



Agendas and Instability in American Politics.

Review Author[s]:
Christopher J. Bosso

The American Political Science Review, Vol. 88, No. 3 (Sep., 1994), 752-753.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-0554%28199409%2988%3A3%3C752%3AAAIAP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-Y>

The American Political Science Review is currently published by American Political Science Association.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/apsa.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ences and systematic investigation of its place in other presidencies. Much of his description of academic advice in post-Johnson presidencies is fresh material. Not surprisingly, he finds that the high water mark reached by academic social scientists and their knowledge talk was during the days of Johnson's Great Society. In subsequent presidencies, although there were academics present, they were most evident in campaigns and transitions, less so in governance. In the Nixon and Carter presidencies, lawyers became increasingly important in shaping policy. Over time, knowledge talk unfortunately has lost ground to rhetoric and ideological talk, Wood believes.

He seems to be somewhat ambivalent about the Reagan presidency, however. On the one hand, for Wood, Reagan was "a man of beliefs, not ideas" (p. 139), and ideological talk was a prominent part of his presidency. The ill-conceived supply-side economics and the "reckless rush to deregulation" (p. 160) were products of ideology, not knowledge. Yet in other areas, such as the New Federalism proposals, Wood sees circumstances that cause him to conclude, "The pattern of advice and counsel from the social sciences not only persisted in the Reagan administration; it was expanded and, in its implementation, perfected," (p. 160). As Wood observes, the line separating ideology and knowledge is blurred, and it remains so in present understandings of the Reagan presidency.

Another troublesome part raised but not fully resolved in Wood's book is, in general, the loss of currency of academic social science and the present preeminence of ideological talk over knowledge talk. In his last chapter, there is a provocative essay that touches upon a variety of possibilities, including the troubled state of universities and social science disciplines that make them inhospitable places for scholars who wish to relate knowledge to policy, the rise of think tanks, an increased analytical capacity within government, and a political environment marked by a resurgent "fervor for capitalism" (p. 174) and by a politics driven by ideological contention. In the end, however, there is no confident explication of the determinants of the quantity and quality of knowledge talk informed by social science in the presidential arena.

In summary, all students of the presidency will be interested in these books. Each makes important contributions to how the personal preferences of presidents mix with institutional characteristics and contextual political forces in the uses of presidential power.

University of Tennessee, Knoxville DAVID M. WELBORN

Agendas and Instability in American Politics. By Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. 289p. \$47.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

Those who follow public policymaking in the United States long have suspected that the dynamics they observed never seemed to match up to the laws embodied in the discipline's dominant models. Incrementalism reigns, but dramatic and deep changes occur rather often. Policy subsystems are inherently stable, shaped by differential intensity among interests and buttressed by institutional biases; but they erode—or collapse entirely. And of course, the system tends always toward

general equilibrium, though many have observed apparent and frequent disequilibria. In short, scholars ask, Which conditions are the norm and which are the exceptions?

Baumgartner and Jones have produced the book that students of public policy have been awaiting and that more than a few will wish they had written. In this rich work, the authors show how long periods of policy incrementalism and spasms of change are part of the same equation of issue definition and institutional bias; how policy subsystems both maintain stability but also can succumb to powerful countervailing forces; and finally, how the search for some general equilibrium probably is fruitless. What exists, instead, is a "punctuated equilibrium" of subsystem stability *and* change. Amid seeming stability, there is continual change. In fact, they note, for a political system long regarded as structurally and politically conservative, "one is struck by the vast policy changes that have occurred in the United States" (p. 235).

The authors come to these conclusions honestly. First, this book is based firmly on, and is heir to, a long line of scholarship going back at least as far as Schattschneider (1960), who, it seems, garners more respect with each passing generation. Its theoretical base is built upon the literatures on problem definition and agenda formation, policy subsystems, and (in a very nuanced application), social choice theory. These traditions are woven together in subtle and sophisticated ways, and the first several chapters alone would make this work a worthwhile read for any core graduate seminar on public policy processes.

Second, the authors back up theory with a methodology that is both commonsense and (even more important) readily reproducible. They start initially from a base of solid longitudinal case studies on issues like nuclear power, pesticides, smoking, and urban policy (among others). These cases, taken individually, show long periods of policy subsystem stability interspersed by sharp spasms of change. Taken together, these cases suggest the impact of broader systemic forces on policy subsystems, since so many of these subsystems encounter trouble for roughly the same reasons at about the same times. The authors build from these cases with empirical analyses of media sources, interest group mobilization, governmental attention and action, and policy outputs (with methods and data sources explained more fully in a useful appendix). The result is a truly comparative, empirically supported analysis of several issues across time—a rare commodity indeed.

No one of the authors' findings may surprise those who follow this literature closely. Issue definition and control over the agenda for debate are critical to policy stability or change. Institutions and institutional design can buttress the policy status quo or can offer opportunities to new voices. Policy entrepreneurs exploit their opportunities to define issues and gain access to sympathetic institutional venues and seek to keep others from doing likewise. The ways in which competing elites and interests seek to involve the "apathetic" in a conflict powerfully affects its outcome. Schattschneider, for one, said pretty much the same things over 30 years ago. What is important is how Baumgartner and Jones back up what have become truisms with solid analysis and how they extend the literature into new theoretical directions. The perceptive discussion about the interactions between policy "images" and institutional "ven-

ues" alone should keep more than one doctoral student busy for a while.

Perhaps the single most illuminating theoretical finding in this work is what the authors call the *dual mobilization* thesis. The mobilization of new voices and previously excluded interests either can come during a wave of enthusiasm for a particular policy (the cycle of "alarmed discovery" and "euphoria" about problem solution explored by Anthony Downs) or out of opponents' criticism of, and attack against, the policy status quo (as suggested by Schattschneider's notion about the "socialization" of conflict). But each type of mobilization produces a far different outcome. A "Downsian" mobilization is marked by a positive policy "image" (e.g., "peaceful" uses of nuclear power) and by the creation of institutions likely to support subsystem hegemony (e.g., the Atomic Energy Commission). A "Schattschneider" mobilization, by contrast, involves negative policy images (e.g., the health dangers of nuclear power) and the greater policy role played by institutions (e.g., congressional oversight committees) less likely to offer unalloyed support for the status quo. There are, in politics, two very different kinds of mobilization; and which one dominates at any given point explains convincingly whether a subsystem is or is not stable—hence, *punctuated equilibrium*, or stability and change.

There is so much offered in this book that any one review may not do it justice, so read it yourself. It is one of the more important books in years, a powerful and well-supported rejoinder to narrowly mechanistic and deterministic policy models. It reminds us that ideas, institutions, and (yes) politics all matter. Its lessons to students of public policy are several: look long (into history), look broadly (beyond the narrow confines of a single institution), look deeply into issues, and compare across issues and across time. It is at once a grand synthesis of the past and a pathbreaking work against which future studies will be measured. In these ways, it is a worthy heir to a long tradition.

Agendas and Instability in American Politics is well written, particularly for a work where the hands and souls of both authors are evident. Any quibbles about the book (a couple of the later chapters fit in a little awkwardly) are minor. This book is recommended especially for graduate courses in American and comparative politics, public policy, and interest groups, among other topics; but it also is accessible for upper-level undergraduate offerings.

Northeastern University

CHRISTOPHER J. BOSSO

Careers in City Politics: The Case for Urban Democracy. By Timothy Bledsoe. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993. 231p. \$39.95.

Ambition and Beyond: Career Paths of American Politicians. Edited by Shirley Williams and Edward L. Lascher. Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies Press, 1993. 260p. \$21.95 paper.

The literature on political careers, writes Timothy Prinz in *Ambition and Beyond*, encompasses the fields of "political recruitment, political elites, personality and politics, political biography, legislative studies" (p. 11). But from the books under review, it is clear that as "disparate and far-flung" as this literature is (*ibid.*), one theoretical approach dominates. Joseph Schlesinger's

ambition theory looms large both in Williams and Lascher's collection of essays and in Timothy Bledsoe's study of city politicians. These books offer us an opportunity to see how Schlesinger has influenced our understanding of American political careers.

Ambition theory states that officeholders' ambition for higher office shapes their behavior. Most politicians hold *progressive* ambition (the desire to move to higher office), rather than *static* ambition (to remain in their present office) or *discrete* ambition (to leave office). Schlesinger's work suggests three broad areas of inquiry into differences: ambition, opportunities, and the behavior of politicians in one institution whose sights are set on moving to another. But the "key component," writes Prinz, is the structure of opportunities, or "the seats available and the hierarchy of positions for advancement," which "give shape and definition to the political career" (p. 27).

Although they do not follow a common format, the Williams and Lascher essays fit together well. The first section includes an introduction by Shirley Williams and the literature review and prospectus by Prinz. Williams offers comparisons between political careers in the United States and Britain. Prinz lays out the three stages of political careers discussed in the essays: recruitment, advancement, and retirement. The book includes sections on congressional careers (Linda Fowler and John Hibbing), subnational legislative careers (Peeverill Squire and Edward Lascher), and careers for women and minorities (Susan Carroll and Fernando Guerra). The essays are drawn together by Lascher's introduction to each section and his concluding essay summarizing the critiques of ambition theory offered by the other authors.

While some of the research here can be found elsewhere, it is kept fresh by the authors' efforts to use their findings to speak to ambition theory. Hibbing, for example, uses his research on the internal congressional career to show how ambition theory actually misses a great deal of ambitious behavior. Ambition theory tends either to assume that all politicians have progressive ambition or to infer ambition from behavior, that is, that those who run for higher office have progressive ambition. This is limiting, however, because "progressive ambition can just as easily be displayed by running for Party Whip as by running for the Senate" (p. 131). Focusing on a predetermined hierarchy of offices and *office seeking* as an outlet for progressive ambitions misses how ambition may be satisfied by *position seeking* within an institution. The critical question, Hibbing argues, is "why some members vent progressive ambitions by employing the many ladders within the House, while others do so by attempting to jump to a different institution" (p. 131).

Linda Fowler's essay on recruitment demonstrates the need to appreciate how ambitions interact with opportunities and institutional characteristics. A puzzling aspect of recruitment in an era of candidate-centered campaigns, she writes, is "why individuals who could be the strongest candidates . . . never think about running for Congress at all" (p. 89). Restricting ourselves to those who want to move on means we will miss many of the ways politicians satisfy their ambitions. For example, ambition may be more satisfactorily pursued in some local and state governments than in others. Fernando Guerra finds that in the Los Angeles County hierarchy of elective offices, many local offices rank above a seat in the House. We might easily misconstrue the relationship