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Domestic Policy



On the evening of April 20, 2010, an offshore drilling well, leased and run by British Petroleum (BP) and known as Deepwater Horizon, exploded off the coast of the state of Louisiana. The well released methane gas and ignited into flames, killing eleven workers and injuring seventeen others. Two days later, on April 22, the rig completely sank into the ocean, and workers observed an oil slick forming in the Gulf of Mexico. What followed became the greatest environmental disaster in American history, as BP repeatedly tried—and failed—to cap the leak or capture the oil leaking into the Gulf.

The company used a variety of tactics to try to stop the constant flow of oil. These included using unmanned underwater robots to close the open valves on the rig, installing containment domes, and attempting to divert the flow away from the fractured pipe. Nearly 2 million gallons of chemical dispersants were applied directly to the well one mile below the surface of the ocean in order to break the oil into tiny droplets. Finally, on July 15, almost three months after the leak had begun, engineers were able to cap the leaking well.

Three years after the spill, estimates of the environmental and economic impact of the BP spill remain imprecise. Although visible short-term damage can be measured, including more than a half million claims by businesses and individuals, over a thousand miles of oiled shoreline, and the deaths of thousands of birds, turtles, and sea mammals, the long-term impact is immeasurable. Large areas of the ocean floor remain covered in oil, and plumes of oil and natural gas have been detected in a ten mile radius, endangering the sensitive growth stages of the entire marine food chain. A total of 88,000 square miles of the Gulf remain closed, off limits to the fishing and oil industries. Scientists question whether the recent increase in the death of young bottlenose dolphins is linked to the spill; more than 150 washed ashore in the first few months of 2012.

It often takes a crisis of this magnitude to prompt changes in public policy, yet controversies about the responsible party, the economic impact of regulations, and scientific and technological uncertainties impede decision making. Many Gulf state politicians initially called on the national government for

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DRILLING FOR OIL HAS BEEN A MAJOR INDUSTRY IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE THE 1850s.

Above, an oil well at Semitropic, California, in the late 1800s. Below, the Deepwater Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico following the 2010 disaster.



16.1

public policy

An intentional course of action or inaction followed by government in dealing with some problem or matter of concern.

16.2

domestic policy

A category of public policy that includes a broad and varied range of government programs affecting the lives of citizens within a country.

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support. Later, however, they criticized the efforts of the Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard to limit the spill. In particular, Louisiana Republican Governor Bobby Jindal said, “We’ve been frustrated with the disjointed effort to date that has too often meant too little, too late for the oil hitting our coast. . . . It is clear we don’t have the resources we need to protect our coast. . . . we need more boom, more skimmers, more vacuums, more jack-up barges . . .”¹ Despite U.S. military and administrative involvement in the cleanup efforts, President Barack Obama has claimed that the cost of cleansing affected areas should fall entirely on the shoulders of BP. “We will fight this spill with everything we’ve got for as long as it takes. We will make BP pay for the damage their company has caused,” said President Obama.² The oil company, to date, has paid over \$6 billion in claims, with a tentative settlement agreement to pay an estimated \$7.8 billion in “fairness” for the company’s liability. The real policy concern, however, is how to prevent such a disaster in the future. In the short term, President Barack Obama delayed plans for leasing new drilling sites off the coast of mid-Atlantic and southeastern states and in large areas of the eastern Gulf region pending further study.

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Public policy is an intentional course of action or inaction followed by government in dealing with some problem or matter of concern.³ Public policies are thus governmental policies; they are authoritative and binding on people. Individuals, groups, and even government agencies that do not comply with policies can face penalties of fines, loss of benefits, or even jail terms. The phrase “course of action” implies that policies develop or unfold over time. They involve more than a legislative decision to enact a law or a presidential decision to issue an executive order. Also important is how the law or executive order is carried out. The impact or meaning of a policy depends on whether it is vigorously enforced, enforced only in some instances, or not enforced at all. Government inaction, or the decision not to make policy, also defines public policy.

Domestic policy is a category of public policy that includes a broad and varied range of government programs affecting the lives of citizens within a country. Health care, welfare, education, environment, energy, and public safety are all considered domestic policies, although most public policy today also has global implications. Domestic policies reflect a country’s historical experiences, values, and attitudes toward social and economic conditions. This chapter provides in-depth analysis of three domestic policy areas: health care, education, and environment and energy. Each area highlights a different stage of the policy-making process and the conditions that create opportunities for and constraints on reform.

Roots of Domestic Policy in the United States

16.1

Trace the stages of the policy-making process.

The Framers of the Constitution created a decentralized policy-making process with powers shared by Congress, the president, the courts, and the states. In addition, social forces, including attitudes toward the role and size of government, constrain the development of government policies. In the United States, policy making often begins at the state and local levels, where these “laboratories for democracy” set the stage for federal governmental action. Some issues, however, instantly demand policy leadership at the federal level. Which level of government dominates can change over time as issues evolve. Historically, the federal government’s involvement in domestic policy making has shifted focus from the immediate economic and national security concerns facing the new nation, to improvement of social and working conditions created by industrialization, to an expanded focus on a broad range of domestic policies, including health care, welfare, education, environment, energy, and public safety.

As the federal government initially concentrated more on economic policy and national security, states took the lead in addressing poor living and working conditions for Americans. Progressivism called for reforms in response to the industrial revolution, starting at the grassroots level, working up to the states, and eventually capturing the federal government's attention. In the area of child labor, for example, in 1836 Massachusetts required child factory workers under the age of 15 to spend at least three months in school. Other states followed with limits on the length of a child's workday and minimum age laws. The National Child Labor Committee was formed in 1904, but when the first federal child labor law, the Keating-Owen Act, passed in 1916 it was struck down as unconstitutional.⁴ The law was revised, reintroduced, and subsequently struck down again. Similarly, states passed protective legislation to improve the working conditions of women. Oregon's maximum hour law, which applied to women but not to men, was declared unconstitutional. When Congress passed a minimum wage law for women and children working in the District of Columbia, it was also struck down. Finally, the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act created a minimum wage for both women and men and prohibited the employment of minors. The 1930s marked a clear change in the federal government's role in domestic policy making, specifically in the President's role in dominating that process. President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal created the modern welfare state and the first entitlement programs: Social Security and Aid to Families with Dependent Children. From that point, the federal government, under the direction of strong presidential advocates, continued to expand its role in domestic policy.

□ The Evolution of Health Care Policy

In the health care field, the federal government's involvement began in 1798 with the establishment of the National Marine Service (NMS) for "the relief of sick and disabled seamen." States and localities primarily were responsible for public health issues, including public sanitation, clean water programs, pasteurization of milk, immunization programs, and other activities designed to reduce the incidence of infectious and communicable diseases. National health insurance first received serious consideration in the 1930s, when Congress was legislating a number of New Deal social programs. But, because of the strong opposition of the American Medical Association (AMA), universal health insurance was not adopted. The AMA and its allies distrusted government intervention in their affairs and feared that regulations would limit their discretion as well as their earnings. In particular, they worried that government intrusion into the health care field would limit physicians' fees, restrict the amount of time approved for specific types of hospital visits, and constrain charges for prescription drugs.

As a result, government health insurance remained on the back burner for many years. It received some consideration during the 1960s, when Congress and the Johnson administration were working to establish Medicare and Medicaid. Health care attracted a great deal of attention in the early 1990s, during the first year of President Bill Clinton's term. Clinton established a health care reform task force led by his wife, Hillary, and attempted to compel Congress to adopt legislation creating universal health coverage in the United States. Ultimately, however, these efforts failed. The phrase "socialized medicine" and horror stories about long wait times for medically necessary services in countries with nationalized health care turned public opinion against Clinton and the Democrats.

Clinton's failure at health care reform, as well as the extended period of Republican legislative control that began in 1995, kept national health insurance off the governmental agenda for the next fifteen years. During this time, health care costs and the number of uninsured Americans rose dramatically. By 2008, more than 45 million Americans had no health insurance coverage, and another 20 million were underinsured.

Thus, during the 2008 presidential election, Democratic candidate Barack Obama ran on a platform that promised to bring much-needed reform to the American health insurance system. After taking office, Obama and the Democratic Congress set to work crafting legislation that accomplished their goal. More than a year later—and after a great deal of political wrangling—on March 23, 2010, President Obama signed into law the **Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act**. This legislation represents a dramatic change in the

Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

2010 legislation aimed at reducing the number of uninsured individuals and decreasing health care costs.

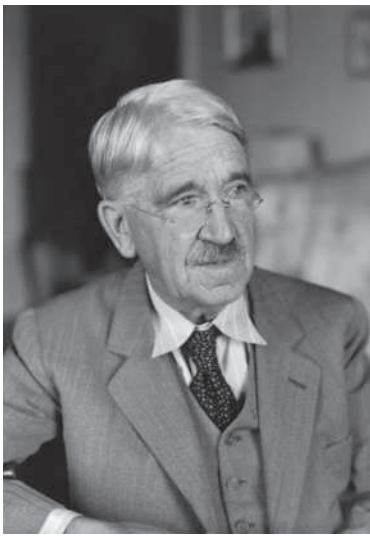
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WHO WAS JOHN DEWEY?

John Dewey was an influential education reform advocate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He advocated active and experiential learning. He also created the numeric Dewey Decimal system for organizing books uniformly throughout the United States.

federal government's role in health care policy. Immediately, states challenged the constitutionality of the law, and in 2012 the Supreme Court voted 5–4 to uphold it.

□ The Evolution of Education Policy

In the field of public education, the state level also historically took the lead. Following the Revolutionary War, reformers of that era, such as Benjamin Franklin, began to see education as a means of legitimizing democratic institutions in the minds of young people and of establishing social and political order in the United States. In 1787, the Northwest Ordinance specifically set aside land for the establishment of public schools. However, state and local governments controlled development of their education systems, curricula, and goals. In 1852, Massachusetts passed the first compulsory education law, and by 1918 all states had similar laws.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when immigration was at high levels, education again emerged on the governmental agenda. Many of the social, economic, and political elites of the era came to view education as a tool for assimilating immigrants and for protecting social and political order. Policy making focused on curriculum development. Reforms came about largely through the work of John Dewey (1859–1952), a psychologist by training, who advocated experiential learning rather than relying on passive experience, whereby teachers would inform students of “facts,” and students would memorize them. By the mid-twentieth century, the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union sparked new curriculum reforms focused on enhancing math and science programs. After the Soviets launched the world's first satellite, known as *Sputnik I*, into space on October 4, 1957, many American policy makers and citizens grew concerned about the capacity of American technology to meet the perceived threat of the Soviet Union and its allies.

At the same time, education policy making at the federal level shifted toward access and equality. The Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ruled that separate educational facilities for black and white students were inherently unequal. *Brown* established both the road map for racial desegregation in American schools and a national standard for equality of educational opportunity. Under Johnson's War on Poverty, Head Start was initiated in 1964 to provide preschool to at-risk low-income children, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 created Title I programs to improve educational opportunities for low-income K–12 students. These policies marked an important turning point in education policy. Enforcement of civil rights legislation—related to both race and gender, such as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972—required the national government to increasingly involve itself in a policy area traditionally reserved for state and local governments.

The Department of Education was created as a Cabinet-level agency in 1979 specifically to guide national education policy, establish education opportunity programs, and construct national examinations for administration in local schools. In 1983, the department released *A Nation at Risk*, including sobering statistics about the quality of education in the United States. Among the report's findings were the following: 13% of all seventeen-year-olds were functionally illiterate; standardized test scores had declined; achievement in math and science had declined; students were spending an average of 6 hours per day for 180 days in school, compared with 8 hours per day for 220 days in other industrialized countries; and most students lacked “higher order” intellectual skills, such as the ability to draw inferences, write persuasive essays, or solve multistep math problems.

States responded with outcome-based education (OBE) reforms in the 1980s, focused on assessment of student learning, while the national government continued providing guidelines. In 1994, Congress passed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, replacing OBE with standards-based education (SBE). States worked to develop their own standardized curriculums and assessment programs based on federal guidelines, paving the way for more comprehensive reform with the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB linked standards, testing, and accountability, further increasing the role of the federal government in education policy. While the new federal



HOW DID TITLE IX CHANGE EDUCATION?

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 greatly expanded educational and athletic opportunities for women. As a result of these gender equity requirements, women's lacrosse is one of the fastest growing collegiate sports.

legislation did not *require* policy change, states had to comply with federal rules if they wanted to receive federal funding. Included in the legislation was a school choice option in the event a school fails to meet standards or make adequate yearly progress. The school choice movement, as well as strong arguments for privatization of elementary and secondary education, reflects the influence of Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman, who concluded that through private marketplace competition, schools would be forced to either improve student achievement outcomes or face the shuttering of their enterprise. More than a decade after passage of NCLB, states continued to struggle to meet standards. President Barack Obama created the Race to the Top initiative to encourage states to develop their own innovative education reforms. By 2011, math scores were the highest they had been since enactment of NCLB, although reading scores had not measurably improved.⁵

□ The Evolution of Energy and Environmental Policy

In the areas of environmental and energy policy, issues have successfully demanded national attention and federal government policy leadership until recently. Initial concerns about the environment related to industrialization and laissez-faire attitudes about what individuals and businesses could do with their private property. President Theodore Roosevelt, a Progressive, embraced conservation as a federal government policy, creating the U.S. Forest Service, national parks, national forests, national monuments, and nature preserves. President Franklin D. Roosevelt continued this trend and, in 1937, Congress passed the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid and Wildlife Restoration Act to protect endangered species and provide conservation funding for state programs.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, America was in the midst of one of the most robust economic periods in national history. The nation prospered, with vibrant manufacturing and transportation sectors that were bolstered by access to cheap fossil fuels. With the nation's abundant coal supplies and relatively unfettered access to oil, little need arose for government efforts in the area of energy policy. In essence, the issue of energy was largely absent from the government agenda because energy was not seen as a real problem for the United States.⁶ However, the effects of intensive energy use on the environment grew more obvious to the nation as a whole. From heavy smog in major cities to thick clouds of smoke in industrial towns, Americans had begun to take notice of deteriorating environmental conditions that related to its industrial might.

In response, the government's agenda shifted from conservation to environmental protection. The 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* increased the visibility of environmental damage due to toxic and hazardous waste. Americans' growing concerns about environmental conditions led to the first Earth Day in 1970, when millions of citizens took part in marches and rallies demanding greater government action to protect the environment. This public pressure had tremendous impact on the national and state governments, ushering in the "environmental decade" of the 1970s. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created in 1970 and the federal government passed major policies affecting water pollution, air pollution, endangered species, and hazardous waste.

At the same time, the United States grew increasingly dependent on oil from foreign sources. In particular, oil from Middle Eastern nations such as Saudi Arabia and Iran accounted for a growing share of the nation's energy sources. While foreign oil remained cheap and abundant, the national government faced little demand to invest itself in major energy initiatives. But, in 1973, the need for action in the area of energy became all too obvious to the American public, and the energy problem abruptly found its way onto the government's agenda. On October 17, 1973, the members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) announced an embargo of oil shipments to any nation that supported Israel during its war with Egypt and Syria; this included the United States.⁷ The embargo was compounded when the larger Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) decided to raise oil prices throughout the world.⁸ The cumulative impact of these actions was a dramatic increase in the cost of oil in the United States, with a gallon of gasoline rising from 38 cents to 55 cents between May 1973 and May 1974.⁹ Soaring prices and shrinking supplies led to the first rationing of gas in the United States since the end of World War II and thrust energy to the front of the government's agenda.

The national government responded with a series of policies designed to reduce consumption of petroleum in the United States, including a national speed limit of 55 miles per hour in order to increase fuel efficiency and an earlier date for the start of daylight savings time in an attempt to lower demand for electricity.¹⁰ It also initiated Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) standards in 1975, which required automakers to meet average fuel efficiency standards for the fleet of cars they sold in the United States. For example, in 1978, General Motors was required to have its domestically sold automobiles average 18 miles per gallon (MPG). This meant GM could sell a large sedan that got 12 MPG if it also sold a smaller car that got 24 MPG.

Besides adopting energy conservation measures, the national government also turned its attention to increasing the availability of energy for the nation. To minimize the short-term impact of oil disruptions, Congress established the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in 1975 as part of the Energy Policy and Conservation Act. The Strategic Petroleum Reserve holds about two months of inventory that can be accessed under a presidential order.

With policy initiatives mounting and the complexity of energy policy growing, the Department of Energy (DOE) was established in 1977.¹¹ In 1978, Congress expanded the reach of the DOE with passage of the National Energy Act of 1978 (NEA), a comprehensive law including a variety of components related to both energy conservation and the expansion of energy sources. A key component of the 1978 NEA was the Energy Tax Act, providing tax breaks to individuals and companies that used alternative energy sources, such as solar or geothermal power, and penalizing inefficient use of energy by establishing a "gas-guzzler tax" on cars that did not reach a minimum MPG threshold. Although the purpose of the gas-guzzler tax was to reduce the public demand for such vehicles, the law did not make the impact originally anticipated because it did not apply to vehicles over 6,000 pounds. What was originally considered an exemption for businesses that needed vans and trucks to do their work turned out to be a way around the gas-guzzler tax for business owners, who could purchase or lease sport utility vehicles (SUVs) to conduct everyday business activities.

In 1989, the oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* ran aground, spilling 11 million gallons of crude oil into the Prince Edward Sound off the coast of Alaska. The environmental crisis

that followed ultimately prompted congressional passage of the 1990 Oil Pollution Act, improving the EPA's ability to prevent and respond to future oil spills. The law created an Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund to provide funding to clean up oil spills if the responsible party is unable to do so. New rules required oil companies to submit oil spill contingency plans and meet new standards for above-ground storage of oil. The Coast Guard also issued new rules requiring a double-hulled structure for oil tankers. These policies would later prove insufficient, as revealed by the BP incident of 2010, not just in containing an oil spill but in protecting the safety of oil spill cleanup workers, as well.

Global concern for climate change also escalated during the 1980s. Scientists warned that the burning of fossil fuels contributes to increased levels of **greenhouse gases** in the atmosphere, which in turn leads to higher global temperatures. These higher temperatures have a number of significant impacts on the planet, such as melting polar ice caps, increasing sea levels, prolonged droughts, more intense storms, major habitat destruction, and species extinction. These scientific concerns have spurred international action to manage the problem of **global warming**.

However, while most of the world's industrial nations ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which committed them to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the United States did not do so. President George W. Bush steadfastly refused to join other nations in signing the treaty, citing the damaging effects of the Protocol on the U.S. economy. In contrast, former Vice President Al Gore gained national attention as an advocate for awareness of climate change with the 2006 film *An Inconvenient Truth*, winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for his activism. Still, no comprehensive change in national policy took place. In the absence of major national activity to control global warming, state governments began taking the lead with climate change action plans, regional agreements, and legislation to reduce emissions, increase efficiency, and promote alternative fuel.

Domestic policy making in the United States has evolved over time, shifting responsibility and leadership back and forth between the states and the federal government. The role of government in domestic policy making at all levels has expanded, increasing the number and types of domestic policies. Within each policy area, the nature of an issue often changes as well. Ultimately, the domestic policy-making process reflects the country's historical experiences, values, and attitudes toward social and economic conditions.

□ A Model of the Policy-Making Process

Political scientists and other social scientists have developed many theories and models to explain the formation of public policies. These theories include elite theory, bureaucratic theory, special-interest theory, and pluralist theory. According to elite theory, all societies are divided into elites and masses. The elites have power to make and implement policy, while the masses simply respond to the desires of the elites. Elite theorists believe that an unequal distribution of power in society is normal and inevitable.¹² Elites, however, are not immune from public opinion, nor do they, by definition, oppress the masses.

Bureaucratic theory dictates that all institutions, governmental and nongovernmental, have fallen under the control of a large and ever-growing bureaucracy that carries out policy using standardized procedures. This growing complexity of modern organizations has empowered bureaucrats, who become dominant as a consequence of their expertise and competence. Eventually, the bureaucrats wrest power from others, especially elected officials.

In contrast, according to special-interest theory, narrow, specialized groups—not elites or bureaucrats—control the governmental process. Special-interest theorists believe that so many potential pressure points are in the three branches of the national government, as well as at the state level, that special-interest groups can step in on any number of competing sides. The government then becomes the equilibrium point in the system as it mediates among competing interests.¹³

Finally, many political scientists subscribe to the pluralist perspective. This theory argues that political resources in the United States are scattered so widely that no single group could ever gain monopoly control over any substantial area of policy.¹⁴ Participants in every political controversy have the ability to weigh in; thus, each has

greenhouse gases

Gases in the atmosphere that lead to higher global temperatures.

16.1

global warming

The increase in global temperatures due to carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels such as coal and oil.

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some impact on how political decisions are made. The downside is that, because governments in the United States rarely say no to any well-organized interest, what is good for the public at large often tends to lose out in the American system.¹⁵

Which theory applies depends, in part, on the type of policy. Some policies are procedural in nature, incrementally changing existing policy, while others are substantive, involving bold revisions or innovation to change a policy outcome. Policy types can also be categorized as distributive, regulatory, or redistributive.¹⁶ Distributive policies provide benefits to individuals, groups, communities, or corporations. These policies are the most common and, typically, the least controversial form of federal action to solve public problems, providing tangible benefits to the recipient while costs are shared widely and not necessarily viewed as competitive. Examples include student loans, farm subsidies, and water projects. Regulatory policies limit choices in order to restrict unacceptable behavior. Land use regulations, for example, limit how property can be developed in order to protect the environment. These policies are typically more controversial because the costs are concentrated, in this case on developers, while the benefits are diffused, or shared by the larger community. Redistributive policy involves transferring resources from one group to assist another group. These policies such as health care reforms under the Obama administration have been perceived as redistributive in nature, fueling opposition to full implementation of the legislation.

Participants, both governmental and nongovernmental, enter and exit the policy-making process at different stages. Although the policy-making process is often described in terms of stages or functional activities, the process is not necessarily sequential. One illustration of such a model is shown in Figure 16.1. This model can be

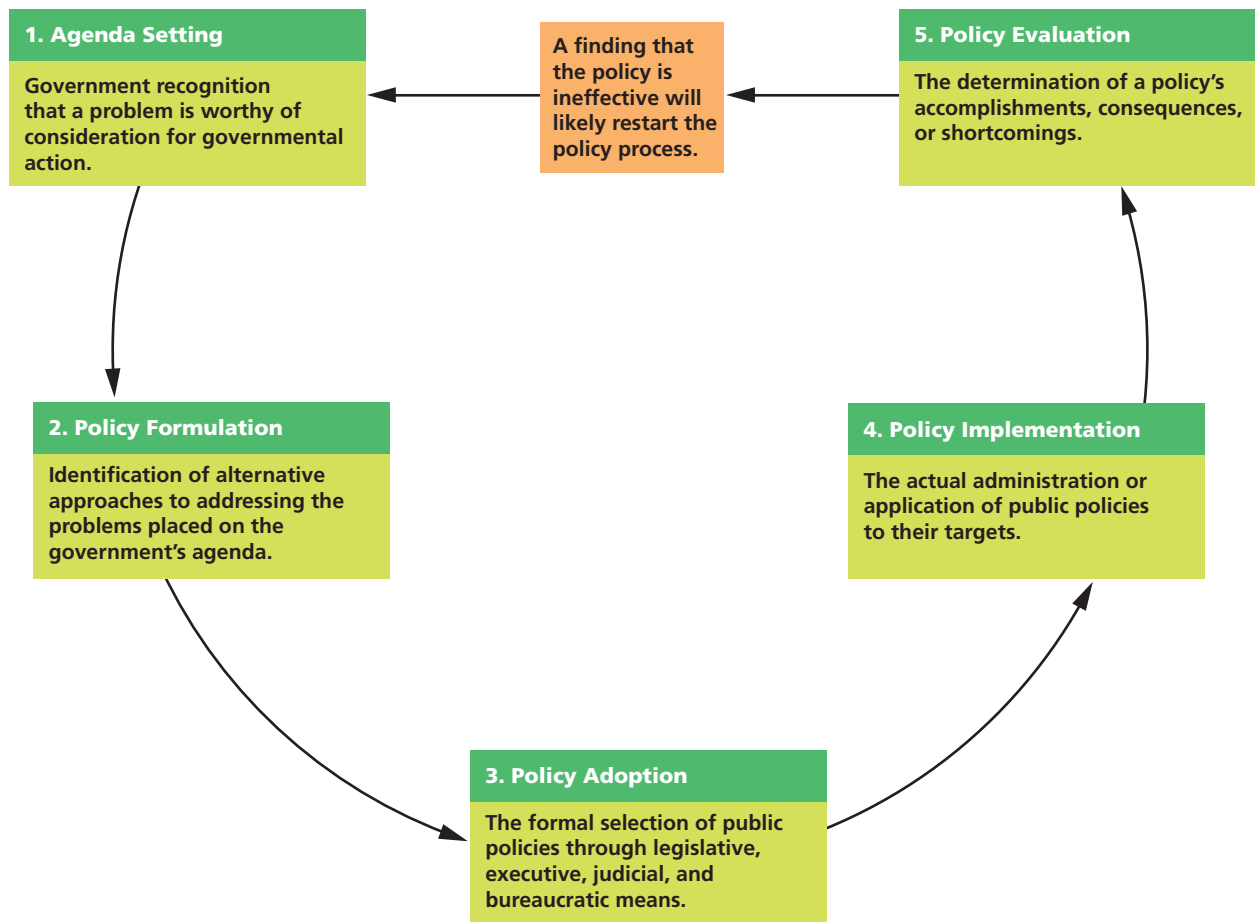


FIGURE 16.1 WHAT ARE THE STAGES OF THE PUBLIC POLICY PROCESS?

One of the best ways to understand public policy is to examine the process by which policies are made. Although there are many unique characteristics of policy making at the various levels of government, certain commonalities define the process from which public policies emerge. In the figure, the public policy process is broken down into five steps. Each step has distinguishing features, but it is important to remember that the steps often merge into one another in a less distinct manner.

used to analyze any of the issues discussed in this book. Although models such as these can be useful, it is important to remember that they simplify the actual process. Moreover, models for analyzing the policy-making process do not always explain *why* public policies take the specific forms they do. Nor do models necessarily tell us *who* dominates or controls the formation of public policy.

Policy making typically can be regarded as a process of sequential steps:

1. *Agenda setting.* Government recognition that a problem is worthy of consideration for governmental intervention.
2. *Policy formulation.* Identification of alternative approaches to addressing the problems placed on the government's agenda.
3. *Policy adoption.* The formal selection of public policies through legislative, executive, judicial, and bureaucratic means.
4. *Policy implementation.* The actual funding and administration or application of public policies to their targets.
5. *Policy evaluation.* The determination of a policy's accomplishments, consequences, or shortcomings. With this overview in mind, we examine the various stages of the policy process or cycle.

AGENDA SETTING An **agenda** is a set of issues to be discussed or given attention. Every political community—national, state, and local—has a **systemic agenda**. The systemic agenda is essentially a discussion agenda; it consists of all issues viewed as

agenda

A set of issues to be discussed or given attention.

systemic agenda

A discussion agenda; it consists of all public issues that are viewed as requiring governmental attention.

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HOW DOES GOVERNMENT IDENTIFY PUBLIC POLICY PROBLEMS?

Public policy problems are circumstances that can be addressed by government action. One example is disaster relief. During and after Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans Centre housed thousands of people displaced by the storm in appalling circumstances never before seen on such a massive basis in the United States.

16.1

governmental (institutional) agenda

Problems to which public officials feel obliged to devote active and serious attention.

16.2

agenda setting

The process of forming the list of issues to be addressed by government.

16.3

policy formulation

The crafting of proposed courses of action to resolve public problems.

16.4

16.5

requiring public attention and as involving matters within the legitimate jurisdiction of governments.¹⁷ A **governmental or institutional agenda**, in contrast, is much narrower. It includes only problems to which public officials feel obliged to devote active and serious attention. The movement of an issue from the systemic to the institutional agenda is known as **agenda setting**. John Kingdon describes this process as three streams—problems, policies, and politics—that must converge to create a policy window, or opportunity, for government action.¹⁸

First, a consensus must be reached that a societal condition is actually a problem. For a condition to become a problem, some criterion, a standard or value, must lead people to believe that the condition does not have to be accepted and, further, that it is something with which government can deal effectively and appropriately. For example, natural disasters such as hurricanes are unlikely to be identified as a policy problem because government can do little about them directly. The consequences of hurricanes—the human distress and property destruction they bring—are another matter. Usually, no single, agreed-on definition of a problem exists. Indeed, political struggle often occurs at this stage because how the problem is defined helps determine what sort of action is appropriate. Note that public policies themselves are frequently viewed as problems or the causes of other problems. Thus, for some people, gun control legislation is a solution to gun violence. To the National Rifle Association (NRA), however, any law that restricts gun ownership is a problem because the NRA views such laws as inappropriately infringing on an individual's constitutional right to keep and bear arms. To social conservatives, legal access to abortion is a problem; for social liberals, laws restricting abortion access fall into the problem category.

Second, in the policies stream, possible solutions must be available to address the problem. Policy experts are prolific in measuring indicators of problems and debating the costs and benefits of various proposals. If the problem has no apparent solution, or no perceived “acceptable” solution, few will advocate moving the issue forward. Immigration policy has numerous possible reforms, for example, but no consensus on whether the solution is to build and secure more fencing, deport illegal immigrants, or provide pathways to citizenship. In part, the lack of consensus on policy solutions is related to debates over whether or not immigration represents an economic or security threat. This lack of consensus on both problem definition and policy solutions has effectively kept comprehensive immigration reform off the national government's agenda.

Third, in the politics stream, changes in the public mood, interest group campaigns, or electoral turnover can create opportunities for agenda setting. With each new presidential administration, for example, the president enjoys a brief honeymoon period when he is more effective at launching policy initiatives. In his first days, for example, President Barack Obama issued nineteen executive orders, signed twelve bills into laws, and used his inaugural address to help focus the nation's attention on a broad agenda covering health care, education, energy, economic recovery, and foreign policy. Presidents, members of Congress, or interest group representatives can act as policy entrepreneurs, selling an issue to the point where the public demands a governmental response. Crises, or critical mobilizing events, can also create momentum for an issue. The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, placed the issue of homeland security at the top of the policy agenda. The home mortgage crisis and continuing recession in 2010 received significant media attention and corresponding responses from Congress, remaining on the agenda through the 2012 election.

Very few problems ever reach the government's agenda, however, and typically they do not stay there for long. Anthony Downs describes an issue attention cycle in which the intensity of the public's concern over an issue fades with time, either because solutions are perceived as too costly, another issue has taken its place, or time has simply passed.¹⁹ In this early stage of the policy-making process, if the problems, policies, and politics streams converge, then a policy window opens temporarily and the issue can reach the institutional agenda.

POLICY FORMULATION **Policy formulation** is the crafting of proposed courses of action to resolve public problems. It has both political and technical components.²⁰

The Living Constitution

All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives. — ARTICLE I, SECTION 1

Article 1, section 1 of the Constitution vests the law-making power in the hands of the legislative branch of government because the Framers believed that Congress, with its large and diverse membership, was a much lesser threat to tyranny than the executive branch. The judicial branch, the Framers thought, was little more than a theoretical necessity and would be the “least dangerous branch.”

Today, Congress retains its law-making power and does a great deal of public policy formulation and adoption. But, it is by no means the only source of public policy in the national government. The president, for example, has the power to make public policy by using executive orders. In such a way, President Barack Obama has made policy on subjects such as abortion, foreign policy, energy, and stem cell research.

The bureaucracy is also an important policy maker. Through a quasi-legislative process known as rule making, executive branch agencies formulate and implement policies in nearly every imaginable issue area.

Rules, in fact, are the largest source of policy decisions made by the national government.

Even the judicial branch, which the Framers thought would be essentially powerless, has evolved into an important source of policy decisions. In recent years, the Supreme Court has made policy prescriptions in each of the domestic policy issue areas, as well as in criminal justice, civil liberties, and civil rights.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Is the decentralized nature of the policy-making process an advantage or disadvantage in producing the best possible solutions to the country's problems?
2. Choose two areas of domestic policy. Who do you think should ultimately decide policy in each area? Are your answers for each policy area the same or different? Why or why not?

The political aspect of policy formulation involves determining generally what should be done to address a problem. The technical facet involves correctly stating in specific language what one wants to authorize or accomplish, to adequately guide those who must implement policy and to prevent distortion of legislative intent.

Policy formulation may take many forms:

1. *Routine formulation* is the process of altering existing policy proposals or creating new proposals within an issue area the government has previously addressed. For instance, the formulation of policy for veterans' benefits is routine.
2. *Analogous formulation* handles new problems by drawing on experience with similar problems in the past or in other jurisdictions. What has been done in the past to cope with economic recession? How have other states dealt with child abuse or divorce law reform?
3. *Creative formulation* involves attempts to develop new or unprecedented proposals that represent a departure from existing practices and that will better resolve a problem. For example, plans to develop an anti-missile defense system to shoot down incoming missiles represent a departure from previous defense strategies of mutual destruction.

Various players in the policy process may undertake policy formulation: the president, presidential aides, agency officials, specially appointed task forces and commissions, interest groups, private research organizations (or “think tanks”), and legislators and their staffs. The people engaged in formulation are usually looking ahead toward policy adoption. These individuals may include or exclude particular provisions of a proposal in an attempt to enhance its likelihood of adoption. To the extent that formulators think in this strategic manner, the formulation and adoption stages of the policy process often overlap.

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16.1

policy adoption

The approval of a policy proposal by people with the requisite authority, such as a legislature.

16.2

policy implementation

The process of carrying out public policy.

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POLICY ADOPTION **Policy adoption** is the approval of a policy proposal by the people with requisite authority, such as a legislature or chief executive. This approval gives the policy legal force. Because most public policies in the United States result from legislation, policy adoption frequently requires building a series of majority coalitions necessary to secure the enactment of legislation in Congress. To secure the needed votes, a bill may be watered down or modified at any point in the legislative process. Or, the bill may fail to win a majority at one of them and die, at least for the time being.

The tortuous nature of congressional policy adoption has some important consequences. First, complex legislation may require substantial periods of time to pass. Second, the legislation passed is often incremental, making only limited or marginal changes in existing policy. Third, legislation is frequently written in general or ambiguous language, as in the Clean Air Act, which provided amorphous instructions to administrators in the Environmental Protection Agency to set air quality standards that would allow for an “adequate margin of safety” to protect the public health. Phrases such as “adequate margin” are highly subjective and open to a wide range of interpretations. Language such as this may provide considerable discretion to the people who implement the law and also leave them doubting its intended purposes.

Ideally, policies would be adopted on the basis of comprehensive rational decision making, in which policy makers would make decisions with complete information and expertise about the nature of the problem and the costs and benefits of proposed solutions. In the real world, however, policy making is not always rational. Decision makers often lack the time, information, or expertise to analyze accurately the likely effectiveness of various policies. They may be biased by their own personal values or experiences. The decentralization of the legislative process also encourages bargaining and compromise. Finally, once a course of action has been chosen and funds committed, “sunk costs” have been established, making it easier to continue in the same policy direction, adjusting policies incrementally rather than comprehensively.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION **Policy implementation** is the process of carrying out public policies, most of which are implemented by administrative agencies. Some policies, however, are enforced in other ways. Voluntary compliance by businesses and individuals is one such technique. When grocers take out-of-date products off their shelves or when consumers choose not to buy food products after their expiration dates, voluntary compliance is at work. Implementation also involves the courts when they are called on to interpret the meaning of legislation, review the legality of agency rules and actions, and determine whether institutions such as prisons and mental hospitals conform to legal and constitutional standards.

Administrative agencies may be authorized to use a number of techniques to implement public policies within their jurisdictions. These techniques can be categorized as authoritative, incentive, capacity, or hortatory, depending on the behavioral assumptions on which they are based.²¹

1. *Authoritative techniques* for policy implementation rest on the notion that people’s actions must be directed or restrained by government in order to prevent or eliminate activities or products that are unsafe, unfair, evil, or immoral. For example, consumer products must meet certain safety regulations, and radio stations can be fined heavily or have their broadcasting licenses revoked if they broadcast obscenities.
2. *Incentive techniques* for policy implementation encourage people to act in their own best interest by offering payoffs or financial inducements for compliance with public policies. Such policies may provide tax deductions to encourage charitable giving or the purchase of alternative fuel vehicles, such as hybrid automobiles. Farmers also receive subsidies to make their production (or nonproduction) of wheat, cotton, and other goods more profitable. Conversely, sanctions, such as

high taxes, may discourage the purchase and use of products such as tobacco and liquor, and pollution fees may reduce the discharge of pollutants by making this action more costly to businesses.

3. *Capacity techniques* provide people with information, education, training, or resources that enable them to participate in desired activities. The assumption underlying these techniques is that people have incentive or desire to do what is right but lack the capacity to act accordingly. Job training may help able-bodied people find work, and accurate information on interest rates will enable people to protect themselves against interest-rate gouging.
4. *Hortatory techniques* encourage people to comply with policy by appealing to their “better instincts” and thereby directing them to act in desired ways. In this instance, policy implementers assume that people decide how to act according to their personal values and beliefs. During the Reagan administration, First Lady Nancy Reagan implored young people to “Just say no” to drugs. Hortatory techniques to discourage littering include the use of highway signs displaying slogans like “Don’t Be a Litterbug” and “Don’t Mess with Texas.”

Often government will turn to a combination of authoritative, incentive, capacity, and hortatory approaches to reach its goals. For example, public health officials use all of these tools in their efforts to reduce tobacco use. These techniques include laws prohibiting smoking in public places, taxes on the sales of tobacco products, warning labels on packs of cigarettes, and anti-smoking commercials on TV. There is no easy formula that will guarantee successful policy implementation; in practice, many policies only partially achieve their goals.

Budgeting also influences policy implementation. When a policy is adopted, funding levels are recommended but must be finalized by another set of policy makers. Congress separates the authorizations of new policies from the appropriations of funds so that debates over new policies do not delay or derail the national budgetary process. Whether a policy is well funded, poorly funded, or funded at all has a significant effect on its scope, impact, and effectiveness. For example, as a result of limited funding, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) can inspect annually only a small fraction of the workplaces within its jurisdiction. Similarly, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has funds sufficient to provide rent subsidies only to approximately 20 percent of eligible low-income families.

POLICY EVALUATION Practitioners of **policy evaluation** seek to determine whether a course of action is achieving its intended goals. They may also try to determine whether a policy is being fairly or efficiently administered. Although policy evaluation has become more rigorous, systematic, and objective over the past few decades, policy makers still make judgments often on the basis of anecdotal and fragmentary evidence rather than on solid facts and thorough analyses. Sometimes a program is judged as a good program simply because it is politically popular or fits the ideological beliefs of an elected official.

Policy evaluation may be conducted by a variety of players, including congressional committees, presidential commissions, administrative agencies, the courts, university researchers, private research organizations, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO). The GAO, created in 1921, conducts hundreds of studies of government agencies and programs each year, either at the request of members of Congress or on its own initiative. The titles of two of its 2012 evaluations convey a notion of the breadth of its work: “Homelessness: Fragmentation and Overlap in Programs Highlight the Need to Identify, Assess, and Reduce Inefficiencies” and “Unconventional Oil and Gas Production: Opportunities and Challenges of Oil Shale Development.”

Evaluation research and studies can stimulate attempts to modify or terminate policies and thus restart the policy process. Legislators and administrators may formulate and advocate for amendments designed to correct problems or shortcomings in a policy. In 2006, for example, national legislation establishing the Medicare program was amended to create a prescription drug benefit for senior citizens,

policy evaluation

The process of determining whether a course of action is achieving its intended goals.

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Medicare

The federal program established during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration that provides medical care to elderly Social Security recipients.

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known as Medicare Part D. The evaluation process may also result in the termination of policies; for example, in 2011, Congress terminated subsidies for ethanol, ending the tax credit established in 1986. Congress took this action in response to research suggesting that increased use of ethanol had a minimal positive impact on the environment. Policies may also be terminated automatically through sunset provisions, or “expiration dates” that Congress can add to legislation. Without reauthorization by Congress, a 1994 ban on civilian use of assault weapons, for example, expired in 2004 under a sunset provision. The 2001 USA PATRIOT Act initially was set to expire in 2005, but was evaluated, amended, and reauthorized. Most recently, in 2011, President Barack Obama signed a four-year extension of three components of the law: the government’s ability to search records, use roving wiretaps, and conduct surveillance of terrorist suspects.

The budgetary process also gives the president and the Congress an opportunity to review the government’s many policies and programs, to inquire into their administration, to appraise their value and effectiveness, and to exercise some influence on their conduct. In 2011, a national debate arose over government funding of Planned Parenthood. Critics unsuccessfully tried to end what they deemed public funding of abortion, while supporters advocated the need to protect women’s health services, including cancer screening. Not all of the government’s thousands of programs undergo full examination every year. But, over a period of several years, most programs come under scrutiny. The demise of programs is relatively rare; more often, a troubled program is modified or allowed to limp along because it provides a popular service. For example, the nation’s passenger rail system, Amtrak, remains dependent on government funds. Although its northeastern lines are financially self-sufficient, many of Amtrak’s longer-distance routes are not able to operate without significant government subsidies. Nevertheless, the more rural routes remain popular with legislators in western states; thus Amtrak continues to receive governmental support.²²

Health Policy Today

16.2

Describe health policy in the United States.



he national government’s involvement in health policy extends to a number of other policy areas. Many millions of people receive medical care through the medical branches of the armed forces, the hospitals and medical programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Indian Health Service. In the 1960s, the government began funding health programs for senior citizens and the poor and disabled, known as Medicare and Medicaid, respectively. And, in 2010, the Democratic Congress passed, and President Barack Obama signed into law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which expanded the federal government’s role in providing health insurance. The federal government estimated that it would spend \$967 billion in the 2014 fiscal year for health and human services.²³

□ Medicare

Medicare, which was created by Congress and Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, covers persons who are disabled or over age 65. It is administered by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in the Department of Health and Human Services. Medicare is financed by a payroll tax of 1.45 percent paid by both employees and employers on the total amount of one’s wages or salary. In 2014, this tax increased to 3.8 percent for Americans making more than \$200,000 per year. Medicare coverage has four components: Parts A, B, C, and D. Benefits under Part A are granted

to all Americans automatically at age sixty-five, when they qualify for Social Security. It covers hospitalization, some skilled nursing care, and home health services.

Part B, which is optional, covers payment for physicians' services, outpatient and diagnostic services, x-rays, and some other items not covered by Part A. Excluded from coverage are eyeglasses, hearing aids, and dentures. This portion of the Medicare program is financed partly by monthly payments from beneficiaries and partly by general tax revenues.

Medicare Part C programs are also known as Medicare Advantage programs. Administered by private insurance companies, they provide coverage that meets or exceeds the coverage of traditional Medicare programs. Medicare Advantage programs may also include additional services for a fee, such as prescription drug coverage and dental and vision insurance.

Medicare Part D is the optional prescription drug benefit that went into effect in 2006. Participants pay a monthly premium that varies by plan: after an annual deductible, 75 percent of prescription costs are covered until the subscriber reaches a coverage gap, known as a "donut hole." Participants are then responsible for 100% of prescription costs until they reach their yearly maximum for out-of-pocket expenses, after which additional costs are covered at 90% to 95%. The 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act gradually phases out the coverage gap by 2020.

Today, Medicare provides health insurance coverage for more than 45 million Americans. Roughly 20 percent of these enrollees choose Medicare Advantage programs. More than half of Medicare enrollees also choose to take advantage of the Medicare prescription drug benefit. In 2010, the first wave of baby boomers reached retirement age. As the number of eligible beneficiaries continues to increase, the cost of Medicare is expected to grow at an annual rate of 6.3%, with projected budget shortfalls as soon as 2020. To address these budget issues, the Medicare tax will increase by 0.9 percent starting in 2013 for individuals with incomes over \$200,000 or married couples with incomes over \$250,000. An additional 3.8% tax increase will be applied to unearned investment income.

□ Medicaid

Medicaid, a government program that subsidizes health insurance for the poor and disabled, was enacted in 1965, at the same time as Medicare. It provides health insurance coverage for low-income Americans who meet a set of eligibility requirements. To receive Medicaid benefits, citizens must meet minimum-income thresholds, be disabled, or be pregnant.

Unlike Medicare, which is financed and administered by the national government, Medicaid is a joint venture between the national and state governments. The national government provides between 50 and 75 percent of the funding necessary to administer Medicaid programs (depending on state per capita income). This money is given to the states in the form of block grants. States then supplement the national funds with money from their own treasuries. They also are given the latitude to establish eligibility thresholds and the level of benefits available to citizens.

As a result, Medicaid programs vary widely from state to state. Most states provide coverage for all pregnant women and all children younger than one year. In a majority of states, the income requirement is set to provide coverage to citizens with incomes up to 185 percent of the federal poverty line. This is equivalent to an income of about \$21,000 for an individual or \$44,000 for a family of four. In some states, all low-income residents receive Medicaid assistance, whereas in other states, many of the needy are left unprotected. And, in some states "medically indigent" people—those who do not meet traditional income requirements but have large medical expenses—receive coverage, whereas in other states, these citizens must find their own funding.

In 2014, Medicaid provided coverage for almost 66 million Americans, making it the largest government health insurance program in the United States. This program comes with a substantial price tag: more than \$400 billion in national and state funds. Medicaid is also one of the largest and fastest growing portions of state budgets. In

Medicaid

A government program that subsidizes medical care for the poor.

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recent years, it has accounted for roughly 17 percent of state general expenditures. Starting in 2014, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act expands Medicaid eligibility to include low-wage workers and their families (up to 133% of the poverty line). The state health insurance exchanges are also expected to facilitate increased enrollment of those currently eligible for Medicaid. These two factors combined will increase Medicaid coverage to an estimated 95 million Americans by 2022 at a cost of more than \$840 billion per year.

□ Health Insurance

One of the most significant issues that policy makers must confront in the area of health policy is the rising cost of care. As medical technology advances, citizens live longer. But, this increased lifespan comes with a price tag. Often, it comes in the form of long-term care, prescription drugs, and costly medical procedures that would have been unimaginable forty years ago. These rising costs place a significant burden on individuals and insurance companies, as well as the national and state government commitments to Medicare and Medicaid.

A quick review of the increase in health care costs over the past forty years helps to demonstrate the magnitude of the problem. In 1970, Americans spent about \$356 per capita on health care costs. By 2013, spending increased to an estimated \$9,349 per person on health care costs—more than 26 times 1970 levels. These levels far exceed the rate of inflationary growth and are projected to continue to rise to more than \$13,709 per capita by 2020.

In reality, of course, these expenditures are not evenly distributed across all Americans; 10 percent of citizens account for 63 percent of all health care costs. The majority of these expenditures pay for physician's office visits and hospital care. However, prescription drug costs and nursing home expenditures constitute rapidly rising proportions of American health care costs.²⁴ (To learn more about Americans' health care expenditures, see Figure 16.2.)

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 marked the first major change in national health policy since the adoption of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. Its primary purpose was to establish government-run health insurance exchanges to ensure that nearly all Americans would have access to health care coverage, including those living in poverty, who are eligible for special subsidies. These exchanges are financed

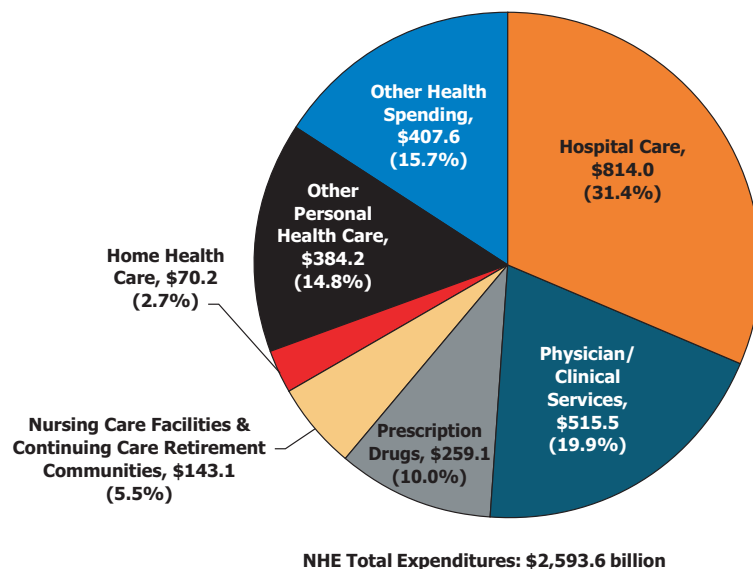


FIGURE 16.2 WHERE DO AMERICAN HEALTH CARE EXPENDITURES GO?

Physicians and hospital care constitute a majority of health care expenditures. However, prescription drug and nursing home costs are rapidly rising.

SOURCE: Kaiser Family Foundation, www.kff.org/insurance/upload/7692_02.pdf.

Take a Closer Look

The year 2013 marks the twentieth anniversary of three strikes laws, or habitual offender laws, requiring states to impose a life sentence when a criminal is convicted of a third serious felony. First passed in Washington State and popular through the mid-1990s, currently twenty-four states retain three strikes legislation. Over time, these longer sentences have produced an aging inmate population with escalating health care needs, which states are required to meet. The Supreme Court ruled in *Estelle v. Gamble* (1976) that to deny prisoners access to professional medical diagnosis and treatment violates the Eighth Amendment's protection against cruel and unusual punishment.

The inmates are shown to be advancing in years, a reference to the fact that the inmate population—perhaps as a result of habitual offender laws—is aging and in need of continued and sustained health care.



"My third felony was a smart move. Folks on the outside are still waiting for health care."

The prisoner's comment is a reference to the fact that he will be guaranteed health care—unlike Americans who are not incarcerated—for the duration of his life sentence.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Why are inmates the only class of people constitutionally guaranteed the right to health care?
2. How will states fund the rising costs of prison health care?
3. Should the "three strikes, and you're out" policy have an age limit?

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by a number of taxes and fees, most notably an increase in the Medicare tax for Americans earning more than \$200,000 per year. Americans do not have to buy in to these exchanges; they have the option of retaining their private health insurance if they so choose. The bill also provides incentives for businesses to offer health insurance—a very costly proposition for many employers. And, importantly, it prevents health insurance companies from denying Americans coverage on the basis of preexisting conditions.

Reaction to the Affordable Care Act has been mixed. Large majorities of Americans believe that the legislation will lead to significant changes in the American health care system. However, support for the program was severely undermined in October 2013 when, upon roll-out, the Healthcare.gov Web site was unable to process the sudden influx of applicants. Further complications have arisen in practice, such as narrow provider networks under the ACA.

The legislation has been especially unpopular with state governments. More than half of the states have already sued or announced that they will sue the national government to block implementation of the policy. These states believe that the act is an infringement on states' reserved powers, which are granted to them under the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Although in July 2012, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the new law, it seems likely that the ACA will continue to be highly contested at many levels of government and also within the “court of public opinion.”

□ Public Health

Government also plays a major role in managing the spread of, and increase in, infectious and chronic disease, respectively. From AIDS to obesity, public policy makers have attempted to use government power to fight threats to the nation's health. Among the government's tools are immunizations, research, education, and regulations. For many contagious diseases such as polio, measles, and chickenpox, the government requires immunization of young children if they are enrolled in day care, preschool, or elementary school. Public health officials also use vaccines in the adult population to manage the spread of diseases such as influenza (the flu). While not requiring citizens to receive flu shots, the government recommends that high-risk groups (infants, senior citizens) receive immunizations and also subsidizes vaccines for low-income populations.

Debates over public health also can run into conflicts over social values. After the Food and Drug Administration approved a vaccine to prevent human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, a widespread sexually transmitted infection (STI) linked to cervical and

TABLE 16.1 WHAT DO AMERICANS THINK ABOUT HEALTH INSURANCE REFORM?

“In general, would you say that the 2010 health care law recently upheld by the Supreme Court will make things better or worse for each of the following?”

	Make things better	Make things worse	Same/No difference (vol.)	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
People who currently do not have health insurance	59	32	2	6
People who get sick	55	34	2	8
Hospitals	45	45	2	8
You, personally	38	42	13	7
Doctors	37	51	3	9
People who currently have health insurance	36	46	10	8
Businesses	33	57	3	8
Taxpayers	30	60	3	8

(vol.) = Volunteered response

SOURCE: Data from Gallup, National adults, July 9–12, 2012.

other cancers, a national advisory committee recommended universal vaccination for boys and girls. However, debate raged over whether states should *require* the vaccine, commonly known as Gardasil, or simply offer parents the option. The issue even arose in the 2012 presidential election, with opponents arguing that mandating Gardasil vaccination would violate parents' rights, be too expensive, and could increase promiscuity by giving a false sense of security concerning protection against STIs. Uncertainties about the long-term safety and immunity provided by the vaccine also have complicated the debate.

The national government also finances medical research, primarily through the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The National Cancer Institute, the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and the other NIH institutes and centers spend more than \$30 billion annually on biomedical research. Another leading agency is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which are tasked with prevention and management of infectious disease, food-borne pathogens, environmental health, occupational safety, and health promotion. Most Americans accept and support extensive government spending on medical research.

Evidence supported by medical research has moved obesity onto the agenda as a public health issue. The policy debate has evolved from emphasizing individual responsibility to a comprehensive solution, including the food industry, schools, marketing, the workplace, and communities. First Lady Michelle Obama launched the "Let's Move" campaign to fight childhood obesity in 2010. A year later, President Barack Obama proclaimed September as National Childhood Obesity Awareness



HOW DOES THE GOVERNMENT PROMOTE PUBLIC HEALTH?

A 2012 New York City proposal called for a ban on the sale of large sodas in city restaurants, theaters, and sporting venues. As part of Obama's health care reform, restaurants with twenty or more locations now have to provide nutritional information on menus, including calories and calories from fat.

16.1

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Education reform passed in 2002 that employs high standards and measurable goals as a method of improving American education.

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Month. In 2012, the Institute of Medicine issued a report, “Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation,” further capturing national attention with startling statistics on the prevalence of obesity in America. Approximately two-thirds of adults and one-third of children are overweight or obese, an epidemic that costs \$190.2 billion per year.²⁵ In 2012, as well, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued new rules for federally subsidized school lunch programs, requiring that schools increase servings of fruits and vegetables while decreasing salt and fat. At the local level, in June 2012, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed a ban on large sugary soft drinks in city restaurants; this was followed by a discussion of a similar ban in Cambridge, Massachusetts. All three streams of the agenda-setting process—problems, policies, and politics—are at work pushing the issue of obesity onto the government’s agenda.

Education Policy Today

16.3 Outline education policy in the United States.

In 2012, more than \$1.5 trillion was spent on education at all levels of government. The federal government paid approximately 10% of the bill. In addition to aiding states for K–12 and higher education, the federal government offers two forms of indirect assistance to higher education: grants for low-income students and guaranteed student loans. Ultimately, states and localities dominate education funding and policy making, although national policies provide monetary incentives for compliance with standardized goals. The largest shift toward the federal government in educational policy making came with the 2002 bipartisan education reform bill supported by the late Democratic Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D–MA) and Republican President George W. Bush, commonly referred to as the **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)**. NCLB employs high standards and measurable goals as a method of improving American education across states, with states left to decide if the new requirements are worth complying with in exchange for limited federal funding. In the wake of this major reform, the policy debate has shifted from comprehensive solutions to perceived problems in education to incremental changes in the implementation of NCLB.

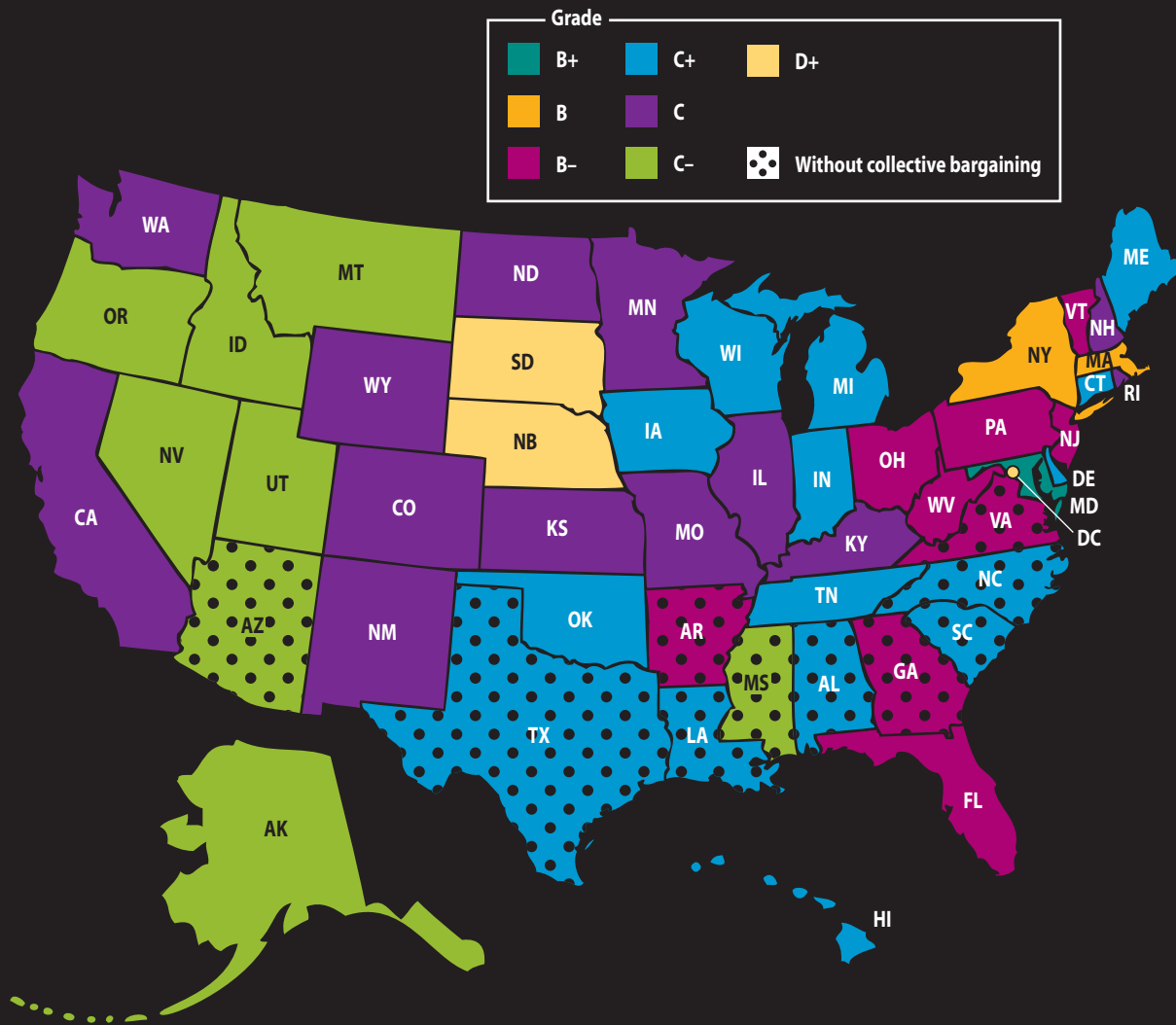
□ The No Child Left Behind Act

Signed into law in January 2002, NCLB has four main pillars. First, results-oriented accountability plays a central role in NCLB. The legislation is designed to monitor student achievement in schools, paying special attention to disadvantaged student populations. Each year, students take a battery of standardized tests designed to measure whether they have met a set of educational goals. Test results are then tabulated and broken down by race, ethnicity, and gender to better measure students’ progress. Schools and school districts also use these data to issue annual report cards on their achievement. Schools that do not meet their goals are encouraged to offer ancillary education services, such as tutoring, to improve their students’ educational achievement. If progress is still not made, schools or school districts may be forced to reorganize.

Second, the design of NCLB encourages state and local flexibility in the use of national funds. Flexibility in funding is an effort to build a cooperative education enterprise between national, state, and local government by reducing commitment to “one size fits all” policy reforms. Thus, depending on their local needs, schools can use resources to enhance school technology, develop experimental programs intended to improve education outcomes, or invest in programs to upgrade teacher training and quality. Outcomes are viewed as more important than uniformity in process.

Has the No Child Left Behind Act Influenced Education?

This map shows state education report cards across the United States as of January 2010, as reported in *Education Week*. The report provides a comprehensive measure of policy and performance across six areas that include K–12 achievement, teaching profession, and school finance. Each state is assigned a “grade” in each category using a complex grading rubric. The summary grades reported in the map below allow for comparisons across states and regions. Overall, the nation scores a C. For the third year in a row, Maryland has the highest score with a B+. States with a dotted fill are ones that do not allow collective bargaining rights for teachers. Some argue that collective bargaining rights prevent state flexibility in reforming education. Critics, however, point to the positive impact that collective bargaining rights have on recruiting and retaining teachers. They also note that some of the top performing states allow collective bargaining rights.



SOURCE: Data from http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/qc/2011/QualityCounts2011_PressRelease.pdf; <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/guest-bloggers/how-states-with-no-teacher-uni.html>

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Which states have the lowest ranking for overall quality of public schools?
2. Why do you think school quality rankings vary substantially from state to state?
3. How might policy makers use this data to improve educational equity in the United States?

16.1

vouchers

Certificates issued by the government that may be applied toward the cost of attending private or other public schools.

16.2

charter schools

Semipublic schools that have open admission but may also receive private donations to increase the quality of education.

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The third pillar of NCLB envisions the national government as a purveyor of proven methods of achieving high-quality education outcomes. National policy analysts and curriculum experts create best practices in a range of subject areas ranging from reading to mathematics to science and share this information and curriculum with schools and school districts. For example, NCLB's "Reading First" and "Early Reading First" programs are designed to produce high-quality readers. The programs have established a track record for educational success.

At times, schools and districts are unable to meet educational goals despite all efforts. Thus, NCLB's fourth pillar involves school choice. If a child is attending a failing school, students and their parents may have the option to enroll at an institution that is successfully meeting its educational achievement goals. In some cases, this may mean sending a child to another public school at no cost in the district or to a private school.

One way to implement a school choice policy is through the use of **vouchers**, or certificates issued by the government that may be applied toward the cost of attending private or other public schools. The monetary value of these certificates usually correlates with the cost of educating a student in his or her local public school. Supporters of vouchers essentially argue that money talks. They believe that if parents remove their students from failing schools, these schools will quickly learn that they have to take steps to improve educational quality, or they will no longer have a reason to exist. Opponents, however, contend that allowing students to take money away from failing schools is counterintuitive and actually makes it harder for failing schools to improve.

Parents may also choose to send their children to **charter schools**. Charter schools are semipublic schools founded by universities, corporations, or concerned parents. They have open admission and receive some support from the government; they may also receive private donations to increase the quality of education. When the number of students interested in attending a school exceeds the openings available, students are usually selected by means of a random lottery. Charter schools are rapidly increasing in popularity in the United States. In some jurisdictions, such as New Orleans, charter schools are consistently among the highest performing institutions in the city. Critics, however, charge that it is difficult to ensure that charter schools are meeting educational

**WHAT ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS?**

Charter schools are semipublic institutions that are run by universities, nonprofits, or corporations. Many charter schools, such as Harlem Success Academy, seen here, have achieved outstanding results in traditionally underprivileged communities.

standards, and that a system that cannot accommodate all students interested in attending is inherently flawed. Because they are semi-private they do not have the same controls on curriculum—and the fact that there are not enough slots for all those who want to attend—creates inequality in access to good education.

Despite efforts to improve education quality and equality, implementation of the NCLB remains controversial across the political spectrum. Critics often claim that the reform places too much emphasis on standardized testing as a means of measuring student achievement. This, they argue, ignores many of the nonmeasurable but equally important aspects of student learning. It also encourages teachers to “teach to the test” rather than helping students learn analytical thinking skills. Finally, the requirements of NCLB may force schools and teachers to sacrifice education in subject areas that are untested, such as civics, art, or music. These sacrifices may produce less well-rounded students or fail to engage or prepare students for the professional world.

Other critics contend that the primary problem with NCLB is that it further nationalizes elementary and secondary education, which is best administered by state and local governments. These observers believe that state and local governments are better able to understand the unique social and economic challenges that face communities and may affect educational policies and achievements. What is worse, these critics argue, is that NCLB contains a host of national mandates for state and local governments, but it contains little funding to help with policy implementation.

As a result of these criticisms, the National Education Association and its affiliates filed a lawsuit charging that the act was unconstitutional because it required state and local governments to spend their own funds to comply with national legislation. The courts, however, disagreed. Legislative attempts to express opposition to the law have been more successful. The states of Utah, Vermont, and Hawaii, to name a few, have passed legislation or resolutions opting out of portions of the law they consider to be unfunded or underfunded.

Opponents of NCLB appeared to gain an ally in the White House with the election of President Barack Obama in 2008. Obama’s Race to the Top initiative provided funding for education through competitive grant programs, rather than a formula based on student achievement on standardized tests.²⁶ In response, states have begun to adopt a common core curriculum, implement new systems for performance-based teacher evaluations, and convert low-performance schools to charter schools, among numerous other reforms.

The Obama administration also took a number of other steps outside NCLB to advance education policy. Within one month of taking office, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The act, which became law in February 2009, awarded \$94.7 billion to education programming. Under the law, Head Start programs for low-income preschoolers received over \$2 billion in supplemental funding. State departments of education, which were struggling with budget shortfalls and teacher furloughs and layoffs, were given nearly \$45 billion in aid. Additional monies also were allocated for childcare programs and the low-interest college loans known as Pell Grants. Grant recipients reported that over 275,000 jobs in education were saved as a result of the additional funding provided by the law.

□ Federal Aid to Higher Education

Federal governmental policies toward higher education provide indirect support through funding of research grants and financial assistance to students, representing about 15% of total spending by all levels of government in higher education. The federal government also funds the U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy, U.S. Coast Guard Academy, and the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. Any school that receives federal funding (K–12 or higher education) must comply with Title IX of the Educational Amendment Acts of 1972, barring any discrimination on the basis of sex in admissions, student financial aid, or athletics.

Access to college, however, has been the most prominent higher education policy focus in recent years. Students graduate from college with an average debt of \$23,000,

yet the federal government spends more than \$140 billion each year in grants and loans. Grants, based on financial need, do not require repayment, including Federal Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grants, and Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grants. The Federal Direct Student Loan Program allows students and families to borrow money to pay for college, with repayment (with interest) deferred until a student graduates or leaves college. This program includes the Federal Perkins Loans, Federal Stafford Loan, PLUS Loan for Parents, PLUS Loan for Graduate and Professional Degree Students, and Consolidation Loans. College Work Study programs, providing part-time jobs to college students while enrolled in school, also rely on federal funding.

Changes to student aid that went into effect in the 2012–2013 school year under the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (2007) include requirements that a student graduate from high school or pass the GED in order to be eligible for federally funded college grants or loans. The federally subsidized Stafford loans have a fixed interest rate of 3.4%. Additional reforms take effect in 2013–2014 with the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act, signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2010, increasing Pell Grants by more than \$40 billion, allowing new borrowers of student loans to cap their repayments at 10% of their income with the entire balance forgiven after 20 years, and providing \$2 billion to community colleges to implement career training programs.

Energy and Environmental Policy Today

16.4 Explain energy and environmental policy in the United States.

Energy and environmental policy are inextricably linked in today's global economy. Environmental pollution is the by-product or consequence of development that imposes unwanted costs, or externalities, on society at large. Balancing the demand for inexpensive and abundant sources of energy, the costs of regulation, and the need to address issues of climate change creates controversy within this policy area, preventing comprehensive policy reform.

□ Energy Policy

In 2013, President Barack Obama's budget included \$27.2 billion for the Department of Energy to implement an "all-of-the-above" approach to energy policy. Highlights of the budget included increased funding for research and development of clean technologies, incentives to create clean energy jobs, and increased measures to provide nuclear safety while maintaining nuclear deterrence. Obama also pledged to further reduce dependence on foreign oil by a third; in 2011, for the first time in thirteen years, the United States imported less than half of the crude oil it consumed. Still, the U.S. contains only 2% of the world's oil reserves but consumes 20% of the world's oil (see Figure 16.3).

The budget reflects the energy priorities first established during the energy crisis of the 1970s and expanded incrementally through both Republican and Democratic administrations. The need for energy is constant, and just 6.8% of energy sources in the United States are renewable, or derived from natural resources that can be replenished, including solar, wind, biomass, rain, tide, and geothermal energy. Fossil fuels—oil, coal, and natural gas—are nonrenewable, and each has advantages and disadvantages in terms of efficiency, costs, and the environmental impact of production and consumption.

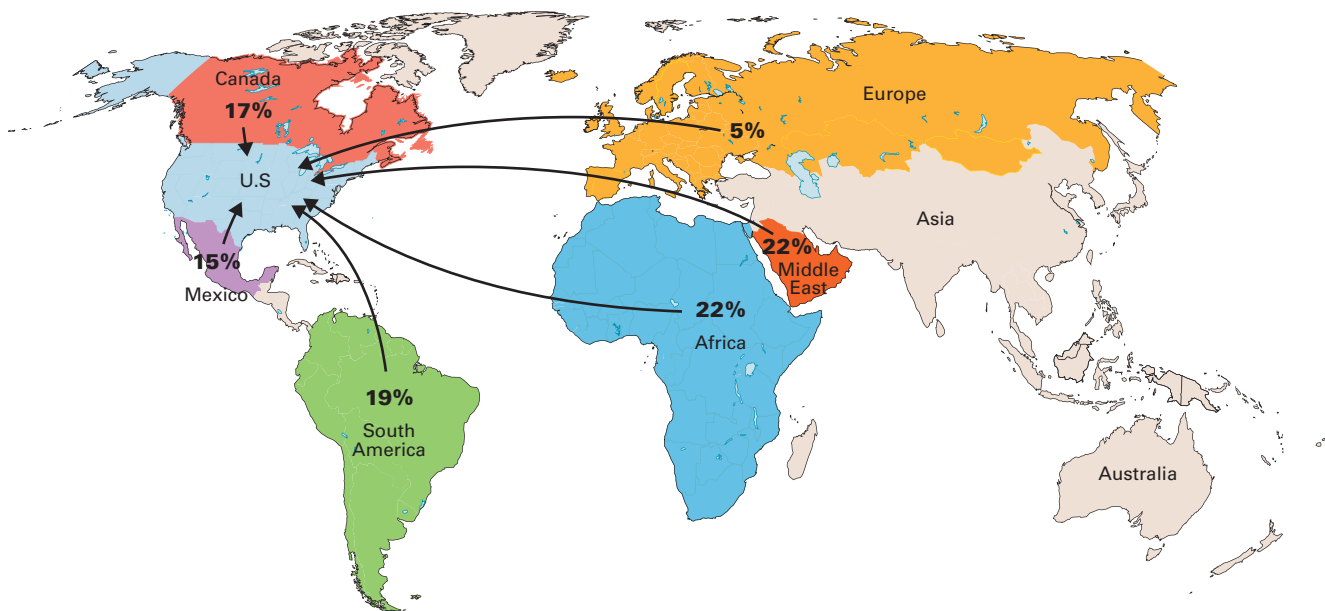


FIGURE 16.3 WHERE DO U.S. OIL IMPORTS COME FROM?

American oil imports come from sources around the globe. Although the largest percentages come from the Middle East and Africa, significant proportions also come from South America, Mexico, and Canada.

SOURCE: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Office of Senator Richard Lugar.

Extraction of natural gas, for example, has raised concerns about groundwater and drinking water contamination and about potential links to earthquakes induced by hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as fracking, in which fluids are pumped into a rock layer to create a wellbore to collect natural gas. In 2012, Vermont became the first state to ban fracking, and a growing number of states now require companies to disclose the chemicals used in the process. Although nuclear power is the cleanest source of energy, it is perhaps the most controversial, including concerns about the safety of nuclear power's impact on health, the environment, and national security.

Republicans and Democrats have been divided over plans to increase drilling for oil in the United States, including the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), and in offshore waters. Republicans have been more likely to support business opportunities for the oil and gas industry, while Democrats have been more supportive of developing alternatives energy sources and concerned about potential environmental damage. For example, the Obama administration has remained wary about the Keystone XL Pipeline proposal to link oil refineries in Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, citing concerns regarding its environmental impact. With regard to offshore exploration for new fuel sources, the Obama administration in 2014 cleared the way for significant expansion of exploration along the Atlantic Coast, but had not yet authorized actual drilling.

Energy policy addresses energy consumption in addition to energy production. The federal government has a long history of regulating the car manufacturing industry, for example, to produce automobiles that maintain fuel efficiency standards. Current policy requires an average standard of 54.5 MPG for passenger vehicles by 2025. The fuel efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions of trucks have also been limited for models manufactured from 2014 to 2018. In addition, investments are being made in the development and production of enough batteries to support a million plug-in, electric, and hybrid vehicles by 2015. Moreover, the Department of Energy and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have joined forces to upgrade the efficiency of buildings, factories, and homes across the United States.

Incrementally, energy policy reforms have focused on issues of supply and demand while balancing costs, safety, and the environment. Addressing the environmental impact of the production and consumption of energy, however, often requires regulations that increase costs for businesses and consumers, at the pump and in environmental degradation (see Figure 16.4).

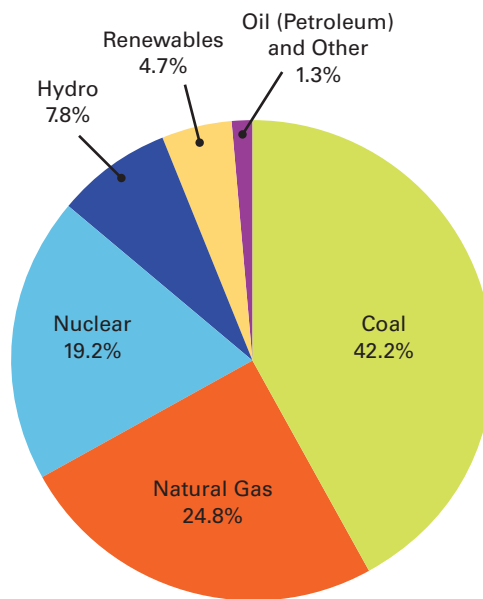


FIGURE 16.4 HOW DOES THE UNITED STATES GENERATE ELECTRICITY?

Although the percentage of American power coming from alternative fuel sources has increased in recent years, coal is still the largest source of electrical power.

SOURCE: U.S. Energy Information Administration, www.eia.doe.gov.

Clean Air Act of 1970

The law that established national primary and secondary standards for air quality in the United States. A revised version was passed in 1990.

Clean Water Act of 1972

The Act that created water quality standards to control pollution, including elimination of point source discharge of pollutants.

Environmental Policy

In the United States in recent years, the need for economic recovery and the demand for reduced dependency on foreign oil have overshadowed the issue of environmental protection. The major federal government environmental policies in effect today were passed during the 1970s in efforts to address air and water pollution, endangered species, and hazardous waste disposal.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 required the completion of environmental impact statements by bureaucratic agencies when the government proposed a project. These impact statements are available to the public, opening up the policy-making process to citizens, interest groups, and other levels of government. The intended result is to require agencies to consider the environmental consequences of their decision making. To help facilitate the oversight of NEPA and other environmental protection efforts, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created in 1970. The EPA consolidated many national environmental programs under one independent executive branch agency, with the agency administrator reporting directly to the president.

Congress followed up its efforts with NEPA by passing the most significant piece of environmental legislation in American history. Under the **Clean Air Act of 1970** (CAA), Congress established national primary and secondary air quality standards for six air pollutants. The primary standards were for the protection of human health, and the secondary standards were to protect nonhealth values, such as crops, buildings, lakes, and forests. The CAA also established emissions standards for vehicles and regulated fuels and toxic and hazardous sources of pollution.

In 1972, Congress followed up the Clean Air Act with the **Clean Water Act** (CWA). With nearly unanimous support among members of Congress, the law established the goal of making all American surface water “swimmable and fishable by 1985.” The law gave states the authority to implement the policy within federal guidelines, including water quality standards and technological controls on discharges of pollutants. The law also provided funding for states to construct new wastewater treatment plants.

National policy initiatives grew throughout the 1970s, with the passage of legislation such as the Safe Drinking Water Act (1974), which established national standards for drinking water quality; the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (1976), which eliminated the existence of unsanitary town dumps; and the Comprehensive Environmental

Explore Your World

16.1

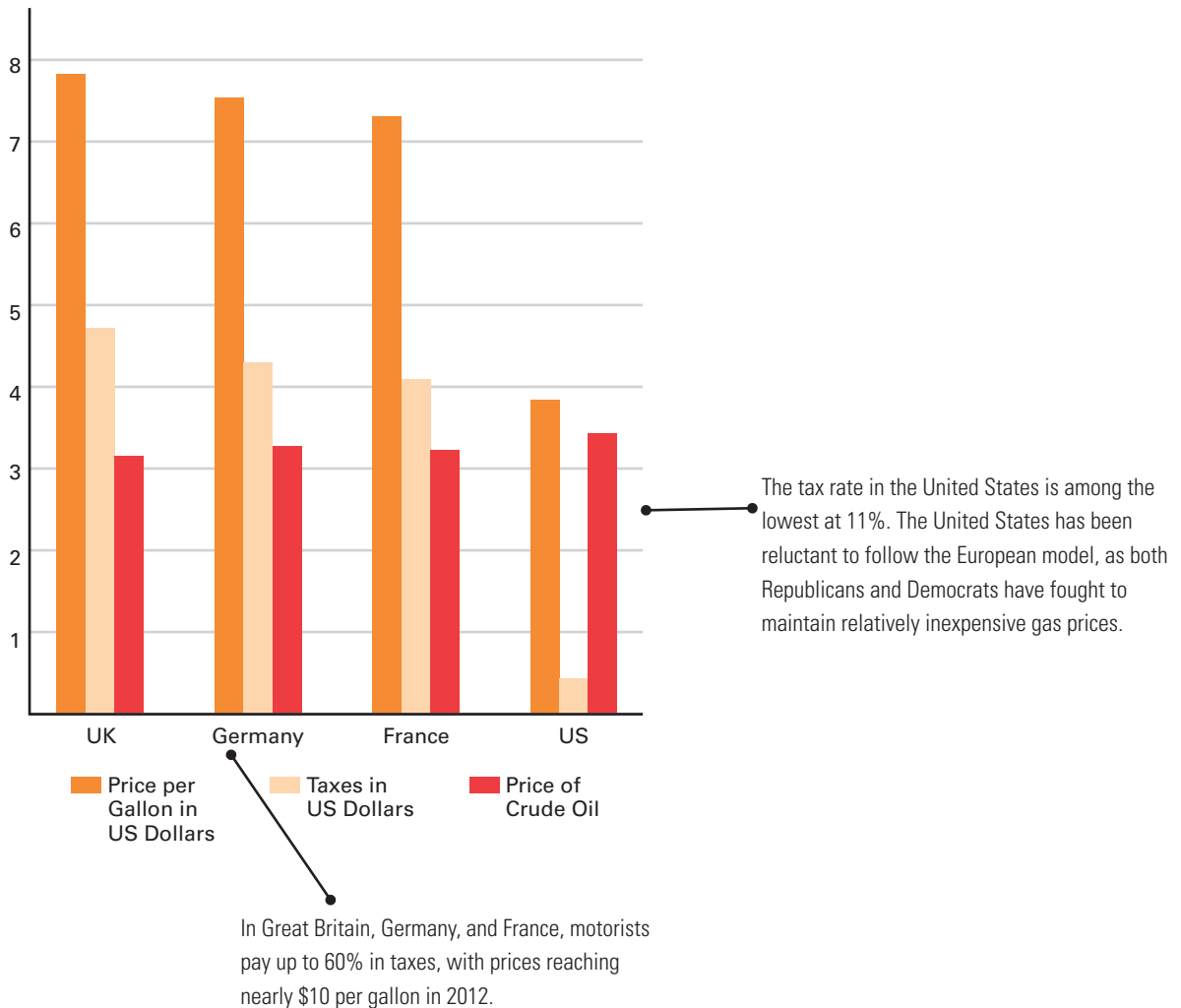
16.2

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16.5

Gas prices vary significantly both within the United States and around the globe, depending on the price of crude oil and levels of supply and demand. Within the United States, gas prices increase as distance from the source of crude oil increases. Regions that produce crude oil have lower gas prices than those that have to either transport crude oil across states or import oil internationally. However, these differences are minimal in comparison to gas prices in Europe, where governments have imposed high taxes on fuel to encourage conservation and fuel-efficient technologies.



SOURCE: <http://www.eia.gov/countries/prices/gasolinewithtax.cfm>, accessed June 6, 2012.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What would be the financial impact of a significant tax increase on gas in the United States? How would this tax influence low-income versus moderate- to high-income families?
2. What long-term changes in behavior might result from increased taxes on gas in the United States? How might these behavioral changes affect environmental, transportation, and housing issues in the United States?
3. Is it possible to reduce American consumption of gasoline if prices remain low? Aside from increasing taxes, what policy changes might encourage people to buy more fuel-efficient cars or to make better use of public transportation?

Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (Superfund), which was designed to clean up many of the nation's hazardous waste sites.

As the 1970s ended, so did the prominent role held by energy and environmental policy on the national government's agenda. With a few notable exceptions, such as the Clean Air Act of 1990 and a 2009 requirement for the EPA to regulate carbon dioxide, the national government has not aggressively tackled environmental issues with policy reforms as it had done in the 1970s.

□ Climate Change

The need for comprehensive policy focusing on both energy and environmental issues became apparent as global climate change advanced to the forefront of environmental concerns. However, scientists cannot predict the absolute consequences of climate change, nor does the problem have an easy solution. President Barack Obama has been involved in international agreements on climate change, including the Copenhagen Accord in 2009 and the follow-up 2010 Cancun Agreement and 2011 Durban meeting, reaching agreements to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Obama's Climate Change Adaptation Task Force continues to make recommendations for policy changes at the national level.

Meanwhile, states have taken their own initiatives to address greenhouse gas emissions. In 2002, the state of California passed a law aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles by 30 percent before 2016. This law went far beyond the national standards for greenhouse gas emissions established by the Environmental Protection Agency. By 2012, thirteen other states adopted enforceable emissions standards, while twenty-three states created emissions goals or targets. States are also cooperating with each other to address climate change. Currently, five regional climate initiatives are in operation, including, for example, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a cap and trade agreement between nine states to buy and sell permits for greenhouse emissions, creating financial incentives to reduce emissions.

By 2012, thirty state governments and the District of Columbia adopted mandatory Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS), which require set amounts of electricity to be generated from alternative sources. Another seven states have adopted voluntary standards. For example, California has mandated that the percentage of renewable energy sales reach at least 33 percent by the end of 2020. Nearly half of states also have "public benefit funds" to provide subsidies for energy-efficient appliances, weatherization, and renewable technologies. Nearly all states have "net metering" and green pricing, allowing individuals to sell electricity back to the grid or to pay a higher premium for renewable sources of energy. States are also adopting policies to limit power plant emissions, encourage energy efficiency, provide incentives for low-carbon fuels and vehicles, and promote biomass initiatives. For example, Maine offers its residents up to a \$7,000 tax rebate on residential photovoltaic system (solar power) installations and \$1,250 on solar thermal water heaters. Texas also offers tax incentives for individuals and corporations who use solar or wind power to generate energy. By 2012, more than two-thirds of states adopted comprehensive climate action plans. For its part, the national government offers tax incentives for energy-efficient construction and has also taken steps to encourage the usage of compact fluorescent light bulbs, which are more energy efficient and last longer than their incandescent counterparts.

State and local governments have taken a number of additional steps to encourage citizens to become more environmentally friendly, or "green," in other areas of their lives. Many states and localities offer mandatory or optional recycling programs. The state of North Carolina, for example, recently passed legislation making it illegal to throw plastic bottles and aluminum cans in trash bins. Although the law has proved difficult to enforce, activists still argue that it is a step in the right direction and that it will have a significant environmental impact. And, in an attempt to reduce the waste generated from plastic bags, a number of cities, including San Francisco, have adopted legislation banning plastic bag use or charging consumers for plastic bags with their purchases. In Washington, D.C., shoppers who want a plastic bag must pay



16.1

16.2

16.3

16.4

16.5

HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS ENCOURAGE AMERICANS TO GO GREEN?

One simple way governments have encouraged environmental consciousness is to provide citizens with incentives to purchase compact fluorescent light bulbs, shown here.

an additional five cents per bag. In the city of Seattle, the fee is twenty cents per bag for paper or plastic to encourage shoppers to bring their own reusable cloth bags.

These public policies represent only a small sampling of the legislation enacted in recent years. They also say little about citizens' and interest groups' actions to put Earth-friendliness on the systematic and governmental agendas. It is likely that these policy areas, along with the other domestic policy issues, will continue to have importance to Americans in years to come.

Toward Reform: Ongoing Challenges in Domestic Policy

16.5 Assess the ongoing challenges in U.S. domestic policy.

Domestic policy legislation has a rich history in the United States. However, in each of the issue areas considered, public policy challenges are yet to be solved. Health care costs continue to rise, implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act has not met goals for standards and performance, and the need for a comprehensive policy to address energy and climate change continues. Innovative, bold solutions to problems, however, are difficult to achieve in a decentralized policy-making process. Ultimately, which group dominates the process varies by issue. The elite theory, bureaucratic theory, special-interest theory, and pluralist theory are useful models for understanding the politics of domestic policy making. The process also changes, depending on whether the proposed policy is routine or comprehensive in nature, and on how it is categorized—as distributive, redistributive, or regulatory policy. It is also important to understand that each stage of the policy-making process presents both opportunities and barriers to change.

At the agenda-setting stage, rarely do all three streams—problems, policies, and politics—converge to open a policy window. In addressing climate change, for example, disagreement exists over the exact cause and extent of the problem. Without a clear definition of the problem, it is even more difficult to gain consensus on a solution, or capture the attention of elected officials and the public.

Policy often is formulated in the context of uncertainty. The risks of offshore drilling were visibly apparent in the wake of the BP oil spill. How are these risks contained and prevented in a comprehensive energy policy that balances the need for energy with protection of the environment? Policy makers do not always have complete information on the long-term costs and benefits of proposed policy solutions. As a result, incrementalism often describes the policy adoption stage. President Obama's energy policy, for example, includes limited expansion of offshore drilling and exploration of additional sites, but no guarantee of future leases.

At the implementation stage, policies can change shape as they are carried out day to day by the bureaucracy. As teachers implemented No Child Left Behind, new standards and teaching to the test changed the content and delivery of information to K–12 students. Policies also are constantly subject to challenge, in routine evaluations and budget allocations, or in constitutional challenges in the courts. Challenges to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act jeopardized full implementation of Obama's health care initiative. As new policy concerns rise, the policy-making cycle starts over again. At the same time, this process has limits. Anthony Downs describes an issue attention cycle in which problems are easier to address when a crisis or critical mobilizing event captures the public's attention. As the problem is addressed, or the shocking nature of the crisis fades, the public loses interest. Sometimes realization dawns that no easy solution is possible, or that the costs outweigh benefits. Incremental steps toward solving the problem, or just the perception that something is going to be done, can also shift the public's attention to another issue. Once the intensity of public interest fades, comprehensive policy making is much more difficult to achieve.

Review the Chapter

Roots of Domestic Policy in the United States

16.1 Trace the stages of the policy-making process, p. 450.

Public policy is an intentional course of action or inaction followed by government in dealing with some problem or matter of concern. A popular model used to describe the policy-making process views it as a sequence of stages that include agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. Although this model can be useful, it is a simplification of the actual process, and it does not always explain why policies take the forms they do or who controls the formation of public policy.

Health Policy Today

16.2 Describe health policy in the United States, p. 462.

Governments in the United States have a long history of involvement in the health of Americans. Beginning in the 1960s, the government began to fund health programs for senior citizens and the poor, known as Medicare and Medicaid, respectively. And in 2010, after several failed attempts by prior administrations, the Democratic Congress passed and President Barack Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, expanding the national government's role in providing health insurance. The U.S. government also plays a prominent role in public health through the use of immunizations, education, advertisements, research, and regulations.

Education Policy Today

16.3 Outline education policy in the United States, p. 468.

Education policy in the United States has been a work in progress for over two centuries, and reform has focused on social and political order, individual liberty, and social and political equity. In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law a bipartisan bill commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind. It set high standards and measurable goals as a method of improving American education. One of the act's more controversial tenets involves the issue of school choice, whereby if a child is attending a failing school, parents have the option of sending the child to another public, private, or charter school that is subsidized through government vouchers. President Barack Obama's Race to the Top initiative encourages states to develop their own innovative education reforms to accelerate progress.

Energy and Environmental Policy Today

16.4 Explain energy and environmental policy in the United States, p. 472.

As energy sources have become more limited and environmental problems have magnified, government efforts in these policy fields have expanded. Before the 1970s, activity on the part of government to establish policies related to energy and environmental protection was very limited. Energy shortages and expanding pollution problems propelled these policy areas into the forefront of the government's agenda in the 1970s, but their prominence at the national level has fluctuated greatly. During recent years, skyrocketing energy prices and increasing concerns about global warming and other aspects of climate change have placed these issues once again at the center of American politics, with states currently taking the lead in policy development.

Toward Reform: Ongoing Challenges in Domestic Policy

16.5 Assess the ongoing challenges in U.S. domestic policy, p. 477.

Policy making in the United States is a decentralized process that makes it difficult to pass comprehensive reform. Each of the domestic policy areas highlighted in this chapter—health care, education, and energy and the environment—illustrate the forces that create opportunities for and constraints on change. Each of the five stages of policy making—agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, implementation, and evaluation—presents an additional hurdle for policies to survive. Often it takes policy entrepreneurs or crises to elevate an issue to national attention and force governmental action. Still, most policy making takes place in a context of uncertainty, related to science and technology, costs and benefits, or politics. The nature of problems also constantly evolves, and the policy cycle repeats itself continuously. The issue attention cycle suggests, however, that the country's attention does not stay focused on any one problem for very long.

Key Terms



Study and Review the Flashcards

agenda, p. 457
agenda setting, p. 458
charter schools, p. 470
Clean Air Act of 1970, p. 474
Clean Water Act of 1972, p. 474
domestic policy, p. 450
global warming, p. 455

governmental (institutional) agenda,
p. 458
greenhouse gases, p. 455
Medicaid, p. 463
Medicare, p. 462
No Child Left Behind Act, p. 468
Patient Protection and Affordable
Care Act, p. 451

policy adoption, p. 460
policy evaluation, p. 461
policy formulation, p. 458
policy implementation, p. 460
public policy, p. 450
systemic agenda, p. 457
vouchers, p. 470

Test Yourself



Study and Review the Practice Tests

- The intentional course of action followed by government in dealing with problems or matters of concern is called
 - policy formulation.
 - social welfare policy.
 - policy administration.
 - public administration.
 - public policy.
- Domestic policy making in the United States is characterized by
 - a highly centralized process.
 - ideological consensus over policy goals.
 - incrementalism.
 - constant bold initiatives that transform policies.
 - a very large range of issues.
- Medicaid was designed to provide health care
 - for the aged and ill.
 - for the poor.
 - for the working class.
 - for children.
 - for everyone.
- Obama's health care reform focused on
 - decreasing physician costs by socializing the medical profession.
 - government ownership of the pharmaceutical industry.
 - community-based free clinics.
 - affordable health insurance.
 - privatization of all health care.
- The earliest example of national government involvement in education policy is the
 - Northwest Ordinance.
 - creation of the League of Nations.
 - Civil Rights Act.
 - creation of the Department of Education.
 - passage of the No Child Left Behind Act.
- The No Child Left Behind Act sought to improve education by
 - providing vouchers for parents to choose public or private school.
 - assessing performance on standardized tests.
 - improving enrichment programs in music and the arts.
 - eliminating charter schools.
 - privatizing elementary education.
- The federal government's response to global warming has been
 - ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.
 - generally absent.
 - extensive, particularly since the Clean Air Act of 1990.
 - mandating that all new homes built must be green.
 - banning the sale of incandescent light bulbs.
- States have responded to global climate change by
 - decreasing emissions standards.
 - increasing the use of coal.
 - exploring offshore drilling opportunities.
 - entering agreements with other states to "cap and trade" pollution.
 - increasing gasoline taxes.
- Health care costs
 - are increasing at about the rate of inflation.
 - are lower in the United States than in other industrialized nations.
 - are affected by life expectancy.
 - have declined as a result of the Medicare program.
 - do not affect states' public policy decisions.

10. The issue attention cycle

- a. refers to the never-ending national focus on education, health care, and the environment.
- b. makes it difficult to sustain long-term policy progress as the visibility of an issue fades.
- c. rotates predictably through major policy areas.
- d. makes it easy to increase funding for policies once they are enacted.
- e. makes it easy to create new government programs.