was in a recession or depression. This finding ran counter to the National Bureau of Economic Research's conclusion that the so-called Great Recession ended in 2009, and it was also contrary to the economic research at the time that showed moderate growth. But it is also not difficult to understand, given that unemployment had largely stayed well above 9 percent for nearly 2 years by that point. The Gallup poll underlines another important point about economic policy: there are economic problems and there are political problems. While the economic recession³ had ended, policymakers were still under political pressure to make economic policy to address the "recession" voters still perceived. There is a disjoint between policy instruments and elite political action, on the one hand, and mass electoral politics on the other hand.

In recent years, research on the electoral implications of economic policy has focused on the ways individuals perceive economic conditions. Gerber and Huber (2009, 2010) find that partisan sentiment conditions economic perception and behavior, contrary to the well-known traditional model that argues vote choice is conditioned on economic perception. Gerber and Huber (2009) argue that individuals have a partisan identity as well as partisan beliefs. Consumption in Democratic-leaning counties goes up after a Democrat is elected to the presidency, regardless of observed economic conditions. This type of effect is not limited to presidential elections. Gerber and Huber (2010) find that a similar pattern emerges after congressional elections and statewide elections.

The Gerber and Huber studies present further difficulties for scholars contending that retrospective economic assessments predict vote choice. If partisanship affects economic assessments and vote choice is heavily correlated with economic assessments, then partisanship is still driving vote choice. Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Elias (2008) argue that the traditional account is still more accurate. Like Gerber and Huber, Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Elias use panel data and attempt to "exogenize" party identification. When the causality is taken into fuller account, Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, and Elias argue, economic assessments still matter greatly to vote choice. According to the authors, this finding not only saves the extant research on economic voting, but it also means citizens can still hold elected officials accountable for the state of the economy.

The extent of this accountability, however, is questionable. Renno and Gramacho (2010) find that less sophisticated voters in Brazil and Chile are more likely than sophisticated voters to be indiscriminate with their opprobrium for the economy. They tend to want to "blame everybody," regardless of institutional features and constraints. More sophisticated voters seem to pinpoint their anger at the president.

The “blame everybody” approach seems to be generalizable to the United States as well, given the 2010 midterm election results. Voters seemed more than willing to vote Democrats out of office despite low approval ratings for Republicans.⁴

The reverberations of these electoral studies can be felt on policy outcomes. Elections, obviously, have policy import, and how the public interprets economic conditions influences their policy demands. The research in this section suggests that the public’s economic assessments are driven by partisan ideology, and economic assessments drive voter’s electoral decisions. Moreover, voters seem remarkably willing to blame everyone regardless of institutional constraints. In such an environment, there are multiple avenues for political gamesmanship. The strategies used by political actors to garner electoral favor would alter veto points for legislative passage, which would at least moderate policies and at worst create insurmountable gridlock. So if policy can be created it is likely to be far short of any technocratic ideal.

Institutional Response

Policy responses to the Great Recession are ongoing, despite the end of the nominal recession. Congress, the President, and the assorted bureaucracies of economic oversight (such as the Fed, the Treasury Department, and many independent agencies) continue to write rules to regulate financial markets, generate job growth, address the needs of the long-term unemployed, as well as deal with European sovereign debt crises and the national debt, which as of this writing stands at more than \$14.5 trillion. Moreover, much of the data on which original decisions were based continue to be revised by statistical agencies within the government.⁵ Accordingly, there is little by way of solid policy analysis to ground any assessment of institutional actors. In other words, the jury is still out on the policymaking behind and effects of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (the “stimulus” bill) in 2009 and several other programs.

The research that has made it to print thus far has described the political dynamics of the legislation that has flowed from the start of the recession in 2007 (see Table 1), particularly the Dodd-Frank Act re-regulating the financial industry in 2010. There have been no fewer than ten legislative responses to the economic downturn that

Table 1. The Great Recession and Its Legislation. Recession dating follows the National Bureau of Economic Research

Recession	Legislative response
December 2007–June 2009	Economic Stimulus Act of 2008 Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 Tax Extenders and Alternative Minimum Tax Relief Act of 2008 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 Helping Families Save Their Homes Act of 2009 Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2009 Worker, Homeownership, and Business Assistance Act of 2009 Travel Promotion Act of 2009 Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment Act of 2010 Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010

began in December 2007, not including such legislation as healthcare reform that may have longer term or indirect effects on economic productivity. Given the high levels of polarization and predictions of gridlock, the amount of legislation may seem surprising, but it was how the legislation managed to pass that warrants greater analysis.

Legislators in Washington began addressing an apparent economic downturn well before the banking crisis in September 2008 but still months after the start of the recession.

A Democratic Congress and a Republican president managed to pass a tax-cut stimulus in spring 2008. When the full extent of the banking crisis became apparent, the same divided government passed the provisions of the Troubled Asset Relief Program that gave the Department of the Treasury and Federal Reserve Board of Governors unparalleled power to rescue failing investment banks and mitigate the systemic risk all banks faced. But this legislation came only after Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson and Fed Chair Ben Bernanke made congressional leaders a take-it-or-leave-it offer and invoked the specter of another Great Depression during a tense weekend meeting (Sorkin, 2009, pp. 442–43). After the inauguration of Barack Obama, a period of unified government saw the passage of the remaining seven pieces of legislation meant to ease the suffering of homeowners, bring stability to the banking industry, and prevent future crises from occurring.

But unified government did not mean easy or swift passage of that legislation, particularly with regard to reregulation. Carpenter (2010) and McCarty, Poole, Romer, and Rosenthal (2010) both document the passage and prospects for Dodd-Frank. For Carpenter (2010) the Dodd-Frank legislation represented threats to established bureaucratic regimes, and strategies of “partisan intransigence” through exploited veto points. These summed to “institutional strangulation” that undermines consumer reform especially. McCarty et al. (2010) compare the 2010 reforms to the creation of the Resolution Trust Corporation in the wake of the Savings and Loan scandal of the late 1980s. In the intervening time, McCarty et al. argue, a newly developed “regulatory-financial” complex creates a cycle of lax enforcement by regulators, little oversight by congressional committees, increasing complexity in the financial world, and growing income inequality and polarization. These forces team up to inhibit a secure marketplace, in the first instance, and timely responses in the event of a crisis.

This literature squarely blames partisan polarization for watered-down policies created to hurdle previously non-existent veto points and compromises that led to greater delegation to the bureaucracy, which then led to turf battles. This literature also blames an orthodox “free market” ideology that looks at any form of government regulation or taxation as inherently wrong. These issues, and ideology in particular, reduced the capacity of the standing bureaucracies to foresee or forestall the slow-motion collapse of the housing market and the systemic risk in the banking industry, since Bush Administration appointees to the relevant regulatory agencies did not prioritize oversight of the subprime mortgage industry (Khademian, 2009). As Khademian (2009) notes, the irony of the Bush Administration is that while it putatively wanted to reduce bureaucracy’s reach into the private sector, its legacy was a massive delegation of control to the Fed and Treasury to rescue the banking industry and the reorganization of financial regulators.

Taylor (2009) and Congleton (2009) argue, by contrast, that the government's reaction to the financial crisis extended the impact of the banking problems. Congleton (2009) argues that talk of a "crisis" hindered the ability of policymakers to respond with appropriate deliberation and analysis. Taylor (2009) argues that government programs subsidizing homeownership helped create the mortgage bubble in the first place along with the Fed's loose monetary policy—without the housing boom, there would be no housing bust. Second, relevant regulators misdiagnosed the problems as the market imploded. And third, the government did not establish consistent criteria in rescuing banks—saving Merrill Lynch, for example, while letting Lehman Brothers fail. All of these actions created uncertainty in the markets and made the situation worse.

Finally, the crisis and the response to it reignited a debate in economics over Keynesian fiscal stimuli. In a paper written before the stimulus measures of 2008–2009 were passed, Magud (2008) finds that government spending in the event of a negative economic shock is stimulative conditional on the state of the government prior to the shock. The more fiscally fragile the government is before the shock, the more contractionary (rather than expansionary) fiscal stimulus is likely to be. Magud (2008) argues that information failures create asymmetric business cycles that may result in recession when complete information would avert one. This piece creates a dilemma for the purely ideological on both ends of the spectrum in the American case. Would America's high level of indebtedness make stimulative spending contractionary? Or would America's large economy offset risk of default and make stimulative spending expansionary? There are downside risks associated with each position that partisans are unlikely to address.

Discussion and Conclusion

In their analysis of more than eight centuries of financial crises, Reinhart and Rogoff (2009, p. 289) conclude that "banking crises tend to be protracted affairs." This seems to be case regardless of the policy responses employed by the relevant governments. The research presented in this essay would seem to corroborate Reinhart and Rogoff's conclusion. Recently, rising income inequality, declining trust in government, and greater partisanship and ideological polarization have conspired to create a "regulatory-financial complex" that strangulates policymaking institutions and creates gridlock when veto points—constitutionally imposed or otherwise—cannot be surmounted. These forces lead voters to judge the economy with their political ideology firmly in mind, but also retrospectively assess the policymakers. The circle becomes self-reinforcing as the public's views turn more conservative and less supportive of government intervention to solve economic problems.

There remain questions for future researchers. How the macropolitical climate affects policy outcomes, and how advocates and interest groups mobilize is ripe territory for new research. Additionally, the precise dynamics of institutional relationships need to be further explored. How Congress, for example, interprets Fed action, and how the president and executive branch try to get Congress on board with policy

solutions in a timely way is not well developed in an integrative manner. And of the many impediments to successful policymaking listed above, we know little about how these institutions focus attention on economic problems and use information to craft effective policy solutions. Krause and Corder (2007) find, for example, that macroeconomic forecasts on which policymakers base their decisions vary depending on the political responsiveness and reputational impacts of the forecaster.

Of the many theories of the policy process available, I suggest that the Great Recession lends itself best as a critical case for information processing theories (see Baumgartner et al., 2009; Workman, Jones, & Jochim, 2009). When the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)'s GDP estimates are more than six percentage points off, as it was in 2008 for example, how is policy affected? The data on which policymakers act is crucial to understanding the policy solutions they choose. The BEA's inability to provide accurate data is akin to policy information failure during the Iraq War, an example used in Workman et al. (2009). Moreover, if the information is wrong and the policy inadequate, how can policymakers adapt given institutional constraints? Getting all the institutions of governance "on board" for economic policy action is a particularly tall order, even when recessions or other economic problems demand it. Jones and Strahan (1985) argue that during crises the president and the executive branch have an incentive to coordinate concerted action while the decentralized Congress has incentives to splinter responsibility across committees and subcommittees and "spread the wealth," so to speak. Yet because the responsibility for economic policy is diffuse, understanding how information flows between relevant institutions is important in understanding the policy process.

But these information flows are not devoid of politics: institutional dominance and reputation are at stake. The separate branches of government and the highly specialized bureaucracy are interested in maintaining their independent spheres of influence (Hall & Jones, 1997; Khademian, 1992). Second, there is partisan politics, especially at times of divided government (Alesina & Rosenthal, 1995). But independent agencies may not be beyond partisan politics as well, as the Federal Reserve shows a greater propensity to help Republican presidents *ceteris paribus* (Galbraith, Giovannoni, & Russo, 2007).

What is particularly interesting about information processing is how the information signals are conditioned first by what the institution prioritizes and then, second, by politics. May, Workman, and Jones (2008) find that *how* organizations pay attention to relevant issues conditions to *what* they pay attention. Given differing institutional political incentives, the president generally receives more blame for the state of the economy than Congress (see, for example, Alesina & Rosenthal, 1995; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007), one would expect the separate institutions not only to behave differently when processing economic problems as Jones and Strahan (1985) would anticipate, but pay attention to different issues as well.

This disjointed processing raises questions about how "policy windows" open, what causes them to open, and when they open to address economic problems. For example, one is left to wonder if an opportunity for policy change cannot appear without simultaneous processing of similar concerns across institutions. Extant research also leaves unanswered whether specialized bureaucracies must be on

board with administration plans for Congress to act, or whether opinion leaders in Congress in concert with the administration can overcome bureaucratic objections.

Studying economic policymaking from a position of information processing could be divided into three analytical units. First, there are political incentives for political actors. The president, for example, takes more electoral blame for the economy so may be more responsive to economic information. Moreover, the informational infrastructure is located in the executive branch. Second, there is reputation for bureaucratic actors, which could be subdivided into credibility and expertise. Reputation is a function of whether agency can speak the truth, especially to the powerful—an agency's credibility—as suggested by Khademian (2009). And reputation is also a function of expertise—whether the agency has a track record of success. Third, an analyst must recognize if the various institutions under study can credibly commit to a given course of action. For example, under what circumstances could President Obama have credibly threatened to veto any debt limit extension during the debt ceiling “crisis” in 2011? There would seem to be too much political pressure to believe a veto was possible, giving Congress the upper hand in negotiations.

Recent events have given researchers cause to reassess their models in light of new information and search for novel ways to examine policymaking. Economic inequality, Keynesian stimulus, economic voting, and political polarization have all played a role in the latest set of economic problems and responses to them. In this paper, I have suggested that trust in government and information processing comprised of political incentives, reputation, and credible commitment be given greater examination in the future.

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Notes

- ¹ The merits of the S&P downgrade are debatable given the firm's track record and accounting errors in the U.S. report. But the decision and attending stock market gyrations did mark a particularly low point for economic policymaking and the ability of the American system of government to address pressing problems.
- ² Debt is not created by the statutory limit but by imbalances between appropriation bills that allocate resources to government programs and the revenue that fund appropriations. The debt limit statute has, since 1917, merely set a number on the amount of debt the government can take on independent of the revenue and funding processes.
- ³ Contrary to popular received wisdom, a recession is not two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth as defined by output. According to the NBER, recessions are “significant decline[s] in economic activity,” and the NBER's recession dating committee uses a variety of indicators to determine their beginning and end. For more, see: http://nber.org/cycles/general_statement.html.

⁴ The 2010 U.S. midterm elections could be pinned on a host of issues, but economic models still performed well in predictions. For one example, see: <http://www.douglashibbs.com/house2010election22september2010.pdf>.

⁵ One example from the Bureau of Economic Analysis showed that 2008 fourth quarter gross domestic product declined by 3.8 percent in the January 2009 estimate, 6.2 percent in February 2009, and 8.9 percent in July 2011. These revisions mean policymakers were dealing with incomplete information at the time of their decisions, and it also changes how policy analysts examine the efficacy of solutions to solve economic crises. For more, see: http://www.bea.gov/newsreleases/national/gdp/2011/pdf/gdp2q11_adv.pdf.

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Integrative Frontiers in Environmental Policy Theory and Research

Meredith T. Niles* and Mark Lubell

Environmental policy research continues to advance toward a more Kuhnian “normal” science where theory and empirical tools are brought to bear on real-world policy systems to better understand social processes and determine the context in which policies work best. Traditional environmental policy tools now involve more flexible market-based instruments, voluntary agreements, and information provision tools like ecolabels and sustainability indicators. Policy process theories continue to be refined through hypothesis testing and are evolving into more integrative and multidisciplinary frameworks. Interdisciplinary methods are also being employed to better measure and analyze environmental outcomes, which has always been a major challenge in environmental policy research. These research tools are being explored in emerging policy approaches like collaborative partnerships and with novel environmental issues like climate change adaptation, pharmaceuticals and personal care products, and nanotechnology.

KEY WORDS: Policy tools, policy process, integrative policy frameworks, policy outcomes, emerging environmental issue, collaborative policy

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of environmental policy research focusing mostly on the last five years but including several earlier, seminal works. Policy research is transitioning into a phase of what Kuhn (1996) would call “normal” science, where multiple theories guide empirical hypothesis testing. At the same time, policy sciences seek to investigate applied implications and develop policy recommendations. This paper discusses these broader changes in how policy sciences have played out in environmental policy theory and empirical applications. A cross-cutting theme of our discussion is *integration*, where synthetic theoretical frameworks and multidisciplinary approaches are being developed to understand the linkages between the social and ecological systems inherent in environmental issues.

Recent environmental policy research continues the tradition of economic analysis of policy tools, with a particular focus on market-based instruments. Concurrently, attention is directed to behavioral and political variables through

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development and testing of theories of the policy process like Institutional Rational Choice (IRC) and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). Theoretical approaches are benefiting from more interdisciplinary collaboration within the social sciences, as well as with natural and physical scientists, to explore the coupled dynamics between social and ecological systems. The call for empirical research on environmental outcomes remains strident, especially in the context of emerging, complex environmental problems like climate change. The dialog between theory and empirics drives the policy sciences forward in classic Kuhnian fashion.

This theoretical and empirical research is further complemented by important methodological advancements. Space limitations prevent a thorough discussion here, but at the heart of these advances is an attempt to better observe causal processes in policy settings. Policy research is plagued by the lack of “counterfactual” observations (Ferraro, 2009; Winship & Morgan, 1999), and approaches like randomized interventions (Duflo, Glennerster, & Kremer, 2007) and matching methods (Ferraro, McIntosh, & Ospina, 2007) are being used to attack these problems.

The next section discusses theoretical frontiers in environmental policy research, followed by a section on emerging empirical research. The distinction between theory and empirics is not meant to be sharp given the constant feedback between different aspects of the scientific process. The organization of our paper merely reflects our judgment about whether the theoretical or empirical aspect of the research is more interesting at the current time. We conclude by offering perspectives on the future of research in environmental policy theory and applications.

Theoretical Frontiers in Environmental Policy Research

Environmental policy research benefits from the application of social science theories that identify how policies affect individual behavior and, in turn, how those policies are influenced by collective decisions. Environmental policy theory is now explicitly integrating a broader range of disciplines to better understand the linkages between human and natural systems.

Policy Tools

Policy tools research is a well-established tradition in environmental policy with origins in the economics of market failures. Interlinked with broader policy trends, early research focused on command-and-control regulation or pollution taxes as ways to reshape incentives (Hahn & Stavins, 1991; Keohane, Revesz, & Stavins, 1998). However, some early policy tools were considered inefficient for solving a number of environmental problems (Fiorino, 2006). For example, though command-and-control regulations have addressed point source water pollution, they have been less successful in dealing with non-point source pollution. The combination of new and unresolved problems, along with criticisms of existing tools, has fueled the development and analysis of new, more “flexible” policy tools (Fiorino, 2006; Tews, Busch, & Jorgens, 2003). Such tools have often been implemented outside the gridlocked

Congressional legislative process (Klyza & Sousa, 2008) and are increasingly used in private sector collaborations (Eisner, 2006). Here we focus on market-based instruments, voluntary agreements, and information-based tools, each of which attempt to realign economic incentives with individual choice or information, rather than relying on mandatory behaviors backed by enforcement.

Market-Based Instruments. Market-based instruments, including pollution charges, marketable permits, deposit refund systems, and offset markets (Hahn & Stavins, 1991), have developed in response to the inefficiencies of traditional command-and-control regulation. In theory, market-based incentives facilitate technology innovation (Jaffe & Stavins, 1995) and increase net benefits by reducing compliance costs and increasing flexibility in achieving environmental goals (Olmstead, 2010). Though market-based instruments were historically utilized for air pollutants like sulfur dioxide, they have more recently been applied to water quality (Breetz, Fisher-Vanden, Jacobs, & Shary, 2005; Stephenson & Shabman, 2011), nutrient trading (Barry, King, Larson, & Lennox, 2010), and carbon offset programs (Mooney, Antle, Capalbo, & Paustian, 2004a, 2004b).

Market-based instruments have had some notable early successes. It is widely recognized that the United States sulfur dioxide emissions trading program significantly reduced emissions (Kruger, 2007; Schmalensee, Joskow, Elerman, Montero, & Bailey, 1998). As well, bottle deposit refund programs have increased recycling rates in many municipalities throughout the United States (Bell, Huber, & Viscusi, 2010; Walls, 2011).

However, market-based instruments have also received considerable criticism. The European Union carbon trading program has not reduced overall greenhouse gas emissions in part because it allowed for free allowances and individual country allocation, which resulted in an oversupply of permits and a low carbon price (Newbery, 2011). Limited participation in market-based programs can be significantly affected by non-financial barriers such as trust in third parties and other group participants (Breetz et al., 2005). Market-based instruments may have multiple trade-offs, such as having to compromise cost-effectiveness, which may be alleviated through hybrid approaches or multiple instruments (Goulder & Perry, 2008). Future research should address not only the success and efficiency of the instrument, but also trade-offs and how program design influences participation and environmental quality.

Voluntary Agreements. Voluntary agreements (VAs), or “green clubs,” are growing in popularity among industries for going “beyond compliance” to improve environmental conditions (Prakash & Potoski, 2006, 2007). Different types of VAs feature integration with existing regulations and agency processes (OECD, 2003), but a consistent criticism of VAs is that a lack of enforcement can reduce effectiveness (Glachant, 2007). Much of the research has focused on how to facilitate effective VAs, as well as what causes firms to participate. Studies on participation have found that firms are more likely to participate if they perceive a net benefit (Alberini & Segerson, 2002), there is a threat of regulation (Alberini & Segerson, 2002; Brouhle, Griffiths, &

Wolverton, 2009; Khanna, Koss, Jones, & Ervin, 2007; Lyon & Maxwell, 2002), and if they operate in states surrounded by states with existing VAs (Daley, 2007). Other variables that have influenced firms to participate include industry group membership, the level of environmental funding in a state, and neighborhood characteristics (Brouhle et al., 2009). Though some research has found that stakeholder influence has no effect on industry participation in VAs (Khanna et al., 2007), more recent work found that business participation in voluntary environmental programs was positively influenced by stakeholder perspectives of their company (Darnall, Potoski, & Prakash, 2010), and others have highlighted the need for companies to engage with stakeholders in the VA development process (Murdock, Wiessner, & Sexton, 2005).

There remains debate over the effectiveness of VAs; while they can be more efficient than other types of policies because enforcement is often undertaken by third parties and paid for by participants (McEvoy & Stranlund, 2010), they can be ineffective in dealing with large-scale environmental issues if their scope is local in nature (Press, 2007). VAs are more effective if they minimize collective action problems like free riding and shirking by accruing most benefits to participants and requiring a minimum abatement level (Brau & Carraro, 2011; Prakash & Potoski, 2006, 2007). Emerging efforts are trying to combine VAs with other policy tools to reduce free riding behavior and maximize financial opportunities to participating firms (Arimura, Hibiki, & Katayama, 2007; Oikonomou, Patel, van der Gaast, & Rietbergen, 2009), but new tools are needed to monitor VA impacts (Lyon & Maxwell, 2007). Recent empirical research also found that VA effectiveness may depend on the nature of the environmental issue. Business participation in ISO 14001 certification, the most common environmental VA, resulted in reductions for air pollutants but not water pollution, suggesting the need for additional research to understand the influence of VAs on multiple types of pollution (Prakash & Potoski, 2011).

Information Provision Tools. Information provision tools aim to reduce information asymmetry, which occurs when consumers do not have full information about the products they are purchasing, resulting in inefficient choices. In the context of environmental policy, one of the best-known examples of information disclosure is the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) “right to know” clause requiring companies to release information about toxic chemical use (42 U.S.C. Sec. 116, 1986). Research on the TRI suggests some overall decrease in toxic chemicals, but the impact was not uniform across sources and was likely influenced by other policies (Bui, 2005; Kraft, Stephan, & Abel, 2011). Reacting to criticisms about how information tools are integrated into decision making (Weil, Fung, Graham, & Fagotto, 2006), more effort has been devoted to communicating environmental information directly to consumers who want to buy environmentally friendly products or to producers to help them make decisions and develop a reputation for improved environmental management.

Ecolabels are one type of information provision tool that describes some aspect of an environmentally friendly product or industry behavior. Some ecolabels are based on scientific analysis of environmental criteria or sustainability tools like life cycle analysis (LCA). Examples of ecolabels include organic, biodegradable, and

carbon footprint labels, among others. There are varying levels of regulation with ecolabels; the U.S. EPA Energy Star ecolabel as well as the EU ecolabel initiatives (Baldo, Marino, Montani, & Ryding, 2009) are government sponsored initiatives, while others are individual company creations not independently verified by a third party (Tews et al., 2003). Reacting to these inconsistencies, several consumer groups like the Environmental Working Group (*Skin Deep Cosmetics Database*, 2011) and Consumers Union (*Greener Choices Eco-Labels*, 2011) have developed their own databases to evaluate ecolabels.

Ecolabel research has analyzed their effectiveness in changing consumer and producer behavior. Economic models have found that ecolabels can reduce pollution if consumers are willing to pay for environmental quality; however, ecolabels alone cannot eliminate all externalities (Ibanez & Grolleau, 2008). While ecolabels can encourage green behavior, financial policies, in the form of incentives and penalties, can be more effective (Coad, de Haan, & Woersdorfer, 2009). In part, this may be because environmentally conscious consumers utilize ecolabels in their purchasing decisions, while price-oriented consumers are less affected (Schumacher, 2010).

Sustainability tools and indicators are another information provision tool that mostly have assisted companies and governments to understand the environmental impact of their products and policies (De Smedt, 2010). Rabl and Holland (2008) note the differences among multiple sustainability tools including impact pathway analysis (IPA), LCA, and multi-criteria analysis (MCA). Recent advancements of the LCA method termed "dynamic life cycle analysis" consider both the carbon mitigation potential and the embodied carbon emissions of a practice or technology, which can assist in policymaking by prioritizing low-emission technologies (Kenny, Law, & Pearce, 2010). Despite their prevalence, sustainability tools face technical challenges such as lack of data, uncertainty about future scenarios, and non-linear impacts (Rabl & Holland, 2008). In addition, the definition of the term sustainability remains vague and contentious, increasing the potential for symbolic rather than substantive use of indicators.

Policy Process

Theories of the policy process expand beyond the economic basis of the policy tool perspective to integrate political and behavioral components into policy analysis. The past 20 years have seen the emergence of a number of policy process theories such as the ACF, IRC, policy diffusion, and punctuated equilibrium, among others (Sabatier, 2007), which have been applied to environmental contexts. In Kuhnian fashion, research has turned to further refining these theories by testing competing hypotheses and synthesizing theories.

Testing Theories of the Policy Process. Sabatier (2007) summarizes the most common policy process theories and shows how each is based on different assumptions and focused on different questions (see also Schlager & Blomquist, 1996). Recent empirical environmental research utilizes these theories in three ways: 1) testing hypotheses from a single theory; 2) testing competing hypotheses from different theories;

and 3) attempting to combine elements of existing theories into a more synergistic framework. Below we provide examples from the ACF and IRC, which are arguably the two policy theories most actively (but not exclusively) applied to environmental policy.

ACF scholars continue to expand the theory's geographic scope and apply it to different environmental policy issues. In the comparative politics tradition, Sabatier and Weible (2007) argue that the degree of consensus needed for major policy change and openness of political systems in different countries affects the process of coalition formation. Tests of the ACF in a number of environmental policy subsystems have produced supporting evidence for hypotheses involving policy change, learning, and coalition stability (Ellison & Newmark, 2010; Huntjens et al., 2011; van Overveld, Hermans, & Verliefde, 2010; Weible, Sabatier, & McQueen, 2009). One of the most important recent findings is evidence that policy beliefs drive actual political cooperation among members of coalitions (Henry, Lubell, & McCoy, 2011; Weible, 2005), in contrast to previous research that identified coalitions as actors with similar beliefs without measuring coordinated behavior.

IRC theory, especially Ostrom's Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework, has also advanced its approach by moving from case studies to more large-N, comparative research. A leading example is the International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI) program, which tests hypotheses about common-pool forest management among many sites across multiple spatial scales. This research has found that monitoring and rule enforcement, group rules, and local autonomy significantly affect forest quality (Lavertu & Weimer, 2009). Continued large-N research through IFRI has more recently shown that property rights (Coleman, 2011) and the percent of women in a community (Mwangi, Meinzen-Dick, & Sun, 2011) significantly affect adoption of sustainable forest practices. Further advancement of the theory can be achieved by examining the effect of cross-scale and cross-sector linkages, power structures, and social inequalities (Tucker, 2010).

Testing competing hypotheses from multiple theories provides a more robust approach to refining theories. Henry (2011) compares perspectives from the ACF and the Resource Dependency Theory (RDT) in a regional planning setting, finding that the ACF hypothesis of shared ideology more accurately describes network collaboration in regional planning than the RDT theory of power-seeking as a driving force for collaboration. Weible (2008) reviews the use of expert knowledge among four policy theories—multiple streams, punctuated equilibrium, social construction, and ACF—across unitary, collaborative, and adversarial policy subsystems. This comparison suggests a number of revisions to existing theories including defining principal and auxiliary coalition members and acknowledgement that conflicts can occur between coalitions from different policy subsystems.

Policy process theory has been criticized for being too elastic and capable of predicting any result through continued refinement of initial assumptions (Meier, 2009). In response, many scholars are combining the strengths and weakness of different theories to build more synthetic frameworks. Lavertu and Weimer (2009) argue that theory of delegation, which predicts policymaking authority, organizational structures, and the level of expertise incorporated into policymaking, should

be synthesized into policy process theories like those outlined by Sabatier (2007). Henry (2011) combines the ACF and RDT theories in a land use planning setting to conclude that perceived influence within groups of ideologically similar network actors is positively associated with collaborative ties. Ingold (2011) suggests that combining network structure and actor preferences in climate change research can assist in identifying coalitions and policy output for the ACF. Schneider and Sidney (2009) assert that the future of policy studies involves the need to combine policy theories with research that is relevant to society. These more integrative approaches may ultimately produce a widely accepted theory linked to multiple disciplines, although theoretical pluralism will persist for the time being and is preferred by some researchers.

Integrative Theoretical Concepts and Frameworks

The increasing recognition across the social and natural sciences that environmental issues involve complex systems has led to a growing amount of integrative, multi-disciplinary research in recent years. Early frameworks in this context include the Pressure State Response (PSR) and Drivers Pressures State Impact Response (DPSIR) frameworks (Tapio & Willamo, 2008). Emerging research has built on existing theories to integrate multiple disciplines and provide more sophisticated views on the role of social learning and networks for linking social and ecological systems.

Social and Policy Learning. Social and policy learning research encompasses disciplines including policy studies, management, sociology, communications, and organization studies (Van Bommel, Röling, Aarts, & Turnhout, 2009). The multidisciplinary nature of social learning has produced definitions ranging from social conditioning of individuals (Bandura, 1977) to collective learning (Ostrom, 1990). Social learning is an important process in environmental policy, with acknowledgment that it is based on different epistemological assumptions than traditional policy analysis (Ison, Roling, & Watson, 2007; Van Bommel et al., 2009). Theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that institutions that facilitate learning are more adaptable and effective in managing common pool resources (Gerlak & Heikkila, 2007; Ostrom, 1990).

One notable example of social learning research is SLIM (social learning for the integrated management and sustainable use of water at catchment scale), a multi-year European Union (EU) project on watersheds (Steyaert & Jiggins, 2007). SLIM argued that natural resources are complex systems featuring uncertainty, which requires social learning to understand interdependence between biophysical and social forces (Ison et al., 2007). Collins and Ison (2009b) built upon SLIM to argue that climate change adaptation requires a social learning paradigm. Other studies have tried to examine the environmental contexts in which social learning can be effective. Social learning can be hampered by distrust and disagreement stemming from unequal power relations (Van Bommel et al., 2009). On the other hand, social learning can be more effective in collaborative groups with decentralized institutions and networks spanning multiple groups as found in the Florida Everglades collaborative

ecosystem restoration program (Gerlak & Heikkila, 2011). These studies are beginning to provide more precise definitions of social and policy learning, measure social learning in empirical settings, and identify the conditions under which social learning occurs and influences policy.

Social Ecological Systems. Another integrative framework that draws heavily from the natural and social sciences is the social-ecological systems (SES) framework, which links social, political, and ecological processes using concepts and methods from complex systems (Anderies, Janssen, & Ostrom, 2004). SES frameworks have evolved from the IAD framework, which analyzed the effect of institutions on common-pool resources (Ostrom, 2011; Ostrom & Cox, 2010). Early SES frameworks considered resources, resource users, and public infrastructure coupled with drivers and disturbances to better understand how institutions play a role in governing SES (Anderies et al., 2004). Ostrom (2007) developed a more advanced SES framework, which integrated resources, resource users, and governance systems within the multi-scale socioeconomic, political, and ecological settings in which systems exist. Further revision of this framework has more completely integrated IAD and SES by explicitly including “action situations” such as monitoring, provision, and policy-making (McGinnis, 2010, 2011; Ostrom & Cox, 2010). SES frameworks have borrowed concepts from natural science, such as sustainability, resilience, and adaptive capacity (Folke, 2006; Folke, Hahn, Olsson, & Norberg, 2005; Holling, 2001). These concepts often become the key dependent variables in theoretical frameworks, and researchers are debating the best way to define and measure them.

As with other policy process theories, SES frameworks are being empirically tested in diverse settings, often facilitated by large-scale funding from the National Science Foundation and other organizations. SES has been applied with success by researchers, policymakers, and managers with different research and management priorities in the Himalayan Mountains (Amatya et al., 2010) as well as in small-scale fisheries (McClanahan, Castilla, White, & Defeo, 2009). Most recent empirical research is focused on coupling management of social and ecological systems with health and well-being indicators (Bunch, Morrison, Parkes, & Venema, 2011). Agent-based models and bioeconomic mathematical models (Sanchirico, Smith, & Lipton, 2008), which involve a number of different actors that interact with each other as well as their environment, are well-suited to analyzing SES frameworks (Berger, 2001; Bodin & Crona, 2009; Kaufmann, Stagl, & Franks, 2009; Matthews Gilbert, Roach, Polhill, & Gotts, 2007). Beyond developing new SES frameworks, future research should focus on more empirical testing of model predictions and validation of parameters, as well as using models for decision-support in real policy settings.

Policy Network Frameworks. Policy networks have become a cross-cutting theoretical and methodological tool applied to multiple environmental policy settings. The basic idea of policy networks is that different types of policy actors (e.g., individuals, organizations, countries) are linked by some type of social relationship (e.g., information sharing) and that the structure of the network influences policy decisions and outcomes. Many policy process theories directly employ network-related concepts,

for example the idea of coalitions in the ACF and social capital in IRC. Network analysis methods thus provide an empirical tool for evaluating theoretical hypotheses, though network theory can also act as a stand-alone approach to understanding policy and governance (Jones, Hesterly, & Borgatti, 1997). Network analysis has been usefully employed in a number of empirical environmental settings such as natural resource management (Bodin & Crona, 2009; Prell, Hubacek, & Reed, 2009), urban ecosystem services (Ernstson, Sorlin, & Elmqvist, 2008; Ernstson, Barthel, Andersson, & Borgstrom, 2010), small-scale fisheries (Marín & Berkes, 2010; Ramirez-Sanchez & Pinkerton, 2009), and watershed management (Schneider, Scholz, Lubell, Mindruta, & Edwardsen, 2003).

Despite widespread recognition of the utility of network theory, a consensus has not yet emerged about what network variables are most important for improving environmental policy. The literature commonly employs some vague idea of social “embeddedness” or “connectivity” as having a positive effect on environmental decisions, with empirical measurements focused on network density, reciprocity, and transitivity (friends of my friends). However, a number of scholars have pointed out that the functional role of networks is likely to depend on different contextual variables, for example whether or not the actors are facing coordination or cooperation problems (Berardo & Scholz, 2010). Though some empirical evidence suggests that well-connected and centrally located organizations are more collaborative than smaller, denser networks (Scholz, Berardo, & Kile, 2008), there is a need to further develop and test theories about the conditions under which different types of network variables matter.

Empirical Frontiers in Environmental Policy Research

Below we summarize some emerging frontiers of empirical research in environmental policy. We highlight substantive areas where a large amount of empirical research is currently underway or emerging, which can contribute to theoretical advancements and political applications. As is obvious from above, there is significant empirical research happening on different theoretical questions, and the empirical research below has theoretical implications.

Policy Outcomes

Measuring environmental outcomes has always been one of the central challenges of environmental policy research, since tangible environmental improvement is a key goal of policy implementation. Environmental policy research is frequently criticized for focusing on process measures like political participation and attitudes, or output measures like policy adoption, plan implementation, and budget expenditures rather than actual environmental benefits. Fully evaluating environmental policies requires analyzing different parts of this causal chain (Rauschmayer, Berghöfer, Omann, & Zikos, 2009), but many environmental outcomes are difficult to measure due to complexity and data scarcity. The emergence of multi-disciplinary research teams offers opportunities to explore these outcomes in more integrated

ways. While air pollution has been studied significantly in the development of environmental indicators (O'Neill et al., 2003), more recent large-scale efforts for indicator development include biodiversity and environmental justice.

Biodiversity. Measuring biodiversity and quantifying its benefits can be challenging because of its complex structures and multiple interactions (Noss, 1990). International collaborative efforts to develop biodiversity indicators began in earnest with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2002, which pledged to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Though early efforts to create biodiversity indicators focused largely on ecological parameters, new efforts span multiple scales. The CBD created a framework of indicators ranging in scale from genes to entire ecosystems (Diversity, 2006). More recent efforts include measures for both ecological indicators like habitat extent and condition as well as socioeconomic influences on biodiversity like resource consumption, overexploitation, governance corruption, and human population density (Butchart et al., 2010; Crafton & Anthony, 2011).

Numerous critiques of biodiversity indicator development exist both previous to, and in light of, the failure of CBD to meet biodiversity goals. Existing indicators have been criticized for their failure to have a desired end goal for conservation (Mace & Baillie, 2007) and their limited focus on genetic diversity (Laikre, 2010). There is also broad recognition that biodiversity indicator development needs to be coupled with large scale monitoring programs (Scholes et al., 2008) and that indicators should be more incorporated into other types of policies like land-use planning, agriculture, and economic decision making (Butchart et al., 2010). Overcoming these shortcomings requires biodiversity and other environmental indicator development, monitoring, and evaluation across multiple scales.

Environmental Justice. Environmental justice research focuses on the potentially unequal distribution of environmental outcomes, benefits, and costs across regions, ethnic groups, and income categories (Maguire & Sheriff, 2011). Though environmental justice concerns have become an important policy priority, only recently have environmental justice indicators become more sophisticated and integrated to include multiple measurement tools and disciplines.

There is an increasing need for frameworks and common questions to guide the development of environmental justice indicators. Maguire and Sheriff (2011) suggest a variety of potential tools including GIS, Lorenz maps, concentration curves, inequality indices, and regression to present environmental justice indicators and potential impacts to policymakers. There is also a growing body of empirical research to understand how certain policies have or may affect different populations in the future. Data analysis of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) trading activities in the United States between 1995 and 2009 found that, contrary to the author's hypotheses, African American and Hispanic communities had fewer imports of SO₂ over time. Instead, SO₂ was concentrated in communities where a larger percentage of adults did not have a high school diploma, suggesting that there are multiple variables to be measured for understanding what types of communities can be adversely affected by pollution (Ringquist, 2011). Efforts are also investigating how government

funding could have environmental justice implications. One recent study found that unsuccessful applicants for the U.S. EPA Brownfields grant program are more likely to be non-white, lower income, and in areas with low resource governments (Dull & Wernstedt, 2010). These empirical efforts identify potential problems with existing policies and can provide guidance to policymakers on remediation and indicator development for assessing future policies and programs. Applied research suggests the need for continued cross-disciplinary collaboration to understand how to develop and implement environmental justice indicators that inform policy development to minimize unequal environmental harm.

Collaborative Policy

Collaborative policy, often paired with the concepts of ecosystem and adaptive management, represents an institutional framework for decision making that has spread to nearly every aspect of public policy, and is especially important in the context of natural resource management. Well-known examples include the Chesapeake Bay Program, CALFED Bay-Delta Program, Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program, and the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2005; Layzer, 2005), but these types of programs can be found in nearly every watershed in the United States and most Western democracies, as well as in many developing countries. The basic idea of collaborative policy is to bring together multiple stakeholders to address complex problems that span administrative boundaries, have high levels of uncertainty, involve multiple ecological functions, and have not been effectively managed by traditional policy tools (Lubell, 2003, 2004; Sabatier, 2005; Weible, Sabatier, & Lubell, 2004).

One important aspect of collaborative policy is that it has become a testbed for policy theory. For example, IRC has used the idea of polycentric governance to understand how collaborative policy operates in the context of cross-scale problems like climate change. Given the failures of international governance alone, Ostrom (2010) asserts that global policy efforts must be complemented with regional and local programs of mitigation and adaptation. Other researchers argue collaborative policy reduces the overall transaction costs of cooperation in the context of environmental policy (Lubell, Henry, & McCoy, 2010; Thomas, 2003). ACF research examines whether collaborative policy breaks down the traditional basis for the formation of competing coalitions (Lubell, 2000, 2003) or whether the political forces driving coalition formation continue to operate (Weible, 2006).

Given its widespread use in the real world, researchers are engaged in a vibrant debate about its effectiveness (Koontz & Thomas, 2006; McCloskey, 2000, 2001). In a large review of 137 case studies not exclusive to environmental policy, Ansell and Gash (2008) find that history of conflict or cooperation, stakeholder participation incentives, power and resource imbalances, leadership, and design of institutions are the key variables that influence the effectiveness of collaborative governance structures. More recently, Newig and Fritsch (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of 47 environmental case studies throughout North America and Western Europe and found that polycentric governance systems yielded higher environmental outputs

than simple monocentric structures. Additional studies have found that a multitude of other factors can affect the overall success of collaborative governance structures including leadership (Heikkila & Gerlak, 2005), stakeholder participation (Johnson, Hicks, Nan, & Auer, 2010), and government agency participation (Weible, 2011). Additional empirical research is needed to better understand these effects in practice and to further develop the link between multi-level governance and public participation within environmental governance.

Emerging Environmental Policy Issues

One interesting aspect of environmental policy (and policy in general) is how new issues are discovered and incorporated into the policy agenda. Environmental issues are often first recognized by their impact on human health, followed by engagement in the political process, a broader concern about environmental effects, and a growth in environmental policy research. Many of the issues that have emerged more recently have high levels of uncertainty and complexity, with human health and environmental impacts that are hard to measure. In this way they differ somewhat from earlier environmental issues like point sources of air and water pollution, which had acute and visible impacts. We limit our discussion here to three complex issues at different stages of public awareness and scientific attention: climate change adaptation, nanotechnology, and pharmaceuticals and personal care products. Each of these issues involves complex governance and policy structures to deal with their potentially widespread impacts. However, each issue is at a different level of policy development, in part due to the nature of the environmental issue itself as well as the policy and research devoted to specific topics. As a result, these three examples provide perspective on emerging environmental topics at various stages of the policy process.

Climate Change Adaptation. Climate change is a central global challenge that is motivating research in nearly every discipline. While a wide range of research (Metz, Davidson, Bosch, Dave, & Meyer, 2007; Pacala & Socolow, 2004; Roughgarden & Schneider, 1999) has focused on climate change *mitigation*, climate change *adaptation* has recently gained greater emphasis (Aakre & Rübhelke, 2010; Burton, Huq, Lim, Pilifosova, & Schipper, 2002; Rabe, 2010; Yamin, 2005). Among the three emerging issues described here, climate change adaptation is the most advanced in a research context as significant studies and models aim to predict climate change impacts across the globe for the future. As well, many international agreements, national policies, and regional strategies all address adaptation as a key component of climate change and a necessary policy target to reduce future impacts across time and space. Climate change adaptation policies may be fundamentally different from mitigation policies, in part because the private benefits associated with adaptation may increase the likelihood of adoption (Berkhout, 2005). Climate adaptation is also a good context for studying social learning (Adger, 2003; Collins & Ison, 2009a).

There is growing recognition that adaptation will be needed at multiple scales (Adger, Arnell, & Tompkins, 2005), which may require polycentric institutions.

Since climate change impacts will be felt at regional and local scales and policy decisions about global issues like climate change are often made at this level, sub-national policies may be an appropriate approach for implementing climate change adaptation efforts (Galarraga, Gonzalez-Eguino, & Markandya, 2011; Harrison & Sundstrom, 2010; Ostrom, 2010; Rabe, 2004). However, multiple climate change initiatives across several different jurisdictions can also create a lack of coordinated effort and overall effectiveness (Selin & VanDeveer, 2009). Climate change adaptation is also a useful setting for SES frameworks, because the advent of downscaled climate models allows researchers to analyze the links between climate change risk and uncertainty and climate-related behavior and attitudes (Adger, 2003; Ostrom, 2010). While these existing theories and research can inform further policy development of climate change adaptation, it will also be important to consider how existing conservation policies can be changed or incorporated into new policies (Hagerman, Dowlatabadi, Chan, & Satterfield, 2010). Future research should continue to couple natural science research on climate change impacts with social science research on appropriate responses, risk management, and adaptive capacity to understand the multiple ways in which different communities and settings can respond to potential impacts. This research should continue to analyze how policy networks and process may be effective in facilitating adaptive capacity.

Nanotechnology. Nanotechnology is a growing industry that raises a number of ethical, environmental, human health, and policy questions (Bowman & Hodge, 2006). Though nanotechnology has had a significant investment in research, it remains less developed as a policy issue than climate change adaptation because significant uncertainty has delayed the emergence of strong regulations and policies (Bosso, 2010; Wijnhoven et al., 2009). The novel scale of nanotechnology offers new and unprecedented challenges for thinking about human health, environmental impacts, and appropriate control (Fiorino, 2010). Environmental advocates and researchers are now calling for faster policy development and searching for appropriate policy tools to address the unique environmental and human health risks of nanotechnology (Kaegi et al., 2008; Panyala, Pena-Mendez, & Havel, 2008; Seaton, Tran, Aitken, & Donaldson, 2010).

Many scientists have developed frameworks to consider the multiple issues surrounding nanotechnology. In the early stages of an emerging environmental issue like nanotechnology, an open, experimental, and interdisciplinary model is necessary (Macnaghten, Kearnes, & Wynne, 2005). In their regulatory framework based on Australian regulations, Bowman and Hodge (2006) found regulatory gaps between the commercial advancements in nanotechnology and consumer expectations for safeguards with emerging technologies. Similar frameworks have been developed to better understand how to integrate the social and natural sciences with ethics, health, and policy and to understand potential problems that may cross disciplinary boundaries (Kuzma et al., 2008; Linkov et al., 2009).

Despite academic and practical attempts to create interdisciplinary frameworks (Fisher, 2007; Lee, 2010), most countries have few if any policies in place to deal with

nanotechnology from these multiple perspectives (Fairbrother & Fairbrother, 2009; Lee, 2010). The United States National Nanotechnology Initiative is one example of a government program that coordinates efforts to conduct research throughout multiple government agencies; however, only 3.4 percent of the total \$16.5 billion budget over the past decade has been devoted to environmental, health, and safety research (Initiative, 2011). As a result, while the practical applications of nanotechnology have been heavily supported, research to safeguard human and environmental health has been less prominent. Instead of large-scale government policies, voluntary agreements have thus far been the major environmental policy tool employed for nanotechnology. As well, NGOs, including the Wilson Center, have developed inventories to enable information disclosure about products that contain nanomaterials and health and environmental research (“Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies,” 2011). Nevertheless, these initiatives should complement, not substitute, the development of comprehensive government policies (Fiorino, 2010). To facilitate this development, additional research is needed in the natural and social sciences to understand the risk, uncertainty, and potential human health and environmental impacts of nanomaterials, which can inform the development of comprehensive regulations and policies.

Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products. Pharmaceuticals and personal care products (PPCPs) have received increasing policy attention related to their potential environmental and human health impacts (Kannan et al., 2005; Klaschka & Kolossa-Gehring, 2007; Lamas, Sanchez-Prado, Garcia-Jares, & Llompart, 2009; Peck & Hornbuckle, 2006; Steinemann et al., 2011). In the European Union, an information disclosure policy requires the labeling of 26 particular fragrance chemicals often found in PPCPs with suspected human allergy concerns (Buckley, 2007). The state of California also regulates personal care products for their volatile organic compound content (California Air Resources Board, 2010). However, in the United States, there are no laws requiring disclosure of the range of chemical products that may enter the environment and human systems (Steinemann, 2009; Steinemann et al., 2011). Among the three emerging issues described here, PPCPs have the least developed research and policy initiatives, potentially as a result of the multiple ingredients involved in such products, adding to their level of complexity. The ubiquity and low dose prevalence of many of these products in the environment present challenges to creating policies and understanding the fate and transport of chemicals.

Empirical research on the effectiveness of existing PPCP policies is still nascent but increasing. The information disclosure approach of the EU “26 allergens rule” does not appear to have had a notable effect thus far. Even though approximately 50 percent of consumer products contain one of the allergens, the labeling rules have not produced significant change in consumer behavior or industry product ingredient use. A more effective risk management policy could include bans and restrictions of hazardous substances rather than reliance on consumers for risk management in purchasing (Klaschka, 2010). Though there have been numerous articles to examine these policies from a human health perspective (Becerril et al.,

2010; De Vader & Barker, 2009), little research has considered the effect of these policies on the environment. As a result, though some initial policies are in place, there has not been the development of larger scale research or policy initiatives at a national scale like adaptation and nanotechnology. Additional scientific research is necessary to better understand the prevalence, fate, and transport of these products to enable the creation of informed, appropriate, and effective environmental policy at a broader scale.

Conclusion

Environmental policy research is coming of age as a subfield of policy sciences. It provides a critical research site for developing economic theories of policy tools and political theories of the policy process. The necessary linkage between human and natural systems provides a platform for the development of integrative frameworks, interdisciplinary collaboration, and sharing of scientific tools. However, theory can only be advanced through empirical analyses, which continue to broaden in scope and perspective as new problems and policy responses emerge and spread. Methodological advancements, including the better measurement of environmental outcomes, are providing stronger means for hypothesis testing and observation of causal processes.

There will be a continuing demand for environmental policy research, driven, at least in part, by the emergence of new environmental problems. National and international research funding and initiatives increasingly emphasize cross-cutting concepts like sustainability and resilience and call for multidisciplinary teams to address global environmental challenges. Within industry, government, and academia, there is a growing demand for people trained in environmental policy research. Future environmental policy scholars, and the universities, governments, NGOs, and businesses that hire them, need to recognize the importance of this trend. The significant environmental policy researchers of the future will not come from the ranks of students trained narrowly in a single academic discipline. Rather, environmental policy researchers must learn to operate at disciplinary interfaces, borrowing theories and methods as appropriate, while still recognizing how their research contributes to central disciplinary questions. While this is a difficult balancing act, it is one that is necessary to continue the maturation of the environmental policy field in a way that advances knowledge and practice and helps human society solve vexing environmental problems.

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Beyond Path Dependence: Explaining Healthcare Reform and Its Consequences

Simon F. Haeder

This essay reviews recent developments in the field of health policy. It identifies a variety of frameworks brought forward to explain the enactment of health reform, including pivotal politics, path dependence, and multiple streams. It further identifies various challenges for the implementation of reform with a particular focus on state–federal relations and cost containment.

KEY WORDS: Affordable Care Act, health reform, health politics, policy implementation, Medicaid, insurance exchange

Introduction

The problem of providing satisfactory medical service to all the people of the United States at a cost which they can meet is a pressing one. At the present time, many persons do not receive service which is adequate either in quantity or quality, and the costs of service are inequably [sic] distributed. The result is a tremendous amount of preventable physical pain and mental anguish, needless deaths, economic inefficiency, and social waste. (Committee on the Costs of Medical Care 1932/1972, 2)

These words are part of the Final Report of the Committee on the Costs of Medical Care first released in 1932. The Committee, made up of a diverse group of health professionals, academics, and the public, conducted an extensive analysis of the American healthcare system supported by the most advanced scientific techniques and funded by America's premier foundations. After five years of research, the Committee released its report containing a series of recommendations that sound rather familiar today. The recommendations included the utilization of provider groups, emphasis of preventive services, universal coverage and access through a combination of insurance payments and taxation, medical research to improve the provision of care, and a significant investment in provider training. With the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) it appears as if almost 80 years later, the ideas propagated by the Committee had evolved into what John Kingdon (2003, p. 1) termed "an idea whose time has come."

Health policy scholarship over the past two years has necessarily been dominated by a focus on the enactment of the ACA, its benefits and its problems, and its implications for the American healthcare system. This article follows a similar pattern. First, I provide an overview of the various explanations brought forward by scholars utilizing a variety of conventional approaches, including path dependence, gridlock and pivotal politics theory, presidential power, and multiple streams theory. I then turn toward implementation of health reform with a focus on the interrelationship between the states and the federal government. Third, I present the key feature of health reform that will determine its ultimate success: cost containment. This section also features a potential solution that has received little attention so far, the utilization of stakeholder regulation. Fourth, I address several less researched components of health reform and provide a brief assessment of the reform effort looking back and ahead. I conclude with a discussion of gaps in the literature and fruitful areas for future research.

How Health Reform Came About

The enactment of healthcare reform has been described extensively in other venues (see Altman & Shactman, 2011; Jacobs & Skocpol, 2010, 2011; McDonough, 2011; Starr, 2011; The Staff of the Washington Post, 2010, for example). For Lawrence Jacobs (2010), the enactment of the ACA serves as an instructional showcase for the contemporary American political system (see also Marmor & Oberlander, 2011). First, the ACA highlights the importance of institutions such as Congress and the presidency in explaining policy change as they provide the parameters and structure for action. Second, parties, their competition, their internal divisions, and their platforms, exert key influence. Third, past decisions constrain future actions. In other words, not only do politics make policies but policies also make politics because government actions create constituencies who benefit from the resulting status quo. Fourth, paradoxically, presidential power in the American system is vast yet simultaneously severely constrained by a variety of factors. Fifth, the fight over policies does not end with the presidential signature on a bill. Instead, it merely shifts the conflict into other venues. Over the past two years, policy scholars, economists, and political scientists have provided various accounts aiming to explain how health reform, after decades of failure, finally succeeded. The major academic attempts at explaining the enactment of health reform emphasize one or several of the following components.

Path Dependence and Health Reform

Many of the explanations of the historic development of the American healthcare system brought forward by health policy scholars emphasize the role of path dependence to one degree or another. Yet in the past, possibilities for reform have often been too narrowly confined by the limitations of path dependence. In its strictest form, path dependence so severely limits the range of possible actions that the role of agency becomes inherently negligible because simply “one damn thing

follows another” (Brown, 2010, p. 646; see also Wilsford, 2010). Even in its weaker forms it often leaves many questions unanswered and is “too shallow to be false” (Brown, 2010, p. 659). In response to these criticisms authors have called for various adjustments. Most prominently, several authors have urged the better integration of ideas (Béland, 2010; Feder-Bubis & Chinitz, 2010) as well as agency (Wilsford, 2010) and their interaction with structure into accounts of policy change in order to create better theory. With these adjustments, policy becomes significantly less deterministic and possibilities are opened for dynamism, contingency, and leadership resulting in both incremental and non-incremental changes.

The accounts of reform presented within this framework build on these adjustments and incorporate more sophisticated versions of path dependence. In addition to the accounts provided below, Jacobs (2011) is perhaps the strongest proponent of this approach when he argues that the ACA serves as a critical juncture, a turning point in the American healthcare system, because it significantly altered the status quo.¹ In his reasoning, it will create certain lock-in effects that will be hard to alter in the future. In essence, he argues, the ACA altered the trajectory of health policy by creating access to care as a social right, by widening the arena for public decision making, and by socializing the conflict. However, virtually all authors point to the historic development of the healthcare system and the structure of the U.S. Congress as creating certain boundaries to reform. Nonetheless, they acknowledge the power of agency, mostly personified in Democratic leaders, and ideas about social justice and fiscal acceptability.

Critical Junctures: The Role of Context and Agency

Perhaps in no other substantive field of policy research has Kingdon’s (2003) seminal work played a more prominent role than in health policy. Although not always mentioned by name, Kingdon’s multiple stream approach, in which political, problem, and policy streams merge with the help of policy entrepreneurs at critical moments during windows of opportunity, informs and guides many works in the field. It is not surprising that various accounts of the ACA exhibit the distinct markings of Kingdon’s framework. First, Mark Peterson (2011) proposes a contextual interpretation of health reform in his evaluation of seven episodes of reform from Franklin Roosevelt through Barack Obama. Peterson categorizes the contextual factors as policy problems, institutions, and political resources. His research shows that conditions for reform were favorable during the Obama Administration and often prohibitive during prior presidencies. Nonetheless, leadership is crucial to take advantage of promising conditions.

Jacobs and Theda Skocpol also invoke the notion that contextual factors set the stage for policy change. As they put it, “the stars align[ed] just right” (2010, p. 17). In their account of healthcare reform, the inherent problems of the status quo led to the inevitability of action. Cost, quality, and access problems created an incentive for Democrats to address health reform once more. Consequently, Democratic presidential candidates prominently featured health reform in their campaigns for the nomination. Moreover, for various reasons candidate Obama, after initial caution, felt

particularly drawn to the Democratic crusade. Once in office, President Obama made the deliberate choice, against many of his advisors' recommendations, to elevate health reform to a priority for his administration. The combination of these two major factors, the broken system and the election for change, serve as the prime explanatory factors for why health reform efforts reemerged. In explaining the successful enactment of reform, Jacob and Skocpol's account includes references to familiar contributors to the final legislative outcome described elsewhere in this article, such as the power of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the role of party leaders in Congress and the White House, media coverage, the bargaining of the administration with industry stakeholders, the role of Progressives and Tea Party activists, and the commitment and persistence of Democrats in Congress.

Jacob Hacker (2010, 2011), a political scientist actively involved in the reform effort, also emphasizes contextual factors that opened the proverbial window of opportunity. For Hacker, four crucial components allowed Democrats to succeed where many of their predecessors had failed. First, the complete and overwhelming Democratic takeover of both houses with resounding majorities and the election of a Democratic president favorable to health reform were indispensable. However, what proved even more essential is the fact the Democratic caucus in the 111th Congress was strikingly different from its predecessor in the 103rd Congress. Years of retrenchment in conservative districts, particularly in the South, had created a Democratic caucus, while still far from homogeneous, that was nonetheless much less divided on crucial issues factoring into health reform. Second, the economic context provided an opportunity for Democrats. Health care costs had risen virtually uninhibited since the 1994 failure and the number of uninsured and underinsured Americans had risen steadily as well. In addition, the recent economic downturn had exacerbated the hardship of many Americans and hence created demand for governmental action. Third, many crucial interest groups had become much more reliant on government payments over the past decade. As a result, they were much more favorably inclined at least not to impede reform efforts if costs and benefits could be adequately balanced. This tendency was further sustained by the decision of the Obama Administration to enter into a variety of agreements with key industry stakeholders.

Most fundamentally, Democrats coalesced around a single dominant solution for health reform based on the successful enactment of reforms in Massachusetts (see also Brasfield, 2011; Patel & McDonough, 2010). Many Democrats willingly moved away from their preferred choice in 1994, the single-payer system, in lieu of the so-called public option (Gottschalk, 2011). This convergence was supported by all three leading contenders in the presidential primaries and strongly advocated for by a variety of liberal interest groups and alliances, such as Health Care for America Now!. Eventually, the public option made it into the campaign platforms of the three leading Democratic presidential candidates and it was included in the bill passed by the House of Representatives (Halpin & Harbage, 2010). However, it did not survive bargaining in the Senate & the public debate (Brasfield, 2011). Strikingly, supporters of reform led by the White House were even willing to sacrifice this compromise further in order pass anything over nothing. In essence, Democrats pragmatically assessed their past failures and strategically adapted their approach. It

is nonetheless striking that reform advocates were able to overcome what has been referred to as *Altman's Law*, the assertion that "nearly every major interest group favors universal coverage and health systems reform, but, if the plan deviates from their preferred approach, they would rather retain the status quo" (Altman & Shactman, 2011, p. 44).

Despite the Democratic success in enacting health reform, Hacker (2010) further explains why the final legislation is so limited and exhibits a striking resemblance to prior Republican proposals. Part of the explanation can be found in the entrenched power of constituencies created from past policy decisions with significant interest in maintaining the status quo or at least in limiting potential losses. Moreover, a significant number of Americans are rather satisfied with their personal health coverage and do not see any benefit in substantial changes. Perhaps even more importantly, the conservative U.S. Senate with its procedural rules regarding cloture and reconciliation served as an almost insurmountable barrier, strictly limiting the potential for changes. Last, the Democrats were severely restrained by the power of economic numbers in the form of CBO scores, PAYGO, and presidential promises about deficits. Finally, Hacker addresses the heated nature of the debate. According to Hacker, the emotions of most Americans were driven by concerns about their personal situation and the impact that health reform would exert on it. In an environment marked by distrust, confusion, and loss aversion, a decidedly vocal minority at the far right was able to exert disproportionate influence over public opinion. Moreover, Republicans as a party had been steadily steered right by the dominating influence of activists and allied groups within the party.

Partisan Explanations: The Success of the Democratic Party

Various accounts of the enactment of health reforms focus on the ability of the Democratic Party to learn from its failures and mishaps during the Clinton Administration and the application of those lessons (Brown, 2011; Feder, 2011; Gusmano, 2011; Marmor & Oberlander, 2011; Oberlander, 2010; Starr, 2011). First, the priority assigned to reform by President Obama focused attention on the subject (Feder 2011). Second, the decision to have Congress take the lead in writing legislation resulted in a large number of legislators becoming personally invested in its success (Brown, 2011; Feder, 2011). As a result Congress was able to overcome gridlock and enact a significant reform proposal into law. Third, various authors emphasize the importance of political pragmatism at various stages in the effort. This pragmatism becomes evident in the cooptation of industry opposition, various strategic maneuvers to obtain acceptable CBO scores, the willingness to sacrifice the public option, and the numerous inclusions of moderating amendments to the legislation in both chambers (Brown, 2011; Feder, 2011; McDonough, 2011; Oberlander, 2010). In particular Max Baucus's attempts to create a bipartisan bill made the final result moderate enough for the vast majority of moderate and conservative Democrats to come aboard (Feder, 2011). Fourth, Democrats were able to avoid past internecine warfare between factions over the details of reform by agreeing early on to a model based on reforms in Massachusetts (Brasfield, 2011; Brown, 2011; Hacker, 2010, 2011;

McDonough, 2011; Patel & McDonough, 2010; Starr, 2011). Fifth, Democrats were able to maintain a large degree of organizational unity despite attempts by Republicans to drive wedges in between the different wings of the party. Facilitated by excellent legislative leadership, courage, and an awareness of united Republican opposition, Democrats were able to overcome their notorious infighting just enough to succeed (Brown, 2011; Oberlander, 2010). Particularly in the final stage of the legislative process, it fell to Democratic leaders to convince their copartisans that, because of their common investment, failure was unacceptable (Feder, 2011). Ultimately, moderate House Democrats became convinced that the previous vote on the bill had already exposed them politically and gave their support (Feder, 2011). Hence, it was not that the American public had been convinced of the merits of health reform and exerted pressure on its representatives, but instead successful health reform was the result of Democratic cohesion and persistence.

Congressional Lawmaking: Pivotal Politics and Gridlock

Models of Congressional gridlock provide further insights into the enactment of health reform. Craig Volden and Alan Wiseman (2011) evaluate whether gridlock over health policy issues in Congress is particularly ingrained. Moving away from narratives that have been the mainstay of our understanding of major health reform efforts, Volden and Wiseman turn their attention to a quantitative analysis of all health policy bills introduced in Congress from 1973 through 2002. Utilizing data from Scott Adler and John Wilkerson's Congressional Bills Project database, Volden and Wiseman test a large variety of hypotheses related to health policy. Their findings are consistent with expectations as they assess gridlock over health policy issues to be significantly more severe with fewer health bills enacted, surviving committees, and getting passed in both chambers. They also find that health legislation tends to be carried by more senior legislators and chairmen, members with previous health policy expertise, members of the majority party, and more ideological extreme members. Moreover, legislation has been carried overwhelmingly by such policy entrepreneurs as Henry Waxman (D, California).

Writing prior to the enactment of the ACA, David Brady and Daniel Kessler (2010b) utilize a spatial model to explain why major health reform efforts have failed to pass Congress in the past. Their explanation builds on the earlier work by Brady and Kara Buckley (1995) that analyzed the failure of the Clinton health plan. In both cases, the authors utilize a unidimensional spatial model of Congress based on a variety of assumptions to explain policy gridlock. The familiar model assigns pivotal importance to crucial legislators at the filibuster and veto pivots in relation to shifting policy from the status quo. Gridlock is further hardened by legislators' uncertainty about policy outcomes, constituent reactions, and the behavior of their colleagues. According to the model, the Clinton health plan never had a chance of passage. Too liberal in its conception, it failed to gain the support of the public and its representatives in Congress because it fell into the gridlock interval in which pivotal legislators preferred the status quo. At the time of writing, Brady and Kessler predicted gridlock because they saw the composition of Congress as inherently similar to that

in 1994. As a result they predicted that at best minimal reforms would be able to pass into law. That health reform passed and that the Obama Administration was able to overcome Congressional gridlock hailed in larger part from the utilization of the reconciliation process, which avoids the filibuster pivot and shifts power to the median voter. As Brady and Buckley (1995) demonstrated in their earlier work, the ideological difference between median and filibuster pivot is significant and avoiding the filibuster pivot is crucial. Moreover, it is likely that in order to pass the original Senate version, Democrats made the legislation significantly more conservative in order to gain the 60th vote. Finally, as Joseph White (2011) asserts, it appears plausible that pivotal legislators were confronted with a lose-lose situation, either voting against their constituents and, to a degree, their own preferences, or against any reform at all and for the unsatisfactory status quo. Ultimately, reform in this interpretation occurred because the status quo appeared less preferable than an imperfect reform to enough legislators. It is undeniable that healthcare reform significantly contributed to the resounding defeat of many Democrats in the mid-term elections (Iglehart, 2011a; Saldin, 2011).²

Presidential Power: The Role of the President

Presidents have long been assigned a crucial role in the policymaking process by political scientists and the public alike. In *The Heart of Power*, David Blumenthal and James Morone (2010; also see Morone, 2010) follow this tradition and develop a framework that utilized “health as a lens on the oval office.” In this framework, health policy changes are the result of ideas, personal biography, institutional arrangements, and existing policies. Analyzing presidential health policy from Franklin Roosevelt through George W. Bush, Blumenthal and Morone distill eight lessons for successful presidents, including the ability to manage Congress, to go public, to learn how to lose, to have passion, to be speedy, to have a plan, to focus on the big picture, and to manage the economists. In their new preface written after the enactment of the ACA, they apply this framework to the Obama presidency and find their recommendations confirmed.³ As a result, they support the conception that the presidency is crucial in any effort of reform. However, they paint the path to reform as necessarily rocky and hazardous. This interpretation is supported by Stephen Wayne (2011), who asserts the importance of presidential character for decision making. Particularly, he emphasizes the role of President Obama and credits his personal beliefs and his refusal to give up as one of the main determinants of reform.

Implementation of the ACA

States did not sit idle as the reform debate swept over America. According to John Dinan (2011), states were particularly concerned about the pivotal role of Medicaid in expanding coverage under any reform proposal because of the potential impact on state budgets. As a result, all states shared universal concerns that they expressed particularly through intergovernmental organizations such as the National Governors Association. They also skillfully utilized political pressure

through the mobilization of public opinion. The threat of lawsuits and noncompliance served as a useful instrument to gain publicity and steer the debate. Moreover, states lobbied their respective Congressional delegations in order to obtain categorical and particularistic benefits. States achieved significant success in all these efforts, shifting the major burden of Medicaid expansion on the shoulders of the federal government and gaining significant leeway in implementing reform.

Yet the role of states will become even more crucial in the years following the enactment of the ACA. Implementation is crucial for every policy enacted but it is particularly important for the ACA because its underlying design and structure heavily rely on the cooperation of the states over long periods of time (see Greer, 2011; Kersh, 2011; E. Miller, 2011; T. Miller, 2010; Nichols, 2010; Skocpol, 2010; Weil & Scheppach, 2010). Perhaps most substantially, state governments are tasked with the expansion and improvement of their Medicaid programs, the expansion of high-risk insurance pools, the design and operation of health insurance exchanges, and the adjustment of their regulatory frameworks. In all cases, the federal government and the states will have to cooperate closely from the very beginning. A particular challenge for states, even those eager to support health reform, will be the extension of Medicaid, which is expected to cover about half of all newly insured Americans although projections vary significantly (Ku, 2010; Sommers, Swartz, & Epstein, 2011). The massive inflow of newly insured individuals will also likely increase the pressure for states to accelerate their efforts to shift beneficiaries into managed care leading to an expected \$40–60 billion in managed care contracts by 2014 (Iglehart, 2011b). Moreover, Pizer, Frakt, and Iezzoni (2011) expect significant crowd-out effects in the second decade.

Concerns about Medicaid have been extensively documented by Mark Pauly and Thomas Grannemann (Grannemann & Pauly, 2009; Pauly & Grannemann, 2010) and Laura Olson (2010). Pauly and Grannemann provide two accounts written before the ACA focusing on the crucial role of Medicaid in all reform efforts. Driven by a public choice approach they focus on equity, efficiency, and democracy and aim to provide a set of principles for reforms including accountability, inter-state equity, and value-based cost containment. Their approach revolves around keeping promises to the three major stakeholders in Medicaid—providers, voter-taxpayers, and beneficiaries. However, it appears as if few of their recommendations were incorporated into the ACA. Olson (2010) outlines the historic development of Medicaid from its inception to the present. She describes a program riddled with cost overruns, cost shifting, fragmentation, and inequalities that only partially fulfills its promise of adequate access to quality medical care. Instead, she finds a system dominated by a medical-industrial complex of third-party providers. In particular, changes over the last decade under the guise of flexibility and choice have severely impeded access for many Americans and bode ill for the future. These concerns are largely shared by Frank Thompson (2011) who likens the developments to termite damage: invisible at the surface yet severely degrading the foundation.

The requirements and expectations of the ACA will put a significant administrative burden on states already under fiscal stress from the recent recession. While the federal government will shoulder almost all of the coverage costs for the expan-

sion population, grave concerns remain about the ability and willingness of states to muster the capacity to adjust adequately their Medicaid programs (Ku, 2010; Thompson, 2011). Democrats were forced into a convoluted structural arrangement for coverage expansion by cost constraints in the form of CBO scores that led to the continued reliance on employer coverage and the extensive utilization of Medicaid with its low reimbursement rates (Miller, 2010).

Reliance on these low reimbursement rates has reignited an intense debate about the ability of providers, hospitals in particular, to engage further in cost shifting. Many argue that the low government reimbursement rates have created significant resentment toward government payers in all states because they encourage providers to shift costs to private insurers, in effect serving as a hidden tax on the insured, although empirical evidence is rarely presented (Altman & Shactman, 2011; Hadley, Holahan, Coughlin, & Miller, 2008; McDonough, 2011; Olson, 2010). At the same time, they provide a scapegoat that allows providers to increase steadily their private reimbursement rates by pointing to low public rates as a justification (Kilbreth, 2010). However, a thorough review of the evidence from 2006 to 2011 by Austin Frakt (2011) comes to the conclusion that cost shifting is not pervasive or large and instead varies significantly depending on a variety of factors, including most prominently the local market structure. Others (see Hackbarth, 2009; Robinson, 2011; Wu, 2010) have also pointed toward the importance of market structure and market power in the response of hospitals to fiscal pressures. These findings conceptually match those of Melnick, Shen, and Wu (2011) with concentrated hospital markets driving up costs and concentrated health plan markets reducing them. Pauly and Grannemann (2010) also reject what they refer to as the hydraulic model of cost shifting and see hospitals maximizing their profits in each market segment by adjusting the quality of care.

The crucial role of states in the implementation of health programs has been explored by several scholars in the context of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Robert McGrath (2009) finds in his case studies of Georgia, Massachusetts, and Ohio that state capacity and programmatic experience exert crucial influence on the implementation and administration of this joint state and federal program. Colleen Grogan and Elizabeth Rigby (2009) evaluate the impact of state decisions about program structure and eligibility levels during the implementation of SCHIP on the debate during reauthorization of the program. Their findings highlight the importance of policy feedback in state-federal programs as Democrats and Republicans sought to rein in states with whose decisions they disagreed while supporting those whose approaches they favored. Surprisingly, the form of the program, a block grant, garnered little attention during reauthorization. In a similar vein, Kevin Esterling (2009) in his analysis of Congressional hearings in the case of Medicaid prescription drug costs and intergovernmental transfers finds that Congress is only receptive to state expertise when federal and state interests are aligned.

Some observers are particularly concerned about the ability of states to implement portions of the ACA adequately because of capacity and financial issues as well as the fact that many state executives have only recently been elected (Weil &

Scheppach, 2010). Ironically, many of the low capacity states are solidly Republican and hence it might be hard to disentangle what degree of inadequate implementation hails from noncooperation (Greer, 2011). Moreover, states, such as Idaho and Oklahoma, have eagerly publicized their opposition to any implementation efforts and initiated a heated debate over nullification (Nichols, 2010). However, as Grogan (2011) points out, despite much front-stage fighting, many states are largely cooperating privately and in less visible forms. It will be particularly crucial to pay attention to implementation decisions by the executive branches in the states as Thompson and Burke (2009) have shown in their analysis of the Section 1915(c) Medicaid State Waiver Program. Their research emphasizes the replacement of *picket fence federalism* which “assigned considerable importance to federal and state bureaucracies in shaping intergovernmental grant programs,” often frustrating executives due to balkanization and lack of coordination (Thompson & Burke, 2009, 38). It is replaced by *executive federalism* in which the actions by executives have become more potent and often far outweigh state legislatures and bureaucrats.

There are also concerns that the complex regulatory environment of the insurance sector, made even more complex by the ACA, holds great potential for disruption (Jacobson, Napiewocki, & Voight, 2011). States will have particularly wide discretion in the implementation of their health insurance exchanges. In many respects, these exchanges are the most crucial components of the ACA. Exchanges are intended to serve as vehicles for individuals and small businesses to access affordable coverage and make sound financial decisions. States are tasked with setting up these exchanges, including their organization and governance structures, risk selection measures, benefit options, and insurance premiums (Ku, 2010).

It should be emphasized that states are not the only crucial partners of the federal government in implementing health reform. The ACA also assigns significant responsibilities to private insurers in the implementation process (Brennan & Studdert, 2010). While many of the most egregious insurance practices of the past have been limited or eliminated, insurers still may have the potential to achieve market segmentation with continuing risks of adverse selection. Crucial to the process will also be the debate about the regulation of medical loss ratios (Brennan & Studdert, 2010; Kersh, 2011). Perhaps most importantly, insurers will significantly influence the regulatory framework guiding implementation in the states (Brennan & Studdert, 2010).

Lastly, the federalist approach to healthcare can also have striking unintended consequences. Sparer, France, and Clinton (2011) have argued that the fragmented nature of the U.S. healthcare system has created incremental growth in government involvement that they refer to as *catalytic federalism*. Joint programs and efforts create incentives for multiple levels of government to become involved in policy decisions. Fragmentation thus increases the number of “opportunity points” for policy involvement as seen in the increasing participation in insurance regulation through the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and now the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). The overall result is greater rather than lesser government involvement in the healthcare system.

Cost Containment: The Achilles Heel of the ACA

Cost containment measures have been the focus of much scrutiny since the enactment of the ACA. These measures include, among others, the so-called Cadillac tax on high-cost insurance plans, delivery system reforms, including improved information and incentive structures, particularly through demonstration projects, and health insurance exchanges (see Gusmano, 2011; Oberlander, 2011; Pauly, 2011). However, any efforts at containing costs will inevitably cut into the profits of powerful interest groups and are bound to create backlash (Luft, 2011). Moreover, the power of special interests to impede and interfere with the utilization of effectiveness research has been documented extensively. Most recently, Daniel Fox (2010) describes the controversies surrounding the adoption of Preferred Drug Lists (PDLs) in state Medicaid and CHIP programs. It is also disheartening that the competitive pricing component introduced to Medicare Part C in the original version was struck out in reconciliation as competitive pricing has worked effectively in Part D (Coulam, Feldman, & Dowd, 2011).

Overall, observers are far from convinced that the ACA contains sufficient cost control measures to bend the cost curve (Altman and Shactman, 2011; Gusmano, 2011; Oberlander, 2011; Pauly, 2011). Experts point to the lack of hard caps envisioned under the ill-fated reform effort of the Clinton Administration or other containment efforts that have proven to work effectively abroad (Marmor & Oberlander, 2011; Oberlander, 2011). Many observers have criticized the fixation of the American political system on seeking magic bullets in the form of technical and efficiency gains to bend the cost curve (Oberlander, 2011). Michael Gusmano and Sara Allin (2011) refer to this approach as the “painless prescription” in comparison to the “painful prescription” approach by the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. Oberlander (2011) is particularly critical of the major mechanisms included in the reform bill, likening them to “throwing darts” hoping for a cumulative miracle. Nonetheless, greater government financial exposure in the future may trigger more interest in cost containment. Ultimately, the appropriate percentage of gross domestic product dedicated to healthcare in this country is not an empirical but a normative and political question (Gusmano, 2011).

Medical care in the United States is excessively expensive and, as described above, the ACA does little to control spending but instead enlarges the existing system by adding 0.1 percent to the medical expenditures growth rate annually (Keehan et al., 2011). The biggest cost drivers are technology and providers. For example, proportionally, there are four times as many CT scanners and three times as many MRI machines in the United States than there are in the United Kingdom (Gusmano & Allin, 2011, p. 96). Moreover, there are six times as many intensive care beds (Gusmano & Allin, 2011, pp. 95–96). It is far from surprising that this has implications for the provision of care, although not necessarily always as expected. For example, rates of revascularization are between two and six times higher in the United States while access to primary care is significantly better in the UK (Gusmano & Allin, 2011). Ultimately, it is not the aging of the population that serves as a cost driver but rather the adoption of new medical technology particularly valued in the

American medical community (Gusmano & Allin, 2011). At the same time cost containment hinges particularly on the ability to address the issue of provider payments because, as Bruce Vladeck and Thomas Rice (2009) have pointed out, the power of medical providers has led to excessive costs. This disproportionate growth in provider payments in recent decades has resulted in U.S. physicians earning significantly more than their OECD counterparts (Laugesen & Glied, 2011). Compared to the impact of provider costs, any technical fix such as the utilization of health information technology or effectiveness research necessarily pales. As a result, Vladeck and Rice urge government buyers to utilize their monopsonistic and oligopsonistic power to rein in provider reimbursements. However, their advice was largely ignored in the healthcare debate.

The Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) serves as a remarkable example of the failure of the U.S. healthcare system to contain costs that was perpetuated by the ACA. Originally, Congress had envisioned the SGR as a ceiling that would induce providers to utilize effectiveness research to contain costs. Yet over the past decade, the SGR has done little to curb healthcare costs as Congress has reversed proposed cuts every year since 2003 in a process that Miriam Laugesen (2009) likened to singing of the Sirens. Instead, provider reimbursements have shown excessive growth rates since the inception of Medicare in 1965, often exceeding 10 percent annually. However, the incentives for individual providers induce the utilization of creative techniques to maximize payments through volume and intensity of care adjustments. Unfortunately, this second form of "moral hazard" is little mentioned in the healthcare literature (see Stone, 2011). In the processes of enacting the ACA, the potential opposition by the American Medical Association was neutralized by adjusting the Medicare physician payments in a separate non-connected bill, which removed them from the official CBO analysis (Laugesen, 2011). In light of this history it is questionable if the advisory board created by the ACA aiming for a similar goal as the SGR will be able to rein in spending (Gitterman & Scott, 2011).

David Weimer (2010a, 2010b) identifies a potential solution to a variety of problems inherent in any cost containment effort. In his analysis of the organ procurement and transplantation system in the United States, Weimer describes the ability of stakeholder rulemaking to bring together evidence-based medicine, competitive values, and divergent interest in the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN).⁴ Stakeholder rulemaking is conducted by key stakeholders based on a charter and set rules and exhibits a variety of desirable features when compared to agency or even negotiated rulemaking. First, private rulemaking facilitates the utilization of expertise in the rulemaking process by bringing all relevant parties to the negotiating table. Brought together by the high stakes involved for all constituents, stakeholders meet frequently and continuously and hence create mutual trust and respect that enhances cooperation and compromise. Moreover, its private character allows for more flexibility. Expert participation further enhances rulemaking through the application of tacit knowledge. Second, stakeholder rulemaking accommodates competing interests by providing them with the proverbial seat at the table and the ability to influence policy outcomes. A basic charter and set of decision rules create clarity and encourage continuous and incremental rulemaking while simul-

taneously allowing for the occasional drastic change if necessitated by circumstances. Third, stakeholder rulemaking facilitates the promotion of a variety of social values such as equity and efficiency simultaneously by finding a more appropriate balance. Professionals with the broader, less individualistic perception of beneficial policy drive the entire process. At the same time, rulemakers are sufficiently isolated from political influence while allowing for transparency through openness and frequent monitoring. Stakeholder rulemaking is also politically attractive because it allows politicians to avoid blame and transform political decisions into technical ones. According to Weimer, stakeholder rulemaking, if implemented correctly, proves far superior to traditional approaches in cases with high stakes, limited resources, and the potential for politically driven results. Weimer (2010a, 2010b), writing before the enactment of the ACA, proposes its application to a Medicare surgery budget, but the American healthcare system under the ACA offers a wide variety of applicable venues.

Looking Backward and Ahead

Despite the public debate's focus on healthcare, the ACA contains significant improvements for mental health (Mechanic, 2011), public health (Pollack, 2011), and long-term care (Frankford, 2011) which have long been neglected in American politics. However, particularly the issue of long-term care in the United States still requires further attention despite the initial inclusion of the CLASS Act. With Secretary Sebelius halting implementation of the CLASS Act and with Republican efforts to repeal it in Congress the system will remain fragmented between Medicare (short-term care), Medicaid (long-term care), and private insurance. It is hence likely that the unsystematic approach combined with uncertainty will exacerbate the current haphazard system with questionable results for quality, equity, and efficiency (Ogden & Adams, 2009).

Certainly, reform efforts were driven overwhelmingly by economic considerations that came to be exemplified by CBO scores. Theodore Marmor (2011) particularly laments the lack of an underlying philosophical debate about justice and fairness, which was the foundation for system reforms in other countries yet was virtually absent from the American debate. As Jill Quadagno (2011) points out, the end result was shaped more by interest group preferences than a focus on reducing the number of uninsured although undeniably the number of Americans without insurance declines significantly. As a result, most potent interest groups gained significant concessions. Nonetheless, health reform, after initially extending state high-risk insurance pools, will significantly limit, or to some extent eliminate, the ability of insurers to take advantage of risk pool segmentation (Chollet, 2010). This arguably moves health insurance in America away from the principle of actuarial fairness to the principle of solidarity touted by Deborah Stone, although full social insurance remains elusive (Stone, 2009).

It is not surprising that Medicare played a crucial role in the reform of healthcare in America. However, its role was strikingly different from that envisioned by reform proponents who had long hoped for coverage expansion through Medicare or even

a full-fledged single-payer system based on Medicare. Instead Medicare served as the Congressional piggy bank to ensure that reform proposals gained the seal of approval from the CBO (Gitterman & Scott, 2011). Particularly affected was Medicare Part C, the private managed care component of Medicare, which had significantly expanded since the last round of reforms under the Bush Administration in 2003 (McGuire, Newhouse, & Sinaiko, 2011). However, Medicare Part C has consistently shown its inability to balance the competing goals of increasing choice while curbing costs (McGuire et al., 2011). Nonetheless, about one fourth of all seniors rely on Medicare Advantage for their coverage (Gitterman & Scott, 2011), which raised the potential for political conflict and partisan politics that Republicans were more than willing to exploit. Their endeavors were supported by a significant information gap for senior citizens that created an environment of fear and confusion (Gitterman & Scott, 2011).

Public opinion played a crucial role in the debate about health reform. Mollyann Brodie and her colleagues (2010) tracked the changes in public opinion during the health reform debate and found that it closely mirrored those of the past: a vast majority of the public supported many of the provisions of reform with specific opposition to certain provisions. Perceptions of the public were shaped by partisan polarization, distrust of government, and most importantly, the implications for the individual. Not surprisingly, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky's (1984) proposition that losses far outweigh equivalent gains was yet again confirmed in the debate surrounding health reform as individuals showed a particular unwillingness for personal sacrifices (Brodie et al., 2010). This finding is further supported by Brady and Kessler (2010a) who utilize contingent valuation based on an Internet survey to account for the interactive effects among various demographic factors in the support for health reform in the forms of Medicaid expansion or subsidies for private coverage. Their findings point to the dominant factor of income, which overshadows all other explanatory factors even at relatively low economic levels. Moreover, and equally unsurprising, Brady and Kessler find that older individuals are distinctively biased against major changes to the status quo.

It is also remarkable how quietly the goal shifted from universal to near-universal coverage during the debate about enactment. As a result, the ACA leaves a significant number of individuals without coverage and viable solutions will have to be developed in the future (Hall, 2011). By design undocumented immigrants are excluded from directly benefiting and there is concern that their health situation could actually have been impaired by the ACA (Zuckerman, Waidmann, & Lawton, 2011). Yet despite its title, there also remain considerable questions whether the ACA is really making care affordable for everyone else, particularly those individuals above the Medicaid and CHIP thresholds between 200 and 300 percent FPL (Gruber & Perry, 2011). The impact of medical debt has been well documented (Himmelstein, Thorne, Warren, & Woolhandler, 2009; Robertson, Egelhof, & Hoke, 2008, 2009); yet there was remarkably little debate about the concept of affordability in official deliberations during the reform efforts. However, recently a lively debate about the essential meaning of affordability has presented a variety of diverse methodologies including expert opinions (Muennig, Sampat, Tilipman, Brown, & Glied, 2011),

budget- and expenditure-based approaches (Gruber & Perry, 2011; Gruber & Seif, 2009), insurance pick-up (Gruber & Seif, 2009), comparisons between state CHIP programs (Gresenz, Laugesen, Yesus, & Escare, 2011), fair equality of opportunity (Saloner & Daniels, 2011), reasonable trade-offs (see Saenz, 2010), and public deliberation (Cook, 2011). It appears that the only consensus is that there is no consensus. The question arises whether the ACA was the best possible outcome. McGlynn, Cordova, Wasserman, and Girosi (2010) utilize the RAND COMPARE Microsimulation Model to evaluate the ACA against a variety of reforms and come to the conclusion that most of the other proposal that would have provided more universal coverage were simply unacceptable politically.

Overall, the changes initiated by the ACA are far from the cataclysmic proportions alleged by its opposition. Instead, it largely builds on the existing American healthcare system, only slightly increasing the government's role while increasing the overall size of the system (Grogan, 2011) and using delegation extensively (Morgan & Campbell, 2011). It is a system built on the historic combination of joint public and private funding and provision that relegates the assertions of a government takeover into the realm of myth (Grogan, 2011). Timothy Jost (2011) instead turns his attention to those aspects of the law that have largely escaped public and political scrutiny including the delegation of vast Congressional powers to the executive, the severe limitations on judicial review, and the questionable impact on the separation of powers.

The extensive use of delegation also means that the battle for reform will continue long after the ACA was signed into law by President Obama. Even under ideal circumstances, it will take years for the ACA to be fully implemented. This cooperative, long-term approach creates a number of vulnerabilities for the ACA. The federalist approach to implementation creates multiple venues for special interests gradually to chip away at the various provisions of the ACA. It has been well established that not all societal interests are granted equal access to the policymaking process (Schattschneider, 1975). However, the disparity may be particularly striking in the healthcare sector as David Lowery and his colleagues (2009) have shown in their analysis of Health PACs and lobbying in the states. They report that two thirds of all health-related PACs are created by direct care providers and 15 percent are attached to drug and medical device manufacturers while a meager 1 percent belongs to advocacy groups. Moreover, they find that lobbying and PAC contributions are inherently interrelated. Over time, this imbalance and others may accumulate to significant changes to the policy envisioned by Congress, particularly with regard to the redistributive components of reform (Skocpol, 2010). As the case of Louisiana's public hospital system after Hurricane Katrina shows, entrenched interests will continue to play a significant role in shaping the implementation of reform and will utilize their resources to their advantage (Clark, 2010). Ultimately, each venue provides the potential for political opposition to stir up public debate and further damage already low public approval ratings of the reform effort (Kersh, 2011).

There is reason for cautious optimism about the ability and willingness of states to cooperate with both the federal government and other states to implement health reform successfully. The ACA also creates national standards, a floor for

what is acceptable, and allows willing states to expand significantly on this foundation (Greer, 2011). The significant federal financial support will facilitate the ability of states to focus on implementation, administration, and experimentation (Greer, 2011). Congress also included various fallback options in the legislation that assign powers to the federal government in case states fail to follow through adequately in tasks such as creating health insurance exchanges and high-risk insurance pools. As the experience with high-risk insurance pools has shown, this was a prudent decision (Nichols, 2010). Moreover, a significant amount of regulatory authority has been assigned to the Secretary of Health and Human Services accompanied by \$1 billion in appropriations for implementation activities (McDonough, 2011). By one count the phrase “the secretary shall” occurs 1,563 times in the ACA (Morone, 2011). Especially crucial for the ACA will be the early trajectory of implementation efforts (Martin & Keenan, 2011). It is hence not surprising that the federal government has issued a significant number of rules ahead of schedule (Kersh, 2011).

While Skocpol’s (2010) assertion that Democrats deliberately frontloaded many of the most positive aspects of health reform in order to create a lock-in effect with supportive constituencies may be correct, they undeniably pale in comparison to the major coverage expansions in 2014 through Medicaid and the exchanges. Moreover, implementation may be particularly jeopardized by the failure to provide adequate funding for a wide variety of provisions of the ACA and appropriations might become entangled in partisan fights in Congress (Iglehart, 2010; Kersh, 2011; McDonough, 2011). As many scholars rightfully point out, the ACA remains vulnerable and the prospects for many of the provisions if not the entire law hence remain uncertain (see Jacobs & Skocpol, 2011; McDonough, 2011; Starr, 2011).

Gaps and Future Research

Much has been written about health reform before, during, and after the Affordable Care Act, yet a few issues certainly deserve further research. Particularly, empirical evidence of the role of health reform in the 2010 elections would increase our understanding of electoral accountability. Moreover, the impact of the ACA on the 2012 presidential and Congressional elections should provide a fruitful opportunity for study. Obviously, the influence of the Tea Party movement on the debate about health reform also calls for more research. We should also evaluate what this latest chapter in the long history of health reform efforts does to further our understanding of theories of and in the policy process. Moreover the implementation in the states, resulting from an exogenous shock, will provide excellent opportunities not only for students of health policy but state politics in general. This should include a focus on the potential difference between action and rhetoric. Finally, should the ACA be repealed by either courts or Congress, or at least significant portions of it, this would create an interesting juncture in the future of American health policy much surpassing the infamous Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act of 1988. Of particular interest would be what would happen to the implementation efforts already initiated by the

states and the national government, let alone the future of health reform and the American health care system in general.

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Notes

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- ¹ More recent writings of Jacobs (2011) are perhaps less enthusiastic and show more concerns for potential revisions.
- ² The Kaiser Health Tracking Poll by the The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation provides more detailed insights. It is available at <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/trackingpoll.cfm>.
- ³ Various scholars also provide their own lists including Altman and Shactman (2011) and McDonough (2011).
- ⁴ Weimer and his colleagues also provide an innovative and thought-provoking solution to the shortage of kidney transplants through commodification (Rosen, Vining, & Weimer, 2011).

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