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Swing Issues and Policy Regimes: Federal Education Policy and the Politics of Policy Change

Political scientists have long debated the nature of the American political system, particularly the degree to which the federal government is amenable to major policy initiation and reform. There are two basic schools of thought on this question. One school—which I will call the stasis school—argues that the system is highly resistant to major change. The other school of policymaking—which I will call the dynamic school—emphasizes the openness and responsiveness of America's political system and the relative ease of generating reform at the national level. While the stasis and dynamic schools are helpful in explaining systemic tendencies and the influence of particular forces on the policy process, they are less useful in illuminating the evolution of governmental policymaking in a single issue area over time.

Dynamic approaches correctly identify the *potential* for policy change in the American political system, but history validates the stasis school's claim that extensive reform within a particular issue area is, in reality, quite infrequent. It does nonetheless take place, and this article will draw from both schools in articulating a policy regimes framework that specifies the mechanisms by which major policy change occurs *within a specific policy arena.* By "major change" I do not mean the perpetual fine-tuning and incremental ebb and flow of policymaking but the more fundamental reshaping of policy ends and means, such as one finds in the 2002 No Child Left Behind education law. NCLB replaced a narrow federal role that had historically been focused on providing resources and procedural protections for disadvantaged students with a greatly expanded national

THE JOURNAL OF POLICY HISTORY, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2006.
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effort to improve the performance of all students through mandates on teacher quality, academic standards, testing, and accountability.

A policy regime is the set of ideas, interests, and institutions that structures governmental activity in a particular issue area (such as health care, transportation, etc.) and that tends to be quite durable over time. A policy regimes framework draws on the insights of the stasis school to understand the factors that allow policies to withstand pressures for major change for many years, but it relies more heavily on the dynamic school to comprehend how inertial forces are eventually overcome and a new regime constructed. It offers an alternative to the "punctuated equilibrium" model developed by Baumgartner and Jones in which major policy change is seen as resulting from short bursts of rapid reform after a long period of hegemony by a policy monopoly. The policy regimes framework draws from the American political development literature's study of *political* regimes to argue that individual policy regimes are less stable—and change, when it occurs, less rapid—than the "policy monopoly" model would suggest.

The Stasis School and the Politics of the Status Quo

Political scientists have frequently observed that the American political system contains numerous inertial forces that reinforce the status quo and limit major policy change. The stasis school does not say that major change *never* occurs, but it emphasizes the forces that make policymaking configurations and policies highly durable and stable over time. It has several variants. One places the emphasis on American political culture and strong public support for free enterprise, limited government, and local control which make efforts to create national programs and regulations difficult (Hartz 1985; Lipset 1997). Another stresses the character of the American constitutional system and, in particular, the fragmentation of its policymaking institutions. Federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances create a system of multiple veto points that opponents can use to protect existing policy arrangements and thwart reform proposals (Mettler 1998; Quadango 1994). Other variants of the stasis school add to the systemic explanation something more general about the character of policymaking itself. Incremental and bureaucratic models, for example, emphasize the limitations on decision-making and implementation processes that incline complex systems toward only minor change (Downs 1967; Wilson 1989; Moe 1989).

A large and powerful class of interest-group actors can use these veto points and their influence over the bureaucracy to block initiatives that threaten their interests.[1] Together with politicians and bureaucrats, these groups establish "iron triangles" that reinforce the status quo and make major policy creation or change extremely difficult. The general apathy and inattention of the general public to politics, meanwhile, largely permits a "power elite" to control government unimpeded by citizen vigilance (Mills 1956; Schattschneider 1975; Lowi 1979). Citizens generally have low levels of political information and interest, and politicians can mask their unresponsiveness through procedural mechanisms or shift public attention to other issues. As a result, policymakers are more likely to be responsive to mobilized interest groups or party activists than to the public at large (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000).

In this environment, elites work to create "policy monopolies" around issues—political alliances, institutional configurations, and conceptual understandings that structure the participation and policymaking in that area for many years (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Policies generate patterns of political mobilization, citizens' ways of thinking about the issue, and institutional structures that become "sticky" and "locked in" and very difficult to change. Initial policymaking in a particular area often generates "positive feedback" and "increasing returns" and becomes "self-reinforcing" over time. These subsystems gain public acceptance of (or at least deference to) a favorable conception of their issue that they then use to dominate their particular policy area by limiting access and proposals for radical change. These causal stories or buttressing policy ideas are generally connected to core political values (such as progress, fairness, economic growth, etc.) that are sold to the public through the use of image and rhetoric (Stone 1988).

The generally inattentive nature of the American public means that public mobilization on behalf of policy reform is rare and infrequent. The overwhelming number of issues facing Congress and the public at any one time also ensures that Congress will often delegate much discretion to policy subsystems and that few issues stay on the public agenda for long (Kingdon 1984). It is in this vacuum of public, media, and congressional attention that policy monopolies thrive (Schattschneider 1975: 34–35). Beneficiaries of the policy defend the status quo against reforms that threaten their interests and it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to change the direction of the program or to eliminate it. As a result, government policies and programs tend to become path dependent (Pierson 1993; North 1994; Hacker 2002). Paul Pierson argues that "most policies

are remarkably durable" and that "political arrangements are unusually hard to change." "Key features of political life, both public policies and (especially) formal institutions are change-resistant . . . formal barriers to reform are thus often extremely high . . . [as the] institutional stickiness characteristic of political systems reinforces the already considerable obstacles to movement off of an established path" (Pierson 2003: 54–55).

For these reasons, major change in federal programs is difficult to bring about and tends to come only slowly and incrementally (Lindblom 1960; Wildavsky 1984; Hayes 2001). In her study of social security policymaking, for example, Martha Derthick demonstrates how the program was long viewed as politically untouchable and how established interest groups worked with policymakers and administrative officials to protect and gradually expand it. "The nature of policymaking did little to correct, but instead reinforced, a complacent, poorly informed acceptance of the program—participation was so narrowly confined; expert, proprietary dominance was so complete; debate was so limited . . . and the forward steps seemed so small . . . conflict was muted and narrowly contained. Other courses of action than orthodox, incremental measures of expansion received little attention" (Derthick 1979: 413). In the interest-group, path dependency, and incrementalist approaches, policymaking becomes a closed and static process characterized by iron triangles, subgovernments, issue networks, or policy monopolies, with policies modified only incrementally, if at all. This view of the American policymaking system helps to explain why major policy change is rare, but it is less useful in understanding those cases, such as federal education policy, in which the ends and means of government policies are fundamentally altered.

The Dynamic School and the Politics of Policy Change

How is major policy change possible in a system with such strong and varied inertial forces? Even political scientists who emphasize the closed or unresponsive nature of the American policymaking process recognize that policies sometimes change. Pierson, for example, writes about path dependence theory that "asserting that the social landscape can be permanently frozen hardily is credible . . . and that is not the claim. Change continues but it is bounded change—until something erodes or swamps the mechanisms of reproduction that generate continuity" (Pierson 2003: 66–67). This formulation, however, simply begs the question, What factors lead the mechanisms of reproduction to be "swamped"?

The dynamic school emphasizes that the keys to understanding policy change in the American political system are electoral competition and public pressure. Politicians in a republic with frequent elections have strong incentives to be mindful of the "electoral connection" by responding to changing public policy demands.[2] The result, as Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson concluded in their study of a wide range of domestic policies, is that politicians behave "like antelopes in an open field. . . . When politicians perceive public opinion change, they adapt their behavior to please their constituency" (Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995: 545, 559). While the general political apathy of the American public often permits policy monopolies to exist unimpeded for long periods of time, an apathetic public is always a latent political force. As E. E. Schattschneider has noted, "many conflicts are narrowly confined by a variety of devices," but "there is usually nothing to keep the audience from getting into the game."[3] The mobilization of public pressure behind policy change effectively expands the "scope of conflict" and can have a major impact on policy outcomes (Downs 1972: 28–50).

Party competition provides a natural and recurring incentive for the expansion of conflict—for drawing public attention to policy issues. Anthony Downs has argued that strategically minded party leaders will try to raise new issues that cross party lines or "trespass" on the issues of the other party in order to expand their electoral coalition (Downs 1957; Riker 1986). Policy entrepreneurs inside and outside government also spur policy change by "going public"—bringing problems to the attention of the media and citizens to generate political support for new ways of thinking about old issues (Mintrom 2000). Exogenous shocks to the political system can also lead to policy change by drawing public and elite attention to the failure of existing programs or their inappropriateness to new conditions.[4] Disasters, wars, economic crises, scandals, and even the release of new research can challenge the status quo and create conditions favorable to policy change (Kingdon 1984). The fragmentation of the American political system, meanwhile, offers many opportunities for reformers to redefine issues or seek change through an alternate institutional venue. Proposals for policy change that are rejected in one institutional setting, for example, can be reintroduced in another.

Electoral competition ensures that existing policy approaches will be frequently challenged and that political leaders will seek public support for the creation of new policies or the reform of existing ones. Public pressure for reform can be a powerful agent for policy change when it reaches a "critical mass" that can overcome the stasis orientation of the policymaking system (Neuman 1990: 174). Some scholars have even argued that

secular changes in the American political system over the past twenty years have reduced the power of inertial forces in policymaking and made major policy change in the contemporary era easier to accomplish (Landy and Levin 1995). The stasis school's emphasis on the power of interest groups and other inertial forces in the American system misses the important reality that politicians and policy entrepreneurs often have incentives to expand the scope of conflict and to challenge existing policies. Clearly, however, there are many obstacles to policy reform and the outcome of any individual reform effort will depend on the status of the dominant policy approach, the political strength of the status quo coalition, and the relationship of the policy issue to broader partisan conflict.

A Policy Regimes Framework

Political scientists have generally focused on periods of relative stability or periods of rapid change in policy areas but have made little effort to explain the transition from one to the other. Existing studies of policy change also tend to focus either on aggregate change across all issue areas or on the influence of particular institutions, actors, or events in driving change. In order to understand the origins of policy change in a particular issue area, however, it is necessary to develop a framework that weaves together the complex interplay among ideas, interests, and institutions over time and that analyzes the impact of public opinion and electoral pressures on political strategy and partisan competition.[5] What is needed is a more integrative approach to studying policymaking—one that synthesizes the insights of both the stasis and dynamic approaches and that incorporates the institutional insights of political science with the ideational and group focus of sociologists and the longer temporal reach of historians.

Such a framework must be based on the recognition that the national policymaking process exhibits very different characteristics across time and space. At certain moments and on certain types of issues, politicians are generally quite responsive to reform pressures, while at other times and on other issues the forces of the status quo are likely to defeat the forces of change. This is not to say that a general theory of policy change is unobtainable, but rather that it must carefully specify how the American political system can produce both long periods of policy stability and periods of extensive policy change. Such an approach must also dispense with attempts to quantify the influence of single causal variables on policymaking. Policy change is a complex process involving numerous actors, venues, and forces and the crucial

question is not which element is the most important but rather how they interact to produce policy change. Similarly, the macro-level debate over whether the anti- or pro-change view of policymaking is more accurate is less useful than specifying the conditions under which policies are amenable to change and when they are not.

The recent work of Baumgartner and Jones on agenda-setting offers the most promising effort to date in explaining policy change. (Baumgartner and Jones 1993 and 2002) They argue that while no general equilibrium is possible in the policymaking process, it is best described as a system of punctuated equilibria featuring long periods of policy stability and short periods of rapid and dramatic change. Baumgartner and Jones's contribution to our understanding of the dynamics of policy change has been enormous, but their work focuses largely on agenda setting and they devote less attention to exploring what happens after policy monopolies are destroyed and issues opened up for reconsideration. As they note in their more recent work, "The punctuated equilibrium perspective directs our attention to how governmental institutions and policy ideas interact—sometimes yielding stability, sometimes yielding punctuations. But the particular network of causation has not been fully analyzed. More than anything else, we need case studies of particular policy arenas cast within a framework that is sensitive to institutional constraints and incentives and the nature of ideas and arguments put forward by the participants" (Baumgartner and Jones 2002: 297). In addition, Baumgartner and Jones's work emphasizes that the American policymaking system tends toward equilibrium—that while this equilibrium is occasionally punctured when an issue rises on the public agenda, a new policy monopoly will arise and enforce a new status quo that will persist for many years.

The punctuated equilibrium view has long gone unchallenged in the political science and public policy literatures, but it seems to underestimate the importance of history—and in particular the long-term shifting of ideas, interests, and institutions both within policy areas and in the broader political environment. In part, this may reflect a general reluctance on the part of political science to integrate historical approaches into the empirical analysis of politics and policymaking in a systematic way. This situation has begun to change in recent years, however, with the publication of Paul Pierson's *Politics in Time*, Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek's *The Search for American Political Development* (both 2004), and a series of articles in the *Journal of Policy History* and *American Political Development*.[6] Pierson has argued that we must reintegrate history into political science and move away from the current focus on isolating individual causal variables because

> the significance of such variables is frequently distorted when they are ripped from their temporal context. While most contemporary social scientists take a "snapshot" view of political life, there is often a strong case to be made for shifting from snapshots to moving pictures. This means systematically situating particular moments (including the present) in a temporal sequence of events and processes stretching over extended periods. Placing politics in time can greatly enrich our understanding of complex social dynamics.[7]

The concept of regimes that has been articulated in the American political development literature seems to provide the basis for a new way of incorporating history into the study of public policy and for understanding the politics of policy change. A regimes approach has long been utilized by scholars in international relations and comparative politics to study historical shifts in governing coalitions and by economists to examine different eras of financial policy. Recently, Americanists such as Stephen Skowronek have used the idea of regime building in their exploration of the dynamics of presidential politics (1993) and (with Karen Orren) of the origins of the New Deal (1998). Skowronek has also argued in another work (1997) that the opportunity for presidential leadership is dependent on the president's position within and relationship to the political regime cycle. His insight that the power of political regimes fluctuates over time and that it is this dynamic that provides the crucial context for transformational leadership would seem to have great import for the study of the politics of *policy* change as well. A policy regimes framework offers an alternative to the punctuated equilibrium approach articulated by Baumgartner and Jones and emphasizes that particular policy regimes are less stable—and policy change less rapid—than the "policy monopoly" model would suggest.

The policy regimes approach offers a systematic framework for analyzing the role of ideas, interests, and institutions in generating major policy change in a specific issue area over time. As Carter Wilson has noted, policy regimes are organized around specific issue areas and consist of three dimensions: a policy paradigm, a power alignment, and a policymaking arrangement that combine to produce a distinctive pattern of policymaking and policies.[8] Power arrangements can take many different forms but center on the alignment of interest groups and governmental actors on the issue. A policy paradigm refers to how the particular issue is conceptualized—how problems, target populations, and solutions are defined by elites and the public. A policymaking arrangement is the

institutional and procedural context for making decisions about an issue and the implementation process by which these decisions are carried out. The policies created in a particular issue area will thus reflect the regime's particular conception of the ends and means of government programs, the institutional arrangement that structures policymaking in that area, and the goals of the members of the dominant political coalition. These factors play a crucial role both in the establishment of the core policies and programs in a policy area and in the defense of these policies and programs from reformers.[9]

The political guardians of a policy regime use the established policy paradigm, power alignment, and policymaking arrangement to protect the status quo. These regimes, however, though vigorously defended and often quite durable, are under almost continuous attack by a variety of forces. Competing political actors actively seek to define and redefine issues in the pursuit of better public policy and/or electoral advantage.[10] Policy entrepreneurs seize on focusing events to draw public attention to new ideas and understandings about old problems and programs.[11] Power shifts and institutional changes within the policy regime and in the broader political system can enable reformers to force a reconsideration of existing policies. Orren and Skowronek have observed, for example, that "the ordering propensities of institutions are about so many points of access to a politics that is essentially open-ended and inherently unsettled. As institutions congeal time, so to speak, within their spheres, they decrease the probability that politics will coalesce into neatly ordered periods, if only because the institutions that constitute the polity at that time will abrade against each other and in the process drive further change" (Orren and Skowronek 1994: 320–21). Major policy change is extremely difficult and takes time to bring about because reformers must contend with the political, institutional, and policy remnants of the old regime even as they construct its replacement. Rarely, however, are the different pillars of a policy regime felled at the same time or with a single decisive assault. As a result, the tendency of the policymaking system is not toward equilibrium but toward disequilibrium.

The Development of a Reform-Oriented Federal Education Policy Regime

An examination of the evolution of federal education policy[12] offers an opportunity to explore the politics of policy regime construction, maintenance, destruction, and reconstruction as well as its relationship to and

influence on American political development more generally. The major policy change contained in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 is best understood as a response to gradual shifts in the policy regime and broader political environment that played out over a three-decade period. In particular, the emergence of the new federal policy regime in education cannot be understood apart from the deep and growing salience of school reform on the public agenda and its influence on the strategic calculations of political actors. The federal role in education policy has undergone major changes from the original path established in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Public and elite perceptions of a crisis in education, in tandem with changes in the wider political and electoral environment, have led politicians to alter how they look at education policy and to challenge existing arrangements in pursuit of school improvement and electoral gain.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 laid the foundation for a policy regime in education that persisted for over thirty years (Hess and McGuinn 2002). At the heart of this regime was a policy paradigm, meaning a set of views about the nature of the country's educational problems and the appropriate means of government response. The core beliefs of this paradigm were that most public schools were doing fine, that problems were concentrated in schools located in poor areas, and that issues of school governance and improvement were the responsibility of local and state governments.[13] As a result, ESEA programs were framed as temporary measures designed to address an extraordinary crisis for a specific group of disadvantaged students. Both the ends and means of federal policy were clearly circumscribed; the national government would limit its efforts to improving educational equity by providing small categorical programs and supplemental funding for poor schools and children.

Strong institutional and ideological obstacles to an expansion of the federal role in education persisted long after the passage of ESEA in 1965 and a bipartisan consensus of sorts developed around these limits on the federal role. Because of their alliance with teachers unions and the belief that inadequate school resources were the primary problem facing schools, Democrats sought to keep the federal role centered on school inputs rather than on school outputs or governance issues. Conservatives, meanwhile, saw any increase in federal involvement as a threat to local control of schools and sought to minimize the intrusiveness of federal directives and enforcement efforts. While they supported standards, testing, and accountability reforms, they believed that these should be established at the state rather than federal level.

An influential network of interest groups arose during the 1960s and 1970s to maintain the policy regime and advocate for the expansion of existing programs.[14] These groups allied with powerful congressional committees and subcommittees to lock in the equity orientation of federal education policy and to defeat periodic reform efforts. Federal education policymaking during this early period was a largely closed process dominated by an iron triangle of congressional staffers, educational interest groups, and executive bureaucrats with little influence exerted by the wider public. School reform was not a salient issue in national elections during the 1960s and 1970s because the majority of voters saw public schools as doing a good job and the major debates around schools centered on equity, integration, and social issues rather than concerns about academic performance.[15] This permitted the scope of conflict around education policy to be narrow and the issue to be dominated by a small group of political actors. Democrats used their control of Congress during most of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s to gradually expand existing federal education programs for the poor and to create small new targeted initiatives. Crucially, federal mandates and administrative capacity in education also increased as liberal Democrats sought to force recalcitrant state and local school officials to embrace congressional goals and methods. The story of the 1960s and 1970s for federal education policy, then, was one of expansion—but expansion largely within the context of a limited focus on ensuring procedural compliance with equity programs for a small group of disadvantaged students.

By 1980, however, the increasingly active and prescriptive federal presence in education—symbolized by the creation of a U.S. Department of Education by Democratic president Jimmy Carter in 1979—led to a backlash from conservatives. Republican president Ronald Reagan made tax cuts, devolution, and privatization the centerpieces of his administration. Social welfare programs generally, and federal education programs specifically, were attacked as being expensive, overly bureaucratic, and ineffective and were targeted for reduction or elimination. The release of the *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983 was a crucial focusing event as it fueled increasing public concern about the decline of public education and, in particular, its impact on the nation's economic competitiveness. Both Democrats and Republicans seized on the report to argue for major changes in federal education policies, but they advocated very different approaches. Democrats argued that the country's educational problems demanded greatly expanded federal funding and control over schools. Republicans argued that *A Nation at Risk* was an indictment of past federal programs and mandates and the public education system generally

and called for eliminating federal influence and converting federal education funding into block grants or vouchers.

An alternative reform vision, which called for national leadership and reforms centered on academic standards and assessments, also began to develop among many governors and business leaders. These developments altered the political dynamics around education and started the country on a road to major reform, albeit one that would have many significant twists and turns and take almost two decades to complete. Regime change would take some time, as the guardians of the old regime continued to defend it and both parties faced challenges in attempting to develop federal education reform agendas. The continuing opposition of both liberals and conservatives—and key groups within the Democratic and Republican party coalitions—to a reform-oriented federal role in education persisted throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. The position of Democrats on education continued to be heavily influenced by the teachers unions and its strong opposition to federal reforms such as strong standards, testing, choice, and accountability measures. The Republican party in the 1980s and 1990s, meanwhile, was heavily influenced by religious conservatives and states-rights groups that opposed any federal influence over schools whatsoever.

As a result, the federal role in education remained limited in important ways between 1965 and 1994, and even contracted somewhat in the 1980s as part of a broader assault on federal activism and the welfare state. During the 1980s, conservative proposals to abolish the Department of Education and to create private school choice programs were successfully resisted by a coalition of Democrats and moderate Republicans with support from the education establishment. Democratic proposals for a significantly enlarged federal role were also blocked by the Reagan administration's philosophical opposition and a squeeze on discretionary spending due to tax cuts and the defense buildup. Thus, the decade resulted in a stalemate as efforts to eliminate or significantly expand the federal role in education largely failed.

During the 1990s, however, the rise of education to the very top of the public agenda changed the political dynamics of federal education policy (see Appendixes 2 and 3). It became a crucial electoral issue for both parties. With the old policy paradigm increasingly under fire from the left and the right, the parties fought over what the new federal role in schools should be. Moderate Republican George H. W. Bush made a pledge to be an "education president" a major theme of his 1988 election campaign and of his administration. Bush's efforts, and particularly the Charlottesville education summit with the nation's governors, helped to nationalize the debate over education reform and to shift its focus from

school inputs to outputs. His America 2000 education standards plan received the support of moderates but was ultimately defeated by an alliance of liberal Democrats who were still wedded to the old policy regime and conservative Republicans who opposed a more assertive federal role.

The debate over America 2000 and the advance of standards-based reforms in many states during the 1980s, however, helped to build significant momentum behind reforming ESEA. The next president, Democrat Bill Clinton, played a decisive role in moving the standards and choice movements forward and in laying the ideational foundation for a new federal education policy regime. As a centrist New Democrat and former "education governor," Clinton rejected both conservative efforts to eliminate the federal role in education and the liberal emphasis on inputs over outputs. He embraced a greatly expanded federal role and increased investment for schools but also a shift toward promoting school reform and improved student academic performance through the imposition of standards and accountability measures. The first steps in this direction—despite strong resistance from conservatives and from liberals in his own party—were taken in 1994 with the passage of Goals 2000 and a number of important changes to ESEA. Alongside the existing federal commitment to equalizing educational opportunity for disadvantaged students, a much broader federal commitment to improving the quality of public education for all students began to unfold.

The expanded federal involvement in education precipitated another backlash, however, and Republicans used their newfound control of Congress in 1995 and 1996 to once again push a conservative agenda of decentralization and privatization. A coalition of Democrats and moderate Republicans (with the assistance of Clinton's veto power) prevented these proposals from being enacted. It ultimately became clear to many Republicans that these proposals were unpopular with voters and were contributing to a negative image of the party. This was reinforced by Bob Dole's defeat and Clinton's reelection in the 1996 presidential election. By this point, education had risen to the top of the public agenda and the issue was seen by strategists from both parties as central to Clinton's victory. Dole campaigned on conservative proposals on education and Clinton defeated him by a wide margin on the issue and used it to gain a decisive advantage among key voting blocks, particularly women and independents (see Appendix 4 for a chart on the education gap between the parties). As a result of these political and policy defeats, the congressional Republican leadership called off its assault on the federal role in education and used the remainder of the decade to

reshape the GOP message on school reform and social welfare policy. The debate between Democrats and Republicans at the turn of the century was no longer about whether or not there should be a federal role in education, but about what the nature of that role should be. The parties' competition to win the education issue resulted in dramatically increased federal spending on schools, a wide array of new federal programs, and a growing embrace of centrist accountability reforms in their legislative proposals ("Three R's" and "Straight A's").

If congressional Republicans and Democrats had softened their opposition to a new reform-oriented federal role in education by the late 1990s, it would take the election of a former Republican governor, George W. Bush, as president to cement the foundation of a new policy regime. While most earlier Republican presidential candidates had either ignored the issue of education or run in opposition to a federal role, Bush made education the number one issue of his 2000 campaign and a crucial part of his compassionate conservative philosophy. In an effort to close the gap on education and appeal to swing voters—for whom education was an important issue—Bush adopted a pragmatic and centrist education agenda that called for an active but reformed federal role in promoting school improvement. Bush was able to reposition the Republican party on education and erase the historic Democratic advantage on the issue by citing his experience with education in Texas, by emphasizing specific solutions over ideology, and by painting Al Gore and the Democrats as captives of the teachers unions and unwilling to support meaningful reform. Once in office, Bush leveraged his success on the education issue to push recalcitrant conservatives and liberals to support the grand bargain contained in the No Child Left Behind Act—increased federal spending and activism on education in exchange for expanded flexibility, accountability, and choice.

The final vote on the conference report of NCLB was overwhelming and bipartisan in both the House (381–41) and Senate (87–10), revealing that after years of debate over whether there should even be a federal role in education, there is now general agreement not only on the need for federal leadership to improve public schools but also on the broad direction that such leadership should take.[16] The centerpiece of the new law is the requirement, that as a condition of accepting federal funds, states test all of their children in grades 3–8 in reading and math every year. States are required to make the results of their tests publicly available with breakdowns by school, race, and level of poverty, to move all students to proficiency on state standards, and to undertake a series of corrective actions to fix failing schools. The law also dramatically increased federal

spending on education and provides for greater flexibility in the use of federal funds by allowing states to transfer funds among different federal programs[17] (see Appendix 5 for more detail on the provisions of the law). NCLB represents the most significant overhaul and expansion of the federal role in education since ESEA was created in 1965.[18]

The original bipartisan coalition that passed NCLB remained intact as of 2005. Congressional Republican education leaders—including committee chairs Senator Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) and Representative John Boehner (R-Ohio)—have remained steadfastly supportive of the law. And while Democrats have criticized Bush for what they believe to be his inadequate funding of the law and called for more flexible enforcement, the Democratic Leadership Council and key liberals such as Representative George Miller (D-Calif.) and Senator Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) have reiterated their support for the law's central principles and reforms. President Bush repeatedly pointed to NCLB during the 2004 campaign as his major domestic accomplishment and announced his desire to extend the NCLB framework to high schools. Both members of the 2004 Democratic ticket, Senators John Kerry (D-Mass.) and John Edwards (D-N.C.), meanwhile, voted for NCLB and reiterated their support for the law's central principles. Neither they—nor the Democratic Party platform—called for repealing or substantially changing the law during the general election, clear evidence that the political dynamic that brought about the bipartisan passage of NCLB in 2002 remains in place.

The passage of No Child Left Behind fundamentally changed the ends and means of federal education policy from those put forward in the original ESEA legislation, and in so doing created a new policy regime. The old federal education policy regime was based on a policy paradigm that saw the central purpose of school reform as promoting equity and access for disadvantaged students. With NCLB, federal education policy has embraced the much broader goal of improving education for all students and seeks to do so by significantly increasing accountability for school performance. The Department of Education has been converted from a grant-administering institution to one focusing on enforcing compliance with federal directives. In stark contrast to the implementation of previous federal education legislation, the Bush Department of Education has also developed tough, detailed regulations in support of NCLB and has threatened to withhold federal funds from states that do not comply with its mandates.[19] These changes were made possible by developments in the electoral arena, as well as shifts in the configuration of interests around education (in particular the embrace of federal reform

leadership by civil rights and business groups). The broad bipartisan consensus behind NCLB stands in sharp contrast to the partisan struggles over national school policy in the 1980s and 1990s and reflects the rise of a new policy regime that will govern the expanded federal role in elementary and secondary education for years to come.[20]

Policy Regimes, Policy Change, and Contemporary American Politics

The creation of a new federal education policy regime and an expanded national role in schools reflects and helps to explicate broader changes in American politics at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Understanding policy change requires a recognition that policy regimes exist inside of broader political regimes even if, in rare cases such as education, they also help to shape them. Two interrelated developments have been crucial to policymaking in the contemporary era—the demise of the New Deal coalition and the rise of partisan parity in the electorate and intense national electoral competition. They have produced what Landy and Levin have called "a new politics of public policy" that is more centered on issues and more open to public pressures.[21] In particular, the political environment since the 1990s has encouraged national politicians to make more frequent public appeals for political support, and this has been especially true for presidents and presidential candidates.[22]

The competitive national electoral context has also forced both Republicans and Democrats to appeal to centrist swing voters. Parity in partisan identification—combined with the large number of independents and weak identifiers who tend to be moderate in their political views—means that national elections in the contemporary era are typically won in the middle with moderate voters. This is why Landy and Levin argue that both parties and their candidates have been focused on "seeking the center" of the ideological spectrum in their campaigns and policymaking.[23] Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, for example, both operated under the same macro-political reality—an era of partisan parity and divided government in which no political philosophy or governing coalition has been dominant. In such an environment, presidents have strong incentives to establish a moderate image, distance themselves from the ideological wings of their own parties, and forge bipartisan solutions to important policy issues. As Jeffrey Cohen has concluded: "In this

media-saturated age, there are powerful pressures for presidents to follow public opinion."[24]

Presidential candidates from both parties struggle to craft winning coalitions by attracting moderate voters without alienating established constituencies. One of the primary ways they do this is by strategically repositioning both their broad rhetoric about the role of government in society and their specific positions on salient policy issues.[25] This is done in both an offensive and a defensive manner, as politicians seek to capitalize on the resonance of their popular policy positions with the electorate and to inoculate themselves from the potential electoral damage of their unpopular issue positions. Given the power of the bully pulpit and their desire to appear innovative and moderate to swing voters, presidents often become the key players in driving policy change and in bringing about the destruction and reconstruction of policy regimes. However, party leaders who attempt to modify policy positions or rhetoric that is unpopular with the general public will often encounter opposition from party constituencies wedded to the status quo.[26] As a result, the story of partisan politics and policymaking is as much a story of intraparty struggles as it is a story of interparty struggles—in fact, the two struggles occur simultaneously.[27]

Public policy scholars have long emphasized that policy subsystems are highly durable and that major policy change is as a result extremely difficult and rare. Earlier policy case studies from the 1970s and 1980s—such as those by Derthick, Mucciaroni, and Harris and Milkis, for example—emphasized the closed nature of the political and policymaking environment and the ability of powerful interest groups to block reform and preserve the status quo. The policy struggles described in their work were dominated by "inside" actors—bureaucrats, interest groups, and congressmen and their staffs. These were not public debates—in part because of the closed nature of the policymaking process at the time and in part because the issues in question were not particularly salient with citizens.[28] The case of federal education policy is entirely different because the question of how to reform schools became a central issue in partisan debates and political campaigns during the 1990s. It helps to illuminate how the closed policymaking process that existed before the 1990s has given way to a new, more open policymaking regime. Developments in American politics and institutions—particularly the existence of partisan parity and intense political competition for swing voters—have elevated the importance of public opinion and electoral pressures to the rise and fall of policy regimes.

To argue that policymakers respond to public priorities and demands at first blush does not seem like a particularly controversial statement. Yet the political science literature on policymaking is in fact quite divided on the question of the degree to which politicians are responsive to public opinion.[29] There is a sizable body of research that argues that policymakers tend to be influenced more by narrow constituent groups than by the demands of the mass public.[30] The evolution of federal education policy provides a case study of how politicians and parties struggle to negotiate the tension between public and private demands. It sheds light on the conditions under which policy issues are transformed from a closed interest-group model of policymaking to a more open mass politics model—when the focus of policymaking shifts from satisfying narrow interest-group demands to appealing for broad electoral support.

The development of an expansive, active, and reform-oriented federal role in education can only be understood in light of the shattering of the old, interest-group dominated policymaking regime. Studies of federal policymaking in education have long emphasized the importance—even the dominance—of particular interest groups within each party. On the Democratic side, the teachers unions—which are the largest single source of campaign contributions to the party—wield enormous influence. The unions have adamantly opposed school choice and national testing and accountability measures. On the Republican side, religious and states-rights conservatives are a crucial part of the party's primary and donor base. They have long vociferously opposed increased federal spending or control in education and have fought for the elimination of the federal Department of Education. The equity regime created in 1965 was marked by its closed and consensual nature—federal education policymaking was dominated by a few groups, with little public input, and bipartisan support for the limited ends and means of federal policy. As a result, efforts to substantially expand or reform the federal role during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were defeated.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, however, mounting evidence of problems in the public school system and the strategic use of the issue by both parties for electoral gain combined to expand the scope of conflict around education. Public pressure began to grow for increased federal involvement and for a shift to more rigorous reforms like standards, testing, and accountability, many of which were opposed by important interest groups committed to the previous governance and policy regime. As citizens and politicians alike pushed for federal fixes for what was perceived as a broken school system (see Appendix 6), the antifederal reform

views of powerful interest groups on the left and right were gradually pushed aside. Education became a top public priority and politicians became more interested in how the issue would help (or harm) them with voters than they were in satisfying the demands of their allied interest groups.[31] The case of education demonstrates that the ability of an interest group to influence policy outcomes is dependent on four factors: (1) the salience and visibility of the particular issue with the public (and thus its wider political significance), (2) the extent to which the interest group's views on the issue are considered mainstream or extreme, (3) its ability to prevent the entrance of new groups and perspectives, and (4) the centrality of the issue in the campaign and governing agendas of the party.

It is important to note that public opinion did not determine the specific content of federal education policy—as Hochshild and others have shown, citizens have relatively low levels of information about school reform issues and often hold conflicting positions.[32] But public preferences were clear and strong on a number of important points and set the broad parameters within which deliberations about school reform at the national level took place. Polls taken in the 1990s demonstrated that clear majorities of citizens supported public school choice but opposed private school vouchers; supported increased federal spending on schools but believed that more money alone would not solve schools' problems; wanted expanded federal leadership in education reform but supported local control of schools; and believed that more rigorous standards, testing, and accountability measures were necessary to improve student and school performance.[33]

Because education is what Stone et al. call a "high reverberation issue"—one "characterized by frequent reshuffling of mobilized stakeholders, multiple and strongly-felt competing value and belief systems, deeply held stakes by both educators and parents and ambiguous boundaries"—politicians were forced to respond to these public preferences even as they sought to reshape them.[34] Education also came to play a central—though underappreciated—role in ideological debates during the 1980s and 1990s about the proper role of government. These political developments launched a new era of education policy in which the alliances, policies, and assumptions of the past forty years were fundamentally transformed. Democrats in the 1990s, led by Clinton, and Republicans in 2000, led by Bush, ultimately embraced positions on education that went against the preferences of strong constituent groups within their parties. Democrats came to support national standards and accountability and some choice, while Republicans pushed through legislation

expanding the federal role in education to an unprecedented degree. In each case, party leaders opted to go against powerful but narrow constituent groups in the pursuit of political gain among the broader electorate. A key consequence of these maneuvers was the gradual nationalization of education policy.

Conclusion

A chasm has long existed in political science between those who view the American policymaking process as static and those who see it as dynamic. Insufficient effort has been made to bridge this divide or to incorporate the insights of both perspectives into the analysis of major policy initiation and reform in a single issue area over time. The theory of path dependence has gained great credibility in political science and it, along with the older disciplinary focus on the power of interest groups and the apathy and ignorance of citizens, emphasizes the static nature of politics and policymaking. While these approaches may indeed be accurate for the majority of policy issues, issues such as education that achieve high salience with the public are often susceptible to major reform. Contemporary developments in American politics, particularly the existence of partisan parity and intense political competition for swing voters, have elevated the importance of public opinion and electoral pressures to the rise and fall of policy regimes. Entrepreneurial political elites today routinely seek to broaden the scope of conflict around policy issues in order to secure preferred policy changes and/or electoral advantages.

It is important to note that the majority of policy issues under consideration in the political system at any particular time are low-visibility and low-salience issues on which there is little public interest or pressure for reform. A much smaller minority of issues, however, achieves high visibility and high salience with the public and takes on wider political significance. These "swing issues" have the power to swing elections in an era of partisan parity and narrow electoral margins and have become central to the electoral and governing strategies of politicians and parties. In an effort to appeal to swing voters on these issues, politicians and parties will often adopt popular, moderate positions even if they conflict with long-standing ideological convictions or the preferences of allied interest groups. This political maneuvering gradually forces both parties to the center and can generate compromises on salient policy issues over which there may have long been great conflict. Swing issues such as education are thus an important political phenomenon—their unique characteristics facilitate major

policy change even as they influence the direction of wider political debates and encourage greater democratic responsiveness from government.

In studying policy change, it is necessary to place political and policymaking developments in their broader historical context, to create, in Paul Pierson's phrase, a "moving picture."[35] Doing so both emphasizes how earlier decisions and events influence and constrain later policy development and how such constraints can sometimes be overcome when features of the political and policymaking environment change. Political scientists have tended to look at federal education policy only in narrow terms, by focusing on individual events, actors, or policies. Historical analyses have enlarged the scope of inquiry but have generally failed to offer explanations for how and why broader political forces interacted to produce policy development. Early historical interpretations of federal education policy thus tended to emphasize the fundamental limits on the national government's role, while later accounts have tended to portray the expanded federal role as inevitable. Previous accounts of federal education policy by historians and political scientists have also failed to account for conflicts and pressures that could have pushed the federal role in different directions and that contributed to the particular shape that federal policy ultimately took.

The case study of federal education policy presented here offers an alternative interpretation of major policy change founded on the insights of the American political development literature. Rather than fitting Baumgartner and Jones's punctuated equilibrium model of a long-standing policy monopoly that is rapidly punctured and replaced in a single decisive stroke, the evolution of federal education policy demonstrates how it is the interaction of the *gradual* shifting of ideas, interests, and institutions in a policy area with changes in the broader political context over time that ultimately brings about major reform. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 dramatically expanded and transformed the federal role in education, but the new law is best understood as a response to ongoing shifts in the policy regime and the broader political environment that played out over a three-decade period. NCLB replaced an equity policy regime that was created in 1965 and was slowly weakened internally but could be replaced only after conditions in the broader political and electoral environments began to change in the 1990s. Policymaking in many issue areas may be best characterized not by intermittent punctuated equilibria amid long periods of policy stasis, but rather of gradual regime construction, maintenance, enervation, and reconstruction, which unfold in fits and starts over time.

Drew University

Appendix 1. Major Pieces of Federal Education Legislation (1965–2002)

1965

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law 89-10) authorized grants for elementary and secondary school programs for children of low-income families; school library resources, textbooks, and other instructional materials for school children; supplementary educational centers and services; strengthening state education agencies; and educational research and research training.

1975

Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) guaranteed a free, appropriate public education to each child with a disability in every state and locality across the country. (In 1997, the program becomes the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* [IDEA].)

1979

Department of Education Organization Act (Public Law 96-88) established a U.S. Department of Education containing functions from the Education Division of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare along with other selected education programs from HEW, the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the National Science Foundation.

1981

Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (Part of Public Law 97-35) consolidated forty-two programs into seven programs to be funded under the elementary and secondary block-grant authority.

1994

Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Public Law 103-227) established a new federal partnership through a system of grants to states and local communities to reform the nation's education system. The act formalized the national education goals and established the National Education Goals Panel. It also created a National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) to provide voluntary national certification of state and local education standards and assessments and established the National Skill Standards Board standards.

Improving America's Schools Act (Public Law 103-382) reauthorized and revamped the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The legislation includes Title I, the federal government's largest program providing educational assistance to disadvantaged children; professional development and technical assistance programs; a safe and drug-free schools and communities provision; and provisions promoting school equity.

2002

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) provides for the comprehensive reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, incorporating specific proposals in such areas as testing, accountability, parental choice, and early reading.

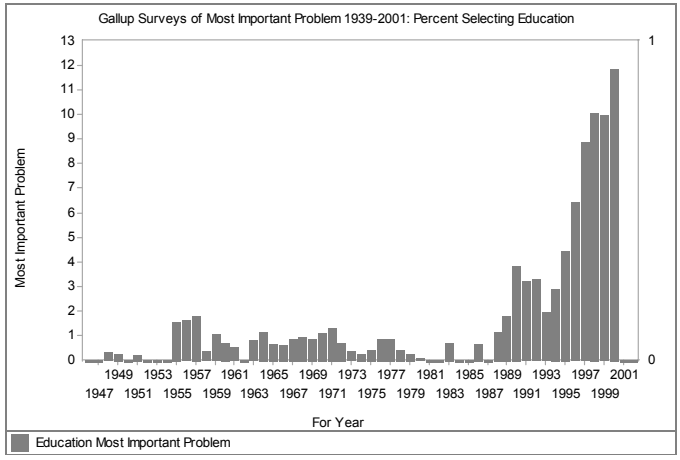
Appendix 2. Public Perceptions of the Nation's Most Important Problem, 1960–2004

Year	*Candidates*	*Issue Rated Most Important by Voters*	*Relative Ranking of Education*	*Standardized Rank of Education*
1960	Kennedy-Nixon	Foreign relations	14th of 20 issues	Lower 33 percent
1964	Johnson-Goldwater	Civil rights	24th of 24 issues	Last
1968	Humphrey-Nixon	Vietnam	17th of 17 issues	Last
1972	McGovern-Nixon	Vietnam	26th of 26 issues	Last
1976	Carter-Ford	Inflation	Not listed in 27 issues	Last
1980	Carter-Reagan	Inflation	23d of 41 issues	Middle 33 percent
1984	Mondale-Reagan	Recession	17th of 51 issues	Upper 33 percent
1988	Dukakis-Bush	Drugs	8th of 26 issues	Upper 33 percent
1992	Clinton-Bush	Economy	5th of 24 issues	Upper 33 percent

Year	*Candidates*	*Issue Rated Most Important by Voters*	*Relative Ranking of Education*	*Standardized Rank of Education*
1996	Clinton-Dole	Economy	2d of 31 issues	Top 10 percent
2000	Gore-Bush	Education	1st of 11 issues	First
2004	Kerry-Bush	Iraq	5th of 46 issues	Top 10 percent

Source: Roper Center at University of Connecticut, Public Opinion Online (http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/form/academic/s_roper.html)
Note: Respondents were asked some variant of: "What do you think is the most important problem facing this country today?" All surveys were conducted within two months of the presidential election, except for 1988 (July) and 2000 (June).

Appendix 3. The Rise of Education on the Public Agenda, 1939–2000



Source: Data accessed from the Policy Agendas Project at www.policyagendas.org. The data were originally collected by Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, with the support of National Science Foundation grant number SBR 9320922, and were distributed through the Center for American Politics and Public Policy at the University of Washington and/or the Department of Political Science at Penn State University. Neither NSF nor the original collectors of the data bear any responsibility for the analysis reported here.

Appendix 4. Public Perceptions of Parties' Credibility on Education Issue, 1979–2004

Year	*Democrats*	*Republicans*	*Advantage*
1979	25 percent	16 percent	Democrats +9
1984	37 percent	19 percent	Democrats +18
1988	55 percent	22 percent	Democrats +33
1992	42 percent	17 percent	Democrats +25
1996	59 percent	30 percent	Democrats +29
2000	44 percent	41 percent	Democrats +3
2004	42 percent	35 percent	Democrats +7

Source: Various polls, Roper Center at University of Connecticut, Public Opinion Online, (http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/form/academic/s_roper.html)
Accessed on 25 June 2001 and 31 March 2005.
Note: Question wording was similar but varied slightly from year to year. The basic question was: "Regardless of how you are likely to vote, do you think the Republican party or the Democratic party will do a better job of improving education in America?"

Appendix 5. Highlights of the No Child Left Behind Act as Signed Into Law

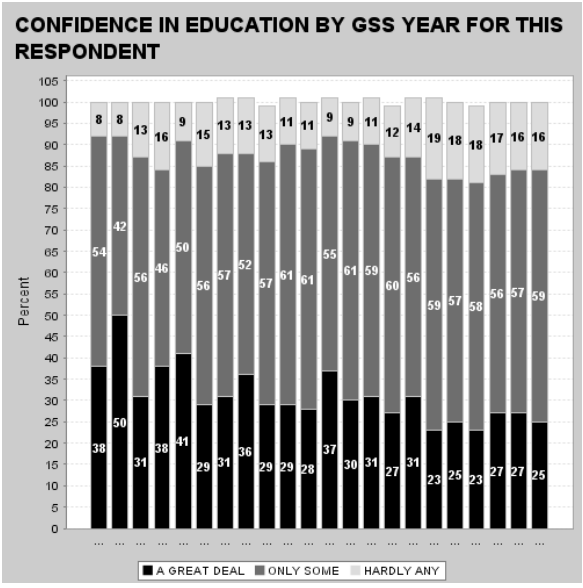
Annual Testing	By the 2005–6 school year, states must begin administering annual, statewide assessments in reading and mathematics for grades 3–8. States may select and design their own assessments, but the tests must be aligned with state academic standards. By 2007–8, states must implement science assessments to be administered once during each of the three levels of K-12 education: elementary, middle, and high school. A sample of 4th and 8th graders in each state must participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and math every other year to provide a point of comparison for the state's results on its own tests. Test results must include individual student scores and be reported by race, income, and other categories to measure not only overall trends but also gaps between, and progress of, various subgroups.

Academic Improvement	States must attain academic proficiency—as defined by each state—for all students within 12 years. States must set a minimum performance threshold based on the lowest-achieving demographic subgroup, or the lowest-achieving schools in the state, whichever is higher. Each state must raise the level of proficiency gradually (with "adequate yearly progress") leading to 100 percent proficiency by 2014.
Corrective Action	If a school fails to make adequate progress for two consecutive years, the school will receive technical assistance from the district and must provide public school choice. After a third year of failure to make adequate progress, a school will also be required to offer supplemental educational services chosen by students' parents, including private tutoring. If a school fails to make adequate progress for four consecutive years, the district must implement corrective actions, such as replacing certain staff members or adopting a new curriculum. After five years of inadequate progress, a school would be identified for reconstitution and be required to set up an alternative governance structure, such as reopening as a charter school or turning operation of the school over to the state. States are also responsible for overseeing districts as a whole, identifying those needing improvement, and taking corrective actions when necessary.
Report Cards	Beginning with the 2002–3 school year, states must provide annual report cards with a range of information, including statewide student-achievement data broken down by subgroup and information on the performance of school districts in making adequate yearly progress. Districts must also provide similar report cards, including district-wide and school-by-school data.
Teacher Quality	All teachers hired under Title I, beginning this in 2002–3, must be "highly qualified." In general, under the law, "highly qualified" means that a teacher has been certified (including alternative routes to certification) or licensed by a state and has demonstrated a high level of competence in the subjects that he or she teaches. By the end of the 2005–6 school year, every public school teacher must be "highly qualified."
Reading First	This new program, authorized at $900 million in 2002, provides help to states and districts in setting up "scientific, research-based" reading programs for children in grades K-3.

Transferability	Districts may transfer up to 50 percent of the money from several major ESEA programs; funds may be transferred into, but not out of, Title I. States may transfer up to 50 percent of state-activity funds between several major ESEA programs.
Flexibility Demonstration Projects	Up to 150 districts may enter into performance agreements with the federal Department of Education under which they could consolidate all aid under several major ESEA programs, excluding Title I. Up to seven states may consolidate all state-administration and state-activity funding under several major ESEA programs.
Public Charter Schools	Authorized at $300 million in 2002, the program provides aid to help states and localities support charter schools, including money to help with the planning and design of charter schools, the evaluation of their effectiveness, and facilities costs.

Source: "An ESEA Primer" *Education Week*, 9 January 2002.

Appendix 6. Citizens' Declining Confidence in Public Schools (1973–2002)



Source: Analysis conducted by author using General Social Survey Cumulative Datafile, 1972–2002, National Opinion Research Center.

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Notes

1. The power of interest groups in policy formation has been emphasized in the work of Miliband 1969; Truman 1971; Fiorina 1989; Berry 1989; Sabatier 1993; and Dye 2001.

2. Mayhew 1974. See also King. King writes that "the American electoral system places politicians in a highly vulnerable position. Individually and collectively, they are more vulnerable, more of the time, to the vicissitudes of electoral politics than are the politicians of any other democratic country. Because they are more vulnerable, they devote more of their time to electioneering, and their conduct in office is more governed by electoral considerations."

3. Schattschneider 1975, 18. He also wrote that "the role of the people in the political system is determined largely by the conflict system, for it is conflict that involves the people in politics and the nature of conflict determines the nature of public involvement" (126).

4. Derthick has shown, for example, that as problems within the social security program grew larger and more visible, political and economic developments encouraged elites inside and outside of government to reconsider the core assumptions and structure of the program. The result was that "a greater variety of participants [became] involved, long established doctrines have been challenged, and longstanding procedures revised. The policymaking system and the program are both changing and, as always, interacting with each other as well as the society to determine the nature of social security politics. During much of the history of social security they interacted in a way that dampened contention. In the later 1970s, they are interacting in a way that will admit more of it." Derthick, 428.

5. See Heclo, in Dodd and Jillson 1994, 383. For Heclo, "the 'action' is at the intersection, where the influences among the three elements is reciprocal." Ultimately, "interests tell institutions what to do; institutions tell ideas how to survive; ideas tell interests what to mean."

6. See especially two articles in the *Journal of Policy History* by Julian Zelizer ("Clio's Lost Tribe: Public Policy History Since 1978" in 2000 and "History and Political Science: Together Again?" in 2004) and articles by Skowronek, Gerring, and Bensel in the Spring 2003 issue (vol. 17) of *American Political Development*.

7. Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time* (Princeton, 2004), 1–2.

8. Carter Wilson, "Policy Regimes and Policy Change," *Journal of Public Policy* 20, no. 3 (2000): 247–74.

9. An initial attempt to apply the concept of a policy regime to the study of change in particular policy areas appears in the work of Richard Harris and Sidney Milkis (*The Politics of Regulatory Change*, 1996) and Daniel Tichenor (*Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Reform in America*, 2002).

10. Robert Reich observed that he was "struck by how much the initial definition of problems and choices influences the subsequent design and execution of public policies. The act of raising the salient public question . . . is often the key step, because it subsumes the value judgements that declare something to be a problem, focuses public attention on the issue, and frames the ensuing public debate" (1988, 5.) For more on the importance of ideas in policymaking, see Derthick and Quirk 1986; Feigenbaum, Henig, and Hamnett 1998; and Teles 1998.

11. As Deborah Stone has noted, "In the polis, change occurs through the interaction of mutually defining ideas and alliances . . . the representation of issues is strategically designed to attract support to one's side, to forge some alliances and break others . . . ideas

are the very stuff of politics. People fight about ideas, fight for them, and fight against them" (1988, 25).

12. The federal government manages a wide variety of education programs. This analysis is focused on the largest of these programs—the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—and in particular on the act's largest component, Title I.

13. LBJ identified his education bill as a crucial component of the broader antidiscrimination efforts begun with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and of his War on Poverty, which had rejected an income-transfer strategy in favor of an emphasis on job training and education. Johnson believed that "very often, a lack of jobs and money is not the cause of poverty, but the symptom. The cause may lie deeper—in our failure to give our fellow citizens a fair chance to develop their own capacities in a lack of education and training." If education was the key to economic and social mobility, however, too many schools lacked the resources to provide the necessary skills to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

14. While the many interest groups comprising the "education establishment" represented different constituencies and often advocated different kinds of federal education programs, they were generally united in their support for greater federal involvement with and spending on schools. While there was some disagreement in the education community over whether to create a U.S. Department of Education in the 1970s—with the American Federation of Teachers opposing the move—once the department was created, it was fiercely defended by the many groups whose interests it represented in Washington.

15. This is not to say that education was absent from public or governmental agendas or from political campaigns during this period. Federal pressure to integrate public schools and end discriminatory practices in the aftermath of the *Brown* decision and the Civil Rights and Elementary and Secondary Education Acts received a great deal of publicity and created tremendous resistance and resentment in many parts of the country. Much of this struggle, however, occurred in the courts and there was little concern or effort directed at the time toward improving school performance per se.

16. Agreement on the broad principles of reforming ESEA, however, by no means implied agreement on the specific measures, timetables, and resources that would be necessary to achieve it. The congressional negotiations over the bill encountered a number of substantial challenges and its provisions changed considerably during the legislative process. Both sides made major concessions—Republicans dropped vouchers, most of their "Straight A's" block-grant proposals, and their major consolidation effort. And Democrats accepted extensive new federal mandates regarding teacher quality, testing, and accountability.

17. For the full text of the No Child Left Behind Act, see www.ed.gov/nclb at the Department of Education. For a detailed analysis of the provisions of the act, see "Major Changes to ESEA in the No Child Left Behind Act," by the Learning First Alliance at www.learningfirst.org.

18. Richard Elmore calls NCLB "the single largest expansion of federal power over the nation's education system in history," while Andy Rotherham, a former Clinton education adviser, says that it "represents the high water mark of federal intrusion in education." Richard Elmore, "Unwarranted Intrusion," *Education Next* (Spring 2002): 31–35; Andy Rotherham interview with the author, 22 August 2002.

19. The ultimate impact of NCLB on students, schools, and state educational policies will be determined by how the law fares during the implementation process. The politics of educational accountability is such that we should expect continued strong pressure by states to relax NCLB's rules and timetables for achieving AYP and moving all students to academic proficiency. In its first few laws of existence, however, the law has already had more of an impact on schools than any previous piece of federal education legislation.

20. Despite lingering conservative and liberal opposition to NCLB and robust disagreements over the funding and implementation of the law, the expanded federal role in education and its focus on standards, testing, and accountability seems unlikely to be significantly reduced in the near future. Democrats and Republicans alike are now publicly

committed to active federal leadership in school reform and holding states accountable for improved academic performance. It is important to note, for example, that while many Democrats have criticized Bush for what they believe to be his inadequate funding of the law and called for more flexible enforcement, the Democratic Leadership Council and key liberals such as Rep. George Miller (Calif.) and Senator Ted Kennedy (Mass.), as well as Senator John Kerry (Mass.), the Democratic presidential nominee, have reiterated their support for the law's central principles and reforms. Congressional Republican leaders such as John Boehner and Judd Gregg have also remained steadfast in their support.

21. Marc Landy and Martin Levin, *The New Politics of Public Policy* (Baltimore, 1995), 277–97.

22. Derthick and Quirk note that "the decisive features of the political system were, above all, leadership that is responsive to broad audiences; widespread competition for leadership, both within Congress and between Congress and other institutions; and extreme receptivity by leaders and other officials, including rank and file members of Congress, to the materials of policy advocacy, that is, argument, symbols, and ideas." Martha Derthick and Paul Quirk, *The Politics of Deregulation* (Washington, D.C., 1986), 253. See also Samuel Kernel, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership* (Washington, D.C., 1986).

23. See Martin Levin and Marc Landy, "Durability and Change," in Levin, Landy, and Martin Shapiro, eds., *Seeking the Center: Politics and Policymaking at the New Century* (Washington, D.C., 2002), 3–32.

24. Jeffrey Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-Making* (Ann Arbor, 2000), 248.

25. These political dynamics have led to a "Nixon goes to China" model of executive action in which presidents sometimes embrace policy positions—as Clinton did on welfare, for example—that go against the traditional stance of their national party.

26. As Milkis revealed in his study of FDR and the New Deal, reconstitutive party leaders inevitably face opposition from factions that have principles or interests that are threatened by the proposed shifts. Sidney Milkis, *The President and the Parties* (Oxford, 1995).

27. The growth of the federal role in education policy is commonly attributed to the successful efforts of the Democratic party in the face of Republican opposition. The analysis here shows that this interpretation—though widely circulated and accepted—is in fact wrong on two counts. First, though many conservative Republicans have long opposed—and continue to oppose—an active federal role in education, Republican presidents have played an important role in nationalizing the politics of education, and the two Bushes significantly broadened the scope of federal influence over schools. Second, Clinton's push for national standards in education with Goals 2000 was opposed and resisted by many of his fellow Democrats, particularly in Congress. So in this sense, the struggles *within* the Democratic and Republican parties were as important as the struggles *between* the Republican and Democratic parties.

28. Harris and Milkis observed, for example, that the nature of the regulatory process had "sheltered regulatory policy from broader democratic influences such as the presidency or electoral politics." Richard Harris and Sidney Milkis, *The Politics of Regulatory Change* (New York, 1988), 51. See also Martha Derthick, *Policymaking for Social Security* (Washington, D.C., 1979), and Gary Mucciaroni, *Reversals of Fortune* (Washington, D.C., 1999.)

29. For a collection of contemporary essays that reveals the different sides of this debate, see Jeff Manza, Fay Lomax Cook, and Benjamin Page, eds., *Navigating Public Opinion* (Oxford, 2002).

30. The most recent version of the view is expressed in Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* (Chicago, 2000).

31. The evolution of federal education policy thus offers some encouragement for those who long for greater public deliberation and influence over policymaking. The

political science literature is replete with studies that cast doubt on the accuracy of public opinion polls as true measures of citizens' views. Scholars of political behavior have emphasized that the conditions for issue voting do not exist—voters have been found to possess relatively little detailed information about policy issues, to pay little attention to electoral campaigns, and to vote largely on partisan labels and candidate characteristics rather than on specific issue positions. Taken together, these lines of research have cast considerable doubt about whether public preferences receive serious consideration in the policymaking process and whether it is even rational for politicians to weigh them heavily. The interviews conducted for this study, however, revealed that politicians and political strategists place tremendous importance on public opinion and monitor polls closely, and that prospective and retrospective issue evaluations by voters weigh heavily in the formulation of party and candidate issue positions and policy agendas. In the case of education, this enabled the public to exert extensive influence over the broad direction of national school reform efforts.

32. See, for example, Jennifer Hochschild and Bridget Scott, "Trends: Governance and Reform of Public Education in the United States," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 79–120; Carl Kaestle, "The Public Schools and the Public Mood," *American Heritage* 41 (February): 66–81; and Tom Loveless, "The Structure of Public Confidence in Education," *American Journal of Education* 105, no. 2 (1997): 127–59. On NCLB specifically, see Lisa Dotterweich and Ramona McNeal, "The No Child Left Behind Act and Public Preferences," paper presented at the American Political Science Association Conference, August 2003.

33. See Lowell Rose and Alec Gallup, *The Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Survey of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, various years, available online at: http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0309pol.pdf

34. Clarence Stone, Jeffrey Henig, Bryan Jones, and Carol Pierannunzi, *Building Civic Capacity: The Politics of Reforming Urban Schools* (Lawrence, Kan., 2001), 50.

35. Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time* (Princeton, 2004), 1–2.