

The Politics of Expertise in Contemporary Policymaking

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- *Farm subsidies have traditionally been viewed as the epitome of pluralist politics, where members of Congress from farm states and assorted interest groups have held sway over the growth of ever more numerous subsidies since the New Deal, to the consternation of economists who railed against the misallocation of national resources such subsidies wrought. In 1995, the reform consensus came to life in the form of the Freedom to Farm Act, endorsed by both Congressional Republicans and President Clinton. Prompted by an analytic consensus among economists, the decades old structure of federal assistance was to be wiped away in favor of declining general purpose aid to farmers, leading to less federal interference in the farming economy, along with lower federal spending*
- *Tax reform has always been viewed as an impossible political dream by the many economists and reformers who occupy think tanks and universities. While the tax code as a whole is disliked by all, the individual subsidies and tax expenditures that constitute the foundation of tax policy are viewed as politically untouchable. Yet surprisingly, President Reagan, and members of Congress from both parties, succeeded in passing comprehensive tax reform legislation in 1986 that bore the imprint of the leading experts and thought leaders in the field. The radical broadening of the base of the income tax achieved by eliminating and trimming numerous important tax subsidies was an outcome that tax policy experts long sought to improve the efficiency of the economy, and their consensus became a powerful driver of the policy process.*
- *Reforming the federal budget process carries high stakes, for the fiscal rules of decision making profoundly influence the outcomes. In 1985, faced with record peace time federal deficits, Congress passed the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act mandating significant annual spending cuts to achieve fiscal balance over five years. When this reform proved to be unworkable, budget experts put forward a reform that focused not on overall fiscal balance but on control of those items federal decision makers determined annually – discretionary appropriations and new entitlement and tax cut legislation. Anchored in careful study of the lessons learned from Gramm-Rudman-Hollings, the experts formulated a new budget regime in the Budget Enforcement Act of 1990 that established the discretionary spending caps and the PAYGO enforcement regime that contributed to the budget surpluses of the late 1990s.*

Contemporary politics abundantly demonstrate that political parties and organized interests remain central actors in the public policy process. Yet, while narrow and broad based interests will always serve as a primary source of motivation and allegiance in policy debates, emergent methods of mobilization place the role of ideas and values as key independent factors driving the placement of proposals on the agenda and contributing to enactment. In particular, experts and their professional knowledge have come to play growing roles in policymaking in our system. When issues fall into what we have termed the expert pathway, professional knowledge and technical feasibility become the source of legitimacy against which all proposals are based.¹

The foregoing examples illustrate that experts in fact can play a formative role in the development of policy agendas and the implementation of complex policy initiatives. While lacking the crucial certificate that grants elected officials the legal power to make final decisions, experts provide a powerful source of legitimation to new policy ideas and proposals. Vulnerable political leaders from party and pluralist pathways at times find it useful, even compelling, to adopt and embrace expert based ideas when such proposals are consistent with their primary coalitions and belief systems. As government's role in the economy and affairs of the nation has expanded over the past century, political leaders are accountable as never before for the success or failure of programs ranging from financial regulation, education, health care or homeland security. Experts have become the new plumbers of the policy process, able to command attention and high prices due to their deep understanding of the ever more complex relationships between government programs and public outcomes. Indeed, the growing stakes and complexity of government informed the vision of the early founders of the field of public

administration, most notably Woodrow Wilson who argued for the emergence of a professionalized field of professionals skilled in understanding the “science” of administration.²

While the growing force of experts has constituted a new form of mobilization, the expert pathway competes with other pathways for influence and legitimation in policy debates. In other work, we have suggested that it is helpful to think of the federal policy making system as a network of distinct but interconnected pathways, which we have called the pluralist, partisan, expert, and symbolic pathways. This typology, summarized in Figure 1, distinguishes among the four according to the scale of political mobilization (whether specialized or mass) and the method of political mobilization (whether principally utilizing organizations or ideas). Each of these pathways tends to function best in a certain environment, favor particular modes and arenas of decision making, employ a unique style of coalition building, and is associated with a characteristic type of policy outcome. Each also tends to appeal to particular actors in the policy system, who seek to steer issues onto a pathway most familiar to them and conducive to their success. The model, therefore, attempts to capture the strategic behavior of policy actors, as they seek not only to frame issues but to define the turf on which they will be contested.

Because each pathway has distinctive attributes, policies that are advanced along one avenue tend to differ in predictable ways from those developed in another. In ideational policy making, for example, it matters greatly whether policies are devised and advanced along carefully engineered and professionally policed routes through the expert community or whether they are fashioned by entrepreneurs who are interested in moving public opinion along a symbolic superhighway.

Recent experience also suggests the potential for convergence in the techniques employed by certain pathways. As the other pathways have become more polarized and mobilized, analysis and evidence is likely to be prized as much for the ammunition it provides for entrenched interest group, partisan and ideological positions, than for its contribution of new and important ideas. Credentialed experts who gained influence by virtue of the credibility of their ideas and their studied detachment from the heat of political battle increasingly find themselves competing with a plethora of more aggressive advocacy analysts eager to become relevant to the policy debates of the moment.³ Nonetheless, the adoption of expert based ideas by parties and interest groups confirms by imitation alone the compelling appeal that ideas and research have to the increasingly diverse combatants that populate the policy process today.

Foundations for Experts' Role in the Policy Process

Broad changes in the nation's socio-economic structure have given rise to the growth of the "professional" class. This broad category, including economists, social scientists, doctors, natural scientists and policy experts of all persuasions, has increased twelve fold in the postwar period.⁴ By one account, associations representing professions tripled their presence in the Washington interest group community between 1960 and 1980 alone.⁵ These shifts in the nation's economic and political foundation prompted sociologist Daniel Bell to herald the arrival of a "post-industrial" society where formal knowledge becomes the critical resource for economic growth and social problem solving.⁶ While most would agree with his analysis of the shifting nature of economic production, this by no means implies that experts have become a cohesive, unified political force capable of having game changing influence in political debate. Like other

interests, experts at times proved to be every bit as splintered and diverse in their political views and their proclivity to engage in policymaking as other interest groups.

The shifting role of government

Before experts could play a pivotal role in policymaking, they had to be invited in by political leaders and publics to help solve specific substantive and political problems. The growing role of government and the growing complexity of that role all brought demand from political leaders in and out of government for the knowledge and expertise that experts bring. Whether it be financial regulation, health care delivery, or homeland security, government became a pivotal player in providing important benefits in critical areas of national life. Total federal spending jumped from 3 percent of the economy in 1930 to 24 percent in 2012.

The nature of the federal role also shifted. Through much of the nation's history, the federal government played a limited role in the economy. Federal programs were typically distributive in nature, featuring the allocation of funds to states and other actors through grants or capital investment projects. As Theodore Lowi would have predicted, such initiatives placed a premium on designing programs to maximize political support – a political rather than a technical challenge which legislatures excelled in.⁷ With the advent of the 20th century, the federal role expanded in regulatory and redistributive policy areas – arenas that were far more technically demanding.

Over the past 50 years, the expansion of the federal domestic role featured complex interventions that placed a premium on those with technical, not political expertise, to engineer and implement. Health care under Medicare and Medicaid enacted in 1964 called for federal officials to put their foot on both the gas and the brake by both

expanding benefits while at the same time controlling cost inflation that those expansions would invariably promote. This predicament bedevils the nation today, as even experts bemoan the rampant cost growth in health care that so far seems to elude the ability of the nation to reign in. President Obama's health reform, in fact, delegates responsibility for trimming health care costs to a new expert Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB) whose proposals will go into effect unless overridden by a 60 percent Congressional supermajority.⁸ Education featured first the targeting of enhanced services to neglected groups like disadvantaged and disabled but then expanded to promote a new found federal role in promoting and measuring educational quality under No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top initiatives spawned by the Bush and Obama Administrations. The metrics necessary to track progress across 16,000 schools became a cottage industry itself that guaranteed full employment for graduates of public policy and education schools for years to come. Environmental protection was founded on increasingly precise measurement of pollution across different modes and increasingly sophisticated policy tools that featured market-like incentives alongside traditional command and control regulation.

Lawrence Brown argued many years ago that as the federal policy expansions from the New Deal and Great Society were completed, the opportunities for what he calls "breakthrough policy" diminished as federal programs occupied most areas of domestic policy. Instead, he argued that policymakers would increasingly become preoccupied by what he calls "rationalizing policy" -- that is, revisions and reforms to the major initiatives of the past. While elected officials may not get as much political credit for rationalizing policies, in fact government programs create their own political and policy

momentum by becoming more central to the social and economic well being of the nation. Accordingly, policymakers become beset with demands to modify, revise, revisit, “fix” and fill gaps in such critical programs as social security, Medicare and education.⁹ As Aaron Wildavsky argued, policy was “its own cause” as the “evils that worry us now spring directly from the good things we tried to do before”.¹⁰

Brown argues, further, that the rationalizing agenda catapults policy analysts and technical staff into more prominent roles since they are the experts who have the greatest understanding of evaluation research and greatest command over the technical terms of program design that are so critical to rationalizing debates. Brown argues that the government comes to the table in rationalizing debates armed with its own agenda as government officials increasingly become central in seeking intricate solutions to government caused problems. Parties and interest groups are no longer the exclusive actors in this domain, whether it be controlling health care costs, easing transportation congestion or addressing homeland security or public health threats. This is not to say that partisan and group positioning does not occur on these issues, but it is to say that experts have more prominent roles in defining the problem and in mediating and legitimizing policy solutions.

Policy specialists and experts are thus the vital cogs in increasingly complex policy wheels. They are prized by the system for their command of technical issues in designing and managing policy. It is comforting indeed for a subcabinet appointee to be able to turn to policy specialists in tackle difficult challenges involved with responding to the crisis of the day or with turning campaign promises to governing realities. These specialists bring more than technical knowledge. They also typically bring what we

would call “institutional knowledge” involving deep understanding of the past history of government initiatives in an area, working relationships with other key players in an issue network across many sectors in and out of government and judgment about integrating technical policy design solutions with overall political agendas of the day.

Political leaders need help

It is these qualities that come to be prized by political leaders who are increasingly on the proverbial hot seat as the stakes involved with government have become broader and more salient to a greater share of the public. Most critically, political leaders are held accountable for outcomes of policies: did federal education programs achieve better student performance? Did federal drug abuse programs lower teen drug abuse? Did federal welfare reform lower the welfare rolls and improve the lives of lower income Americans? As Kevin Esterling notes, there is considerable uncertainty surrounding whether and how government initiatives affect these broader indicators. For instance, education outcomes reflect many factors beyond federal programs themselves, including state and local education programs and the investments made by families in their children.

Employing experts helps political leaders protect against the risks of policy uncertainty, and evidence suggests that political leaders redouble their search for information the more that issues are conflictual and highly salient.¹¹ Regardless of the complex range of factors involved in driving important outcomes, the political environment acts to centralize blame, with particular focus on the President. Thus, for instance, when the response to Hurricane Katrina was viewed as bungled and confused, the public held President George Bush primarily responsible, regardless of the fact that

many hands were responsible for that tragedy including those of the Mayor and the Governor.¹² The fact that the President appointed a policy novice, Michael Brown, to head the Federal Emergency Management Agency, became a magnet for additional criticism, illustrating the key role that expert leadership can play in promoting public confidence in government's responses to problems.

In this high stakes environment, presidents and other officials alike have incentives to reach out to experts to cover their considerable downside risks. When one surveys the federal landscape, it is clear that the role of experts was first institutionalized in policy arenas where Presidents are most centrally responsible for outcomes - national security and economic policy. Interestingly, in both cases, the National Security Council and the White House Council of Economic Advisors were both created in the aftermath of the Second World War. In both cases, presidents needed help in managing sensitive areas where voters were most likely to hold them personally accountable for national outcomes, whether fairly or not. Thus, it behooved them to have the best minds on tap to help plan and design policy and budgetary initiatives.

The growing supply of expertise

One of the most important underpinnings for the growth of the expert pathway has been the proliferation of experts in and around government. There has been a marked expansion of first class policy analysis over the past 50 years that has exceeded anything that was produced before. This output has been anchored by the institutionalization of analysis in schools of public policy and administration throughout the country as well as the growth in applied policy research institutions in and out of government. There are

now over 280 schools conferring masters of public administration and policy degrees throughout the nation.¹³

Within government, policy analysis gained its first real foothold in the Department of Defense during the implementation of Planning, Programming Budgeting Systems by Secretary Robert McNamara in the early 1960's. Armed with analytic "whiz kids", the Secretary was able to use policy analysis to gain leverage over the military services in budget conflicts over scarce resources. The introduction of analysis into budgeting and policymaking gained further traction with the formulation and implementation of the Great Society programs under Lyndon Johnson. Instrumental in designing such programs as the War on Poverty and education programs for disadvantaged children, the alleged failures and disappointments of these initiatives ironically fueled further expansion of expertise within bureaucracies, as program evaluation gained roots to help policymakers better understand how to design and implement complex programs.¹⁴

The federal civil service has become more professionalized as well. In 1950 more than half of the federal civil service was in lower level clerical jobs. By 2000, they comprised only 15 percent of the workforce. The percentage of professional positions exploded during the same period. About 10 percent of the workforce was employed in engineering and scientific positions.¹⁵ The percentage of federal workers with a graduate degree grew among workers holding professional positions, increasing from 26 percent in 1975 to 42 percent in 2005.¹⁶

In a system of separated institutions sharing powers, other actors could not sit idly by while the federal bureaucracy acquired these highly skilled experts. As analysis

became a new high ground for policy debates, the Congress, interest groups and competing agencies realized in Wildavsky's words, "it takes one to beat one".¹⁷ Thus, the hiring of policy analysts by Defense Secretary McNamara inspired the military services to gain their own analytic capability to contest the Secretary's ideas in the new analytic currency for budget debates.

The Congress armed itself with its own analytic support institutions. Congressional staff expanded significantly in the wake of the 1970's Congressional reforms empowering committees and subcommittees with new resources to contest the President for policy influence. Already suffering from principal-agency problems in overseeing a bureaucracy of 2 million federal employees, Congress established and strengthened support agencies that provided ready access to top experts in numerous public policy fields. With the closing of the Watergate era, Congress established the new Congressional Budget Office, carved out a new home for policy analysts in the Congressional Research Service, inspired the Government Accountability Office to redirect its resources to program evaluations requested by congressional committees and created an Office of Technology Assessment to enable more informed deliberation of complex policy issues. While the Technology Office was abolished in 1995, the other three institutions have become leading producers of primary research on major policy and programmatic issues across the entire range of governmental functions.¹⁸ The concomitant growth of Congressional staffs with strong analytic backgrounds has been partly responsible for increasing the demand from these agencies within the Congress itself.¹⁹ These trends have been replicated at the state level as well, as many state

governments have developed high level policy analytic and evaluation staffs working in the legislature during this period of renaissance in state governance capacity.²⁰

Beyond formal governmental institutions, think tanks emerged just after the turn of the twentieth century as part of the progressive movement's push to introduce greater professionalism and efficiency into governing. The earliest think tanks – the Russell Sage Foundation and the Institute for Government Research for example – emphasized the depoliticization of decisionmaking through the introduction of social science research and neutral analysis. The missions of the early think tanks were not ideological, nor were they associated with particular ideologies or interest groups. Donald Abelson has noted that the first generation of think tanks was often funded by philanthropic businessmen, while the second generation was funded by the federal government itself, reflecting the growing interest by policymakers in dealing with more complex policy environments and issues.²¹

The third generation saw a proliferation of think tanks and institutes addressing a wide range of social, economic, national security and governmental management issues. One study concludes that the number of think tanks at the national level tripled from 1970 to reach 305 by 1996.²² The new think tanks were different in several respects: they were often issue specific and they spurned the neutral policy oracle role to become advocates of interests and ideologies. Beginning with the emergence of conservative policy institutes in the 1970's such as the Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute, the new think tanks had a strategy to hire experts who shared both strong advocacy or ideological views and a determination to market those ideas to various target groups. In one survey of Washington journalists, Andrew Rich concluded that the think tanks that were rated as

the most credible were no longer viewed as the most influential. While the Brookings Institution was considered to be the most credible organization, they were not viewed as the most influential.²³

Some of these advocacy think tanks have been organized and supported by interest groups and other advocacy organizations. However, increasingly, interest groups themselves house their own research institutes, which support in house experts as well as consultants from universities and other think tanks. The AARP, one of the largest member based organizations in the United States, has a Research Center consisting of a Public Policy Institute, a Survey and Statistics unit and an Academic Affairs group which supports the production of occasional research papers. These units have surfaced dialogues, papers and forums with leading experts from all parts of the policy spectrum on such issues as the future outlook for Medicare and social security and the implications of fiscal policy on the economy.²⁴ The American Bankers Association has institutionalized a research capacity, with a Center for Banking Research and an Economic Policy and Research department that develops reports on trends and issues in financial markets.²⁵

The foregoing suggests that experts have become more integrated into political and advocacy institutions. The coexistence of experts with political bosses or bureaucratic agencies serves mutual interests. Political leaders gain the shroud of legitimacy for their decisions, while experts gain the opportunity to use ideas to make a difference.

However, even when they are members of broader political organizations, experts gain their foothold because they have different loyalties and accountability from the other

actors in the process. They gain their leverage and standing not due to loyalty to political officials or groups, but rather due to their adherence to professional norms and values of a professional community. Rather than accountability to political, legal or hierarchical sources, experts are first and foremost effective and legitimate because they are accountable to a professional community and its norms. Often that community has certifications that authenticate their standing in the community, whether they be academic degrees or professional certificates. Experts are generally given deference by bureaucratic and political superiors, owing to the technical complexity of their field and the significant credibility that expert pronouncements have in policy discussions and bureaucratic implementation..²⁶

Experts take root in a number of surprising venues. Of course, we would expect experts and professional communities to lead technical agencies. Indeed, the heads of the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and the Food and Drug Administration are by tradition scientists and policy experts who often have attained high professional standing, as evidenced by Nobel Laureates or other awards. Other non scientific agencies are also traditionally led by officials who have expert based credentials of relevance to the agency's mission. Thus, the IRS Commissioner has traditionally been a tax lawyer to reflect the most technical issues that the agency must rule on, while the Director of the Congressional Budget Office is a professional economist who is respected by the economics community.

However, experts survive and even thrive in political settings as well. The President's budget office, the Office of Management and Budget and the Congressional Budget Office make decisions with the highest political stakes imaginable. While the

leaders of these agencies are political appointees, the staffs are highly respected professionals who have long viewed themselves as the bastion of “neutral competence” providing the right numbers and facts to support inherently political budget decisions. Unlike health care research, budget experts can’t be left alone to practice their trade without substantial guidance and interference from political leaders, owing to the inherently political nature of budget decisions. However, political leaders have an interest in ensuring that their decisions are anchored in credible numbers and models.²⁷

In addition to serving as card carrying members of political or bureaucratic organizations and agencies, experts can and often do play a more formative and fundamental role in the providing the foundation of ideas and terms of debate that animate policy debates and issue networks. Hugh Heclo has called the loosely connected bands of public and private officials issue networks, a concept that evokes nonstructured interactions among policy specialists in and out of government.²⁸ The ties that bind these information networks together are a common focus and shared understandings of complex transactions around a policy area, not shared beliefs or positions. Leaders of agencies and programs are no longer the traditional party politicians filling jobs based on patronage, but rather policy politicians skilled at working with and through the many highly specialized professionals needed to design and implement energy conservation, health insurance regulation or air quality permit trading. In Heclo’s concept, expert based policy concepts and data help frame the questions and the discussion across the issue network. While actors often vigorously disagree, they share common epistemological frameworks and understandings that shape the terms of the debate.

The shared values and references that form the agendas of issue networks have been called “epistemic communities” by other researchers, such as John Ruggie.²⁹ The epistemic construct has been used to explain the leading role often played by technical experts in developing shared norms and values in policy networks. Although an epistemic community can include professionals with different backgrounds and party affiliations, the experts and other actors in the network come to share a common set of causal beliefs about the problems in their domain and a set of criteria for judging the validity of information and policy claims. Such communities can be instrumental in defining and framing problems as well as solutions.

The Roles of Experts in the Policy Process

While experts have become a growing presence in government institutions, interest groups, and Washington think tanks, the question remains: what roles do they actually play in policymaking and what factors shape these roles? The answer to this complex question is shaped by a national ambivalence about the normative role that experts should play as well as by the political contest with other pathways for influence on specific issues and decisions.

The paradox of legitimacy

First, the influence and role of experts is shaped by the paradox of legitimacy. On the one hand, expert knowledge provides legitimacy to policy positions when those views are shown to be anchored in research and scientific consensus. In fact, other pathways actively court experts by acquiring their own think tanks and institutes and funding other researchers who are likely to add compelling support. Party leaders championing reforms such as health reform and tax reform that challenged established groups in the pluralist

pathways brought in experts in shaping their initial proposals to capture the policy high ground. Whether it was President Reagan's Treasury 1 proposal that kicked off the debate on 1986 tax reform or the Clinton health task force, large groups of talented experts were brought together to ensure that reforms reflected established research consensus.

However, the legitimacy of experts themselves is clouded by the nation's long standing ambivalence about bureaucracy and policy elites in governing the nation. Skowronek has reminded us that the legitimacy of experts is more tenuous in the United States than in Europe. In those other nations, the legitimacy of bureaucracy was already well established by the time that democracy was ushered in during the 19th century. However, the United States, as a new nation, introduced democracy well before it developed a professional bureaucratic state. For much of our early history, the government was staffed with amateurs filled through political patronage. It was more important who you knew than what you knew. However, as the state evolved in complexity and scope, Woodrow Wilson was among the early public administrators calling for a professional merit based bureaucracy to apply expertise to the growing realm of government programs. Wilson's call was among the first in what Brian Cook calls the "arduous search for legitimating arguments to reconcile and thus artificially reattach administration to a regime predicated on popular sovereignty and individual rights."³⁰ Indeed, starting with Woodrow Wilson's classic work, much of public administration has been preoccupied with reconciling the legitimacy of bureaucracies and experts in a democratic system. As Dwight Waldo has said, the romantic vision of democracy has generated deep distrust of unelected officials, as Americans prefer democratic government to efficient public management.³¹ Wilson sought to bridge the conflict by

articulating the case for a separation of politics and administration, where elected officials would choose goals and administrative experts would be free to implement these goals in the most efficient way possible.³² Public administration was envisioned as a science of means, not ends. Yet this dichotomy failed to satisfactorily resolve the tension between experts and democratic values. Administrative choices and implementation consisted of another round of policy making involving political choices between competing claims and goals – a political, not a scientific enterprise.

Administrative experts should be on tap, but not on top, in balancing efficiency values with other competing goals such as social equity and public support. Wilson's dichotomy thus failed to carve out a legitimate role for experts and bureaucrats in our system. Experts would have to contest with political actors in other pathways for power and influence on each issue – a prospect that would have consequences for the nature of their influence as will be discussed shortly.

Experts in the contest for policymaking influence:

The actual influence achieved by experts is subject to considerable debate among the experts themselves. One might think that the analysis of the impact of policy analysis by policy analysts would succumb to the cheerleading effect. Far from it – in fact, political scientists, along with other observers, often harbor a largely gloomy outlook for the potential policy contributions of social science. In an influential policy text, James Anderson reflects the dim prospects for policy analysis:

“The policymaking process in the United States is an adversarial process, characterized by the clash of competing and conflicting viewpoints and interests, rather than an impartial, disinterested or ‘objective’ search for ‘correct’ solutions for policy

problems. Given this, policy analyses done by social scientists, for instance, may have little impact except as they provide support for the positions of particular participants in the policy process.”³³

Leading scholars of policy evaluation echo these conclusions. For instance, in her survey of congressional committee staffs. Carol Weiss found that analysis has very little prospects of setting the broad direction of public policy.³⁴ Although the social science community has conducted a prodigious level of research on many leading policy issues, Sheldon Danziger summed up the results by noting “So much social science, so little impact”.³⁵ Wyckoff suggests that policy analysis has little real impact on policy debates and that there is a consensus that we are witnessing a retreat of political leaders from the use of analysis in public life.³⁶

However, the experts’ roles in framing and shaping policy debates and outcomes is more robust than the foregoing would suggest. While the uses of research and expert knowledge rarely approximate the analysts’ gauzy ideal, nonetheless research has a palpable, albeit less direct, influence on policymaking. Given the increased political pressures in our system in a media saturated environment, the continued political viability of policy research as a base for at least some decisions is surprising.

As always, the terms of reference are important when assessing the role of policy analysis in decisionmaking. Some observers have been moved to downplay the impact of policy analysis by noting how infrequently specific studies are used in designing policies either at legislative or executive levels. This is undoubtedly the case; indeed analysts often joke about issuing “Olympic divers” – beautiful reports that make no splash. In fact,

proving a link between a specific study and a specific decision is not the most appropriate way to gauge the complex interactions between policy research and decisionmaking.

Rather, there are many other kinds of roles that expert knowledge and studies can play in shaping policy choices and outcomes. Carol Weiss has outlined seven specific models where research gains attention in policymaking.³⁷ The most direct model is the instrumental model where research provides solutions to policy problems. In this scenario, a linear relationship is posited between research studies and policy decisions. Knowledge itself is assumed to be compelling enough to drive its application in decisionmaking. It is assumed that policymakers agree on the goals and on the gap that research can resolve. While this might have characterized the development of the atom bomb in the Manhattan project during World War II, examples of this in the social sciences are few and far between. Given all of the influences and factors bearing on any complex policy question, analysts and others who harbor hopes for instrumental influence are destined to be disappointed and disillusioned.

The performance management arena illustrates the effects that inflated and inappropriate expectations for the role of policy analysis can have. The checkered history of performance reforms at the federal level, from PPBS, ZBB, MBO were all pronounced dead because they seemed to fail to influence federal budgetary decisions. However, this judgment was made based in part on expectations that the performance analysis produced by these reform initiatives would have a direct and mechanical linkage to budget decisions, notwithstanding the numerous other important factors that must necessarily play a role in those decisions. This view was most powerfully articulated by Senator William Roth when he introduced the 1993 Government Performance and Results Act

when he stated that the new performance budgeting process will take politics out of budgeting – programs that succeed will get more money and programs that fail will get less. This relationship, of course, is anything but straightforward – otherwise if the number of drug abusers went up we would cut funding for our drug programs! The point is that performance can realistically be expected to one among several considerations involved in budget decisions including relative priorities, needs and equity issues among others. Performance analysis and measures can realistically be expected to raise new questions on the agenda of decisionmakers but not necessarily provide the answers.

Weiss has highlighted other roles that analysis from experts can play in the policy process. While less direct, these alternative routes can nonetheless have an impact in their own more circuitous manner:

- Enlightenment – research most frequently enters the policy arena by shaping and redefining the policy agenda. The body of research in an area can help convert private troubles into public problems – - obesity is a classic example. Reorientation of this type is rarely the outcome of a single study. Rather it occurs when experts share a consensus about an entire body of research that is framed in compelling terms to policymakers.
- Interactive – experts are part of an issue network that is involved and consulted by policymakers. Research alone does not dictate results, but is considered in concert with experience, political insight, pressure and judgments.
- Political – research serves as ammunition for actors whose positions have hardened. While policymakers are not receptive to research that would cause them to change their view, they are avid users of research that supports their

predetermined positions. Weiss argues that as long as the data are not distorted or misinterpreted, research used by partisans constitutes research that makes a difference.

- Tactical – research can be used as an instrument of agenda denial, as studies are used to deflect pressure by keeping controversial issues off the agenda, among other short term political purposes.

These models should open us to the multiple ways that ideas can take root in the policy process. Experts have at times played prominent roles through the instrumental use of knowledge by policymakers, as the most demanding of Weiss' models would suggest, but more often experts' influence comes from more indirect routes, such as the enlightenment model. Experts can play a role in a wide range of issues, from narrow technical issues where they carry presumptive credibility to broad policy debates where expert based ideas can reframe and redefine problems in transformative ways. From the perspective of his garbage can model, John Kingdon suggested that policy analysts and accountability institutions would have their greatest role in articulating alternatives for the solution stream.³⁸ However, policy research and audits are increasingly being marshaled to assess and validate the legitimacy of problems presented in the problem stream for policymakers' attention.

Although conventional wisdom suggests that analysis will only be of tangential importance for high stakes policy issues, in fact the input of experts was critical in setting the agenda and defining alternatives for such major reforms as airline deregulation, welfare reform, the 1983 social security reform, the 1986 tax reform, and the 1996 farm reforms. Beyond these higher level cases, analytic input has been critical in setting the

agenda and in developing policy alternatives across a range of issues that Brown would characterize as rationalizing in nature. Whether it be Medicare reimbursement formulas, formulas allocating billions in grant dollars, financial reforms of federal deposit and pension insurance programs, analysts from GAO, CBO, federal agencies and think tanks have played vital roles in problem definition and solution development.

Student loan reform provides an excellent example of this dynamic. As loan defaults rose to exceed 20 percent in the mid 1990's, the student loan program earned the dubious distinction as a "high risk area" by the GAO, prompting attention from the Administration and the Congress. With the assistance of staff from GAO and the Education Department, the Congress developed a wide ranging set of reforms targeted at reversing the incentives facing the key actors in this elaborate system of third party government – the banks, the state guarantee agencies, the trade schools generating many of the defaulting students, and the former students themselves. As a result, the default rate was lowered to less than 10 percent. Here experts were influential in both problem and solution streams, using the garbage can model.³⁹

Our research suggests that the expert pathway is characterized by distinctive modes of problem definition and conflict when compared to other policy pathways. While feedback from clients and monitoring by interest groups constitute principal ways that problems were defined in the pluralist pathway, problems in the expert path, by contrast, were defined based on indicators and data and policy research. For instance, the need for farm reform ultimately passed in 1996 was informed by economic studies showing the impacts of the web of federal subsidies on consumer prices and the federal budget. Bills on the expert and symbolic pathways largely steered clear of high levels of conflict as well.

Once the expert frame became the primary frame for addressing the issue, both parties steered clear of outright opposition to expert driven proposals. Once reaching the agenda on the expert pathway, both parties sought to either endorse the proposal or work out differences in bargaining among experts from different factions, parties and branches.

While policies on the partisan pathway prompted the most extensive policy changes, expert based policies also showed the potential to yield nonincremental reforms to major areas thought at one time to be locked down in pluralistic pathway – the 1986 tax reform act, the 1996 farm reform and 1983 social security reform are cases in point. Beland and Waddan conclude that ideas often form the basis for policy reforms by offering new ways to construct social problems and credible alternatives to existing policies, overcoming political resistance, institutional constraints and path dependent policy coalitions. However, they are careful to note that ideas achieve their most significant roles when working in tandem with other parallel institutional and political forces. For instance, the welfare reform of 1996 was a product of successful reframing by conservatives of the old AFDC program as the problem, as well as decline of Democratic influence in the 104th Congress and the rise of budget deficits which sparked interest in reforms yielding savings.⁴⁰

The formative influence of pathways on the terms of debate can best be seen by the accommodations that various actors must make to recast their claims when pathways shift. When issues take an expert turn, groups formerly skilled in the pluralistic pathway had to begin to develop research capabilities to mount effective expert based arguments for their claims. Industries like the tobacco industry, for instance, had to commission their

own scientists to attempt to at least neutralize the increasingly compelling case made by antismoking groups on the expert pathway.

Conditions affecting the emergence of the expert pathway

As the foregoing suggests, experts play wide ranging roles that elude our ability to predict or categorize their impact. Those who conclude that experts play only a limited role in policy except for narrow technical issues may be right most of the time, but nonetheless fail to capture those episodes when experts can suddenly break open established iron triangles and policy images by reframing the problem underlying political coalitions. ⁴¹

Nonetheless it is possible to suggest areas where experts are likely to have the greatest role in public policy. Their roles will tend to be most significant under the following circumstances:

- Rationalizing policy – experts are likely to have more influence in adjusting established policy to account for performance shortfalls or redundancies where technically complex program design questions have the highest salience. Conversely, breakthrough policies where policymakers make a great leap forward to address new problems are likely to be informed more by ideas, ideologies and party positioning than expert ideas and data.
- Low visibility – it is likely that experts will play more vital roles on low conflict issues where other actors perceive minimal political stakes to their own vital interests.. Schwartz and Rosen (2004) find that differences amongst problems in the extent to which data are used in the policymaking process are largely explained by their political salience. Policy decisions with jurisdictional turf or

macro-budgetary implications have high political salience and tend toward data immunity despite the conscious effort to rationalize decision-making. More technical and professional policy decisions with low political salience tend to be more data-driven.⁴²

- Complexity and uncertainty— experts are likely to play greater roles when policy is viewed as being too complex for ordinary laymen to understand the risks entailed by adopting changes. Overburdened public decision makers are often likely to delegate complex specialized issues to expert committees or agencies to resolve to reduce their own culpability and legitimize policy outcomes. The use of the National Academy of Sciences by Congress to resolve technically vexing issues is an example of delegation at work. The Base Closure Commission is another case where Congress mandated a Presidentially appointed commission to develop a package of military bases to close based on expert based reviews supported by the Pentagon. Importantly, delegating to the experts contentious issues like base closing out of Congress' hands, transferring potential political blame to nonpolitical agents.
- Limited engagement of other actors from other pathways - frees up the experts to play a major role. As the foregoing suggests, other actors may perceive certain issues to be too technical and complex or too politically charged to warrant their involvement. In these cases, deference is given to experts to step in, with a short leash should problems and stakes escalate. At times, the disengagement of other actors occurs at the onset of problem definition where interest groups and party officials may be insufficiently organized or aware of the stakes associated with

the issue. In these cases, expert institutions can occupy the field. The emergence of health problems such as cigarette smoking or obesity often occurs first in expert research institutions and journals which get a clear path to frame the problem in compelling ways that eventually become difficult for other pathways to ignore.

- Enlightenment and problem definition –When considering the roles played by experts across all stages of the policy process – agenda formation, decisionmaking and implementation –ideas and analysis play a more formative role in agenda formation and problem definition stages than the drafting of specific legislation where positions have often become firmly established. Andrew Rich argues that experts and ideas play their greatest role in reframing issues or defining problems through new research and data while their prospects become worse as political actors solidify positions and engage in mobilization. In Weiss’ terms, the role of experts shifts over the stages of policy from the enlightenment model to the political model, as experts recede from independent shapers of dialogue to supportive ammunition for entrenched political actors.⁴³

Conversely, other forces diminish experts’ prospects. The high salience and mobilization of other pathways limits the degree of deference to experts in policymaking. In some issues, ideology, interests and party positions are perceived to be of greater importance than ideas. The passage of the Bush tax cuts in 2001 is one example where a conservative President mobilized to deliver this policy plank to the conservative base that had come to define the Republican party. In contrast to the 1986 tax reform, where an expert consensus fueled this major initiative to broaden the income tax base through

elimination of various tax expenditures, in 2001, tax cuts became a political line in the sand that gathered various and often conflicting policy justifications.⁴⁴

The failure of experts to establish and sustain a research consensus is a critical factor that mediates the influence of the expert pathway. Whether it be policy enlightenment or instrumental models, the roles of experts are premised on a clear agreement about the meaning of data and research by people who are viewed as the most credible experts in a field. Thus, the freedom to farm reforms in 1996 and the tax reform act of 1986 were premised on the broad consensus among economists that the old farm subsidies and tax expenditures alike constituted an unjustified drag on the economy that ended up costing the entire nation in the form of reduced economic growth and higher costs. Conversely, conflicts among experts dissipates their collective influence and enables actors in other pathways to divide and conquer by recruiting those experts who happen to agree with their particular policy prescriptions. The failure of experts to speak with one voice on health care reform has served to empower interest groups and partisan advocates with greater influence to offer alternatives that cannot be assessed against a comprehensive expert based benchmark or criteria.

The inability of expert based knowledge to solve policy problems can erode the influence of experts and lead to dissensus among experts themselves. When the economy of the 1970's was plagued by stagflation, political leaders and some economists lost faith in standard macroeconomic theory which had failed to anticipate the concurrence of both high inflation and high unemployment. This policy disillusionment prompted the search for new theories and policy reforms that led to the rise of supply side economics. Unlike conventional Keynesian economics, this line of thinking shifted policy attention from

influencing demand to promoting greater incentives for work, capital formation and savings to improve productivity and long term growth prospects. This in turn lent itself to more conservative policy prescriptions including reduction of tax rates which allegedly discouraged labor supply, savings and investment. Taken to extremes, this theory paved the way for the articulation of the “Laffer curve” which predicted that lower tax rates would bring higher revenues in their wake – a conclusion unsupported by data or informed opinion. The demoralization of economic experts paved the way for the emergence of new ideas cast to serve officials on the partisan and pluralist pathways. The 1981 tax cuts of the Reagan Administration and the tax cuts of the Bush Administration in 2001 and 2003 were premised on dissolution of the old economic consensus.⁴⁵

When thinking about what specific roles expert knowledge will play in individual policy areas, two dimensions are critical – the degree of consensus or conflict among experts themselves and among relevant political actors. Table 1 illustrates that cohesion or dissensus among the suppliers and consumers of expert information may go a long way in determining what role experts play in the policy process.

TABLE 1

Conditions For Differential Roles Of Experts

EXPERTS/POLITICAL ACTORS	EXPERT CONSENSUS	EXPERT POLARIZATION		
POLITICAL CONSENSUS	INSTRUMENTAL	SPECULATIVE AUGMENTATION		
POLITICAL	ENLIGHTENMENT	POLITICAL		

POLARIZATION				
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In this model, cohesion by both experts and political leaders encourages the instrumental use of research knowledge. As Weiss suggests, this the most demanding form of research utilization and one that can only be expected when strong agreement occurs on both sides of the information equation. Conversely, political and expert polarization provides the least propitious environment for expert influence. While complete indifference may very well occur by political leaders in this case, Weiss suggests that such an environment lends itself to the political model where contrasting groups of experts are employed by partisan combatants as political ammunition.

An enlightenment role might be expected to emerge when there is a research consensus but when political leaders are insufficiently cohesive to agree on specific applications to solve specific policy questions. Instead, the research consensus works through issue networks to reframe and refocus the questions facing divided political leaders. Finally, unified political leaders can be expected to pursue public policy solutions even in the face of disagreement among experts when policies delivery electoral advantages, as will be discussed below. When experts are divided, leaders could either demur and avoid incurring potential risks from acting without the benefit of expert guidance, or they could take action through “speculative augmentation”. In his study of air pollution, Charles Jones noted that anxious and ambitious policymakers legislated air pollution goals knowing that the technology was not yet available to meet those standards. Anxious to demonstrate their featly to symbolic cleanup goals, they

nonetheless ventured forth, causing them to have to revise timetables and strategies when the original plans proved to be infeasible, costly and political ruinous.⁴⁶

The Demand For Experts: The Mixed Incentives of Political Leaders

The variable prospects for experts rest in part on the uncertain receptivity of expert information by political leaders in the White House and Congress. On the one hand, many studies presume that political leaders have little reason to pay attention to expert theories or research. Leading treatments of the Congress have been premised on rational choice perspectives where members are assumed to respond to the median voter. Classics in Congressional analysis such as David Mayhew and Douglas Arnold assume that the primary goal of members of Congress is to appeal to their constituents through a range of policy positions, both real and symbolic, as well as localized benefits and constituency service.⁴⁷ Anxious members of Congress have their hands full, in these frameworks, satisfying attentive publics and keeping latent inattentive publics from becoming mobilized against them in their districts. Anchored as delegates of their districts, members of Congress have little incentive to reach for policy optimization defined by policy analysts. Bureaucracies also have been regarded as resistant to policy analysis that disturbs their prevailing policy networks and images.⁴⁸

There is strong evidence, moreover, to suggest that these negative incentives have intensified in recent decades.⁴⁹ When contrasted to the 1950's and 1960's, our policymaking process has become less consensual, more polarized along partisan lines, more contestable by increasingly well organized interests, and more transparent thanks to the proliferation of media coverage. Walter Williams' classic work chronicles the decline of influence of policy analytic offices in federal agencies in recent years, stemming from

the eclipse of neutral competence as a central value in executive agencies.⁵⁰ The Office of Management and Budget is a good case in point. While OMB budget analysts traditionally viewed themselves as the practitioners of neutral competence, this has become increasingly more tenuous as the number of political appointees increased from one – the director – to numerous officials in charge of major divisions on the budget, regulatory and management sides.⁵¹

The climate shift on Capitol Hill has been equally stark. The centralization of power in leadership and the polarization of politics have been responsible for a decline in deliberation. This is particularly the case for authorizing legislation, as much legislation skips potentially contentious authorization cycles to become attached to omnibus bills that bear the stamp of political leadership.⁵² The amount of time members spend in Washington has declined precipitously in recent years – the number of legislative days for voting is scheduled for 71 days, the lowest in 60 years according to Norman Ornstein. Moreover, Ornstein chronicles a secular decline in the number of committee and subcommittee meetings from an average of 5300 in the 60's and 70's to 2100 in the last Congress. These trends partly reflect growing anxiety faced by members increasingly responsible for running their own campaign organizations and fund raising, with greater time spent in districts and less time spent in Washington governing.⁵³

The flowering of more ideologically polarized parties has prompted less serious attention to policy research. As parties become increasingly captured by primary constituencies, elected officials become more preoccupied with appearing to support the hard core ideas animating their extreme wings. Indeed, many members may perceive themselves to be at political risk by endorsing expert based ideas and problems if these

are at odds with their base. The political embrace of fundamentalist assaults on the teaching of evolution and the willful disavowal of expert opinion on [global warming](#) are two manifestations of these trends.

Susan Jacoby observes that these political trends are coupled with broader social and media factors including the rise of a free-for-all internet environment that are undermining the crucial role played by scientists and other experts in mediating what we know about our world.⁵⁴ This book, written in 2009, echoes the path breaking work by Richard Hofstadter in the 1960's who pointed to the recurrent strain of anti-intellectualism that penetrates public debates in our nation.⁵⁵ He notes that historically, we idolize the self-made man and despise intellectual elites, believing that common sense is a more reliable guide to decisions in private and public life than formal knowledge and expertise

Notwithstanding these trends, experts' political prospects are more mixed than might be expected. First, although members of Congress must remain focused on their home district coalitions and the needs of the median voter, members are also driven by the desire to create good policy.⁵⁶ Recent work on the Congress has discovered that Congress, at times, goes to extraordinary lengths to promote general benefits, even delegating its power to extra legislative commissions and the executive in specific cases.⁵⁷

Given the goal of achieving good policy, Congress has an interest in understanding the potential for particular legislative proposals and design alternatives to achieve the outcomes promised. As Krehbiel's pioneering work on information theory suggested, congressional institutions are designed to equip congress with the necessary

specialization to address the uncertainties associated with legislative policymaking.⁵⁸ Central to information theory is the reconceptualization of the goals of members of Congress. Far from merely being interested in asserting positions on legislation to claim credit, as Mayhew suggested, Krehbiel and others in this tradition portray legislators as focused on achieving policy success.⁵⁹ While always interested in the electoral connection, members are also vitally interested in the connections between their policy position and actual policy outcomes. New work has shown that the public's views of overall congressional performance has real electoral consequences for members. Incumbents in fact are held accountable not only for taking positions and delivering earmarked benefits to their districts, but also for the general performance of Congress in solving national problems.⁶⁰

Esterling's important work follows in this tradition.⁶¹ In his view, Congress has significant incentives to use policy expertise to identify socially efficient policies. The considerable uncertainty that surrounds any major legislative proposal is a source of political risk to members of Congress interested in good policy and concerned that they may be identified with policy failures. Fortunately for the Congress, Esterling argues that they can resolve uncertainties about policy outcomes by paying attention to interest group arguments which are focused on the pursuit of efficient policies. In this theory, advocates become the harbinger of analysis, as members of Congress can look for consensus or conflict among interest groups to identify the degree of uncertainty and disagreement over the prospective outcomes of policy proposals.

Other work suggests that Congress relies on its own independent policy analytic capacity for policy development and oversight, whether it be through its own staff or

through its support agencies – CBO, GAO and the Congressional Research Service in the Library of Congress. David Whiteman’s study of congressional information shows that policy analyses and information produced by these offices played a surprisingly central role in the substantive development of legislative policy proposals and in policy argumentation.⁶² Although congressional staff and members use information strategically to support positions they have already arrived at through other means, Whiteman finds a striking level of analytic utilization to shape both the concrete details of policy proposals as well as to set the overall conceptual frame for the policy debate. For instance, over the four major policy cases he examined, most committee staff reported using analytic reports from congressional support agencies and other think tanks to actually formulate legislation.

If elected officials are indeed interested in good policy, we need to more carefully understand the political incentives and the conditions under which such incentives might become activated. The following factors are among those that help bring together the electoral connection with the expert pathway:

- Shame - At times, expert ideas gain compelling political status, rising to the level of a valence issue. As will be noted in the next section, ideas grounded in a consensus by mainstream experts can gain credibility that can move agendas and prompt their embrace by members in the face of opposition by interest groups. Whether it be free trade, second hand smoking bans or trans fat prohibition initiatives, expert based policies can enable leaders to more easily blunt opposition by narrow interests that heretofore had hegemonic influence over these areas.

- Competition – political actors in Congress or the bureaucracy can be motivated to adopt recommendations or initiate their own expert based ideas to compete with expert claims by other actors. The movement to create report cards assessing agencies and programs in an open, public process constitutes a strategy to jump start competition among actors for public approbation and the high ground.⁶³ The foregoing suggests that multiple actors in competitive policymaking environments can inspire a "race to the top" among other actors to ratchet up attention to expert based ideas.
- Conflict management - reliance on policy research also can help policymakers channel and contain conflict by providing a credible base of information that is considered by all contestants as setting the parameters for debates. Rather than debate the veracity of information, the presence of credible institutional information can help leaders focus debates on broader issues. The independence and respect accorded to the Congressional Budget Office is an example of how much legislators need an independent referee to resolve fact based questions, thereby controlling the scope of conflicts. Although there have been calls from some conservatives to open up CBO's "black box" to deploy dynamic scoring for tax policy changes, the validity and assumptions about specific CBO cost estimates are rarely challenged openly. It is conceivable that political actors observe norms of reciprocity, knowing that a challenge by one side will precipitate corresponding challenges by competing actors on other estimates, thereby throwing the entire process into disarray.

- Blame avoidance – political leaders often turn to auditors and analysts to insulate themselves from political heat. Cloaking themselves in the legitimacy of analytic institutions can help leaders make hard choices. Thus, for instance, delegating the closure of military bases in the United States to a Base Closure Commission helped to legitimize decisions and protect leaders from political fallout. The United Kingdom political establishment turned to the National Audit Office to certify the national budget numbers prior to elections, thereby legitimizing these politically charged data with the imprimatur of a disinterested party

While expert based policies arise from real political incentives, they are also contested by other pathways and are vulnerable to countermobilization. . . In the forthcoming book on policy pathways, we have found policies jump across pathways more frequently than is acknowledged by incremental and policy punctuation theory.⁶⁴ Tax policy was subject to no fewer than as shown in Table 3 below. The Reagan 1981 tax cuts were in effect only one year when experts worked to institute reforms to eliminate the most egregious tax breaks from this earlier legislation, reducing the deficit substantially in the process. As noted above, the shifts in pathways correspond to shifts in policy.

TABLE 2: PATHWAY SWITCHING, TAX POLICY

TAX POLICY							
PLURALIST							
PARTISAN	•			•			•
EXPERT		•	•				
SYMBOLIC					•	•	
YEAR.....	1981	1982	1986	1993	1997	1998	2001
INITIATIVE	ERTA	TEFRA	TRA	OBRA	TRA	IRS	Tax Cuts

Policies on all pathways were subject to pathway shifts, but the expert pathway was most vulnerable to policy recapture by other pathways, suggesting that experts have more episodic influence than other actors in our system.. Often, expert based policies are undermined by the reemergence of pluralist interest groups. The 1996 freedom to farm act is a good example of a reform in farm subsidies long endorsed by economists and embraced by Congressional Republican leadership which was in essence overturned in 2002 as a weakening farm economy and several natural disasters helped undermine, and perhaps revealed, the lack of sustainable support for the free market concepts undergirding the 95 reform legislation. Expert policies are also vulnerable to recapture by other pathways as well. The expert based tax reform act of 1986 was whittled away by a combination of higher income tax rates adopted by partisan leaders and reinstatement of tax expenditures pressed through the pluralist pathways

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Expert based policymaking is alive in our system, if not always well. It has become a competing avenue to achieve policy change in our system. Although providing compelling appeal and advantages to policymakers, it is equally clear that expert policies compete with other pathways for influence and possible hegemony. The policy achievements of experts are hard fought and also vulnerable to counter mobilization by actors in other pathways.

We are fortunate indeed that experts have become institutionalized in the policy process. Unlike the other pathways, experts are responsible to a profession, not to the electorate or media markets like officials in other pathways. While undercutting their political legitimacy, this professional accountability helps ensure that they can make independent contributions to help national leaders chart a course toward more informed and effective policy in increasingly uncertain and challenging times. They have left a legacy of major policy reform that gained legitimacy and political appeal as a result of expert based ideas and mobilization.

Ultimately, the fate of the expert pathway will be a function of trends in the broader political system. Many of these trends do not auger well for the influence of credible analysis – short term political perspectives, partisan polarization, media driven policymaking are on the rise. However, as noted above there are continued sustainable incentives on the part of political leaders to use and support traditional consensus based research and research institutions.

As experts gain greater currency, their gains inspire actors in other pathways to redouble their efforts to contest their influence. The recapture of influence by other pathways takes the form of substantive policy changes that undermine previous expert based reforms, as happened with farm and tax policy in recent decades. Another manifestation is the proliferation of scientists, economists and policy analysts employed by contending interests. Although reflecting the new-found power of professional ideas and knowledge, this development threatens to ultimately undermine the credibility of expert communities by eroding professional consensus which is so vital to their impact on policymaking.

Certainly the use of expert based arguments by advocacy groups has the potential to elevate the dialogue – at the very least policy arguments may be conducted on analytic grounds susceptible to validation and legitimation. However, on balance, these trends are worrisome for they portend the erosion of informed decisionmaking anchored in consensus based research ideas, to be replaced by a more opportunistic advocacy “analysis” where ideas become props to advance particular interests and preformed positions.

Figure 1

The Four “Pathways” of Power
 (with prototypical examples listed)

	SCOPE OF MOBILIZATION	
	SPECIALIZED	MASS
IDEATIONAL FORM OF MOBILIZATION	<p>Expert</p> <p>[TRA 1986] [TARP]</p>	<p><i>Symbolic</i></p> <p>[Welfare Reform] [USA Patriot Act]</p>
ORGANIZATIONAL	<p><i>Pluralist</i></p> <p>[2002 Farm Bill] [Categorical Grants]</p>	<p><i>Partisan</i></p> <p>[Affordable Care Act] [Bush 2001 Tax Cuts]</p>

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