

Advocacy Coalitions, Policy Entrepreneurs, and Policy Change

Michael Mintrom and Sandra Vergari

The advocacy coalition framework (AC) explains policy stability. The policy entrepreneurship model (PE) explains dynamic policy change. Thus, augmenting the AC with insights from the PE provides a method of explaining a common empirical phenomenon: policy stability punctuated by dynamic policy change. This analytical strategy could be used to explore stability and change in many policy arenas. Here, we use it to interpret the background to and dynamics of recent education policy reform in Michigan.

Introduction

Intrigued by the policymaking process, policy scholars have developed various models of how it works.¹ Among these contributions, the advocacy coalition framework (AC) presented by Sabatier (1988) and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) usefully explains periods of policy stability. Still, a puzzle remains. How can we explain periods of dynamic policy change? The agenda-setting literature (e.g., Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1995) and the literature on the politics of ideas (Derthick & Quirk, 1985; Wilson, 1980) suggest the importance of policy entrepreneurs as change agents. Following this line of research, recent contributions have presented what we term the policy entrepreneurship model (PE). We suggest that augmenting the AC with insights from the PE can provide a conceptually coherent understanding of how political forces generate stable policy arenas in some periods and dynamic change in others.

We have two main goals in this article. First, we seek to better understand the nature of policy change and how it comes about, by exploring the determinants of a recent, dramatic change in education policy in Michigan. Second, we seek to explore the compatibility of the AC and the PE.

We begin the article by discussing the general aims of models of policymaking. We then review the salient features of the AC and the PE. Following this, we interpret the build-up to and the dynamics of the recent education reform process in Michigan using the two approaches. We conclude the article by returning to a more conceptual level and discussing why it makes sense at least to acknowledge the activities of policy entrepreneurs within the AC. As a general point, we suggest that it is more important to strive for compatibility between the AC and the PE than to attempt some type of full-blown synthesis. This is because we see the models as having been designed to explore different aspects of the policymaking process.

Two Models of Policymaking

Political scientists have devoted considerable attention to the development of models of the policymaking process.² All of these models deal either explicitly or implicitly with how policy changes emerge. The goal of building models is to use abstraction to improve our understanding of complex processes. However, the usefulness of these models can be diminished by falling into an ahistorical trap.

As Swift and Brady (1994, pp. 101–102) note, our models need to be informed by “an historical sensibility.”³ As a result, approaches taken to model construction frequently differ, and for good reason.

To a considerable extent, building models of the policymaking process is similar to constructing maps. Some maps are designed to give us an overview of an area and will identify only features such as major highways. Other maps are designed to show the relationships between specific streets. This mapping analogy suggests three important points. First, to help us explore complex, real-world situations, modeling must involve making many simplifications and ignoring many details. Just because we cannot use a map of the world to find the street we live on, we do not view such a map as useless or incomplete. Second, although the purposes and emphases of various models will differ, any two models ultimately should be consistent (but not necessarily identical) in their handling of those features that appear in both. Third, much can be gained from thinking carefully about the relationships between models designed to expose different aspects of the same broad terrain. We aim to show how the usefulness of two models can be improved by considering the complementary ways that they advance our understanding of a specific policy event.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework

The AC has been developed by Paul Sabatier and a number of co-authors in a series of articles and book chapters (especially Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993).⁴ Sabatier (1988, p. 139) defines an advocacy coalition as “people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers, etc.) who share a particular belief system—for example, a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions—and who show a nontrivial degree of coordinated activity over time.” The “glue” that holds an advocacy coalition together is its members’ shared beliefs over core policy matters. The AC assumes that members of coalitions will disagree often on minor matters, but that disagreement will be limited. The framework rejects the possibility that “coalitions of convenience” motivated by “short-term self-interest” can have lasting impacts on policy directions. Once formed, coalitions seek to translate their shared beliefs into public policies or programs. Thus, the actions and interactions of the advocacy coalitions are viewed as important for shaping policy. The site for these activities is the policy subsystem.

Sabatier describes a policy subsystem as a network of individuals from a variety of public and private organizations who are concerned actively with the maintenance and evolution of policy in a particular domain. Policy subsystems are broad in scope, and at any given time they may contain a number of advocacy coalitions—perhaps one dominant coalition, and one or two subordinate ones. According to Sabatier, policy subsystems consist of more than interest groups, administrative agencies, and legislative committees at a single level of government. They also contain “journalists, analysts, researchers, and others who play important roles in the generation, dissemination, and evaluation of policy ideas as well as actors at other levels of government who play important roles in policy formation and implementation” (Sabatier, 1988, p. 138).

Within the AC, significant policy change is conceived as stemming from events outside the policy subsystem. These can include changes in socioeconomic conditions, changes in the systemic governing coalition, and the impacts of policy changes in other subsystems. More minor policy changes can result from policy learning within the subsystem. This learning can arise when the introduction of

new ideas alters the beliefs of members of the advocacy coalitions. But there are other possible sources of change. As Sabatier (1988, p. 141) notes:

Not everyone active in a policy subsystem will "belong to" an advocacy coalition or share one of the major belief systems. Some researchers who are otherwise indifferent to the policy disputes may participate simply because they have certain skills to offer.... In addition, there will almost certainly be a category of actors—here termed "policy brokers"—whose dominant concerns are with keeping the level of political conflict within acceptable limits and reaching some "reasonable" solution to the problem.

The AC provides a useful guide to thinking about the broader context in which policy changes occur. It directs our attention to thinking about the ways that belief structures arise and adjust over time to bring stability to a policy subsystem. Although the framework identifies exogenous shocks as the potential sources of major policy change, and policy learning as a potential source of more minor policy change, it does not direct our attention to exploring the processes that determine when policy change actually will take place. Clearly, not all exogenous shocks and not all instances of policy learning translate into policy change. We need to better understand why particular policy changes materialize. Another weakness of the AC is that it does not help us to explain changes in the composition of advocacy coalitions and how collective action problems are managed by coalition members. The PE suggests a possible approach to thinking about these matters.

The Policy Entrepreneurship Model

Since the early 1970s, various political scientists have noted the role that policy entrepreneurs play in promoting significant policy changes (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Cobb & Elder, 1983; Eyestone, 1978; King, 1988; Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom, 1994; Polsby, 1984; Schon, 1971; Walker, 1981; Weissert, 1991). However, rarely have these members of the policymaking community been placed under the research spotlight; thus, little has been known about exactly what they do or whether their actions can affect policy change. In recent work, several scholars have begun to develop a policy entrepreneurship model, with the goal of increasing our understanding of how innovative ideas get articulated onto political and legislative agendas.⁵ Here, we summarize the main aspects of this approach.

Whether in business or in politics, all entrepreneurs perform three functions. First, they discover unfulfilled needs and suggest innovative means to satisfy them. Thus, they must be alert to opportunities (Kirzner, 1973). Second, entrepreneurs bear the reputational—and, frequently, some of the financial and emotional—risks involved in pursuing actions that have uncertain consequences. Third, they serve to resolve collective action problems by assembling and coordinating networks of individuals and organizations that have the talents and resources necessary to undertake change. Far from being atomized, instrumental individuals, successful entrepreneurs are embedded in social networks (Granovetter, 1985).

Policy entrepreneurs can be thought of as doing for the policymaking process what business entrepreneurs do for the marketplace. That is to say, policy entrepreneurs serve to bring new policy ideas into good currency.⁶ Like their

business counterparts, they are identifiable primarily by the actions they take, rather than by the positions they hold.⁷

Previous literature provides few clues as to the differences between policy entrepreneurs and other policy advocates. We view policy entrepreneurs as interested primarily in selling ideas designed to bring about dynamic policy change. Unlike interest group lobbyists (whom typically we do not think of as agents for dynamic policy change), policy entrepreneurs are not content simply to push for changes at the margins of current policy settings. Rather, they seek to change radically current ways of doing things. Of course, there are some important overlaps between the actions of policy entrepreneurs and those of other participants in the policymaking process. For example, the issue of to whom policy advocates should try to sell their ideas as well as the issue of credibility are central themes in the recent literature on lobbying (Ainsworth, 1993; Austin-Smith & Wright, 1994). Further, policy entrepreneurs use strategies that parallel those of other types of entrepreneurs in the public sector.⁸

Policy entrepreneurs seek to sell their policy ideas and, in so doing, to promote dynamic policy change. Contributors to the agenda-setting literature suggest that policy entrepreneurs use several activities to promote their ideas. These include identifying problems, shaping the terms of policy debates, networking in policy circles, and building coalitions.

Policy entrepreneurs frequently define policy problems in ways that both attract the attention of decisionmakers and indicate appropriate policy responses (Kingdon, 1995; Majone, 1988; Polsby, 1984). In seeking support for their policy ideas, policy entrepreneurs face choices about which issues to push and how to push them. Thus, arguments in support of the policy idea sometimes will have to be crafted in different ways for different audiences. How well this is done will prove critical for how the policy debate unfolds.⁹

To have their ideas taken seriously, policy entrepreneurs must develop strategies for presenting them to others. Often, for this reason, they will spend large amounts of time networking in and around government (King, 1988; Kingdon, 1995; Smith, 1991). This networking gives them insights into how other people think about policy problems and the ways that they should shape their arguments to make them most convincing to potential supporters. It also increases their visibility in policymaking circles, which can be important in building a reputation for being trustworthy and credible.

Finally, policy entrepreneurs frequently seek to assemble and maintain coalitions to support specific policy ideas (Eyestone, 1978; Smith, 1991). Again, these can prove to be valuable political resources during discussions of policy change.

The success of policy entrepreneurs in any one of these activities will influence their success in others. Those who define policy problems carefully and make good use of networks of contacts will be better placed to make compelling arguments in support of their policy ideas. This can help them to assemble coalitions of supporters to help secure desired policy changes.

To support the selling of their ideas, policy entrepreneurs must have access to resources. These resources can be both organizational and personal. Determining which organizations to work from involves trade-offs. Policy entrepreneurs based in universities or "think tanks" may use their organizations as "safe havens" for exercising intellectual freedom (King, 1988). However, in doing so, they may reduce their ability to be influential politically. Again, this suggests the need for policy entrepreneurs to assemble networks of people and to make the

best use of available organizational resources. Personal resources include intellectual ability, knowledge of policy matters, leadership and team-building skills, reputation and contacts, strategic ability, and tenacity. There is much to be learned about how the structure of political institutions and the nature of the social norms that support them serve to encourage or hinder the adoption and spread of innovative ideas. While the PE inevitably will be refined in the years ahead, for now, it offers a useful starting point for developing microlevel explanations of the workings of the policymaking process.

Comparing the Models

We can compare and contrast the AC and PE models according to the assumptions they embody, concerning: (1) the scope of the policymaking community; (2) the relevant time-frame; (3) the degree of structure in the policymaking process; and (4) the origins of crisis events.

In terms of scope, the AC tends to take an all-embracing view of the policymaking community. Hence, elections and changes in the shape of interest groups are included in explanations of policy change. Further, the focus on the beliefs and actions of coalitions within policy subsystems guides our attention to how political elites interpret changes at the level of mass politics. In contrast, the PE focuses primarily on the way that policy entrepreneurs sell their ideas to decision makers and to other influential members of the policymaking community. To that extent, it assumes the scope of the policymaking community to be quite narrow. However, the PE model also recognizes that, to gain credibility among decisionmakers, policy entrepreneurs frequently must work to build coalitions—which might have a mass-politics aspect to them. The PE suggests that policy entrepreneurs will position themselves wherever they consider their activities will produce the highest expected returns. At some stages in the selling of their ideas, it might make sense for policy entrepreneurs to work outside the policy subsystem. At other times, it might be important for them to work closely with political elites.

In terms of time frame, the AC tends to guide us to analyze subsystem politics over a span of a decade or more. By taking such a long sweep, the framework nudges us to view many short-term events as simply leading to incremental policy change. Thus, the AC is best construed as a model of equilibrium, and it can be seen as a way to make sense of both policy stability and incremental policy change.

In contrast, the PE is best construed as a model of dynamic policy change, guiding us to place primary emphasis on events that occur during a relatively brief episode. Change of this sort occurs infrequently. Thus, scholars describe the policy process in the United States as exhibiting patterns of "punctuated equilibrium" (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

A key faculty of policy entrepreneurs is "the ability to see the political logic in an emerging historical situation and to act on that insight" (Doig & Hargrove, 1990, p. 11). Although the PE appears best suited to explain brief periods of dynamic change, it is important to recognize that policy entrepreneurs may spend several years working to maximize the probability that, given the right timing, their desired policy changes will occur. Sundquist (1968) provides excellent documentation of the ways that "activists"—people we would term policy entrepreneurs—worked for many years to bring about changes in a range of

policy areas at the federal level during the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson years. Other discussions on this theme are provided by King (1988) and Kingdon (1995). The time frame employed within the PE, therefore, might also extend over a period of time.

In our discussion of education policy change in Michigan, the AC is useful for guiding us to look at the longer-term factors that created the historical setting in which dynamic policy change could occur. The PE is helpful in guiding us to look at the details of the process by which such change actually happened, and how the behaviors of various actors affected the outcome.

In terms of structure in the policymaking process, both the AC and the PE assume a fairly high level of formality. However, where the AC views institutional arrangements as being relatively fixed, the PE suggests that such factors can be manipulated carefully or even changed in order to benefit the policy entrepreneur.¹⁰

As a final point of comparison, note that the AC suggests that crisis events are more likely to arise from outside the subsystem than from within it.¹¹ Because the framework assumes mutual adjustment toward a sort of equilibrium among the advocacy coalitions, it is unlikely that crises could emerge from within a subsystem. In contrast, the PE presents policy entrepreneurs as individuals who often reframe policy problems, and thereby generate and exploit the view that a crisis is at hand. Hence, the PE suggests that crises can be developed by members of the policy subsystem itself. Given new opportunities—which well may arise because of exogenous events, but not necessarily—policy entrepreneurs take risks to sell their ideas for policy innovation.

Explaining Education Reform in Michigan

In 1993, 20 years after the last major reform of Michigan's school finance system, a reliance on local property taxes for 70% of the funding for the public schools resulted in vast disparities in per-student spending across school districts.¹² Further, property owners complained of a property tax burden that was heavier than in most other states. In particular, senior citizens and others on fixed incomes complained that they were being taxed out of their homes.

Disdainful of the status quo but fearful of proposed changes, Michigan voters rejected 12 of 13 property tax proposals on the ballot between 1972 and 1993, including 4 in the latter 5 years.¹³ By 1993, most Michigan legislators were (in the words of one of them) eager to "try just about anything" to secure property tax relief and to reform Michigan's system of school finance.

In an astonishing move, in the summer of 1993, the Michigan legislature and Governor Engler approved legislation abolishing the local property tax as a source of school funding. Thus, a crisis in school finance was created, and nobody was certain how the public schools would be funded for the 1994–95 school year. A constitutional rule regarding legislative procedure encouraged policymakers to pass a reform plan by the end of 1993.¹⁴

This crisis marks an important point in the history of policymaking in Michigan. Not only was the school finance system overhauled, but advocates of school quality reform seized the opportunity presented by the 1993 context to secure approval for some of their initiatives, most notably legislation approving charter schools.¹⁵

Interpretation I: The Advocacy Coalition Framework

Viewing events in Michigan through the AC leads us to consider how change can occur within a relatively stable policy subsystem. At the broadest level, we identify the primary policy subsystem of interest in this analysis as having to do with education issues. However, this policy subsystem can be broken down into two interdependent components—school finance and school quality. The school finance crisis created a climate for innovation in school quality. Importantly, the same coalitions are active in both components of the subsystem. There has been a dominant coalition in education in Michigan for several decades, and it has recently been challenged for preeminence by an increasingly active minority coalition.

We identify the dominant coalition as being comprised of “the education establishment.” Typically, this is construed as including the Michigan Education Association (MEA), school boards, the Department of Education, district superintendents, and other public school administrators. Of these coalition members, the MEA is the dominant player for several reasons. First, its members have superior mobilization and lobbying skills. With a membership of 125,000, the MEA has easy access to funds and has considerable canvassing resources.¹⁶ Second, the MEA membership is highly educated and has high voter turnout. Being comprised of teachers and other school personnel, MEA members are well placed to be political opinion leaders in the community. Third, the MEA plays an important role in socializing education administrators into a particular world view. Many district superintendents and public school administrators themselves have worked as teachers, and thus have been acculturated into the belief system of this coalition. Fourth, these unique resources have enabled the MEA to have a virtual lock on Democratic members of the legislature. On an ideological level, the MEA and Democrats share similar beliefs regarding the proactive role of government.

Included in the core beliefs of this coalition is the view that public education serves an important function in society, and that, for the most part, this is being done fairly well. Coalition members acknowledge that problems exist; however, they believe that these can be remedied within current administrative arrangements. Members of this coalition assert that there are many instances in which the public school system is highly successful. When confronted with evidence to the contrary, they often contend that such instances result from circumstances beyond their control (e.g., social problems or inadequate funding).

An example of the political acumen of the education establishment in Michigan is found in the early closing of the Kalkaska schools in 1993. Kalkaska is a rural school district that had suffered from repeated voter rejections of millage increases on the ballot. Hundreds of school officials and teachers from other districts attended Kalkaska’s closing ceremony, held at a middle school, in what was billed as a “vigil for education.” This was designed to draw attention to the defects in the school finance system in Michigan. These were portrayed as being the result of a too-heavy reliance on local property taxes to fund the schools and an unwillingness on the part of the state to address even such an extreme case of inadequate funding. To ensure that the event received maximum public attention, the President of the National Education Association was flown in from Washington, DC, to speak at the gathering. The event assisted in “softening up the environment” for fundamental reform of school finance in the state.¹⁷

We identify the minority coalition as being comprised of actors who seek major change in the public school system. These actors include members of the

business community (e.g., the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and the Michigan Manufacturers' Association) and TEACH Michigan (a grassroots coalition of business, government, and religious-based organizations).¹⁸ The core of the TEACH Michigan (TM) group consists of a small team headed by a policy entrepreneur who has never held public office. Since it emerged in 1988, TM has been active in most of the various school choice initiatives in Michigan and has sought political allies, including most recently Governor John Engler and Republican members of the Michigan legislature. These political actors have been strong advocates for school choice ideas, but it is a commonly held view among lawmakers and other political actors that the leader of TM has played a key role in laying the groundwork and fostering a climate in favor of the introduction of charter schools.

Given the recency with which it has emerged, the core beliefs of the minority coalition are not as well defined as are those of the dominant coalition. Nonetheless, several important beliefs can be identified. First, members believe the solutions offered by the dominant coalition are inadequate and misguided philosophically. Members of the minority coalition typically are skeptical of the ability of government to efficiently address collective action problems such as the delivery of education. They argue that voluntary actions and market forces can best achieve desired results. Members of this coalition share a common frustration with the impervious nature of the dominant coalition. For example, they view the dominant coalition as reluctant to think creatively about solving problems in public school administration. An organizing principle of the minority coalition has been the introduction of competition in the supply of public education. This principle has been developed carefully and promoted by TM.¹⁹

For some time, the question of the dependence of the public school system on local funding had been brewing as a political issue. The dominant coalition wanted a larger state role in school finance. This was seen as important for addressing equity issues and for providing property tax relief. The view was that if these finance issues could be addressed, then variance in school quality across districts could be alleviated.

After a 20-year impasse, the climate was right for a bold move to force reform. The bold move came as a result of gubernatorial campaign politicking. In the summer of 1993, Debbie Stabenow, a Democratic legislator and contender for the 1994 gubernatorial race, challenged Republican Governor Engler's commitment to property tax relief. The Republicans had proposed a 20% cut in property taxes. Stabenow initiated a game of brinkmanship politics when she proposed that all property taxes for funding the schools be abolished. To her surprise, Republican legislators agreed with her proposal. The conditions were now in place for the assertion that a policy crisis was at hand.²⁰ Members of the dominant and minority coalitions saw this crisis as a threat to interests with a stake in the status quo. The dominant coalition felt threatened by the crisis not only because school funding was in jeopardy, but also because it opened a window of opportunity for the minority coalition to advance its school quality proposals.

In October 1993, Governor Engler proposed a reform agenda that largely was reflective of the policy goals of the minority coalition. On the school finance side, the governor favored using primarily the sales tax to replace the property tax funding of the schools. Although the policy crisis was in school finance, Engler seized this opportunity to advance two key school quality initiatives: interdistrict school choice and charter schools.

In the legislature, priority was placed on developing a new system of school finance with a larger state role. The reform package adopted by lawmakers included an overhaul of the school finance system and numerous school quality reform bills—most notably, legislation for charter schools.²¹

The AC provides guidance for exploring the processes of policy change discussed above. However, questions remain. In particular, why did the minority coalition form? How was it able to get its views articulated onto the policy agenda? Given that the interests of the dominant coalition largely were met, how was the minority coalition able to secure a major school quality reform? These aspects of education reform in Michigan are not explained fully by the AC.

Interpretation II: Policy Entrepreneurship

Early on, the school choice policy entrepreneur heading TM and his allies realized it would be difficult to achieve their goal of a broad system of marketlike delivery of public education, in which students could receive government subsidization to attend any public or private school. Michigan's constitution prohibits government funding of private schools. Therefore, without constitutional change, even pilot programs involving publicly funded vouchers for children to attend private schools (like in Milwaukee, Wisconsin) would be impossible to implement.²² Changing the constitution is difficult politically, because it requires a general referendum. The TM policy entrepreneur thus aimed to build a winning coalition to pursue constitutional change.

The material on TM presented here is based largely on several interviews with the policy entrepreneur who founded the coalition. He was motivated to pursue school choice policies for Michigan because, in his view, low-income parents were having to send their children to schools not necessarily well matched to their needs, while most middle-class parents in the state were able to choose the schools their children attended, through either choosing where to live or sending their children to private schools.

Before organizing TM, the policy entrepreneur talked to many people. The most important people he approached were those he anticipated to be his opponents: representatives of the teachers' unions and various other stakeholders in the public education system: "... I targeted people that I thought might be the opposition, because I wanted to find out what they were thinking, what their arguments were." The TM policy entrepreneur found that opponents of school choice:

... have always ... tried to cloak themselves in the kind of mom, apple pie, and the American flag kind of thing. And ... they accuse people who raise these kinds of things [e.g., school choice] as being racist, or elitist, or underminers of public education.

Based on what he learned from his opponents, the TM policy entrepreneur aimed to build a coalition of actors who enjoyed considerable public status. Four groups were targeted. First, the policy entrepreneur wanted support from the corporate community, because he saw it as having a kind of independent credibility. (He also knew that the corporate community had the financial resources to underwrite his efforts.) Second, he sought the support of others with political credibility, such as local mayors, who had important symbolic positions. Third, he reached out to ethnic minorities and to leaders in the Black community, such as the Association of Black Pastors in Detroit. Finally, he worked with

organizations representing the interests of private schools. In political battles, these members of TM could help to counter claims made by opponents.

In seeking the support of these diverse groups, the TM policy entrepreneur made arguments and appeals designed to register on the intuitive level. For the corporate community, for example, competitiveness and economic development arguments were emphasized.

We talked ... a lot about the fact that Ford motor company and Chrysler and General Motors became more competitive, they delivered a better quality product because people could choose a German automobile, or a British, or a Toyota. And they understood that intuitively.... So I could talk to them about choice. But the other thing the business community did seem to be very concerned about [was] ... the fact that we have many people who are falling through the cracks in the system. And my argument was that if different schools could be created that would reach out in creative and sensitive ways to children for whom the current system is not meeting their needs, more of those children would stay in school, ... graduate, and ... become taxpaying, productive workers, rather than people in prison or on welfare.

For the private school groups, the emphasis was placed elsewhere:

[O]f course, my argument there was something they would intuitively understand. All these private school parents were paying taxes and then they were paying tuition on top of that. ...[T]he economic argument there was that these parents are tax-paying citizens and they ought not be treated as second-class citizens.

The TM policy entrepreneur and his allies were concerned that in a ballot initiative the general public would still favor the status quo. Surmising "that the people of Michigan, by and large, were frightened of too radical change," the TM policy entrepreneur and his allies decided to change their strategy. They retained their longer-term goal of constitutional change, but decided first to seek a shorter-term goal. They sought to introduce a choice program

... in an incremental kind of a way, a non-threatening kind of a way, so that [citizens] could look in their own community or in their own region of the state, and they could identify choice schools that were getting government money, they could see them working, they could see the parents choosing, and the parents happier because their kids were in schools that they thought were better.

The networking efforts of the TM policy entrepreneur and his allies were followed by the first consideration of school choice by the Michigan legislature in 1989. Legislation passed in 1991 made provision for intradistrict public school choice. However, this fell short of the kind of broad school choice TM wanted to establish in Michigan.

When the idea of charter schools was adopted in Minnesota, Massachusetts, and California, the TM policy entrepreneur and his allies saw that a charter schools program in Michigan would meet their shorter-term goal. Charter schools are state funded but free of some of the government controls placed on traditional public schools. They can be established and administered by a wide

range of actors but survive only if they attract enough students to sustain adequate funding.²³

The TM policy entrepreneur worked with the Engler administration to promote legislation permitting charter schools in the state. In fact, TM paid for the services of the attorney who drafted the charter schools bill that passed. The law permitted an unlimited number of charter schools in the state.²⁴ Further, school finance reform ensured that funding would follow students from traditional public schools to charter schools. These provisions had the potential to foster major change in the Michigan public school system.

During the legislative debate, the coalition-building activities of the TM policy entrepreneur paid off. "I was able to kind of capitalize on other work I'd done in the last five years with the ethnic minorities and the corporate community. They came down and they visited the legislature and they pushed it...."

Although the advocacy efforts of the TM policy entrepreneur were substantial, it is instructive to note that he and his allies in the coalition could not single-handedly secure approval for their preferred form of charter schools legislation. In particular, many observers have noted that Governor Engler played a critical role in securing legislative support for charter schools. Indeed, the governor indicated to lawmakers that he would not accept a school finance reform package without accompanying legislation permitting charter schools.

The charter schools bill was approved by lawmakers in a flurry of legislative activity in late December 1993. Both the TM policy entrepreneur and legislators with whom we have spoken suggest that if the charter schools bill had been considered alone, in a more deliberative context, free of the pressures of crisis politics, "it is very conceivable that it wouldn't have passed." Of course, the TM policy entrepreneur and his allies have not yet achieved their ultimate goal of a full choice system based on vouchers redeemable at public or private schools. Yet they have been careful to look ahead and reason back to choose what they perceive to be their best course of action.

Although the TM coalition could be construed initially as having been a coalition of convenience, recent events and activities in Michigan suggest that the coalition is no longer temporary, and that alternative forms of public education in the state will continue to be advocated forcefully. In 1994, Governor Engler was reelected for a second term and voters sent Republican majorities to both houses of the Michigan legislature.²⁵ The Michigan Partnership for New Education, managed by allies of TM, has been active in facilitating the establishment of charter schools in the state, as well as in pushing for additional education reform. Further, the establishment of charter schools offices at several Michigan public universities (which can grant charters) legitimates the charter schools approach in the state. These entities, together with the diverse groups organizing charter schools in the state, provide the nucleus of a solid constituency in favor of further market-oriented education reform in Michigan.

Assessing the Merits of Each Interpretation

The AC works well for explaining school finance reform in Michigan, because one needs to consider a period of over two decades to fully understand what occurred in the state's education subsystem. As we have discussed, repeated attempts to secure property tax relief almost never had succeeded. In terms of the AC, the dominant coalition worked diligently to protect its core interests. In

response, a minority coalition emerged, centered around opposition to the dominant coalition. This minority coalition sought to address both finance and quality issues that the dominant coalition successfully had kept off the agenda. Although it enhances our understanding of the Michigan case, an exclusive reliance on the AC provides little guidance on how to explain the details of dynamic policy change.

In contrast, the PE works well for explaining dynamic policy changes like the Michigan charter schools initiative. The focus of the PE is microlevel political activity. Hence, it directs our attention to the way individuals package their ideas, build coalitions in support of those ideas, and use political opportunities to drive their policy preferences home. In the Michigan case, the entrepreneur and his political allies exploited the crisis in school finance as an opportunity to gain legislative approval for charter schools. A drawback of this model is that it does not guide us to think as broadly about the context of policy change as does the AC. Hence, augmenting it with insights from the AC makes good sense. When used in tandem, the two models provide considerable guidance for thinking about the determinants of policy change. Although the facts of the Michigan case are unique, similar crisis events have been observed elsewhere. Therefore, the approach used here might guide other analyses of the politics of policymaking and policy change.

Conclusion

We have interpreted recent reforms in Michigan's public school system using both the AC and the PE. In so doing, we have provided insights into the nature of policy change and how it comes about. We also have shown the compatibility of the AC and the PE.

The AC and the PE make different contributions to our understanding of policy change, yet there is a high degree of compatibility in the way that the two models treat this phenomenon. There are at least two ways that the AC easily could incorporate insights from the PE and thereby gain increased explanatory power.

First, the AC could be improved by incorporating insights from the PE on how coalitions form. Evidence provided on the TM policy entrepreneur indicates that an important aspect of coalition building involves framing issues in ways that appeal to diverse interests. Further, clear definition of the issues and how they can be addressed keeps coalition members focused on policy goals. This serves not only to bring the coalition members together, but also promotes cohesion among them. Thus, through their efforts to sell their ideas to others, policy entrepreneurs help to solve collective action problems.²⁶ The process by which this occurs is instructive. The policy entrepreneur must devise optimal ways of framing an issue to show potential coalition members how their (often diverse) interests will be served by joining it. Once the coalition is formed, the policy entrepreneur must work to ensure that the coalition maintains a strong political presence into the future.

Second, the AC could benefit by including insights from the PE on how policy innovations become articulated onto the political agenda. Not only do policy entrepreneurs work to build coalitions, they also go to considerable lengths to network within and around government. This activity allows policy entrepreneurs to determine the appropriate arguments for selling their ideas to

decisionmakers. It also helps them to gain credibility with policymakers. In the Michigan case, the ability of the TM policy entrepreneur to gain the support of the governor was important for ensuring the success of the charter schools idea.

We have demonstrated the complementary nature of the AC and PE approaches by exploring the ways that each provides insights into a specific period of policy change. If insights from the PE are incorporated into the AC, this should result in a richer analysis of the policymaking process than could be achieved by using either model alone. Thus, this article presents a way to conceptualize the policymaking process that should prove of value to many policy scholars.

Michael Mintrom is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University. He received his PhD at the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1994. His research interests and publications focus on policy entrepreneurship, policy change, and local responses to policy change.

Sandra Vergari is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Northern Iowa. She received her PhD from Michigan State University in 1996. Her research interests and publications focus on crisis policymaking and the politics of education reform.

Notes

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¹ See footnote 2 for a list of key contributors to the literature on the policymaking process.

² The list of possible citations is long. However, important contributions have been made by Baumgartner and Jones (1993), Dahl (1961), Kingdon (1995), Lindblom (1959), Lowi (1969), and Stigler (1971).

³ Other insightful discussions exploring this theme can be found in the volume of essays edited by Dodd and Jillson (1994).

⁴ A discussion of Sabatier's policy learning thesis of change over time can be found in Lester and Costain (1995).

⁵ King (1988) and King and Roberts (1987) have provided important contributions. See also Mintrom (1994, in press).

⁶ The term "ideas in good currency" is borrowed from Schon (1971).

⁷ Further discussion of this point is provided by Conlan, Beam, and Wrightson (1995, p. 135) and Kingdon (1995, p. 122).

⁸ For important discussions of various types of entrepreneurs in government, see Doig and Hargrove (1990), Roberts (1991), and Schneider and Teske with Mintrom (1995).

⁹ For a discussion of this issue, see Kaji and Mintrom (1995).

¹⁰ For example, in the case of Michigan, education reform advocates have not been content to work within traditional institutional arrangements in the public school system. Rather, they have channeled their political activity toward altering these arrangements.

¹¹ Crisis events provide justification for major policy change (Kingdon, 1995; Light, 1995; Lipsky & Smith, 1989; Polsby, 1984; Vergari, 1996).

¹² Per-pupil spending ranged from a low of \$3,291 to a high of \$10,749 across Michigan school districts in 1992 (Michigan Department of Education, 1993).

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¹³ The measure that succeeded was the 1978 Headlee Tax Limitation Amendment to the state constitution. For a discussion of the problems associated with school finance reform measures, see Mintrom (1993).

¹⁴ If lawmakers had waited until 1994, they would have needed a two-thirds vote in both chambers of the legislature to approve almost every bill. Otherwise, legislation passed in 1994 could not take effect until 1995 (too late for the school year beginning in 1994).

¹⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of the Michigan case, see Vergari (1996). For a concise review of the outcomes of this case, see Vergari (1995).

¹⁶ In the midst of the school finance crisis, the MEA solicited a special donation of about \$50 from each of its members. This is but one example of the tremendous resources of the MEA.

¹⁷ The term "softening up the environment" comes from Kingdon (1995).

¹⁸ TEACH stands for "Towards Educational Accountability and Choice."

¹⁹ The TM policy entrepreneur has done this through making appearances at public forums, writing newspaper editorials, and holding meetings with policymakers.

²⁰ For discussion of the concept of "policy crisis," see Vergari (1996).

²¹ Lawmakers rejected interdistrict school choice.

²² For a description of the voucher program in Milwaukee, see Witte and Rigdon (1993, pp. 107-109).

²³ For further discussion of the charter schools concept and charter schools laws across the United States, see Vergari and Mintrom (1996) and Mintrom and Vergari (in press).

²⁴ Amendments to the law since 1993 now limit the number of charter schools that may be authorized by universities.

²⁵ Republicans generally are less sympathetic to the interests of the MEA than are Democrats.

²⁶ Explaining collective action has been an acknowledged weakness of the AC. Schlager (1995) provides a detailed discussion of the AC and collective action issues.

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