PUBLIC POLICY

Politics, Analysis, and Alternatives

Fourth Edition

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POLITICS, ANALYSIS, AND POLICY CHOICE

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IN MAY 2002 VOTERS IN PORTLAND, OREGON, WERE PRESENTED
with A ballot initiative that would have overturned a three-decades-old regional growth policy that was widely recognized as a national model for controlling urban sprawl. The developers who placed the initiative on the ballot were frustrated with the strict local rules that limited housing developments in the area around the city. State law in Oregon required larger cities and towns to create an urban growth boundary for the purpose of maintaining free-of-development farmland and forests outside the city. Consistent with these goals, a regional government body called Metro regulates land use and transportation within the Portland metropolitan area. On three previous occasions, voters in Portland turned down efforts to weaken or eliminate their local growth plan.

This time, however, builders, property rights advocates, and even some environmentalists complained that Portland's stringent regulation of new housing construction had led to lofty home prices and high population density. They wanted to change the plan to allow new development outside the city in the greenbelt. Supporters of the existing land-use plan defended it as essential for allowing Portland to accommodate new housing while protecting the rural character and open spaces at the edge of the city. As a result of the long-standing growth plan, Portland resembles many European cities, with an efficient and popular mass transit system, compact urban residential neighborhoods with older buildings, and abundant forests and farms just outside the urban boundary. In part because of these qualities, Portland regularly appears near the top of rankings of the most livable cities in the United States.

In the end, 57 percent of voters in the Portland metropolitan area opposed the ballot initiative, and 43 percent voted in favor of it.[1] Just a little over two years later, however, in November 2004, voters once again had the opportunity to express their views, this time on a statewide land-use ballot measure. As is the case in many states with large rural areas,

Residents of Portland, Oregon, have long defended their strict urban land-use policies in the face of criticism about their impact on property values and the constraints they place on regional growth. Because of the statewide ballot initiative approved by voters in November 2004, however, the city will face new challenges in managing its growth. The photo shows downtown Portland.

voters in Portland are not always representative of the entire state of Oregon. So a state-wide vote can differ from one in which only Portland area residents vote. The vote on the pro-development initiative, Ballot Measure 37, was favorable at the state level. The measure was approved by a vote of 61 percent to 39 percent. Ballot Measure 37 was backed by a conservative property rights group called Oregonians in Action, and it called for compensation by local governments to property owners who could prove that zoning ordinances or environmental laws harmed their investment in the land. Property rights groups across the nation cheered their victory, and defenders of strict zoning laws and smart growth policies expressed deep concern about the consequences of that vote. They were particularly concerned because the measure allowed for retroactive claims for compensation, a rarity in these kinds of laws.[2]

The story does not end there. In October 2005, the Marion County Circuit Court (in Salem, the state capital) overturned Measure 37 on the grounds that it violated both the Oregon and U.S. constitutions. The state of Oregon announced that it would appeal the decision to the state supreme court, but this was doubtless a reluctant move on its part; state law requires that the state's attorneys defend voter-approved initiatives. Oregonians in Action also entered the fray to defend the initiative it drafted and supported.[3] In February 2006 the Oregon Supreme Court reversed the county circuit court and upheld Measure 37, which took effect the following month.

By December 2007, the state reported having received nearly seven thousand claims for compensation or requests for land-use waivers related to Measure 37, which were referred to the appropriate state agency. These included shopping malls to be built in what was farmland and gravel pit mines located in residential neighborhoods. One Hood River County fruit farmer filed a Measure 37 claim demanding payment of $57 million for his land or approval of his request to build eight hundred houses on his 210-acre property. Because local governments cannot afford to compensate landowners, the laws that would otherwise restrict such developments have to be waived. Not unexpectedly, in the Portland area, many of the requests were filed by major land developers.

Because of the effects of Measure 37, the state held yet another special election in November 2007, when voters approved Measure 49, which modified some aspects of the earlier ballot measure by restricting the circumstances under which property owners must be compensated for a change in land-use regulations. This time the state legislature placed the measure on the ballot, and the property rights group, Oregonians in Action, strongly opposed it. Nonetheless, Measure 49 received overwhelming approval by the electorate—62 percent of voters. The citizens of Oregon modified what many considered to be an ill-advised 2004 policy once the effects on land use became clearer to them.[4]

The Portland growth management initiative and the subsequent statewide ballot measures illustrate several themes that we address in this concluding chapter. The first concerns the substance of policy choices and the critical nature of policy design. As we have shown throughout the text, the way policymakers (or interest groups such as Oregonians in Action) design public policies can make them more or less effective,

efficient, and fair. There is no guarantee that policies will work or have the impact for which policymakers and the public hope; even if they do, some other interest group or segment of the population might find their effects unacceptable. Sometimes careful thought and design of public policies at the earliest stages, whether they address welfare reform, health care, education, or foreign policy, make a big difference and avoid unexpected consequences.

The second point concerns the impact that policies have on society—that is, on children receiving benefits under the State Children's Health Insurance Program; patients accepting health care services under Medicaid or Medicare; students relying on federal grants and loans; homeowners struggling to pay their mortgages; or citizens, property owners, and developers in Oregon. How the policies affect people's lives, whether favorably or not, depends on the choices made about policy goals and the means used to achieve them. What goals make the most sense and reflect a justifiable role for government? What is the best way to achieve those goals through public policy? What is the most equitable solution for all concerned? In the Oregon land-use case, Measure 37 achieved what its backers sought, but it also created some new problems that were addressed three years later by Measure 49. There is little question that the original land-use plan has real and important effects, which pleased some and angered others. The policy changes represented by the new state ballot propositions also had important effects, and the state of Oregon and the city of Portland will likely continue to debate and modify the policies over time in an effort to meet the needs of the diverse and conflicting interests in the state.

The Oregon growth management policy and the later statewide ballot initiatives also illustrate the potential for policy analysis to clarify the problems that citizens face and to help people find and assess possible solutions to them. Whether applied to contemporary challenges such as how best to promote the nation's economic recovery, how to ensure that the nation's food supply is safe, how to make college education affordable to all, or to problems that will arise in the future, analysis can help to define the issues more sharply, focus public debate, and help the public and policymakers find the best solutions.

Finally, the Portland and statewide ballot measures provide a clear demonstration of the dynamics of the policy-making process as well as the opportunities that it affords to citizens. As we have stated often throughout the text, policymaking never really ends. It is an ongoing process of defining problems, developing solutions to them, selecting what we prefer to do, putting those solutions into effect, and then considering whether to continue or modify those policies depending on how well they are working and whether collectively we find the results to be acceptable. Precisely because policy decisions can have important effects on people's lives, those who feel aggrieved by a decision are moved to take action to amend it or overturn it. Individuals and organized groups on either side of a given dispute will make the best case they can and use whatever arguments and data— and political tactics—they believe will strengthen their position.[5] The political parties and elected officials are, of course, deeply involved in this process of policymaking, and

ultimately politics in this sense strongly affects what kinds of public policies we have. Most policies advocated by the Barack Obama administration, for example, are very different from those that the George W. Bush administration favored.

All this is mostly good news for citizens. It means that at all levels of government they can choose to play an active role in decision making, sometimes by the simple act of voting on a ballot initiative and sometimes through deeper involvement in the political process, in government decision making, and in civic or community affairs in general. Initiatives and referenda, such as Ballot Measures 37 and 49 in Oregon, are unusual in that they offer citizens the chance to vote directly on public policy measures; but even if they are less directly involved in other kinds of policymaking, individuals can choose to participate in countless ways, particularly at state and local levels, where opportunities often are abundant.

Reversal of previously approved policy, illustrated by the Oregon case, is not that unusual. In November 2011, for example, voters in Ohio overturned the state's new law that limited collective bargaining rights for public employees. A union-backed citizen drive, We Are Ohio, put the measure on the ballot shortly after the Republican legislature and Gov. John Kasich approved it. After spending a reported $30 million on the campaign to reverse the policy, the citizen coalition won by 61 to 39 percent.[6] Similarly, as we noted in chapter 2, after the Wisconsin legislature and newly elected governor Scott Walker approved a similar and even more contentious state policy to eliminate nearly all collective bargaining rights for state employees (including most public school teachers), opponents gathered more than one million signatures to force a recall election for the governor (only the third in U.S. history), and hundreds of thousands of additional signatures to try to recall the lieutenant governor and four Republican state senators in special elections to be held in mid-2012.[7]

As the presidential election of 2008 clearly showed, modern Internet technologies facilitate a much greater level of involvement, even in national elections and governing. Voter turnout in 2008 was the highest in decades, especially among Democratic voters excited about their candidate, Barack Obama. Interest in the election, participation in the campaign, and voting in 2008 were particularly strong among younger voters, indicating an emerging potential for political activism among this segment of the electorate.[8] By 2012, however, much of the enthusiasm of younger voters for the president had diminished, and it remains to be seen if the 2012 presidential election campaign can spark anything like the level of support and excitement seen in 2008. At the other end of the political spectrum, supporters of the Tea Party movement enjoyed considerable success in the 2010 midterm elections, and many were just as energized during the Republican primary contests in early 2012, although for quite different reasons. They too relied increasingly on Internet technologies and reflected a new approach to grassroots political organizing (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Moreover, pundits in 2011 and early 2012 were suggesting that much of the political advertising and mobilization of voters for the 2012 elections would take place on social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter.[9] If so, future campaigns may well take on a very different character compared to recent political contests.

In this chapter we revisit the core arguments of the book and extend them to several contemporary challenges, especially as they relate to government's capacity to act on

public problems, and what might be done to improve that capacity as well as to build a vital democratic process for the future. The questions are exceptionally important today. The last few months of the Bush administration in late 2008 and the first three years of the Obama administration made crystal clear that government is not always prepared to deal with the problems it faces, whether they concern the Iraq and Afghanistan wars or the U.S. and global financial collapses. Policymakers do not always fully understand the causes of the problems, as was evident in the initial financial rescue plans directed at Wall Street banks, and they may be incapable of designing a coherent and comprehensive approach that stands much chance of working—simply because of the enormity and complexity of the economic system today. Even the economic experts are unsure of what to do.

At the same time, at least some analysts and policymakers viewed the dire conditions of early 2009 as offering a unique opportunity to institute major policy changes. For example, the economic recovery plan that Congress approved in February 2009—the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—and the budget message that Obama delivered to Congress shortly thereafter offered an ambitious policy agenda to "build a new foundation for lasting prosperity." It included sweeping changes in the nation's use of energy resources; a long-delayed plan to address climate change; a proposed overhaul of the nation's health care system; and plans to sharply increase spending on childhood education and college loan programs, to "ensure that every child has access to a complete and competitive education, from the day they are born to the day they begin a career."[10] The president clearly did not get everything that he sought, and the two parties were deeply divided by many proposed solutions. Yet the seriousness of the national economic predicament also sparked some new and creative ways of thinking about long-standing concerns such as rising federal spending and deficits, the costs of entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare, ways in which defense spending might be constrained, and the elements of an equitable tax system.

PUBLIC POLICIES AND THEIR IMPACTS

Chapter 1 defined public policy as what governments and citizens choose to do or not to do about public problems. Such choices are made at every level of government through the kinds of policy-making processes outlined in chapter 3 and elsewhere in the book. General descriptions of policymaking are somewhat abstract, however, and do not convey how important those choices can be, especially the great impact they can have on people's lives. The examples are myriad. Social Security policy has enormous consequences for the ability of senior citizens to live in dignity and meet their most essential needs during what is often a financially difficult period in their lives. So too do health care policies such as Medicare and Medicaid, which provide insurance coverage when health care is urgently needed, expensive, and often beyond the means of many individuals. Education policies can affect every public school in the country, what children learn, and how well prepared they are for college or employment. Economic and environmental policies that shape human well-being in the short term can also have serious long-term effects, as the

discussion of energy policy and climate change in chapter 11 indicated. In short, even though many people may not be aware of it, government and public policy matter.

Because policymaking involves a specification of policy goals as well as the means used to achieve them, a natural part of it is disagreement in every policy area. Should the No Child Left Behind Act continue to require the kinds of testing and evaluation of school performance that have become so problematic, and if so, should Congress add provisions to improve the reliability of testing and performance measures and ensure fair assessments of highly variable conditions from state to state? The federal Medicare program now includes prescription drug benefits, but how generous should those benefits be, and who should pay for them? For Medicare, Medicaid, and the Veterans Health Care System, what regulations might the government adopt to control the rising cost of prescription drugs? What about the case of texting and other uses of cell phones while driving that we discussed in Chapter 4? Should more be done to prevent texting while driving, and if so, should states make the practice illegal or use other ways to curtail the practice? As these and countless other examples illustrate, policy design can make a big difference in how much policies cost and how well they work to meet people's needs. Particular statutory or regulatory provisions can have significant effects on the way policies are implemented, how individuals and institutions comply with the law, and the impacts those laws have on society.

Policy Conflicts and Incremental Decision Making

Conflict arises when policy actors have differing views about the substance of public policies or whether government intervention is justifiable at all. Conflicts over the role of government and public policy underscore the inherently political nature of policymaking. Inevitably, policymaking involves choices about social values as well as calculations about policy design. In the heat of public debate, the differences are not always clear, even to those most directly involved. Policymakers and interest groups may disagree intensely about whether government intervention is warranted and about broad policy goals such as homeland security, access to quality health care, or equality in the workplace. Forging consensus is more difficult on fundamental goals and values than it is on the specific policy tools that might be used, such as provision of market incentives, regulation, privatization, or government management. The history of policy gridlock in areas as diverse as energy policy, tax reform, and health care reflects the inability of policymakers to resolve some of these deep conflicts, particularly when organized groups on each side subject the policymakers to intense lobbying.

Because political conflict is endemic to policymaking, almost all policies represent a compromise on the goals being sought as well as the policy tools proposed to achieve them. Compromise means that the policies are likely to be only partially effective and that the debate over further changes will continue. Thus elected officials enact policies to remove agricultural subsidies, only to put them back again a few years later when farmers complain that the free market that policymakers anticipated is not working well. In 2010 Congress approved the new Affordable Care Act, although without a single Republican in

either the House or Senate voting for it. Will the act survive future Congresses, or a legal challenge in the courts? Almost certainly members of Congress will revisit many components of the law in an effort to fine-tune them as well as to respond to ongoing partisan divisions over the measure.

It is also evident that the nation alternates between periods when policymakers impose tough requirements on food safety and the marketing of drugs, for example, and when there is little effective regulation. When weak policies result in public exposure to unreasonable risks of contaminated food, as happened with a variety of food products between 2008 and 2011, the pendulum swings the other way as public outrage convinces policymakers to take action. In 2010 Congress responded to the spate of food contamination problems by approving the Food Safety and Modernization Act, the first major overhaul of the food safety system since 1938. Yet as we noted in chapter 3, in 2011 members of Congress remained divided over the appropriate level of funding to implement the new law.

We can see that same pattern in financial regulation. Lax oversight of Wall Street banks and their reliance on exotic financial instruments was a major cause of the economic collapse in 2008, and the eagerness of mortgage loan officials across the country to offer risky or abusive home loans free from state or federal regulation was a key factor in the fall of the housing market. In response, Congress in 2010 approved the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, which was designed to help rein in the most abusive financial dealings. However, many conservative members remained deeply skeptical of the new law and were particularly concerned over the power and independence of the new Consumer Protection Financial Bureau that it created to supervise nonbank financial companies such as payday lenders, money transfer agencies, and debt collectors. Yet Congress wrote the act in a way that the new bureau could take action only when it had a permanent director in place. Opponents of the new bureau, however, refused to vote for the president's nominee for the director's post without first securing an agreement to change the powers of the agency, an action the president opposed. To allow the new agency to operate, President Obama chose to use his power to name the new agency head, former Ohio attorney general Richard Cordray, during a congressional recess rather than to seek approval by the Senate, a strategy that he knew was unlikely to succeed. Even that decision was controversial, and possibly subject to legal challenge, as Republicans argued that the Senate was not formally in recess and hence the president's appointment was not proper.[11]

Examples such as these tell us that policymaking is never complete but rather is an ongoing process in which new problems emerge, old ones are seen in a different light, and arguments are advanced once again about how best to further the public interest (Anderson 2011; Kingdon 1995). The pattern is particularly likely when voters alternate between election of Democrats and Republicans. As we have seen, the two parties stand so far apart on many policy issues today that each will use the opportunities created by another round of elections to pursue its agenda. When major policy initiatives such as the economic stimulus measures early in the Obama administration and the Affordable Care Act are approved

largely or purely along party lines, that is a sign of the times and also a good indicator that both policy goals and means will be revisited when the next round of elections changes the party balance.

These and other characteristics of U.S. politics mean that most of the time public policy change occurs in small steps, with only modest alterations made at the margins of existing policy. Incremental policymaking of this kind can be a sensible way to act on public problems, although not always. On the positive side, it can provide short-term political stability by minimizing conflict over social values and policy goals. It can forge compromises that help diverse policy actors gain something that they want while delivering needed services to the public. It subjects policy proposals to careful evaluation of their likely effectiveness, costs, and impacts, thus reducing the risk of serious mistakes. It can help to build political legitimacy and confidence in the policy-making processes. Finally, it can encourage policy experimentation and learning, the kind of trial-and-error decision making that allows policymakers, especially at the state level, to try new approaches to see how they work before committing to a particular course of action (Lindblom and Woodhouse 1993). Programs that are successful or broadly supported, such as Head Start, can be expanded over time, and those that fall short can be curtailed or modified in other ways.

Policy Strategies with No Crystal Ball

Incremental policymaking, the dominant style in the U.S. political system, is suitable for many public problems and circumstances, but it also has its limitations. Some critics suggest that it may be least appropriate when governments face new problems for which they are ill prepared and where considerable uncertainty exists over the risks, the costs of trying to reduce them, and the likely effectiveness of policy measures (Ophuls and Boyan 1992). Others may be tempted to say that this is precisely when incremental policy change makes more sense than a radical departure from the status quo.

Global climate change offers a context in which to consider the relative advantages of incrementalism and radical change. Climate science continues to advance, and yet forecasts of future climate scenarios are necessarily somewhat uncertain given the time frames for such projections. The uncertainties lead some to assume that climate scientists are in serious disagreement on the basics of the changes that are occurring and why, when in fact consensus exists on the reality of the problem. Scientific assessments from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, among others, clearly point to human actions, particularly use of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas, as the chief contributors to release of greenhouse gases, and also to changes in the global forest cover and agricultural practices. So what should be done? Opting for taking minimal policy actions while awaiting more definitive scientific evidence could result in catastrophic consequences for many countries around the world, particularly those with the fewest resources available to permit adaptation to a changing climate. On the other hand, adopting strong measures to force a rapid change in fossil fuel use to try to prevent climate change from occurring could be very costly, and doing so

could pose a very different kind of risk to society—that of spending money that might be better used for other purposes (DiMento and Doughman 2007; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Chang [IPCC] 2007; Selin and VanDeveer 2013). What should governments do in these circumstances? Much the same could be said of policy efforts as diverse as fixing the entitlement programs (Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security), reforming the U.S. tax code, reshaping campaign finance laws, or improving health care. That is, incremental changes might be more politically acceptable than bold or far-reaching changes, but sometimes going well beyond incrementalism is essential to deal effectively with the problem at hand and to minimize the costs to society of current policies. Given the very high federal deficits in recent years, the ever-increasing national debt, and a reluctance to increase taxes, policymakers might judge bold proposals for policy change more favorably than they would in normal times. So too might policymakers at the state and local levels.

Luckily, in many instances a middle course is available. Many recent proposals in a range of policy areas have emphasized the value of policy flexibility and adaptive management, meaning that policymakers can continue to evaluate the situation while taking incremental policy steps that make sense. For climate change, this type of policymaking might mean a real effort to promote energy efficiency and conservation, which are relatively cheap to achieve and for which technologies already exist. Or it might mean funding a research program to develop alternatives to fossil fuels such as wind and solar power, as President Obama favored in 2009 as part of his economic stimulus measure and budget proposals. Or it might mean building additional nuclear power plants, which are one of the few mature energy technologies not based on fossil fuel use. Whatever policies are adopted could have enough built-in flexibility to allow program changes as new knowledge develops. Administrators might be given the discretion to alter course when conditions justify doing so. Policymakers can always revisit the policy when they have enough evidence to warrant a change in direction.

Another way of thinking about responses to an uncertain future is evident in the example of Portland's land-use plan discussed earlier. Because their policy decisions have long-term effects, city and state governments need methods for making reasonable predictions about the future. They can turn to forecasting methods to determine what the city and state might look like in twenty or fifty years if present trends continue. They can also work with citizens to define what they prefer to see in the future. Once a favored vision or ideal for the city or state is identified, officials can develop plans and policies to help realize it. Chapters 5 and 6 discussed a similar trend in many localities to shape their futures around the idea of sustainable development or how best to enhance the quality of life for citizens on an enduring basis. The movement toward sustainable communities is a striking testimony to the belief that citizens can affect their futures through cooperation and local action that includes adopting policies that attempt to integrate economic development, environmental protection, and social well-being. Hundreds of communities across the country have tried to chart their futures in this way, and scholars have begun to assess their success and the conditions that foster it (Mazmanian and Kraft 2009; Paehlke 2013; Portney 2009 and 2012).[12]

In this vein, one of the most frequently observed limits of decision making is that it tends to focus on events or developments that are closest to people in time and space. Commentators often criticize policymakers for having a short-term time horizon as well as a local or parochial rather than a broader perspective on the problem at hand. By this they mean that elected officials tend to think about impacts only through the next election and to view the consequences of public problems or policies in terms of effects on their own states, districts, or localities. This is a common explanation for why the president and Congress have been unable to reform entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare, or to resolve their differences over reducing the federal deficit and the national debt. The effects of the shortened time horizons are particularly notable. The dire consequences of the many challenges or public policies, such as the national debt, entitlement programs, or climate change, will be felt in the future, and often in the distant future. Yet any attempts to address the problems or to revise the policies invite political controversies over short-term costs and burdens. This kind of bias, even if exaggerated, exists throughout society. Corporations, for example, focus heavily on short-term profits shown in quarterly and annual financial reports. As a result, they may lose sight of long-term goals, which are not highly valued in the marketplace. The financial meltdowns of 2008 and 2009 clearly showed major banks and other financial institutions taking on enormous risks for short-term gains, a gamble that turned extremely negative for them, but only after they profited handsomely from those very calculations.

As understandable as such a fixation on the short term is, public policy of necessity must look ahead. It must also adopt a broader perspective that includes people and institutions located at some distance, geographically and culturally, from policymakers and citizens. As the nation has learned since September 11, 2001, fighting global terrorism means more than guarding domestic airports or taking military action against specific targets in other countries. It involves trying to understand and respond to cultural and economic forces around the world that breed resentment toward the United States and sympathy and support for terrorists (Kavanagh 2011).

The 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), mentioned at the beginning of chapter 11, is a good example of forward-looking and wide-ranging policymaking. The world's population is expected to climb to over 9 billion by 2050, and the Census Bureau projects a U.S. population of more than 420 million by then. To provide for all the people, nations will have to foster more economic development to meet rising demands for energy, food, water, clothing, housing, transportation, jobs, and other essentials. To be sustainable, economic development around the globe would have to be designed to avoid the severe environmental and social strains that would likely come with reliance on conventional growth. The 1992 conference on sustainable development as well as its 2012 counterpart were arranged to try to identify and build support for this new kind of economic development.

As these examples illustrate, public policy aims at a moving target. Public problems change over time, in part because economic, cultural, social, and political conditions are dynamic.

New values and perspectives arise, for example, about welfare and work or the right to health insurance, and policy processes shift accordingly. In the mid-1990s, many Republicans in Congress wanted to abolish the Department of Education, which was created during the Jimmy Carter administration in part as a way of showing support for teachers, a major Democratic constituency. Yet many of these same Republicans took the lead in supporting additional federal power for education with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which required national testing of students. What changed? The American public said it was tired of failing public schools, and Republicans, interested in broadening their party's base, were now prepared to back a stronger federal role in education.

Policies also change in response to the development of new technologies, which in turn stimulate new public demands for government intervention. For example, cities and states try to regulate the use of cell phones by drivers, protect individual privacy rights on the Internet, subsidize stem cell research, advance passenger rail service, or provide high-speed highway lanes for those willing to pay for them.[13] The federal government is forced to define its position on human cloning and use of embryonic stem cells as medical science advances and new technologies raise ethical concerns.

Because the targets of public policy are always shifting, analysts, policymakers, and citizens need to be alert to changing situations and consider new policy ideas. As the substantive policy chapters showed, too often old policies continue long after they are outdated. If the nation truly values effective and efficient public policies, it must be open to evaluating those policies and changing them as needed. The same argument applies to addressing new concerns about the equity of public policies, whether the concerns are over environmental justice for poor communities or equal access to opportunities in education.

POLICY ANALYSIS AND POLICY CHOICES

Making public policies more effective, efficient, and equitable raises once again the subject of policy analysis and its role in policymaking. As we discussed in chapters 4 through 6, policy analysis can bring greater clarity to public problems and their solutions than might otherwise be the case. Analysts acknowledge the political character of the policymaking process, but they also believe that objective knowledge can reveal the nature of problems and their causes and help guide the search for public policies that promise a measure of success. If nothing else, policy analysis can clarify the issues and sharpen political debates. The potential for using policy analysis in state and local problem solving may be even greater than at the national level because state and local governments often lack the same level of expertise seen in the federal government.

Oregon's land-use case indicates that potential. In deciding whether to continue or alter the thirty-year-old growth management policy, voters benefited from reliable knowledge of what the policy had achieved to date and a fair assessment of how changing the policy would affect the quality of life in the metropolitan area. For example, how would additional residential development outside of the city affect highway travel, congestion, and

air pollution? Would businesses migrate from the central city to suburban shopping malls, as they have done in most other urban areas around the country? Given the vote on the state's land-use policy initiative in 2004, how might development in the greenbelt around the city affect recreational opportunities? How likely are farmers to sell their land to developers to meet the growing demand for housing? In this case and many others like it, local officials and the citizens who voted on either of the ballot initiatives could have benefited from unbiased information that addressed such questions.

Evaluating Public Policy

Among other evaluative criteria, this book has placed special emphasis on three: effectiveness, efficiency, and equity. Effectiveness, or how well a policy works or might work, is always difficult to address, but it is obviously an important consideration at a time when many critics doubt the capacity of government to solve any problem. At the earliest stages of the policy process, when policy alternatives are proposed, effectiveness is necessarily based on various assumptions and projections of the future that may or may not come to pass.

At periodic stages of the policy process, effectiveness is the criterion analysts use to determine how well a policy has lived up to expectations. Did it succeed in producing the desired results? Even after a reasonable period of time, it is not easy to identify and measure a policy's impacts and compare them to the initial policy goals. Policymakers and independent analysts in and out of government conduct such evaluation studies, which have great value, despite their limitations. Whether use of school vouchers or the operation of charter schools are effective in improving educational outcomes, for example, depends on what one measures. Should analysts consider parental support, improvement by participating students, or progress of all students? The difficulty in measuring success means that students of public policy need to think critically about such studies and their findings.

Efficiency is probably the criterion most likely to receive attention in contemporary policymaking as policy alternatives and existing programs are assessed. The reasons are clear. Government budgets are almost always under tight constraints, and it is a rare politician or taxpayer who favors tax increases, so policymakers want to ensure a good return on the money spent. This has long been true, but with rising federal deficits and a recent surge in the national debt, the constraints on spending today are far greater than they were in the past (see chapter 7). Policymakers almost certainly will want to know how much proposed programs cost and where the money will come from to pay for them. They will demand some kind of comparison of the costs with the benefits of government action. They may even compare different programs according to which are most efficient in producing good results for the same dollar amount invested; increasingly, we want to see such questions addressed in health care, for example, where some very expensive drugs or costly medical procedures may not produce improvements that justify the costs. Policy analysis can contribute to answering those questions. While this is all well and good, public policy students already know that measuring and comparing costs and benefits are rarely simple; not all can

be identified and measured, and it is difficult to compare them over time. Policymakers and the public need to exercise care in the way they use such studies and pay attention to their assumptions and methods so that they understand the studies' limitations.

Equity issues are addressed less frequently than effectiveness and efficiency, but they are no less important in public policy. As we have seen, equity can be defined in several different ways, and therefore it may include concerns that range from protecting individual freedom to regulating how policy costs and benefits are distributed among groups in a population, such as urban and rural residents or rich and poor taxpayers, or as popularized in 2011, between those in the top 1 percent of income earners and the rest of the population (the 99 percent). The issue of individual (or corporate) freedom arises frequently when a new program is proposed or an old one expanded. For example, federal health care policies offer benefits to Medicare and Medicaid recipients, but they impose constraints on health insurance companies and health professionals. Federal and state environmental regulations can help to protect the public's health, but at some cost to the rights of corporations to make decisions about the technologies they use and the kinds of products they make. Policy analysis can facilitate policy choices by clarifying these kinds of trade-offs. Analysis can be similarly useful in describing the way many programs, such as Social Security, welfare, and education, either redistribute wealth in society or try to promote equity in some other ways.

Improving Policy Capacity

Policy analysis also can help improve the performance of government and its responsiveness to citizen concerns. Now might be as good a time as any to consider how to improve the **policy capacity** of government. Public trust and confidence in government institutions fell almost steadily from the 1960s to the late 1990s, with a small upward trend only in the fall of 2001, following the terrorist attacks on the United States and the U.S. response to them (Mackenzie and Labiner 2002). After the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009, and growing public frustration over government's seeming ineptitude in figuring out what to do and which industries and companies deserved a federal bailout, it would be remarkable if trust and confidence in government
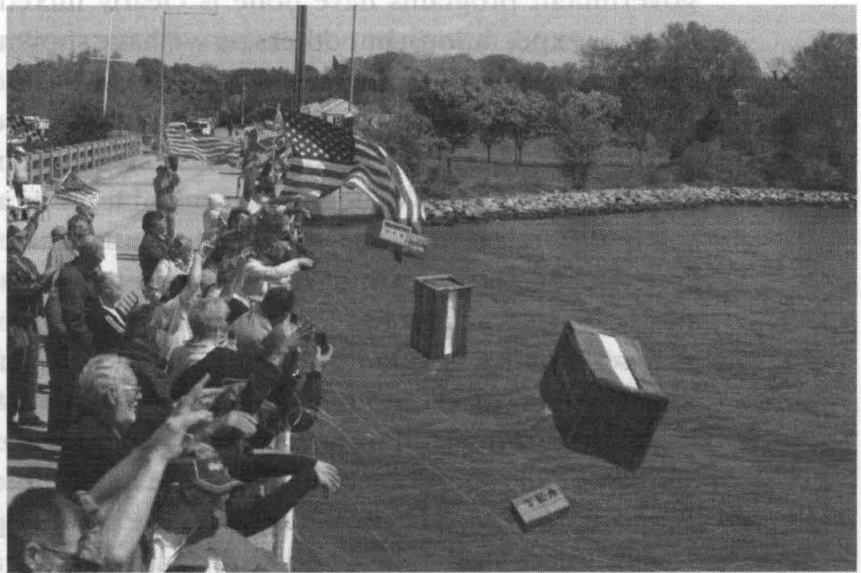
Public participation through protests is often associated with the left side of the political spectrum, but the rise of the Tea Party movement shows that conservatives also can be adept at both protests and electoral involvement. The 2010 photo shows Tea Party supporters taking part in the second annual tea-throwing event at Choptank River Fishing Pier near Trappe, Maryland, organized by the Tea Party and Americans for Prosperity, a conservative advocacy group that contributed heavily to Republican candidates in the 2010 elections. The participants threw crates of tea into the river, evoking the Boston Tea Party, an anti-tax protest in December 1773.

returned to its former levels any time soon. On the campaign trail in 2008, then-candidate Obama pledged to "make government cool again." In support of such a goal, some policymakers and citizen activists supported a new civilian service academy, analogous to the Peace Corps but devoted to training a new generation of public servants. The United States Public Service Academy would have offered a free four-year college education if individuals who attend are prepared to commit to five years of government service. In early 2009, the idea was attracting support, and legislation was pending in Congress to create such a program, but it was not approved.[14]

By 2012, however, many public opinion polls pointed to a continuing decline in public confidence in government and particularly in the U.S. Congress. Indeed, public assessments of Congress reached historic lows, and the public clearly disapproved of the performance of both major political parties. In particular, people faulted Congress for its pattern of political and public policy gridlock—that is, its inability to foster sufficient bipartisan cooperation to deal with public problems such as economic weakness, continued high unemployment, a high rate of home foreclosures, failing public schools, the federal deficit and national debt, and much more. Much the same was true in many state governments that faced similar partisan divisions and policy stalemate.[15]

Despite the many criticisms of government performance, the evidence on how well government programs have done is clearly mixed. Some programs have indeed fallen short of expectations, but others, as we have shown in previous chapters, have produced significant benefits to the public, from public education and environmental protection to health care services delivered through Medicare and Medicaid. A 2007 article in the *National Journal* on ten notable successes in public policy put it this way: "Not every problem is intractable. Progress *is* possible."[16] In a similar vein, in 2000 the Brookings Institution released a study of government's greatest achievements of the past half-century. Among the most notable were rebuilding Europe after World War II; expanding the right to vote; promoting equal access to public accommodations, such as hotels and restaurants; reducing disease; ensuring safe food and drinking water; increasing older Americans' access to health care; enhancing workplace safety; increasing access to higher education; and reducing hunger and improving nutrition. The study's point was simple: it is easy to ignore some of the most important public policy actions because they are not very visible as they become routine parts of American life; yet examining such a list confirms the important role that government and public policy can play in improving everyday life.[17]

Still, there is little doubt from public commentary and political rhetoric over the past decade that many people believe to the contrary, that government is not working well (Bok 2001). In response to this skeptical public mood, policymakers at all levels of government have struggled with how to improve public policies and programs and better meet citizens' needs. Various efforts to "reinvent" government and to improve its efficiency were tried during the 1990s, and they continue today. As indicated

earlier, President Obama began his administration determined not only to operate with openness and transparency, but to ensure that all programs would be as effective and efficient as possible. Yet, as noted, the public remains distrustful of government, and partisan divisions in the nation continue over what role government should play in our lives, from health care and food safety to environmental protection and energy policy. To some extent, the rise of the Tea Party movement reflects this broad discontent, which is fueled by increasingly partisan news shows and talk radio.[18] It is clear that any meaningful change in the public's view of government and public policy will require more than a determined White House. It will mean developing a broader policy capacity to define and respond effectively to public problems, both present and future, and ensuring that government agencies, from the military to Social Security, are as well managed as they can be.

How can policy analysis contribute to improving the policy capacity of government? One way is through the analysis of proposed institutional reforms, such as changes in the electoral process, campaign finance, term limits for legislators, and opportunities for citizens to participate in decision making. This is a task at which political scientists excel (Levi et al. 2008). Yet too often their analyses fail to reach the public or even policymakers, who then must act without benefit of what the analysis has uncovered. The box "Steps to Analysis: Money in Politics" illustrates these needs.

Other chapters have suggested that policy capacity can also be improved through better evaluation of the agencies charged with implementing policies and programs. Thanks to the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, the federal government is likely to conduct more evaluations of this kind than in the past, though probably of varying quality (Radin 2006). For many reasons, think tanks and other independent bodies carrying out external evaluations may be better able to identify institutional strengths and weaknesses and to suggest meaningful paths to reform. For example, chapter 11 noted that a series of studies by the National Academy of Public Administration (1995, 2000) identified many elements of the U.S. environmental protection system that could be changed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other agencies. Studies by Resources for the Future have reached similar conclusions (Davies and Mazurek 1998). Chapter 12 highlighted a number of studies by the Government Accountability Office and the Congressional Budget Office on the use of contractors in the Iraq war and spending on foreign aid. And chapter 8 highlighted studies on health care issues from the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Institute of Medicine, among others, on the costs of health care, the effects of being uninsured, and the promise of various policy initiatives.

Sometimes evaluations of government institutions and processes come from citizen groups such as Public Citizen and Common Cause, which favor reforming laws on campaign finance and lobbying. Policy entrepreneurs such as Ralph Nader and John Gardner, longtime representatives of those two groups, helped to get these issues on the political agenda, attract media coverage of reform proposals, and pressure Congress to act. The

organizations scored a major victory with the enactment of the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act of 2002, which imposed new restrictions on contributions of funds to political parties and campaigns.

One of the central tasks in improving policy capacity in government is in the hands of the people. If citizens lack interest in public affairs and fail to educate themselves on the issues, government is likely to continue to respond to organized groups and special interests. What citizens see as faulty performance in government often reflects the influence of organized groups that work to ensure that policies affecting them are *not* effective, or that they inflict minimum constraints on their activities. A well-known example from the late 1990s was the influence of corporations in weakening government oversight of their financial operations. The weaker financial regulations provided the opportunities for corporate abuses at companies such as Enron and WorldCom that shocked and disgusted the public in 2002. As noted earlier in the chapter, much the same kind of organized opposition to financial regulation helped to weaken the 2010 Dodd-Frank Act and its implementation that was designed to make Wall Street and other financial institutions more accountable to the public. The best way to counter such self-serving actions by special interests is for citizens to get involved. But continued public vigilance is essential to assure strong policies and consistent implementation of the policies. Otherwise those interests with most at stake will likely bide their time and intervene quietly to try to reverse the actions taken at the height of public concern over their practices. Studies of interest group behavior point to the efficacy of such strategies (Kraft and Kamieniecki 2007).

MONEY IN POLITICS

STEPS TO ANALYSIS

No other aspect of politics may be as well documented as the role of money. The Center for Responsive Politics allows you as a citizen to examine the data to see how money is donated and spent to influence the policy-making process. The center's Web site, www.opensecrets.org, lists the amounts of money donated to campaigns, dollars spent on lobbying activities, and soft money contributions. This kind of information can give voters a great deal of insight into the politics

of policymaking. The center believes that turning the "sunshine" on these activities will get policymakers thinking about how they go about making decisions and just who is supplying not only the money but also the information they use to make them.

The Web site also provides research and reports on political issues, and you can make your own assessments of the information. For example, during the 2008 election year cycle, the oil and gas industry contributed over $10 million

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STEPS TO ANALYSIS

to candidates through their political action committees (PACs). Counting all forms of campaign contribution, the industry gave more than $34 million to candidates and parties at a time when energy issues such as offshore drilling were prominent in the campaigns. Much was at stake in the election outcomes, and the industry was fully aware of that. Today much the same is true of the financial services industry.

Go to www.opensecrets.org and click on Influence and Lobbying, and then on Interest Groups. You will see the total contribution by each sector to each of the major parties, such as financial services, lawyers and lobbyists, communications/electronics, and energy/natural resources. Then select Financial Services/Insurance/Real Estate to see how companies within this sector contributed to election campaigns. Beyond the first box on contribution totals, you will find graphics that show the level of contributions by the sector over time, the total amount spent on lobbying, which parties received funds, and the top recipients by name of those funds, among other information.

Examine the data presented in the table and figures for this sector or one of the others. Which political party received the majority of money from this industry in the 2011–2012 election cycle? Which companies contributed the most? How does recent spending on elections compare to spending in previous years?

Now go back to the main page for the site and look for the tab reporting data on Super PACs, a new kind of political action committee created in July 2010 as a result of federal court decisions. These kinds of PACs, known technically as independent expenditure-only committees, can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money from corporations, unions, organizations, and individuals in campaigns for or against political candidates as long as they do not coordinate their efforts with the candidates. Read through the list of the Super PACs and note the names that they use as well as the candidates, viewpoints, or parties they support. What conclusions do you draw about the PACs? Do you think their activities strengthen or weaken the electoral process?

Return to the main page of the site and select Politicians and Elections. Then select the tab for Congress. You can examine any of those members in leadership positions whose names and photos are on the main page. Or you can find your member of Congress, or the candidate who challenged that member, by using the box on the right and entering part of the member's or candidate's name. How much did he or she spend on the last election campaign, and where did the money come from? Click on the member's name to see the leading contributors to the campaign. What conclusions would you draw? To what extent do you think the sources of election funding might affect decisions on public policy issues before Congress?

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

The final perspective this chapter emphasizes is the politics of policymaking—that is, how policy choices are made. The decision-making process affects what kinds of decisions are made and, ultimately, what impacts they have on society. The policy outcomes reflect who

participates in the process, who does not, and the different resources that each policy actor brings to the decision-making arena. In a democracy, one would expect public policies to be consistent with public preferences and to meet the needs of citizens. As noted, however, policymakers are often more responsive to organized interests—the agriculture industry, the mining industry, the oil industry, health insurance companies, or the music recording industry—than they are to the general public. The discussion of subgovernments, elites, and the role of interest groups in chapters 2 and 3 highlighted these patterns.

Citizen Capacity and Policy Engagement

How might that situation be changed? One way is to strengthen **citizen capacity** to participate in policy-making processes. With some notable exceptions as evident in recent Tea Party activism, the level of public participation in policy processes, whether voting in elections or taking active roles in civic affairs, has declined over the past several decades (Putnam 2000; Skocpol 2003; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Of all the age groups, the youngest—including college students—generally has had the lowest level of interest in politics and policymaking and active participation in these processes. However, as stated earlier, there are some contrary indicators of citizen interest in public affairs, especially in their local communities. The movement toward sustainable communities often involves extensive citizen involvement in local decision making, and it captures recent interest in redesigning communities in terms of mass transit, energy efficiency, use of open space, and rehabilitation of older buildings and neighborhoods. There also are encouraging signs from surveys by the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, demonstrating that Americans have a "profound sense of connectivity to their communities and neighbors" and are willing to work with others to solve problems.[19] Additional evidence comes from the 2008, 2010, and 2012 election campaigns, where candidates proved they could spark intense interest and participation by younger voters.[20] As indicated by the recall campaigns in Wisconsin and citizen action on initiatives in other states, such as Ohio, under the right circumstances citizens can and do become mobilized to get involved in political processes.

There is no shortage of analyses about why the American public has been so disengaged from politics and civic affairs for so long. At least part of the explanation lies in the disconnect between the policy process and people's daily lives. That is, most citizens either do not see how government affects their lives, or they do not believe they can do much to change either governmental processes or public policies. As we have argued, public policies unquestionably have a great impact on people's lives. The question is whether people see these impacts, and also whether they really believe their opinions and actions can make a difference. Looking at the election results in November 2008 and 2010, many commentators anticipated a rebirth of citizen enthusiasm about government and politics. Its arrival may have been tempered to some extent by the economic downturn, and time will tell if we are in the early stages of a new era of active citizenship.

In addition to making the connection between policy choices and individual lives clearer, improving the public's access to government information might encourage more people to participate. Consider the activities of the public interest group Environmental Working

Group (EWG), which in 2002 became heavily involved in congressional debates over agricultural subsidies, among many other issues. Frustrated by the lack of public attention to what it believed were inequitable payments to wealthy farmers, the group secured access to the raw data for the government's farm subsidy payments and placed the information on its Web site (www.ewg.org). Members of Congress frequently cited the data and the EWG Web site when considering the bill, probably because they had heard from their constituents on the subject. Particularly important was the revelation that hundreds of farmers and absentee landlords were receiving millions of dollars in subsidies.[21] It is noteworthy that by early 2009 President Obama made a point of urging Congress to end such subsidies.

Later in the year, as Congress began debating whether to approve construction of the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository, the same group put information about possible nuclear waste shipment routes on its site. It included an interactive map that allowed citizens to determine how close the shipments would come to their communities. The site also provided data on the amount of nuclear waste in each state, the likely number of shipments of waste by truck and rail through the state, the number of people who lived within one mile of a transportation route, and similar information. Once again, the Web site attracted a great deal of media coverage, along with plenty of criticism. Critics said the information was misleading because the government has yet to approve any transportation routes for the nuclear waste shipments and that the maps therefore were speculative. Whether one thinks that the group's efforts were praiseworthy or not, its strategy suggests the potential political power of Web-based citizen education and lobbying. The box "Steps to Analysis: Using Web Sites to Influence Public Opinion and Policy Debate" illustrates yet another group effort to shape public opinion and policy debate.

USING WEB SITES TO INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY DEBATE

STEPS TO ANALYSIS

Back in 2002, the groups Public Citizen and Government Accountability Project analyzed testing records from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for Salmonella bacteria found at ground-beef processing plants. They acquired the data with a Freedom of Information Act request. The groups' 2002 report cited many plants that failed the tests, some repeatedly, because of lax USDA enforcement. They placed the list of failing plants on the Public Citizen Web site to highlight what they considered to be a serious threat to public health.

In 2008 another public health scare received enormous media attention. This again involved Salmonella bacteria, but this time the concern was tainted peanut butter at a plant in Georgia whose ingredients wound up in thousands of food products across the country. Eventually, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recall of those products became the largest in U.S. history. The FDA set up a special Web page on the recalls (www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/Salmonellatyph.html) as a way to provide important

information for the public.[1] Visit the site and scan the list of recalled products. How understandable are the FDA's product lists? Review the other topics on this page, including foods, drugs, cosmetics, and medical devices. What conclusions can you draw from the information provided here? Do you believe the FDA did a good job on the peanut butter recall action or on previous product recalls or comparable agency action? Should the FDA have done even more in this case? Should it have more carefully inspected the peanut plant in Georgia to prevent the spread of contaminated peanut products in the first place? Why do you think it did not? Why do think the state of Georgia was not more vigilant or more thorough in inspecting the plant? What about the state of Texas? A peanut processing plant in that state run by the same company, the Peanut Corporation of America, operated for years without any inspection or state license from government health officials.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, improperly handled ground beef, eggs, chicken, and other foods contaminated with pathogens such as Salmonella, Listeria, and E. coli bacteria are implicated in an estimated 14 million illnesses, 60,000 hospitalizations, and 1,800 deaths each year. Illness and death are particularly high among newborn infants, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems. The CDC also reports, as noted in chapter 6, that all food-related illnesses account for perhaps 3,000 deaths each year. In light of these numbers, why do you think the United States has not done more to reduce the risks of food-borne illness and death?

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[1] For an overview of the contaminated peanut story and related problems with food safety inspections, see Michael Moss and Andrew Martin, "Food Safety Problems Slip Past Private Inspectors," *New York Times* online edition, March 5, 2009.

New Forms of Citizen Participation

Public participation in the policy process can go well beyond voting, writing letters or e-mail messages to policymakers, and discussing policy issues. Historically, only a small percentage of the public is even this active. But the percentage could rise as technology makes public involvement easier and as policymakers become more interested in raising public participation in government.

As discussed in many previous chapters, some government agencies already make a concerted effort to promote the use of their Web sites, to offer information and public services through "e-government," and to invite the public to engage in the issues (West 2005). For example, in 2001 the EPA completed an online national dialogue on how to improve public involvement in the agency's decision making.[22] For years the Internal Revenue Service has accepted electronic submission of tax returns, and in 2003 it began a new program called Electronic Account Resolution that allows tax professionals to resolve many kinds of disputes online in minutes. The opportunities to become involved in policymaking are even greater at the state and local levels. In addition to inviting people to public meetings

and hearings and asking the public to submit comments on proposed government actions, policymakers also ask citizens to serve on advisory panels and assist them in making often difficult choices.

In the world of campaign and advocacy politics, recent elections demonstrated the enormous potential for candidate fund-raising and citizen mobilization through Internet technology. The use of specialized networks and blog sites has greatly expanded, and the potential for citizen involvement in politics and public policy continues to grow. With nearly universal access to the Internet and increasing use of high-speed and wireless connections via smart phones and tablet computers, citizens should find it even easier to become active in public affairs (Anderson and Cornfield 2002; Kamarck and Nye 2002; Macedo 2005;Tolbert and McNeal 2003).[23]

Of course, there is also a downside to these developments. Citizens face a veritable flood of political and public policy commentary, much of which is biased and partisan, and sometimes blatantly manipulative and misleading.[24] The same could be said for many Internet news sites that bear little relationship to real journalism.The trend is made worse as Americans' interest in news from all sources has declined steadily in recent years.[25] Without an ability to compare information from different sources, and evaluate it objectively, citizens have little protection against the onslaught.

One of the forms of citizen involvement that is most vulnerable to these kinds of risks is voting on ballot propositions, much like the ones in Oregon discussed at the beginning of the chapter. A highly contentious one, Proposition 23 in California in 2010, asked voters whether or not to suspend the state's Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.The two sides in that dispute spent over $40 million to sway voters' opinions, with much of the support for the measure coming from out-of-state oil companies and much of the opposition funded by environmental groups and Silicon Valley investors who had backed clean energy technologies.The ballot measure lost by a vote of 61 percent to 39 percent.[26]

Consider another example that also gained national media attention but which involved some new twists on the way such campaigns on voter initiatives and referenda are conducted today. In 2008 voters in California approved Proposition 8, a ballot measure that revised the state's constitution to restrict the definition of marriage to a union between a man and a woman.The vote was close, with 52 to 48 percent in favor, and its approval reversed a decision by the state's supreme court earlier that year permitting marriage by same-sex couples; the court had ruled that banning such marriages was discriminatory under the state's constitution. In early 2009, that same court heard legal challenges to Proposition 8 that sought to declare it invalid, and in 2010, a federal district court judge in California ruled that Proposition 8 was indeed an unconstitutional form of discrimination. Early in 2012, a three-judge federal appeals court in California upheld that decision (by a vote of 2 to 1), paving the way for additional legal challenges that likely will include an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court for final resolution.[27] The two sides in the state ballot campaign had spent about $40 million each, making it the costliest state ballot measure ever and, except for the presidential election, the highest-funded election campaign in 2008.

In addition to spending a lot of money, opponents of the measure used new technology that made available on the Internet information on Proposition 8 donations that the state collects and makes public under its campaign finance disclosure laws. Visitors could see donors' names and approximate locations, and as one journalist put it, "That is often enough information for interested parties to find the rest—like an e-mail or home address." Because of public access to the information, donors to groups that supported Proposition 8 said they had been harassed—sometimes with death threats—by some of those who opposed it.[28] Is the use of such information, collected through public disclosure laws that are designed to increase the transparency of the political process, reasonable? Does use of it in this way threaten to undermine democratic values that campaign finance and other similar laws are intended to enhance, as some critics have said? That is, might the practice of making the information public in a very visible way discourage citizens from getting involved by contributing money? Or is it an acceptable way to alert citizens to the identity of those individuals and businesses that stand on one side or the other of a public dispute and contribute money, knowing that such contributions become public information?

As we noted in chapter 4, even public policy think tanks are not immune to some of these trends; some are drawn more than ever into hotly contested partisan and ideological battles (Rich 2004). This is particularly true in the 2010s, as partisan divisions have become wider and sharper than ever before, and each side looks for supportive studies and arguments from public policy organizations and interest groups on its side of the political spectrum. In light of these changes, it is particularly important today that students of public policy develop a strong capacity to think critically about news and policy commentary and train themselves to determine which Web sites and other sources offer the best in public policy information and analysis. Despite the difficulties, there are reasons to be optimistic about the potential of the Internet and citizen access to information about government and public policy.

Policy analysts have long recognized different social goals furthered by public involvement in policymaking and the criteria by which participation can be evaluated. Thomas Beierle and Jerry Cayford (2002) identify five goals: (1) incorporating public values into decisions (a fundamental expectation in a democracy); (2) improving the substantive quality of those decisions (for example, by suggesting alternatives and finding errors of inappropriate assumptions underlying policy proposals); (3) resolving conflict among the various competing interests (by emphasizing collaborative rather than adversarial decision making); (4) building trust in institutions and processes (thereby improving their ability to solve public problems); and (5) educating and informing the public (raising public understanding of the issues and building a shared perspective on possible solutions). The last of these goals can be thought of as enhancing public capacity for participation in policy processes, an example of what Anne L. Schneider and Helen Ingram (1997) refer to as the capacity-building tools that governments possess.

Government agencies and public officials are often unclear about what they expect public participation to accomplish, and citizens might be puzzled as well. Some agencies feign

interest in public involvement to appear to be doing the "right thing" and to comply with legal mandates. But they greatly limit the degree to which citizens can affect decision making. They may do so because they do not trust citizens' capacity to understand issues and participate with a sufficient degree of competence (Yang 2005).

Responding to that common practice, some analysts have suggested that there are four quite different models of citizen involvement, with increasing degrees of public influence on decision making. The first is the commentary model, in which agencies and proponents dominate; second, the social learning model, in which citizens learn about policy proposals and provide advice on them; third, the joint planning model, in which citizens engage in a dialogue with policymakers and planners and work collaboratively with them; and fourth, the consent and consensus model, in which citizens share authority with government and work together to solve problems.[29] This last model resembles what some scholars call **deliberative democracy**, where citizens are expected to play an intensive role in discussions with one another and with policymakers as part of the process of justifying or legitimizing policy action (Fishkin 2009; Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Jacobs, Cook, and Delli Carpini 2009; and Sirianni 2009).[30] Which model makes the most sense? Are citizens well enough informed on the issues to share authority with government officials? If not, how might their knowledge be increased enough to permit such a sharing of authority?

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this book, we have emphasized an integrated approach to the study of public policy rather than focusing on policy history and program details. Although this kind of information is clearly important, policy and program particulars change quickly, and the knowledge learned may be of limited use over time. In the long run, the perspectives and approaches of policy analysis are more helpful in understanding how the nation's policies evolved into their present state and considering what alternatives might work better. The book stresses how to think about policy issues, where to find pertinent information, and how to interpret it. It also underscores the need to develop a robust capacity for critical and creative thinking about public problems and their solutions.

This last chapter revisits some of these points in the context of the policy challenges governments face as they try to make difficult decisions about the future. It focuses on the way policy decisions can affect people's lives, how policy analysis can clarify public problems and possible solutions, and the role of citizens in the policy-making process. Despite a prevailing sense of cynicism toward government and politics, we believe that we live in a time of exceptional opportunity for citizens to get involved in public affairs. New technologies, particularly those based in the Internet, greatly facilitate access to a vast range of policy information. Governments at all levels are welcoming citizen involvement, giving new vitality to the promise of American democracy. We urge you to take advantage of these opportunities and play an active role in designing and choosing public policies for the future.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider the case presented at the beginning of the chapter on land-use decisions in Portland and the state of Oregon. Is the provision for statewide ballot initiatives such as Ballot Measures 37 and 49 a good idea? That is, should citizens be allowed to vote directly on such legislation, or should state governments rely instead on their elected legislators to make such policy choices? What do you see as the major advantages or disadvantages of such state initiatives?

2. Why do you think most citizens do not take more interest in politics and public policy? What might increase their level of interest and participation? What would motivate you to become more active?

3. How much potential do you see in Internet-based political mobilization of citizens, either during election campaigns or for specific advocacy campaigns between elections? What particular kinds of actions are most likely to be successful in reaching voters, especially younger ones? Based on the examples and discussion offered in this chapter, what concerns, if any, do you have?

4. Consider this chapter's discussion of California's Proposition 8 banning same-sex marriage in the state. Should these kinds of highly controversial questions be placed on the ballot for citizens to vote on directly, or should they be decided instead by state legislators? If they are placed on the ballot, is it fair to make public information about individual and business donations to each side of the campaign? Should the state try to restrict the way in which such campaign donation information is made available, or should it leave matters as they now stand—including presenting the data online so that donors to each side can be easily identified?

5. Consider one or more major policy challenges, such as reforming health care, reforming the major entitlement programs (Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid), redesigning the tax code, or developing a national energy or climate change policy. What do you see as the major advantages or disadvantages of incremental policy change? Similarly, what do you think are the major advantages or disadvantages of pursuing policy change that is more far-reaching or radical, whether the ideas are endorsed by the left or right side of the political spectrum?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Derek Bok, *The Trouble with Government* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). A perceptive assessment of government and civic shortcomings, with thoughtful recommendations for greater citizen participation in public affairs.

Russell J. Dalton, *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation Is Reshaping American Politics,* rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2009). Charts how young Americans are creating new norms of citizenship and engagement, including evidence from the 2008 presidential election.

Stephen E. Frantzich, *Citizen Democracy: Political Activists in a Cynical Age,* 3rd ed. (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008). Addresses the myriad ways in which citizens can participate in the political process despite today's prevailing cynicism about government and politics.

Paul Rogat Loeb, *Soul of the Citizen: Living with Conviction in Challenging Times,* rev. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010). Describes how ordinary citizens can make their voices heard on a range of social issues during a time of widespread political cynicism.

Stephen Macedo et al., *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do About It* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2005). A short but significant set of commentaries that both analyze the challenges to contemporary U.S. democracy and propose reforms that can revitalize the practice of politics.

Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). A best-selling, data-filled treatment of civic disengagement in the United States, the reasons for it, and possible solutions.

Carmen Sirianni, *Investing in Democracy: Engaging Citizens in Collaborative Governance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2009). Clearly explains how citizens can work together to help solve the many challenges facing American society and government today.

SUGGESTED WEB SITES

www.apsanet.org/content_4899.cfm. American Political Science Association's Civic Education Network, with links to civic and political education organizations, centers and institutes, teaching and research resources, and service learning programs.

www.citizen.org. Public Citizen home page, with many links to policy issues and activism.

www.excelgov.org. Council for Excellence in Government, a nonprofit organization working to improve government at all levels and to encourage greater citizen involvement. Has links to other resources and sites, including the Center for Democracy and Citizenship.

www.ipi.org. Institute for Policy Innovation, a research organization that believes in individual liberty and limited government; does research and papers on policy options.

www.usa.gov/index.shtml. The federal government's citizen portal, with links to public action and e-government services.

KEYWORDS

citizen capacity   514

deliberative democracy   519

policy capacity   509

public participation   516

NOTES

1. Timothy Egan, "Portland Voters Endorse Curbs on City Growth," *New York Times,* May 23, 2002.
2. Felicity Barringer, "Rule Change in Oregon May Alter the Landscape," *New York Times,* November 26, 2004. Other states allow for compensation to be paid to property owners, including Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. But in all cases they set a threshold for making such a claim (such as 25 percent loss of value), and the state is liable only for losses affected by newly approved land-use rules. For other commentary on how the Oregon law affected local efforts to control sprawl, see Blaine Harden, "Neighbor vs. Neighbor," *Washington Post National Weekly Edition,* March 7-13, 2005, 30.
3. The key aspects of the ongoing saga of Measure 37 can be read at the Web page for the state's Department of Land Conservation and Development: www.oregon.gov/LCD/MEASURE49/misc_m37_information.shtml#. See also the site hosted by the property rights group, Oregonians in Action: www.oia.org/.
4. For those interested, the effects of Measure 37 and the vote on Measure 49 are nicely recounted in a study by the American Land Institute in Portland, "The 'Yes' Vote on Measure 49: Protecting the Geese That Lay the Golden Eggs," July 10, 2008, available at the Oregon State University library: http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/dspace/handle/1957/9132.
5. As is perhaps evident in this review of the Oregon ballot measure, direct citizen participation of this kind is often fraught with risk. Both sides in such disputes may be tempted to distort the facts, a good deal of money can be spent in ways that can easily mislead voters, and the outcome does not always represent what citizens or the state legislature might choose to do with greater deliberation. The risks of direct policymaking by citizens have not gone unnoticed by scholars. See, for example,

Richard J. Ellis, *Democratic Delusions: The Initiative Process in America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

6. Sabrina Tavernise and Steven Greenhouse, "Ohio Vote on Labor Is Parsed for Omens," *New York Times,* November 9, 2011.

7. Monica Davey, "Organizers Say 1 Million Signed Petition to Recall Wisconsin Governor," *New York Times,* January 17, 2012. To put the numbers into perspective, the million plus signatures that recall organizers say they collected is a large percentage of the state population of 5.7 million and represented about the same number of people who voted for the governor in the 2010 election, which he won narrowly (52 percent to 47 percent) over his Democratic opponent, Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett.

8. Scott Helman, "For Democrats, a New Electorate," *Boston Globe,* January 30, 2008.

9. See Aaron Smith, "22% of Online Americans Used Social Networking or Twitter for Politics in 2010 Campaign," Pew Internet and American Life Project, available at http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Politics-and-social-media.aspx; and Ashley Parker, "In Nonstop Whirl of G.O.P. Campaigns, Twitter Is a Critical Tool," *New York Times,* January 28, 2011. For a broader treatment of how use of the Internet is affecting politics, see Jason B. Gainous and Kevin M. Wagner, *Rebooting American Politics: The Internet Revolution* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011).

10. The complex economic recovery measures can be followed on a new government Web site devoted to this effort as part of the Obama administration's pledge to make the actions open to the public, collaborative, and participatory: www.recovery.gov. The text of the Obama speech to Congress at that time and more recent ones are available on the White House Web site: www.whitehouse.gov.

11. Edward Wyatt, "Appointment Clears the Way for Consumer Agency to Act," *New York Times,* January 4, 2012; and Helene Cooper and Jennifer Steinhauer, "Bucking Senate, Obama Appoints Consumer Chief," *New York Times,* January 4, 2011. On the broad pattern of renewed interest in regulation, see Jackie Calmes, "Both Sides of the Aisle Say More Regulation, and Not Just of Banks, *New York Times,* October 14, 2008.

12. In *Taking Sustainable Cities Seriously: Economic Development, the Environment, and Quality of Life in American Cities,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012), Kent E. Portney examined major cities that have "started to take the idea of sustainability seriously as a matter of public policy." These included Austin, Boston, Boulder, Portland, San Francisco, Santa Monica, Seattle, Tucson, and others. Beyond his own analysis, Portney suggests the value of more systematic appraisal that can reveal why cities undertake such efforts and the factors that make some of them more successful than others.

13. For an account of the use of such highway lanes in the metropolitan Washington, D.C., area, see Steven Ginsberg, "A Future Free from Gridlock, for a Price," *Washington Post,* December 12, 2005, A1. For an assessment of California's Proposition 71, a ballot measure that resulted in the state investing heavily in stem cell research, see Connie Bruck, "Hollywood Science," *The New Yorker,* October 18, 2004, 62–80.

14. Jason DeParle, "A Plan to Lift the Lowly Bureaucrat to a Status of Cherished Public Servant," *New York Times,* January 7, 2009. The proposed U.S. Public Service Academy has a Web page that covers the idea, as well as the support in Congress and elsewhere, at http://uspublicserviceacademy.org.

15. See, for example, reports at the Pew Research Center, such as an April 2010 report, "Distrust, Discontent, Anger and Partisan Rancor," at http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1569/trust-in-government-distrust-discontent-anger-partisan-rancor; and Gallup Polls on negativity toward U.S. government, at www.gallup.com/poll/149678/americans-express-historic-negativity-toward-government.aspx. A summary account of the latest surveys can be found in Jeff Zeleny and Megan Thee-Brenan, "New Poll Finds a Deep Distrust of Government," *New York Times,* October 25, 2011.

16. See "10 Successes, 10 Challenges," *National Journal,* January 20, 2007, 18–40. Among the successes were support for higher education, clean air and clean water, the food stamp program, and action against AIDS.

17. The Brookings study, "Government's Greatest Achievements of the Past Half Century," by Paul C. Light, is available at the Brookings Web site: www.brookings.edu/papers/2000/11governance_light.aspx.

18. See Jeffrey M. Berry and Sarah Sobieraj,"Understanding the Rise of Talk Radio," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, October 2011: 762-767.

19. The Pew study,"Ready, Willing, and Able: Citizens Working for Change," is available at www.pew-partner ship.org. The site includes similar studies and recommendations for civic engagement.

20. Melissa Dahl, "Youth Vote May Have Been Key in Obama's Win," November 5, 2008, available at the MSNBC Web site: www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27525497.

21. Elizabeth Becker,"Accord Reached on a Bill Raising Farm Subsidies," *New York Times*, April 27, 2002, 1.

22. The EPA dialogue can be found at www.network-democracy.org/epa-pip/welcome.shtml.

23. One of the most active liberal groups to have exploited the potential of the Internet for citizen mobilization is MoveOn.org (www.moveon.org). For an early assessment of its success and the actions of similar groups, see Carl M. Cannon, "Flexing Internet Muscles," *National Journal*, October 9, 2004, 3047-3050.

24. For an argument that the Republican Party has been especially guilty of such manipulation of the American public, see Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Off Center: The Republican Revolution and the Erosion of American Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Republicans would counter that liberals and Democrats also manipulate language and political symbols that can mislead the public on policy issues in much the same way.

25. See Frank Ahrens, "Hard News to Digest," *Washington Post National Weekly Edition*, February 28- March 6, 2005, 19-20.

26. The list of contributors to each side can be found at the Web site for MapLight, a nonpartisan group that collects data on contributions to political campaigns: http://maplight.org/content/california-prop-23-nov-2010. See also Todd Woody,"Foes Outspend Backers of Proposition 23," *New York Times*, October 11, 2010.

27. Maura Dolan,"California Supreme Court Looks Unlikely to Kill Proposition 8," *Los Angeles Times* online edition, March 6, 2009; Adam Nagourney and John Swartz, "Backers of Prop. 8 Can Challenge Court Ruling," *New York Times*, November 17, 2011; and Adam Nagourney,"Court Strikes Down Ban on Gay Marriage in California," *New York Times*, February 7, 2012.

28. See Brad Stone,"Disclosure, Magnified on the Web," *New York Times*, February 8, 2009, Business Section, 3.

29. See Hardy Stevenson Associates, "How to Conduct National Level Consultations," *Social and Environmental Assessment Bulletin* (Spring 2002).

30. For many practical examples of such deliberative democracy at work, see Stanford University's Center for Deliberative Democracy, at http://cdd.stanford.edu/. See also James S. Fishkin, "How to Fix California's Democracy Crisis," *New York Times*, October 10, 2011. Fishkin is the director of the Stanford center.