The Bigger They Are, The Harder They Fall:
Explaining the Decline of Teachers' Union Political Influence

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1. INTRODUCTION

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush, flanked by jubilant members of Congress from both parties, signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law. NCLB was the first piece of federal education legislation to hold states accountable for federal funding; in other words, states had to show that their schools were improving. It was a long time coming. Standards-based reform—the measurement of school performance, usually with standardized tests—had been floating around the Capitol as a policy solution for nearly two decades. The logic was that, despite the huge amounts of money spent on education, there had been little improvement of the system; thus, it was crucial to examine school and teacher performance to see whether the money was having an impact. Finally the idea had become federal law.

Conspicuously absent alongside Bush were representatives from the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, the two largest teachers' unions in the U.S. Historically, the unions have exercised dominance on top of the U.S. educational system by creating and maintaining an extremely favorable status quo for teachers. The unions have managed to establish a system where their membership has favorable contracts, remarkable job security through the tenure system, and very little accountability for their performance. Furthermore, prior to NCLB federal education policy was little more than a funding stream: the federal government sent money to local school districts without attempting to calculate its impact on learning. The unions were successful in blocking or watering down any significant efforts to reform the education system.

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1 Maris Vinovskis, From a Nation at Risk to No Child Left Behind: National Education Goals and the Creation of Federal Education Policy (USA: Teachers College Press, 2008).
system, and there was no obvious reason to expect that to change.4 Yet the most significant piece of education legislation in 35 years managed to pass Congress with large bipartisan majorities, despite union reservations. For the first time school districts were to be held accountable for their federal dollars through testing; schools were to be judged by outputs instead of just inputs. This trend has continued since the election of President Barack Obama, who has accepted NCLB’s basic principles and continues to push for strong reform.5 What is remarkable is that the unions have consistently opposed these kinds of reforms throughout this period, suggesting that their influence has experienced a precipitous decline.

This presents an important research puzzle: why did the teachers’ unions experience a decline in political influence? If the unions, in the words of Terry Moe, have historically held “more influence on the public schools than any other group in American society,”6 how did NCLB and subsequent reforms pass? In this thesis I will attempt to answer this question.

In order to look at why union political influence has declined, it is necessary to build a theoretical model of that influence, which I can then test. To do this, I will compare the legislative process and circumstances of two case studies. First, I examine the America 2000 Strategy and Goals 2000, both of which were proposed in the early to mid-1990s. Though both pieces of legislation called for standards-based national education goals, the union interest in preserving the status quo won out. Second, I discuss

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6 Terry M. Moe, “A Union by Any Other Name,” Education Next 1, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 1.
No Child Left Behind, which instituted important reforms, many of which the unions opposed. By comparing these cases, I hope to conclude which variables are most significant—in other words, which factors are most responsible for the decline in union influence.

I begin with a discussion of the history and the background of the teachers’ unions—how they were formed, how they rose to power, and how they have built and established a favorable status quo at both the local and national level. Second, I provide a detailed history of recent federal education policy—focusing specifically on America 2000/Goals 2000 and NCLB—and establish that teachers’ union political influence has declined. Third, I review attempts to explain political influence in the literature and define the variables I will test. Fourth, I analyze my case studies and determine which variables are most significant. Fifth and last, I discuss the implications of my research and the prognosis for the unions.

2. THE TEACHERS’ UNIONS RISE TO POWER

2.1 Union History

The two main teachers’ unions in the U.S. are the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). They are allies on most major policy issues, to the extent that the groups nearly merged in the late 1990s. But the friendly relationship today belies the groups’ very different origins and many decades as adversaries.

The National Education Association. The National Teachers Association—later renamed the National Education Association—was formed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

in 1857. It was intended to serve as a central coordinating body for state associations of both teachers and administrators. The main function of the group was holding an annual convention where educators could discuss pedagogical ideas, theories and principles; the application of the strategies was left to the local level.\(^8\) Indeed, while issues of salary and other conditions of employment were mentioned at the conventions, the NEA strictly viewed labor conditions as a local matter and preferred to spend time discussing how to improve instruction. Furthermore, while state affiliates of the NEA had substantial membership, as Allan West notes between 1866 and 1892 the active membership at the national level never exceeded 10,000. The NEA had no permanent headquarters, much less employed national staff.\(^9\) For many decades the NEA was content in its role as a professional organization which sought to improve the quality of teaching in the country through discussion and sharing of ideas. School boards were not concerned about potential labor organization, as the NEA was controlled by school administrators; in fact, many school boards required teachers to join the NEA.\(^{10}\)

*The American Federation of Teachers.* The American Federation of Teachers has a very different history. The AFT labeled itself a union from the very beginning. The group officially formed in Wilmette, Illinois in 1916 and applied for membership in the American Federation of Labor; the application was accepted on May 9, 1916. AFL President Samuel Gompers personally delivered the group’s charter, and predicated that it would “bring light and hope to the lives of American educators and give and receive mutual sympathy and support which can be properly exerted for the betterment for all

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\(^9\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{10}\) Lieberman, *The Teacher Unions: How They Sabotage Education Reform and Why,* 12.
who toil and give service—aye, for all humanity." But despite optimism, the AFT had a tumultuous start. At that time public employees had no legal right to organize, and in 1917 the Chicago school board fired all of teachers who belonged to the Chicago Teachers Federation, an AFT affiliate. The CTF withdrew from the AFT in exchange for reinstatement. Yet the AFT soldiered on, despite widespread opposition. Ironically, one of their biggest critics was the NEA, who accused them of lowering the teaching profession to the level of common laborer, submitting to the domination of despotic labor leaders, and caring about money more than education. Additionally, as was common at that time, union members were accused of having ties to Communism.

2.2 Collective Bargaining and the Rise of the Unions

The AFT managed to survive until the 1960s, despite only unionizing around five percent of teachers, mostly in urban areas. The NEA enjoyed massive membership but continued to stay away from unionism. But soon afterwards the labor environment fundamentally changed as states began to pass laws giving collective bargaining rights to public sector employees. Wisconsin passed the first such law in 1959; by 1979 30 other states had followed suit. The critical event in this transition happened in New York City in 1961. The United Federation of Teachers (an AFT affiliate) convinced the New York City Board of Education to conduct an election on whether teachers wanted to bargain collectively. After the measure overwhelmingly passed, another election was held to

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13 Braun, Teachers and Power: The Story of the American Federation of Teachers, 38.
14 Moe, "A Union by Any Other Name."
15 Ibid., 2.
decide which organization would represent the teachers. With the NEA still averse to real union activity, they ran an inept campaign and the AFT won decisively.\textsuperscript{17} Empowered by their victory, the AFT pushed for similar elections in other cities.

The NEA, still controlled by administrators, was slow to respond. Since it had always opposed unionization, the group could not embrace collective bargaining and instead opted for "professional negotiations," a euphemism which they claimed to actually have broader scope than collective bargaining. Additionally, the NEA refused to embrace the right to strike, instead calling for "professional sanctions."\textsuperscript{18} This kind of euphemistic politics exemplified the NEA's awkward limbo: it was not sure whether it wanted to be a union or a professional organization. Its history and its leadership pushed towards the latter, but institutional survival against the AFT and an increasingly vocal constituency of teachers required the former.

The AFT's longstanding dedication to more traditional union interests put them in a strong position after the first set of elections. By 1965 the NEA had won twenty-six elections, while the AFT won fourteen; the AFT's victories in urban districts, however, meant that they represented 74,000 teachers to the NEA's 21,000.\textsuperscript{19} As Marjorie Murphy notes, the AFT owed their early success to a fierce public-relations campaign which charged that the NEA was dominated by administrators and slow to act on civil rights issues, particularly integration. This message simply resonated more in cities: urban teachers had more encounters with powerful, centralized administration because the

\textsuperscript{17} Lieberman, \textit{The Teacher Unions: How They Sabotage Education Reform and Why}, 13.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{19} Marjorie Murphy, \textit{Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980} (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990), 228.
districts were large, and the ethnic diversity made civil rights a more pressing issue.\textsuperscript{20} The NEA was hesitant to shift away from the doctrine of professionalism, but institutional survival required the change. Yet there was no sudden break in policy. As Murphy claims, "there was a slow shift in emphasis from the more hierarchical educational elite organization to a far more democratic structure that drew more teachers into organizational deliberation."\textsuperscript{21} As the transition continued, the NEA was able to use its large membership when it was a professional organization as a tool to win more elections. Its size today dwarfs the AFT.\textsuperscript{22}

By 1980 virtually every school district—outside of the "right-to-work" states, which forbid collective bargaining for public sector employees—had been organized by the NEA or AFT. With membership in the millions, substantial revenues from member dues, and rigid top-down organization, the teachers' unions had established themselves as both one of the most powerful unions in the country and a loud, unified voice in education debates.\textsuperscript{23}

2.3 The Politics of the Status Quo

Here it is useful to discuss what the unions have managed to achieve with their collective bargaining rights. Indeed, a thorough examination of teachers' unions must include their activities at the local level.\textsuperscript{24} After all, the primary function of a union is to protect the interest of its members; the teachers' unions have been extremely successful

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\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Lieberman, \textit{The Teacher Unions: How They Sabotage Education Reform and Why}, 2. \\
\textsuperscript{23} Moe, "The Politics of the Status Quo," 180. \\
\textsuperscript{24} The unions also have remarkable impact at the state level, perhaps more so than the national. See Burdett A. Loomis and Allan J. Cigler, "Introduction: The Changing Nature of Interest Group Politics," in \textit{Interest Group Politics}, Seventh. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007). In this paper, however, I limit my discussion to national politics.
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in that task. Through a number of systemic advantages, the unions have created an extremely favorable status quo that they seek to protect. This explains their basic political maneuver of blocking reform.

Principal-Agent Theory. The classic economic model of the relationship between teachers and local government is the “principal-agent relationship.” This relationship is impossible to avoid in society—patients hire doctors to treat them, a businessman hires an accountant to do his taxes, or any other number of things. Though helpful and necessary, these relationships have downsides as well. First, the agent (the doctor or the accountant) will have his own interests, perhaps personal ethics or financial concerns. Second, the agent has information the principal does not have, because the principal will not be directly observing the agent and is unlikely to have expertise in the agent’s task.\textsuperscript{25} Generally, the most effective way to mitigate this problem is by monitoring output in some way—for instance, the patient gets better quickly or the businessman’s taxes are completed accurately and submitted on time.\textsuperscript{26} Teachers, while exhibiting this relationship—the citizenry hires them to teach students—gain considerable power from the simple fact that \textit{their outputs are generally not monitored}. Teachers’ unions have long opposed any kind of “merit pay” system where teachers would be held accountable for student performance; furthermore, teachers known to be mediocre or even incompetent are almost never removed from their jobs due to a strong tenure system.\textsuperscript{27} To put it

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{27} Moe, “Politics, Control, and the Future of School Accountability,” 84.
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another way, teachers wield the inherent autonomy and power of a bureaucratic agent without the crucial monitoring by the principal. That is a significant power.

*The Chubb-Moe Model.* John Chubb and Terry Moe take that argument a step further. In their conception of the public school system, democratic control has built a nearly impenetrable bureaucratic structure; local control of schools—through elected school boards in particular—is a myth.28 A desire to democratically control school districts as a whole (thus eliminating the autonomy of individual schools) requires substantial delegation of authority and has “bur[jied] the schools in bureaucracy.”29 And this development is in the interest of all political entities: stable bureaucracy can insulate their favored policies from “subversion by future power-holders.”30 While it could be argued that this stability is positive, the problem is that it prevents the markets from effectively operating. Schools are not able to innovate; the worst educational strategies and schools continue to exist.

*The Collective Bargaining System.* The most important factor in the creation of this powerful education bureaucracy is collective bargaining. In the words of Moe, collective bargaining is the “core function of the teachers unions and the bedrock of their well-being.”31 Though many industries have collective bargaining, the teachers’ unions have even more opportunity for influence due to a favorable negotiation setup. As opposed to a typical union-management negotiation—where the management knows that their business will be hurt if costs increase, thus giving them an interest in fighting hard

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30 Chubb and Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools*, 42.
against the unions—public sector unions such as teachers’ unions are negotiating with the government. There is less of a direct interest in management to fight union demands, simply because there is no competition and no danger of losing business; the fact that public employee contracts are rarely an important campaign issue undermines the theoretical democratic check. Furthermore, government negotiation decisions are often driven by politics as much as economic efficiency: in jurisdictions with strong unions, public officials are aware that their jobs may hinge on a favorable union contract.\textsuperscript{32} It’s no wonder that public-sector unions have continued to be successful amidst the decline of private-sector unions like the United Auto Workers. In fact, recently the number of public sector union workers exceeded the private for the first time.\textsuperscript{33}

But teachers’ unions have an opportunity for an even greater advantage: they negotiate with school boards. These boards are often composed of volunteer citizens without much experience in contract negotiations, giving the unions the upper hand; furthermore, the part-time nature of the job, particularly in smaller school districts, makes it likely that the board members are less motivated to take on the teachers’ unions and secure the most favorable contract for the district. Additionally, school boards are often elected, giving teachers’ unions a unique opportunity to influence the negotiation process: they can help choose their management. And they certainly take advantage of this opportunity. As Moe shows in his analyses of school board elections in California, unions have a substantial impact on school board election outcomes. Union support for candidates who are not incumbents increases the probability of victory by .56; for

\textsuperscript{32} Moe, “A Union by Any Other Name,” 2.
incumbents, it increases .20.\(^\text{34}\) It is also important to note that teachers have more of a direct interest in the outcome of school board elections than the general public since their working conditions depend on it. Moe found empirical support for this claim, showing that teachers who live in the district where they work are two to seven times more likely to vote in a school board election. The low overall turnout for these elections—often around 10 percent of the electorate or less—only increases their impact.\(^\text{35}\)

**Teacher Contracts.** Another component of the collective bargaining process that merits discussion is the broad scope of teacher contracts. Though salary and benefits are the traditional focus of union negotiations, collective bargaining agreements for teachers go into painstaking detail about hiring and firing, promotions, teacher assignments, class size, faculty meetings, parent conferences, among many others.\(^\text{36}\) A topic of negotiation that exemplifies teachers’ union influence is the tenure system. As Patrick McGuinn notes, today every state except Wisconsin requires that teachers be rewarded tenure, typically after three years of teaching. Though the establishment of tenure was never intended to guarantee lifetime employment, strong due process protections built into union contracts has made it increasingly difficult for school districts to revoke tenure. On average, each year districts only dismiss or decline to renew the contracts of 1.4% of tenured teachers. And nearly all are due to egregious conduct violations (such as sexual offenses and violence), not teaching performance.\(^\text{37}\)

\(^{34}\) Moe, “Union Power and the Education of Children,” 234.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

\(^{36}\) Moe, “A Union by Any Other Name,” 3.

2.4 The Teachers’ Unions Enter the Political Arena

Union activity did not stop at the local level, however: they smelled an opportunity to get involved in national politics. The AFT already had a framework for political involvement through their membership in the AFL-CIO, but the NEA had some work to do. Though the idea of creating a political action committee (PAC) had been brewing for a number of years, the first strong steps were taken in 1970, when an NEA task force recommended the institution of an NEA-PAC. In 1972 NEA-PAC was officially created and began supporting candidates. Its impact was palpable: as Allan West quotes NEA President Catherine Barrett: “In 1972, teacher political activity reached its highest level. . . teachers played an active role in electing 30 percent of the House of Representatives, and 40 percent of the 33 candidates elected in the Senate. . . [NEA-PAC] supported 32 candidates. Twenty-six of them won.”

The NEA truly emerged on the national political scene, however, when it endorsed Jimmy Carter in 1976 and played an important role in his victory. Carter, after all, was the consummate outsider candidate. He had few connections in the Democratic party, and so understood the benefit of an NEA endorsement. Early in the 1976 campaign he courted the group and promised to create a cabinet-level Department of Education if elected. The NEA responded in full force during the primary and general elections, donating huge amounts of money to Carter and the Democrats and mobilizing its membership to vote—and, in 1979 Carter fulfilled his promise. Indeed, the NEA’s rise as a player in national politics—particularly in the Democratic Party—was substantial.

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40 Ibid., 228.
and remarkable: as Vice President Walter Mondale put it in 1980, “I’ve learned that if you want to go somewhere in national politics these days, you better get the NEA behind you.” Mondale, who had reaped the political benefits of the NEA’s endorsement and organization in the 1976 election, understood that as well as anyone.

That phenomenon has only increased in recent years. Since 1990 the NEA and the AFT have made $56 million in federal campaign contributions, roughly equal to that spent by Chevron, Exxon Mobil, the National Rifle Association, and Lockheed Martin combined. That money has overwhelming gone towards the Democratic Party: 93 percent of the NEA’s contributions went in that direction; the AFT’s donations are even more skewed, with 99 percent going to Democratic candidates or the party itself. This has established the teachers unions as one of the most important forces in national politics. Indeed, in the words of Myron Lieberman, the combined forces of the NEA and AFT “form a political machine of unparalleled size and sophistication.”

2.5 Union Political Activities

At a basic level, the teachers’ unions don’t operate differently from most other interest groups. They track legislation that affects their interests; establish a position on the legislation; lobby Congress and the bureaucracy; endorse candidates and make political contributions; and mobilize their membership on the grassroots level. Yet education policy is a particularly complicated area, simply because education is addressed at practically every level of government. Teacher contracts are governed at the

43 Ibid., 155.
45 Reg Weaver, Former NEA President. Interview with Author, February 18, 2010.
level of the school district, funding and regulation issues are usually addressed at the state level, and more recently the federal government has become involved. Thus, the unions operate at all levels of government.

For interest groups, however, not all levels of government are created equal. Indeed, different levels of government have different merits and disadvantages for lobbying activities. As a result, groups engage in a process of choosing the appropriate level of government; this is known as "venue shopping." As Sarah B. Pralle notes, "venue shopping is an integral part of the policy process and at the heart of many political strategies." The preferred venues of the teachers' unions are state and municipal governments. The reasoning is fairly simple: there are fewer competing groups, giving them more relative influence. The fact that the unions are unified and focus most of their activities in a single area of policy makes local government an even better fit. As Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan Jones note, "the smaller scale of local governments means that they can be more easily influenced by single constituencies." Thus, the unions have generally focused their activities on the state level. And they do so in a big way. For instance, the California Teachers' Associate, an NEA affiliate, was the largest political spender in California in the last decade, spending $211.8 million. This was over $100 million more than the next largest spender. Additionally, in 2008 alone the New York State United Teachers, an AFT affiliate, spent $6.6 million.

49 Coulson, "The Effects of Teachers Union," 162.
Yet for decades the unions lobbied for the creation of a federal Department of Education. Why would they do that when they have more influence at the local level? The basic answer is that the unions didn’t see the DOE as a real policymaking body. As Patrick McGuinn notes, “You’d classify the early DOE as a classic clientele agency. It was created to serve its clients: teachers, educators, and their unions. [The unions] saw it as a way to solidify a funding stream for federal dollars. It was never intended to serve as a regulating body or a driver of school reform.”50 As education reform increasingly became an issue at the federal level, the unions worked tirelessly to maintain their influence, despite the more difficult venue.

2.6 Conclusions

In the second half of the twentieth century, the teachers’ unions grew from humble organizations to behemoths of education policy. By winning collective bargaining rights and negotiating favorable contracts at the local level, they established a status quo that they sought to protect in the national political arena. And thanks to their perceived expertise, large membership, massive political expenditures, and an American political system where blocking policies is much easier than enacting them,51 they have been quite effective in doing so. As Moe writes,

The teacher unions, now the unchallenged leaders of the education establishment, have amassed formidable power rooted in collective bargaining and electoral politics. They have fundamental interests that drive them to oppose almost all consequential changes in the educational status quo. And they operate in a

political system that, by advantaging groups that seek to block change, makes it relatively easy to ensure that genuine reform doesn't happen.\textsuperscript{52}

In other words, the teachers' unions—once marginalized—have climbed to the top of the education politics food chain. After successfully building extremely favorable working conditions, they have acquired the political muscle to help them keep things exactly how they are.

3. CASE STUDY: AMERICA 2000/GOALS 2000

3.1 \textit{A Nation at Risk} and the Push Towards Education Reform

In 1988, George Bush took a major symbolic step by becoming the first President to describe himself as an "education President."\textsuperscript{53} Considering the preference for small government demonstrated by his predecessor Ronald Reagan, this was a shocking development. For nearly all of American history, education was considered by almost everyone to be a local concern; now a \textit{Republican} was citing education as a national policy priority.

That is not to say, however, that federal involvement in education began with Bush. The first substantial federal foray into education policy was in 1965, when President Lyndon Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which provided direct federal funding for schools. ESEA was part of Johnson's Great Society initiative, which sought to help poor Americans through direct federal involvement. Education equity was a priority for Johnson: as he put it, "No law I have

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 183.2
\textsuperscript{53} Vinovskis, \textit{From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind}, 22.
signed, or ever will sign, means more to the future of America.”54 Almost all of the funding was set aside for the Title I program, which targeted low-income children in failing schools. Though early appropriations were relatively small, it was the first major commitment of federal aid to education. In 1979, Jimmy Carter institutionalized the federal role by pushing through legislation to create a cabinet-level Department of Education (DOE), and appointed Shirley Hufstedler as the first Secretary of Education.55 The establishment of the DOE was cynically viewed as a political payoff to the NEA—which had craved a permanent federal role in education—right before the election, and such claims are not without merit. As Gareth Davies notes, “the [Carter] administration’s interest in the substantive content of the [bill establishing the DOE] yielded almost completely to the political imperative of passing a bill, any bill.”56 Furthermore, the DOE basically differed from the previous non-cabinet level Education Division in name only.57 Yet the establishment of the DOE entrenched the federal role in education policy.58

When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, he sought to abolish the DOE; when that was not immediately successful, he attempted to marginalize the Department within his own administration. Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell, however, supported the federal role in education and refused to be pushed aside. He managed to circumvent Reagan and convene the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which was given the task to evaluate the state of public education in the U.S. In 1983 the Commission released the report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. *A Nation at Risk* (ANAR) painted a shockingly negative picture of the failing

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54 Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980*, 225.  
55 Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind*, 14.  
57 Ibid.
U.S. education system, famously declaring that the foundations of the system were being "eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity." Among other things, the report recommended that the trend could be reversed by strengthening state and local high school graduation course requirements, establishing higher academic standards, requiring more student time in school, improving teacher preparation, and holding elected officials accountable for education progress. Though the report was criticized by some analysts for its pessimism and misleading representation of data, it set off a firestorm in the media. Hundreds of newspapers printed stories on the report, and in the five weeks after its release more than 100,000 copies of ANAR were distributed. This created a difficult political situation for Reagan. Though the report did not recommend a large federal role, it claimed that the federal government should support curriculum improvement and research on school management; furthermore, ANAR declared that the "federal government has the primary responsibility to identify the national interest in education." Reagan’s plan for the devolution of education policy was conspicuously absent among the recommendations. As a result, the following year Reagan dropped his support for abolishing the DOE. As Denis P. Doyle notes, "The whole situation [was] replete with irony." A bold move by Bell turned the Reagan administration into a crucial contributor to the burgeoning federal role in education.

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60 Vinovskis, From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind, 16.
3.2 Education on the Bush Agenda and the Charlottesville Summit

Unsurprisingly, education was a more important issue in the 1988 Presidential election than it had been previously. Despite Bush’s attempts to frame education as a Republican issue, Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis was the overwhelming choice of voters who voted on education policy, largely due to the support of the teachers’ unions. Yet it was not enough to decide the election, which ultimately turned on emotional symbolic issues such as Willie Horton’s furlough and accusations that Vice Presidential candidate Dan Quayle dodged the draft.

Bush, however, did not ignore education when he reached the White House. He fulfilled a campaign promise by holding a meeting in Charlottesville, Virginia with the nation’s governors to discuss the direction of national education policy. Dubbed the Charlottesville Education Summit, the meeting was deliberately made to bypass Congress and thus avoid partisan rancor as much as possible. Indeed, the spirit of bipartisanship was in the air: then-Governor Bill Clinton was one of the leaders in the summit, working closely with Bush and other Republicans. The Summit resulted in the creation of six broad national goals for education. Bush announced them in his 1990 State of the Union:

1. By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.
2. By the year 2000, we will increase the percentage of students graduating from high school to at least ninety percent.
3. By the year 2000, American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography.
4. By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

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67 Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind*, 21.
68 Ibid., 24.
5. By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6. By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and offer a disciplined environment.  

Though the goals carried no official weight, they signified an important shift in the rhetoric in education policy. Instead of leaving education to local authorities and letting them set their own agendas, the goals put an emphasis on outputs: schools had a responsibility to educate students in a particular way, and federal authorities were looking for measurable results. Though it took time before accountability was taken seriously in legislation, the goals from Charlottesville helped to change conceptions of the government's role in education. A threat to the status quo had been posed.

3.3 The America 2000 Strategy

Bush's first attempts at education reform legislation quickly failed. In addition to a Democratic Congress that was averse to bipartisanship, Secretary of Education Laura Cavazos was not outspoken and failed to establish a strong vision for education reform in the administration. This changed with the selection of former Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander to take over the DOE in 1991. Armed with a thirst for the spotlight and a clear legislative vision, Alexander sought to create real reform in Washington. As he put it, "A sermon lasts 30 minutes, and when church is over, everybody goes back to

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69 Office of the White House Press Secretary, "National Education Goals" (Washington, DC, January 31, 1990).
70 Vinovskis, From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind, 36.
living the way they used to live. I’d rather be a spark plug. I’m talking about creating a movement.”

The centerpiece of this “movement” was the America 2000 Strategy, introduced in April 1991. In Bush’s words, the legislation would “re-invent” U.S. education through the following policies:

- Codifying the six education goals made at the Charlottesville summit
- Developing “world-class standards” in education
- Creating voluntary American Achievement Tests aligned with those standards
- Continued collaboration between the President and the NEGP to craft an annual report card on progress towards the goals
- Creating 535 “New American Schools” that would serve as models of school reform
- Permitting children in failing schools to use their ESEA Title I federal education funds at the school of their choice, whether public, private, or parochial, but in accordance with state and local laws.

Initial reactions to the legislation were mostly positive. AFT President Albert Shanker described the plan as “broad and comprehensive, more so than any President or Secretary has come up with.” Various conservative think tanks, Senator Edward Kennedy, and NEA President Keith Geiger also praised the plan.

Unfortunately for Bush and Alexander, the tone dramatically shifted as the legislation arrived on Capitol Hill. Though centrist policies can find success when parties are willing to compromise, there is always the possibility that they don’t please anyone. Democrats harshly opposed the bill for a variety of reasons, including a reluctance to hand Bush a major legislative victory before the 1992 election and fears that the national

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72 Dennis Kelly, “Bush hopes to ‘re-invent’ education,” USA Today, April 19, 1991, sec. NEWS, 1A.
75 Vinovskis, From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind, 45.
76 Kelly, “Bush hopes to ‘re-invent’ education,” 1A.
goals were really attempts to dock federal education funds. In addition to trying to stop
the bill, the Democrats downplayed its significance: as House Majority Leader Dick
Gephardt put it, "If the founding fathers adopted this definition of revolutionary change,
America would still be part of England."\(^{77}\)

The main target of Democratic criticism, however, was the inclusion of school
vouchers. And once they attached themselves to that issue any chance of bipartisan
support was vanquished. As Senator Kennedy remarked on the legislation,

> Robbing old education programs to pay for new ones is nothing more than
education strip mining. We should not . . . look only to current school programs as
the source of new funds for school reforms. That's not the way we paid for the
Persian Gulf War, and it's not the way we win the battle for better education . . .
By offering public dollars to private schools, including religious schools, the
administration is reopening the bitter and divisive policy and constitutional
debates of the past about public aid to private schools.\(^{78}\)

In other words, redistribution of existing funds would not improve education; new
funding was needed. Furthermore, voucher programs were an attack on public education
and raise old constitutional concerns. These concerns about school choice were echoed
by the teachers' unions. As Shanker put it, the voucher provision was a "fig leaf for
giving public funds to private schools."\(^{79}\) When that loudening trope was combined with
opposition from Republicans—many of whom still did not accept a federal role in
education—the legislation was arguably doomed from the start. As Patrick McGuinn
quotes Lesley Arsht, "Democrats hated America 2000 immediately. Liberal Democrats
hated it because it wasn't enough money and it didn't go to the right places. Conservative
Republicans didn't like it because they didn't want federal involvement in schools.

\(^{77}\) Ibid.


period, and certainly didn’t want federal tests.”80 Despite the fact that the tests were voluntary, the mere threat of a greater federal role bothered Republicans.

Bush’s original legislation was eviscerated in committee and on the floor of Congress, and ultimately the House and the Senate were unable to agree on the same version of the bill. The coalition of the teachers’ unions, Democrats who opposed school choice, and Republicans who were skeptical of a large federal role had destroyed Bush’s initiative; despite his efforts, the status quo remained. While America 2000 did not pass, it still had a substantial impact. It showed that federal education policy was an issue for both parties, and pushed standards-based reform as a model for future legislation. As the next section shows, incoming President Bill Clinton was clearly paying attention to the substance and trajectory of America 2000.

3.4 Clinton and Goals 2000

Bill Clinton brought with him to the White House a distinct pragmatist bent, embodying the centrism of the “New Democrats.” Though liberal, Clinton broke with progressives on a number of important issues, particularly welfare reform. He was willing to compromise his position in order to get things done and claim political victories. And this strategy worked: he was elected to two terms as President.

Education was one policy area where his centrism shined brightest. When he was the Governor of Arkansas he worked with President George Bush in Charlottesville to craft national education goals; indeed, the two of them actually agreed on many aspects of education reform. It shouldn’t be a surprise, then, that Clinton’s first major piece of

80 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 66.

Goals 2000, just like America 2000, was centered on the official implementation of the national education goals created in Charlottesville. The legislation sought to achieve this by creating a framework for states to apply for federal grants, provided that they make reforms in accordance with the goals. To do this, the law authorized the creation of two commissions: the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) and the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP). NESIC would certify state reforms, essentially deciding whether they would be eligible for grants through Goals 2000. NEGP was given the task of preparing a “national report card” of the progress made towards the education goals, as well as appoint and oversee NESIC.81

The voluntary nature of the bill made it relatively weak, but there was still a substantial political battle to get it passed. Though Clinton had the benefit of a Democratic Congress, the standards-based framework angered representatives on both sides of the aisle. Conservative Republicans were automatically opposed to the increased federal government role in the bill, but both Democrats and Republicans who accepted the concept of standards-based legislation had a substantial disagreement. In general, Republicans felt that using existing education funding more efficiently through national standards and reform could improve schools without additional funding. As Representative Cass Ballenger put it, “simply throwing more money at the problem is not the answer to our education woes. America spends more on education than any other

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country, yet American students have one of the lowest achievement ratings.\textsuperscript{82}

Democrats, on the other hand, thought that schools could not be improved without substantial additional funding, and that national standards were in fact a shrouded attempt to dock grants for states. As Patrick McGuinn quotes Secretary of Education Richard Riley, “some House Democrats . . . saw the [Goals 2000] proposal to define goals, standards, and reform as substitutes for commitment, programs, and money.”\textsuperscript{83} The relatively small amount of money in the bill—$420 million—seemed to give credence to Democratic concerns. As a result, many Democrats were hostile to the bill as it was originally proposed.

Perhaps the most controversial component of the bill, however, was the empowering of the Secretary of Education to provide discretionary grants to states for the development of so-called “opportunity-to-learn” standards (OTLs).\textsuperscript{84} OTLs, in contrast to student assessments, deal with educational “inputs”: the amount of money spent on students, the quality of the facilities, and other similar issues.\textsuperscript{85} The concern was that this gave the federal government power to judge states on the adequacy of their school resources and how they choose to allocate their money, a form of direct federal regulation. Some Democrats supported this measure because it provided a way for the federal government to hold states accountable and be sure that federal funding was spent the way it was intended to, namely for improving the education and minority and poor children.\textsuperscript{86} Many Republicans, on the other hand, saw the provision as a profound

\textsuperscript{82} Lee W. Anderson, Congress and the Classroom: From the Cold War to "No Child Left Behind" (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 134.

\textsuperscript{83} McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 88.

\textsuperscript{84} Kosar, Failing Grades: The Federal Politics of Education Standards, 118.

\textsuperscript{85} Anderson, Congress and the Classroom: From the Cold War to "No Child Left Behind", 138.

\textsuperscript{86} Kosar, Failing Grades: The Federal Politics of Education Standards, 118.
expansion of federal power into states. By making Goals 2000 grants conditional on OTL standards, there was the potential that the Secretary of Education could create *de facto* unfunded mandates, a deal-breaker for those who believed in a limited federal role. The nation's governors were also deeply opposed to this provision.\(^87\)

The administration's response to these and most other misgivings about the bill was simple: state participation was voluntary. If a state chose not to move towards the education goals, they would simply not be eligible for a grant. Besides, the funding was relatively minimal (about 1/10\(^{th}\) of ESEA Title I funding); states could simply not worry about it. But some conservatives disputed whether the bill was truly voluntary. Senator Judd Gregg, said that it was "ironic" and "absurd," to call the program "voluntary";\(^88\) fellow New Hampshire Republican Bob Smith elaborated on this point:

This [bill] is coercion; states looking for additional funding streams for their educational systems will find it next to impossible to resist the political pressure to apply for these funds, and therefore submit themselves to the dictates of the NESIC . . . In effect, then, what we are doing in the name of the noble goal of creating better educational opportunities for our children, is laying the groundwork for a national school board that will use the power of the purse to dictate standards to our schools. This is not right, and is exactly what opponents of the creation of the Department of Education were afraid of.\(^89\)

Despite this concern, the bill went forward. The language concerning OTL standards was weakened to make clear that state involvement was voluntary. The bill passed the senate easily, but was nearly derailed in the House after Representative Jimmy Duncan (R-TN) introduced an amendment strengthening language in support of school

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 119.
\(^{88}\) Anderson, *Congress and the Classroom: From the Cold War to "No Child Left Behind"*, 134.
prayer. But the amendment was defeated 232-195, and the legislation was passed. Clinton signed the Bill on March 31, 1994.\textsuperscript{90}

Goals 2000, as finally enacted, has a mixed legacy. On its face, the bill—watered-down by partisanship—didn’t do much: the completely voluntary nature of the bill and the low funding made its potential direct impact negligible.\textsuperscript{91} This was a result of powerful forces from both sides of the aisle that were skeptical of mandatory standards and an increased federal role. While the unions were aware that the bill would have little impact on them directly—as Jack Jennings puts it, “they considered it more of an outside reform”\textsuperscript{92}—it is no coincidence that the NEA made opposition to high-stakes testing a central part of their 1994 convention.\textsuperscript{93} In other words, the status quo still reigned when Goals 2000 was passed. But that does not mean that the bill was insignificant. It created a framework for standards-based reform and accountability, established a more permanent federal role in education, and started a trend of the federal government rewarding local educational innovation. Furthermore, it defined a true purpose in federal education policy: to keep an eye on the states and the educational system as a whole. Yet it did not make much of a dent in the status quo.

4. CASE STUDY: NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

4.1 ESEA Reauthorization at the End of the Clinton Administration

The final act of the Clinton administration’s attempt to reform education was the reauthorization of ESEA in 1999. And, for the first time in the bill’s 35-year history,

\textsuperscript{90} Vinovskis, \textit{From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind}, 75.
\textsuperscript{91} McGuinn, \textit{No Child Left Behind}, 91.
\textsuperscript{92} Jack Jennings, President and CEO, Center on Education Policy. Interview with Author, February 24, 2010.
\textsuperscript{93} Carol Innerst, “NEA takes even harder line against standardized testing; Union wants exams to be ‘diagnostic’ - not ‘high-stakes’,” \textit{The Washington Times}, July 7, 1994.
Congress failed to reauthorize and was forced to settle for a one year extension to the previous bill.\textsuperscript{94} With a divided Congress and a Presidential election around the corner, neither party was willing to compromise as they did on Goals 2000. In fact, reauthorization was not even close to passing: as David Nather writes, "Efforts fell apart because of ideological differences over everything from the channeling of federal dollars to proposals for gun control measures in public schools."\textsuperscript{95} The task of revising and reauthorizing the most important piece of federal education legislation was left to the 107\textsuperscript{th} Congress.

4.2 Education and the 2000 Presidential Election

Amidst this legislative turmoil, Texas Governor George W. Bush made education reform through increased federal involvement his central domestic policy priority in his Presidential campaign. In this way he managed to stand out from other Republican challengers, distinguishing his "compassionate conservativism" from the perceived callousness of the Republican establishment. He decried the "soft bigotry of low expectations" created by rigid school bureaucracies and unaccountable local autonomy and vowed to do work to stop it and ensure a quality education for every child.\textsuperscript{96} Though it was certainly a shrewd political move, Bush's push towards education reform was backed up by his work as Governor. His most prominent education achievement in Texas was a complete overhaul of the Texas education code, at the center of which was a

\textsuperscript{94} Vinovskis, \textit{From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind}, 151.
required standardized test called the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

Students were required to pass the test to advance to the next grade; additionally, test results were widely reported to the community. This pushed school districts to allocate their resources to improve the performance of struggling students.97 The success of Bush's educational reforms in Texas certainly informed his later policy positions.

In addition to separating him from the pack of Republican Presidential contenders, Bush's emphasis on education made life difficult for the Democratic candidate, Vice President Al Gore. In a sense, Gore had to go on the defensive on what was traditionally a clear Democratic issue. And it worked: by election day, Gore had just a 4 percent lead over Bush concerning which candidate would best improve education.98

4.3 The Politics of No Child Left Behind

*Early Foundations.* The election itself was incredibly close and controversial, hinging ultimately on the intervention of the Supreme Court of the United States. But Bush came out on top, and quickly began to maneuver towards education reform. Though Republicans had a narrow majority in both Houses of Congress, Bush knew that he would not be able to pass a strict party-line bill; he would need to compromise. As Kevin Kosar puts it, "the political situation was . . . ripe for either true bipartisan policymaking or gridlock."99 Mere days after the Court finalized his election win, Bush met privately with a number of legislators from both parties to discuss education reform. Initially Bush viewed a coalition between Republicans and centrist "New" Democrats as the most likely

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98 Vinovskis, *From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind*, 157.

vehicle for passage, and invited some of the big names from those groups. Republicans including Senators Judd Gregg and James Jeffords and Congressman John Boehner joined Democrats such as Senator Evan Bayh and Congressman Zell Miller. A conspicuous absence at the meeting was longtime education reform proponent Senator Edward Kennedy, indicating Bush’s focus on negotiating with centrist Democrats.¹⁰⁰

Though the meeting had no official legislative significance, it demonstrated that Bush was dedicated to getting the bill passed, even if he had to compromise. He even conceded that he was willing to drop vouchers—a perennial deal-breaker for the Democratic Party—from the bill if it would ensure passage. This made it clear to all involved that Bush was serious about his claims of bipartisanship.¹⁰¹

When it came time to present a proposal to the Hill, Bush executed what became one of his trademark strategies by presenting a mere legislative blueprint—big ideas instead of concrete proposals. Bush education advisor Sandy Kress noted that the President preferred “to let the legislative process take place within the Congress.” Besides the practical benefits of giving the voting representatives an opportunity to put what they want in the bill, it put the ball in Congress’ court: If the bill died, the President could not be blamed.¹⁰² The central components of his proposal included categorical block grants to provide spending flexibility to states; annual testing for grades three through eight; “report cards” for states and schools based on test scores to be divided by subgroup; and required “adequate yearly progress” (AYP), an articulation of educational improvement, for disadvantaged students in any school receiving Title I funds. Should

¹⁰⁰ Rudalevidge, “No Child Left Behind: Forging a Congressional Compromise,” 35.
¹⁰¹ Ibid.
AYP fail to be met repeatedly, public school choice and funding for supplemental services would be provided to students. In general, the legislative blueprint was composed of ideas that had existed for some time. But Bush’s flexibility gave cause for optimism that the bill could find passage.

*Politics in the House of Representatives.* In the House, John Boehner demonstrated his dedication to getting the bill through. His rise to Chairman of the Education and Workforce Committee was rapid and somewhat surprising. After previous Chair Bill Goodling retired in 2000, Boehner, Thomas Petri, and Pete Hoekstra vied for his spot. Though Boehner did not have seniority—traditionally the key to committee chairmanship—he was a strong conservative voice and had fiercely supported Republican leadership, particularly Newt Gingrich. On its face, his appointment to head the committee was not helpful to education reform efforts, as shown by his efforts in the mid-1990s to abolish the DOE. But his partisan rancor belied a fierce commitment to Bush’s success. And, as Andrew Rudalevidge notes, he “knew how to count”: he knew that he needed Democratic votes to pass the bill. As a result he fostered an unlikely legislative alliance with longtime enemy George Miller, the ranking Democrat in the committee. Boehner even went as far as to tell Bush at the aforementioned December meeting that Miller needed to be invited to all similar events in the future. Miller—a longtime advocate for better targeting of federal education funds—was happy to contribute.

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103 Rudalevidge, “No Child Left Behind: Forging a Congressional Compromise,” 35.
105 Boehner was acutely aware that, given the tight 2000 election, it was important for the GOP to stick together despite policy differences.
107 Broder, “The Long Road to Reform.”
The Congressional odd couple worked tirelessly to garner bipartisan support for the efforts. Boehner avoided the slog of the traditional committee process by convening a “working group” led by Miller and himself to put a proposal together. Boehner knew that he would have to give ground on vouchers and block grants in order to get Democrats to cross the aisle and support an initiative from an embattled Republican President, and was willing to do so. The bill that passed the committee was indeed bipartisan—the vote was 41-7—but some Republicans were worried that they had conceded too much. Yet Boehner and Bush stood behind the bill.

Politics in the Senate. The politics of NCLB in the Senate was also characterized by surprising alliances and shifts in coalitions. As work on the bill began in 2001, Jeffords, who chaired the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, made Republicans increasingly nervous with his liberal-leaning policies. As a result, the White House preferred to deal with Gregg, who was right behind Jeffords in terms of seniority. The committee—and the Senate as a whole—was thrown into chaos on June 5 when Jeffords left the Republican Party and became an Independent who would caucus with the Democrats. Kennedy—left out of the initial discussions—took the chairmanship, and Gregg became the ranking Republican.\textsuperscript{108}

Though the loss of the Senate could have been the death knell for Bush’s proposal, Kennedy was the consummate bargaining legislator, eager to make deals and get things done. His willingness to compromise led to the ire of the teachers’ unions and other members of the education establishment, but he refused to stand down, making it clear that passing an imperfect bill was better than no bill at all.\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{108} Vinovskis, \textit{From a Nation at Risk To No Child Left Behind}, 161.
\textsuperscript{109} Broder, “The Long Road to Reform.”
Indeed, Kennedy smelled the legislative game and wanted to play. Even before gaining the chairmanship he approached Bush and demanded to be involved in the process. As DeBray quotes an education aide, "Kennedy went to Bush and said: 'You said from the beginning that you wanted to work with me. You're not going to get an education bill out of this Congress without me. Do you want to work with me or not?'" Bush's affirmative response was vital to the bill's progress. Kennedy simultaneously worked with centrist Democrats like Bayh and Joe Lieberman to craft a moderate proposal and inside the HELP committee to work on a more liberal version. Thus he was able to serve as a conduit between different Democratic blocs—as perhaps no other Senator could have done—and pushed the bill towards passage. 

Final Passage. But even after versions of the bill passed in both the House and the Senate, passage was far from guaranteed. There were myriad differences between the bills; local officials hated uniform standards without local flexibility; unions hated high-stakes testing requirements; and some Republicans thought that the absence of vouchers made passage pointless. But the "big four" of Kennedy, Gregg, Boehner, and Miller pushed on in conference. What resulted was a nearly complete rewrite of the bill with pieces to appease both Republicans and Democrats. For instance, a small pilot program which gave school districts more leeway in using their federal funds pleased Republicans; additional language which targeted Title I funds to poor districts pleased Democrats. It is also important to note that as the process went along it became increasingly closed. Outside groups—including the teachers' unions—were intentionally blocked out of the

110 Debray, Politics, Ideology, and Education: Federal Policy During the Clinton and Bush Administrations, 90.
111 Ibid., 91.
112 Rudalevidge, "No Child Left Behind: Forging a Congressional Compromise," 41.
process by the "big four" to ensure passage. Many groups that had become accustomed to
deep involvement in education policymaking were ignored.113

Still, despite the efforts of the "big four" and others, the bill may not have passed
without the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The unimaginable tragedy of that day
made partisan Congressional squabbles seem petty and pointless; furthermore, people
were looking for positive news from government. These factors made Congress more
amenable to compromise.114

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act on January 8, 2002 was an
enormous legislative victory and a surprise to many. Rudalevidge describes the signing as
a "civics text come to life."115 As Broder quotes a White House official, "Kennedy and
Miller changed the direction of the Democratic Party, and Bush changed the direction of
the Republican Party. That it all happened in one year is remarkable."116 Though it wasn't
easy, the most important piece of federal education legislation in 35 years had passed.
NCLB fundamentally changed the federal education policy regime from one focused on
equity and access for poor and disadvantaged students to one that seeks to improve
education for all students. Crucially, the new regime attempts to achieve this goal by
focusing on educational outputs and holding schools accountable for student
performance. Indeed, as McGuinn writes, NCLB created a "new educational federalism"
in which the DOE functions as a "national schoolmarm," closely monitoring school
activities and punishing those who fail to meet federal standards.117 This increased

113 David S. Broder, "Education Reform Controversy Lingers: Paige Promotes New Rules Amid
114 Joel Packer, Former Director of Education Policy and Practice, National Education Association.
Interview with Author, March 4, 2010.
115 Rudalevidge, "No Child Left Behind: Forging a Congressional Compromise," 23.
116 Broder, "The Long Road to Reform."
117 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 195.
federal role was shocking and unprecedented. The public education system in the U.S. had experienced a seismic shift.

4.4 Education in the Obama Administration

Though it has been eight years since the passage of No Child Left Behind, there are indications that fundamental changes have occurred in the education policy debate. The education policies of Barack Obama support this claim. During his campaign, Obama was cautious about making statements about his education policy preferences. Fitting with his calls for bipartisanship and compromise, he appointed both John Schnur of New Leaders for New Schools, who favors standards-based reform in the model of NCLB, and Stanford professor Linda Darling-Hammond, who opposes that kind of reform, as his main education advisors. Though the presence of different ideologies in his campaign was a welcome change, it made interested organizations uneasy. As Joel Packer notes, the only real sense that the NEA had of Obama was that he was the "least opposed to NCLB" of the Democratic candidates.

Once he took office, however, Obama introduced a bold education reform agenda. He appointed former Chicago schools chief executive officer Arne Duncan, an outspoken proponent of major education reform, as Secretary of Education. The two started quickly in their move towards reform by instituting the “Race to the Top” program as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Race to the Top gives states an opportunity to compete for $4.35 billion in federal grants to encourage educational innovation. The program specifically encourages tougher academic standards, direct intervention in

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119 Packer, interview.
failing schools, building the foundation of a merit pay system through improved data systems, and charter school expansion. The program has been extremely successful thus far, with huge state participation. 40 states and the District of Columbia filed applications for the first round; 16 were named finalists. Some states even changed their laws to meet the program’s requirements. For instance, Delaware, one of the two first round winners along with Tennessee, created a plan to identify the worst-performing schools in the state and turn them around within two years. It also added monetary incentives for teachers and principals who chose to work in the toughest and lowest-performing schools.

In March 2010, Obama released a proposal for ESEA reauthorization that calls for major changes while reinforcing some of NCLB’s key principles. The most significant change in the law is the removal of the simple pass-fail grading system for schools with a system that measures individual student growth, regardless of the level at which they started. There is also a decreased emphasis on test scores, with school progress to be determined more holistically, including factors like attendance, learning environment, and graduation rates. Additionally, the requirement that students must be proficient in reading and math by 2014—a goal which the Obama administration described as “utopian”—has been replaced with a more general standard of college and career

preparedness. Furthermore, the proposal supports more direct intervention in the worst-performing schools while moving away from schools in the middle.  

Yet the basic principles of accountability and standards remain. As Obama said, “under these guidelines, schools that achieve excellence or show real progress will be rewarded, and local districts will be encouraged to commit to change in schools that are clearly letting their students down.” Indeed, as Duncan said directly, the problem with NCLB was not the goal but the means to that goal: “We’ve got to get accountability right this time.” Federal tests are still very much part of the plan; federal monies to schools would still be tied to academic progress.

These policies, despite the many changes from NCLB, have been heavily criticized by the traditional education establishment, especially the teachers’ unions. Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, describes Obama as “Bush III.” NEA President Dennis van Roekel’s reaction to Obama’s ESEA reauthorization plan was somewhat less dramatic: “We are disappointed.” Yet their strong public opposition has been ignored.

Though it is unclear whether Obama’s plan will pass in the near future, there is strong evidence that there have been fundamental changes in the federal education policy debate. The unions’ interest in the status quo—a paramount force in education policy for decades—no longer seems to be as important of a factor. As Packer claims, the next time ESEA is reauthorized, “there will be federal accountability for schools. There will be a

123 Dillon, “Obama Calls for Major Change in Education Law.”
124 Ibid.
126 Dillon, “Obama Calls for Major Change in Education Law.”
hard test as a significant part of that. There will be a linkage of teacher performance to
student performance. In a sense, then, the unions' have already lost several important
battles: federal education reforms which attack the status quo are now a given. Their
influence in education policy, which was so strong during the 1980s and 1990s, has
experienced a significant decline.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

So what happened? In order to look at why union political influence has declined,
it is necessary for me to build a theoretical model of that influence, which I can then test.
The subject of this literature review, then, is: why do teachers' unions have political
influence?

This is a complicated question to answer. Political influence, after all, is a result
of many different factors, including organizational variables, political circumstances, and
characteristics of the political system; there is no one "correct" explanation. Thus, I have
opted to divide the literature into my own two schools of thought to better fit my
question. In my view, it is analytically useful to liken teachers' union influence to a
fortress on high ground: they have the favorable position and seek to maintain it. In
assessing the long-term viability of a fortress there are two primary factors that must be
considered. First is the defensive capabilities of the fortress—the extent to which it can
fend off attacks. Second is the offensive capabilities of outside forces—the extent to
which enemies can mount a successful attack. The interplay of these variables determines
whether the fortress can survive.

127 Packer, interview.
This metaphor provides a convenient framework for my hypothesis. I can divide elements of the schools of thought into novel “defensive” and “offensive” schools, creating a simple articulation of the factors which I believe contribute to union political strength. I call the defensive school “structure of the policy subsystem.” It considers the elements inside of the education policy subsystem that contribute to teachers’ union political influence. I call the offensive school “outside initiative for change.” It considers the outside forces and circumstances that lead to attacks on the status quo.

I believe these two schools—though very general—create a straightforward conception of teachers’ union political influence. Just as it would be irresponsible to analyze the viability of a fortress without looking both at its structure and the strength of potential attackers, I cannot just consider one of the two schools. I am certain that both are important. Discovering the relative importance of the variables which compose these schools is my project.

5.1 School of Thought: Structure of the Policy Subsystem
5.1.1 Iron Triangles, Issue Networks, and Advocacy Coalitions

One of the key discussions in the literature of interest group influence in policymaking concerns the interplay of interest groups and other institutions. The basic argument is that under certain circumstances powerful interest groups can work with other institutions to dominate a policy area.

*Iron Triangles.* The classic conception of this idea is the “iron triangle.” Grant McConnell, in a study of the politics of food and water distribution, was one of the first to use the idea.\(^{128}\) Despite differences among policy spheres, the driving force of

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\(^{128}\) Ralph Pulitzer probably introduced the term. In a statement about the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, he described the situation as “three forces. . . laboring for such a sinister peace: (1,) the bourbonism of
policymaking was the interplay between several institutions: "(1) a federal administrative agency within the executive branch; (2) a heavily committed group of Congressmen and Senators, usually members of a particular committee or subcommittee; (3) a private (or quasi-private) association representing the agency clientele; (4) a quite homogeneous constituency usually composed of local elites." It is important to note that, instead of compromising to make policies, the entities simply took turns pursuing the interests of the others. Indeed, "logrolling, rather than compromise, is the normal pattern of relationship." In subsequent years the concept was broadened. Salisbury, Heinz, Nelson, and Laumann describe it as follows:

Interest groups, congressional committees and subcommittees, and executive agencies are tied symbiotically together, controlling specific segments of public policy to the effective exclusion of other groups or government authorities. This control is exercised so that the groups benefit from the policies, the Congresspeople involved benefit from electoral support by the groups, and the agencies benefit from jurisdictional and appropriations support by Congress.131

Provided that the policy area is not salient, the theory states, this setup—despite confirming popular fears about interest group dominance in the political system—is entirely possible. All "sides" of the triangle benefit from the arrangement, and it is extremely difficult for other interested parties to get involved. The classic example of an interest group in an iron triangle is the defense industry. In that system, Congress, the politicians...; (2.) the materialism of industrial and commercial classes appealing to the business classes...; (3.) the militarism of professional soldiers..." He further noted that "If the Peace Conference is allowed to remain between governments instead of between peoples it is apt to degenerate." See Charles H. Grasty, "Forces at War in Peace Conclave," The New York Times, January 18, 1919.

129 Grant McConnell, Private Power and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 244. McConnell conceptualized the process as composed of four forces; the third and fourth were combined by other scholars as a single entity representing the interest group.

130 Ibid.

Pentagon, and defense contractors work together to build armaments and expand war capabilities even in peacetime. All of the parties have an interest: members of Congress receive campaign contributions, the Pentagon increases its power and importance, and defense contractors make sizable profits.\(^{132}\)

*Issue Networks.* Though most scholars agree with the fundamentals of this “textbook triangle” theory,\(^ {133}\) critiques and revisions of the idea are widespread. Hugh Heclo made an important contribution to the literature with his theory of “issue networks.” As he puts it, the iron triangle concept is “not so much wrong as it is disastrously incomplete.”\(^ {134}\) The search for the most powerful actors in policymaking has caused us to overlook the open, complex networks of people that impact policy. As government has grown, Heclo argues, it has become increasingly difficult to determine which parties are exercising policy power. Policy specialization has exploded the elegant triangle into more of a “cloud.”\(^ {135}\) While bureaucracy was once expected to simply execute the law, it now must make important decisions for society; it must *know* what is right instead of merely *do* what is right. This requires vast policy knowledge that the bureaucracy most likely does not possess. And that opens the door for outside parties to participate. This participation can manifest itself in a variety of ways, from a citizen calling his Congressman, to a vocal group of citizens at a town council meeting, to a large interest group meeting with Congressional staffers or bureaucrats.


\(^{133}\) Salisbury et al., “Triangles,” 131.


\(^{135}\) Ibid., 105.
The key is knowledge and interest in a particular policy issue. Indeed, as Heclo writes, an issue network is a “shared-knowledge group having to do with some aspect (or, as defined by the network, some problem) of public policy.” While these networks are somewhat well-defined, their definition comes from a “common base of information and understanding of how one knows about policy and identifies its problems.” The network does not, however, necessarily have agreement on an issue; furthermore, it is highly dynamic, with participants constantly leaving and entering the network. Issues once defined simply—for instance, the energy debate as a confrontation between big oil companies and consumer interests—are now composed of swarms of issues driven by knowledgeable participants. As Heclo aptly puts it, modern policy debate is not a two-sided war as much as a “Vietnam-type quagmire.” Though the classic “triangle” conception may remain relevant for some policy areas, complex, dynamic networks of participants are becoming more important.

Michael T. Heaney, in a study of welfare politics in Wisconsin, recently discussed issue networks with an emphasis on their informational impact. He claims that they serve as an “informational context in which decisions about alliances are made. Interest groups use the information they acquire through their interactions in issue networks to make decisions about alliances, which in turn reshape issue network structures.” These networks are fluid and flexible—far from the rigidity of the iron triangle. This provides an important route for interest groups to impact policy.

136 Ibid., 103.
137 Ibid., 104.
138 Ibid., 102.
139 Ibid., 105.
Advocacy Coalition Framework. Paul A. Sabatier and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith examined this idea more deeply to look at the impact of interest group interaction within these networks, or "policy subsystems." They define a policy subsystem as "the interaction of actors from different institutions who follow, and seek to influence, governmental decisions in a policy area." Within these subsystems, interest groups have well-established and relatively stable beliefs and priorities and compete with one another to implement their interests. Policy change and learning, then, "can best be understood as the product of [this] competition." Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith call this idea the "advocacy coalition framework" (ACF) and present a useful model of the policy process:

According to the ACF, policy change over time is a function of three sets of processes. The first concerns the interaction of competing advocacy coalitions within a policy subsystem. An advocacy coalition consists of actors from a variety of public and private institutions at all levels of government who share a set of basic beliefs (policy goals plus causal and other perceptions) and who seek to manipulate the rules, budgets, and personnel of government institutions in order to achieve these goals over time. The second set of processes concerns changes external to the subsystem in socioeconomic conditions, system-wide governing coalitions, and output from other subsystems that provide opportunities and obstacles to the competing coalitions. The third set involves the effects of stable system parameters—such as social structure and constitutional rules—on the constraints and resources of the various subsystem actors.

In addition to the competition of coalitions, policy change is driven by other changes as well as systemic constraints. This approach is particularly useful for education.

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policy. Its foundation is in its dynamism: advocacy coalitions are reactive and may revise beliefs or strategy due to both internal and external stimuli.\textsuperscript{144} As Joseph Stewart notes, the ACF brings “some important elements more explicitly into the analysis,” including the “role of new information, ideas, and assumptions.” The ACF explains how these factors can affect the entire policy subsystem as opposed to the rational actions of a single group.\textsuperscript{145}

Lance Fusarelli is one prominent scholar who has applied the ACF to interest groups, particularly teachers’ unions. He analyzes the debate over vouchers—which he considers the “ideal issue from which to examine interest group activism and competition among advocacy coalitions”—in Texas in the 1990s. The debate was defined by two competing advocacy coalitions, one supporting a voucher program and the other seeking to block it. Despite ideological differences among the policy actors, coalitions held together and were even formed around the issue. A spokesman for one such group, the anti-voucher Coalition for Public Schools, described the group as a “one-issue coalition.”\textsuperscript{146} The teachers’ unions and the traditional public education establishment also played an important role, coming together “in an effective advocacy coalition to block vouchers.”\textsuperscript{147} As Tim Mazzoni has written, this is nothing new for the unions: Education interest groups opposed to vouchers nationwide have “put together blocking coalitions of formidable strength” that can draw upon the massive political and financial resources of


\textsuperscript{146} Lance D. Fusarelli, \textit{The Political Dynamics of School Choice} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), 78.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 79.
both state and national associations. The combination of access to resources and focus on achievable, single-issue goals gives the groups this influence.\textsuperscript{148}

This subsystem approach—encompassing iron triangles, issue networks, and the ACF—provides strong explanatory potential for teachers' union power. Conceptualizing policy debates as institutions themselves allows us to analyze how individual actors within the institutions can both interact with one another and affect the policy process.

5.1.2 The Power of Resources: Elite Theory and Resource Mobilization Theory

Though somewhat obvious, it is important to examine the role of political and financial resources in the power of teachers' unions. With a powerful top-down structure, the teachers' unions boast a massive budget for campaign contributions and millions of members who can be mobilized to work on campaigns as well as vote themselves. This may very well lead to greater political impact for the unions.

*Elite Theory.* One of the theoretical foundations of this idea is "elite theory," advanced by scholars such as C. Wright Mills. He describes the presence of "the power elite" in American society—the cohort who "have the most of what there is to have," particularly money, power and prestige.\textsuperscript{149} For Mills, who was writing in the mid-twentieth century, this includes the "political, economic, and military circles which as an intricate set of overlapping cliques share decisions having at least national consequences."\textsuperscript{150} Though Mills' work focuses on the post-World War II economy—what Eisenhower called the "military-industrial complex"—his general point is clear: the

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 18.
actors wealthy in financial and political resources have disproportionate power in government, leaving most citizens with little influence.

G. William Domhoff has been particularly influential in demonstrating the ongoing relevance of elite theory. Though the Cold War is over, our pluralist political system provides many avenues for powerful elites to exert their influence on the political system. As he puts it, today “The power elite build on their structural economic power, their storehouse of policy expertise, and their success in the electoral arena to dominate the federal government on issues about which they care.”\textsuperscript{151} Given the increasing importance and power of administrative agencies in today’s federal government, Domhoff notes that one of the most important ways the elite can dominate government is through cabinet appointments. Corporate executives who have two or more outside directorships are “four times more likely to serve in a federal government advisory position than executives from smaller companies.”\textsuperscript{152} Though in some cases this is justified due to policy expertise of the executive, Presidential appointees frequently “thoroughly dislike” the agency to which they were appointed.\textsuperscript{153} This disproportionate involvement of the elite in government demonstrates that elite theory still merits discussion and examination.

\textit{Resource Mobilization Theory}. This basic idea is also present in social movement literature as part of “resource mobilization theory (RMT).” RMT challenges the assumption that social movements are based upon and driven by “aggrieved populations” who primarily provide the effort necessary for success. Indeed, social movements can be

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
viewed as rational entities in themselves, employing complex strategies, external support, and powerful organization to achieve their goals.\(^{154}\) The "little guy" doesn't drive the movement; in fact, as Mancur Olson famously argues, it is irrational for any individual to invest time and energy into a social movement because he will reap the benefits regardless of his personal involvement.\(^{155}\) Social movements survive because of their ability to effectively mobilize and use available financial and human resources. Centralized, formally structured organizations who effectively mobilize resources are better able to "mount[] sustained challenges" to the status quo.\(^{156}\)

McCarthy and Zald analyzed the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s using this idea. The movements, they claim, were primarily driven by "conscience constituents," supporters of a movement that do not stand to directly benefit from the movement's success.\(^{157}\) Usually middle-class, these outsiders "coopted institutional resources from private foundations, social welfare institutions, the mass media, universities, governmental agencies, and even business corporations" to further the movements' interests.\(^{158}\) In other words, effective use of resources can be more important for an interest group than a mobilized, dedicated membership.

5.1.3 Policy Model: "Punctuated Equilibrium"

Another lens through which to view teachers' union influence is the process of policy change in general. Conventional wisdom suggests that policy change is slow and


difficult, impeding efforts for radical change. Indeed, as Moe writes, "the American political system is literally designed . . . to make blocking—and thus preserving the status quo—far easier than taking positive action. The advantage always goes to interest groups that want to keep things the way they are." As the current educational regime is favorable to teachers' unions, this conception of policymaking can explain their influence: a stubborn system fits their interests.

"Punctuated Equilibrium. But rapid change does sometimes occur. How do we account for both periods of stability and extreme change? Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones attempt to answer this question by borrowing the evolutionary biology term "punctuated equilibrium" (PE). In their view, both change and stability in policy are driven by the interaction of "policy images" and "policy venues." A policy image, quite simply, is how a policy is publicly understood and discussed. This image is either favorable or detrimental to proponents of a given policy. The authors use the example of nuclear power: positive images include high technology, growth and jobs; negative images include nuclear waste and mushroom clouds. Policy venues are defined as "institutions or groups in society. . . [that] have the authority to make decisions concerning the issue." These venues include federal agencies, local authorities, interest groups or any similar body. Policy subsystems—including the previously discussed iron triangles, issue networks, and advocacy coalitions—would also be considered policy venues.

160 Baumgartner and Jones, Agendas and Instability in American Politics, 31.
One result of the interaction of policy images and policy venues is a “policy monopoly”—a monopoly on both how the public understands the policy and the institutional arrangement supporting that policy. All policy actors have an interest in establishing one of these monopolies. Baumgartner and Jones describe these monopolies as having two important characteristics: “First, a definable institutional structure is responsible for policymaking, and that structure limits access to the policy process. Second, a powerful supporting idea is associated with the institution.”

To return to the original language, a policy monopoly includes both a rigid policy venue that supports the present policy and a favorable policy image. The existence of these monopolies accounts for the policy stability often observed in American politics.

But policy images and venues can and do change—and often quickly. Policy images are based on public perception of an issue, which is rarely rational and objective. Indeed, public attention “tends to focus strongly on one set of facts at a time, and exhibits a remarkable ability to dwell on the positives while ignoring the negatives during one period.” If there is a sudden change in the environment—a nuclear disaster, to return to the previous example—public opinion can rapidly switch to the other extreme, forcing policymakers to respond. Even if the environmental change is not directly a result of human agency, framing of the change as a particularly consequential development—often by interest groups using the media—can lead to changes in the policy image. An issue to which the public may have been indifferent in the past, viewed as the domain of a small group of experts, suddenly becomes salient and is thrown on to the policy agenda, destroying the equilibrium of the policy monopoly. Policy venues can change similarly.

163 Ibid., 7.
During one of these periods of heightened attention to an issue, an increasing number of people may become interested and wish to become involved. This challenges the rigid policy venue that once limited access; it becomes impossible to block out interested parties. When a policy image and a policy venue collapse in quick succession and destroy the policy monopoly, rapid change is likely. Once the change occurs, however, the public may once again lose interest, and the venue that succeeded in implementing the change remains in place. This creates a new policy monopoly and equilibrium, likely to stay in place until the next sudden change in environment. PE, then, is able to explain the seemingly paradoxical phenomena of stability and rapid change in American politics. As Baumgartner and Jones put it, "In sum, the American political system is a mosaic of continually reshaping systems of limited participation. Some are strong, others are weak; some are being created, and others are being destroyed at any given moment."  

Celia Sims and Cecil Miskel apply the PE framework to national literacy policy from the 1970s to the 1990s, considering why children's literacy commanded a high place on the Congressional agenda in the 1990s. They first established that the issue was characterized by periods of punctuation and equilibrium. Though when they examined literacy data in the aggregate their results were muddled, switching their analysis to specific target populations for literacy—elementary/secondary students and adults—yielded stronger results. Literacy policy regarding elementary/secondary students particularly displayed PE tendencies: "two short periods of punctuation were present in the late 1970s and early 1980s and in the mid- to late-1990s and bound a rather long and protracted period of decreased activity lasting for most of the 1980s and into the early to

mid-1990s.\textsuperscript{166} The PE framework explains that this phenomenon of stability and sudden attention is due to changes in the policy image and the policy venue. By studying \textit{New York Times} articles on the issue, the authors found that the policy image changed to one focused more on children's literacy; this occurred largely because of the work of interested individuals and groups to reframe the issue.\textsuperscript{167} This new policy image resonated more with policymakers and the public, leading to increased Congressional activity. Coinciding with the change in the policy image was a broadening of the policy venue. The authors gathered data on group involvement in Congressional hearings, and found that the "roster of participants" in the literacy policy subsystem increased with Congressional attention, showing that the policy venue had opened up.\textsuperscript{168} Thus, the study generally confirmed the punctuated equilibrium model, highlighting the role of changes in the policy image and venue that can be spurred on by issue framing activity. Heightened attention to an issue and increased public involvement in the policy venue can pose a powerful challenge to the status quo.

The PE framework explains both policy stability and policy change, which is useful in studying many policies; education policy is certainly no exception. The prominent role given to interest groups in both framing the policy image and participating in the policy venue makes it worthwhile to study PE's applicability to teachers' union power.

\textsuperscript{166} Sims and Miskel, "The Punctuated Equilibrium of National Reading Policy," 16.  
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 1.  
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 20.
5.2 School of Thought: Outside Initiative for Change

Though many scholars focus on the role of forces within the policy subsystem to explain interest group influence, it is also crucial to examine what comes from the outside—the state of potential challenges to the status quo. One important element to discuss is how an issue gets on to the national agenda—in other words, why some subjects receive government attention while others do not. Putting an issue on the agenda—or, in some cases, keeping it off—is a crucial area of policy influence. Understanding the agenda-setting process is important for analyzing teachers’ union power.

Policy Streams. John Kingdon provides one of the most influential theories of agenda-setting. He conceives of agenda-setting as three “process streams”—the problems stream, the policies streams, and the politics stream. Policy change occurs when these streams come together at the same time.¹⁶⁹ These largely operate independently from one another, making significant policy change very difficult.

First is the problems stream. Kingdon suggests that at any given time government could attend to many different problems. Any industry, for instance, is likely to have a way to improve efficiency or safety standards. Kingdon posits that public indicators, focusing events or crises, and popular feedback can highlight certain problems. For example, school safety has always been a problem; it did not become a major issue, however, until the Columbine shootings.¹⁷⁰ In order for agenda-setting and subsequent

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policy change to occur, a problem must be sufficiently public, thus satisfying the problem stream.

Next is the policies stream. To put it simply, problems need workable, feasible solutions. These policies usually emerge out of communities of policy specialists who consider various possibilities; some proposals are taken seriously and others are discarded. Kingdon puts an emphasis on the quality of ideas themselves as a factor in whether a policy is made: “The content of the ideas themselves, far from being mere smokescreens or rationalizations, are integral parts of decision making in and around government.” If a quality policy solution is present, policy change is possible.

The final independent process is the politics stream. This refers to variables like election results, changes in administration, pressure group campaigns, or a swing in the national mood. The key point is that even if a problem has captured national attention and a viable policy solution exists, a stubborn political climate can block policy change.

This stream is particularly important in understanding teachers’ union influence, and so merits further discussion. The basic argument is that the power of interest groups—including teachers’ unions—is contingent on the political environment. As Patrick J. McGuinn succinctly puts it, “the application of interest group power is crucially contextual.”

Anthony J. Nownes lays out five conditions that lead to interest group influence over policy change. Organized interests have a high probability of affecting policy outcomes when:

1) they face little or no opposition from other political actors

172 Ibid., 87.
173 McGuinn, *No Child Left Behind*, 207.
2) they lobby on issues about which the public and the media know and care little
3) they lobby on issues that are highly technical or complex
4) they lobby policymakers who are undecided on an issue
5) they lobby on issues that are nonpartisan and nonideological

McGuinn adds three more, and I summarize them below:

1) their views on the issue are considered mainstream
2) they are able to prevent the entrance of new groups and perspectives
3) their issues are not central to the governing agendas of the parties

Trying to identify a complete list of factors is not essential here; it is no doubt possible to come up with others. The more important point is that interest group power is not exclusively decided by intra-group factors, such as size, organization, and strategy.

Policy Entrepreneurs. Another argument worth mentioning here is the role of policy entrepreneurs in the political process. In certain circumstances, the theory says, individuals can help push substantial policy changes. Policy entrepreneurs are individuals who

could be in or out of government, in elected or appointed positions, in interest groups or research organizations. But their defining characteristic, much as in the case of a business entrepreneur, is their willingness to invest their resources—time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money—in the hope of a future return.

These entrepreneurs have the potential to cause policy change—a potential that has only grown with improvements in communications technology. Kingdon was one of the first to discuss policy entrepreneurs directly, but Mintrom takes it a step further by actually laying out conditions for successful entrepreneurs. He argues that policy entrepreneurs must be creative and insightful; socially perceptive, particularly in seeing

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175 McGuinn, No Child Left Behind, 207-8.
issues from a range of perspectives; able to mix in a variety of social and political settings; able to argue persuasively; strategic team builders; and prepared to lead by example.\(^{177}\)

Mintrom’s study of this conveniently deals with the issue of school choice, discussing the role of policy entrepreneurs in the implementation of school choice legislation. One example is former public school teacher Joe Nathan, who advocated for school choice in Minnesota. Strongly dedicated to educational equality, Nathan worked with a number of other individuals from both inside and outside of politics to build a coalition for the cause. They wrote reports, gave speeches, networked, and worked with other groups to align their efforts with school choice movements nationwide.\(^{178}\)

Furthermore, they actively worked to convince people to look at education issues in a different way. Though success did not come immediately, Nathan’s group was able to push through reforms such as interdistrict enrollment and intradistrict school choice.\(^{179}\)

Policy entrepreneurs are another route for policy change, and could either help or hinder interest group power, depending on which side they’re on. Their role in federal education reform is certainly worth discussing.

6. METHODOLOGY

Given these schools of thought, I devised a method to test which variables were most important. There are many variables at play, and it is not possible to test every one. Thus, I attempted to pick measurable variables that I believe best sum up prevailing


\(^{178}\) Ibid., 62.

\(^{179}\) Ibid., 63.
explanations for teachers’ union political influence in the literature. Additionally, in order to simplify my research I controlled for certain variables with my case selection.

6.1 Hypothesis

Teachers’ union political influence is explained by 1) the structure of the education policy subsystem and 2) outside initiative for change.

Structure of the education policy subsystem (independent variable)
- Coalitions with civil rights groups
- “Open” or “closed” policy subsystems

Teachers’ union political influence (dependent variable)

Outside initiative for change (independent variable)
- Salience/public opinion
- Campaign priority
- Party politics
- Presidential leadership

6.2 Definition of Concepts

Teachers’ union. I am referring to both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. Though they do not always agree on every issue, I will be exploring issues on which they share a position, particularly opposition to consequential standards-based reform.

Political influence. The extent to which the unions get their interests reflected in federal government policy. In this case, I broadly consider their interests to be the continuation of the status quo.
Structure of the education policy subsystem. I will use the general definition of policy subsystem provided by Paul A. Sabatier and Hank C. Jenkins-Smith: “the interaction of actors from different institutions who follow, and seek to influence, government decisions in a policy area.” There are also two measurable variables that I will define.

Advocacy coalitions. This is a theory with which I can evaluate the role of political coalitions within the subsystem. It is not necessary to examine relations between the unions and all groups, so I will limit my analysis to civil rights groups.

"Open" or "closed" policy subsystems. This is Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones' concept of the extent to which outside actors can become involved in the subsystem, particularly by involving themselves in Congressional politics. They argue that a “closed” subsystem can lead to long periods of policy stability, while an “open” one can cause rapid policy change. Thus, we’d expect a closed system to maintain teachers’ union political influence and an open one to decrease it.

Outside initiative for change. The extent to which oppositional forces are in a position to make a policy impact. I will address this concept by looking at several measurable variables.

Salience/Public Opinion. Whether the public views education as an important issue for the government to examine.

Campaign Priority. Whether education reform was an important issue on the Presidential campaign trail.

Party politics. Whether education reform is a priority for the political parties, and whether government is divided or unified.

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Presidential leadership. The acts and characteristics of a President that allowed him to have an individual impact on policy. This is grounded in the theory of policy entrepreneurship mentioned in my literature review.

6.3 Measurement of Variables

Dependent Variable: Teachers’ union influence

My analysis relies on two crucial assumptions. The first is that the era in which America 2000 and Goals 2000 were proposed was a high point in union political influence; the passage of NCLB represented a drop in influence. This is a straightforward claim. America 2000 and Goals 2000 kept the status quo basically the same and so can be considered victories for the unions, while NCLB brought some fundamental changes that the unions opposed. The second is that union activities remained constant throughout this period. My research, particularly my interviews with former union lobbyists, confirms that the unions are and have been fully aware of how federal legislation can affect them and work hard to encourage policies they like and block policies they dislike. They accomplish this by directly meeting with politicians and bureaucrats, submitting policy recommendations, and mobilizing their membership.

Independent Variable 1: Structure of the education policy subsystem

Advocacy Coalition Framework. My analysis was primarily based on interviews with individuals involved with civil rights groups and education policy. I evaluated changes in relations and examined whether that may have had an impact on teachers’
union influence. This was not a perfectly accurate measuring tool, because it is impossible for me to examine every nuance. But it gave me a general picture.

"Open" or "closed" policy subsystems. I analyzed Congressional committee hearings to determine whether more groups and groups with different perspectives were testifying on education reform legislation. If more and different kinds of groups were testifying, that indicated an opening subsystem, and vice versa. Additionally, I tabulated the number of times each piece of legislation was mentioned in the editorial and opinion sections of US newspapers; more mentions indicate a more open subsystem, while fewer indicate a closed one. This presents accuracy problems, because there are many ways one can be involved in a policy subsystem without testifying in Congress or expressing an opinion in a newspaper; contacting one's Congressman is an example. But once again, this provided a reasonable base for analysis.

**Independent Variable 2: Outside Initiative for change**

*Salience/public opinion.* I gathered polls during Presidential election years which asked voters to evaluate the extent to which they believe education policy is important and see how results have changed over time.

*Campaign priority.* Since official campaign strategies were not available, I tracked and analyzed media coverage during election cycles to determine the amount of coverage given to education. This was not a perfect method; one can always quibble with LexisNexis search criteria. But reasonable search criteria yielded plausible results about whether education was a campaign priority.
Party politics. I examined Republican and Democratic party platforms during relevant Presidential election years. I analyzed the sections that consider education reform to determine the education policy agenda for each election. Then I researched which party held the White House and Congress during relevant years.

Presidential leadership. I looked at the roles of Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush in the legislative process and evaluated their individual importance. Based on Michael Mintrom’s analysis of policy entrepreneurs, I determined which characteristics of their leadership were most important.

6.4 Case Studies

I examined two primary case studies, each of which contributes to the puzzling decline of teachers’ union political influence. The different circumstances led to changes in my variables, allowing me to effectively test my hypothesis.

These case studies are particularly useful because they allow me to control for several operative variables. First, the substantial political resources of the unions—in both money, membership, and organization—has actually increased over the period I’m studying, despite the unions’ declining influence\(^{181}\), thus, I can conclude that resources is not an important variable to examine. Second, my research has concluded that the lobbying activities of the unions have remained about the same over this period. Indeed, the unions used the same tactics of submitting policy recommendations, lobbying legislators, and reaching out to membership on the grassroots level for America 2000, Goals 2000, and NCLB. Third, Kingdon’s “policies stream” is accounted for: all of the

\(^{181}\) Coulson, “The Effects of Teachers Union.”
pieces of legislation I examine are based on the same fundamental policy ideas of national standards and accountability.

I believe that these case studies will be useful to scholars in the future. It is clear that policy change does not always happen in a straightforward, logical fashion; reform (or lack thereof) can surprise us. By focusing on important breaking points in teachers' union influence—examining periods of increased and decreased influence—I hope to discover the operative variables, creating a model of teachers' union power. Such a formulation could certainly be generalizable to other interest groups and other time periods because my variables could apply to many other political issues. Indeed, some of the unique causes of teachers' union power—their size and the power of their contracts, for instance—are controlled by my cases.

*America 2000/Goals 2000.* Though they rarely get credit, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton were crucial figures in the move towards federal education reform. They were the first Presidents to call themselves “education Presidents” and proposed education reform legislation, but teachers' union interests prevailed. Bush’s legislation was called the America 2000 Strategy, which outlined broad national education goals, as well as an allocation of federal dollars for school vouchers. The teachers' union opposed the legislation, and it did not pass. Shortly after Clinton’s arrival in the White House, he proposed Goals 2000, which similarly outlined national education goals. Though the bill was passed into law, it was extremely weak, and so had a negligible impact on the status quo.

I examined both of these pieces of legislation in detail, analyzing the factors which led to such a strong showing by the unions. This is an important case study as a
high point in union power—an extended period of time when their interests were reflected in federal policy (or lack thereof).

*No Child Left Behind.* George W. Bush made education reform his primary domestic priority and succeeded with the passage of the NCLB in 2002. This was certainly a defeat for the teachers’ unions, which begs an important question: why did reform happen then? This serves as a valuable case study as an example of low teachers’ union influence. By comparing the circumstances of NCLB to America 2000/Goals 2000, I hoped to find which variables are most important in determining teachers’ union political influence.

7. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: STRUCTURE OF THE POLICY SUBSYSTEM

7.1 Coalitions with Civil Rights Groups

Though the teachers’ unions have historically been one of the most powerful actors in education politics, they still must operate within a larger political framework. Washington is inundated with interests groups, all of which are eager to alter policy to further the interests of their membership. With countless opinions floating around Congress, it is important for groups to build coalitions. A strong coalition can make a group’s voice louder; a weak or disintegrating coalition can significantly turn the volume down.\(^{182}\)

For years the teachers’ unions had strong relationships with civil rights organizations;\(^{183}\) both blocs focused on increased funding as the proper way to improve

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\(^{182}\) Hank C. Jenkins-Smith and Paul A. Sabatier, “Evaluating the Advocacy Coalition Framework.”

\(^{183}\) I acknowledge that it is not possible to characterize the civil rights advocacy community as one bloc. But here, though my evidence is anecdotal, I advance a plausible theory that may be applicable to many groups.
education. Yet there are indications that the relationship has become strained in recent years. In this section, I will examine the change in that relationship and whether it has had an impact on union influence.

America 2000/Goals 2000. Teachers' union concern for the equality of minorities has a long history. As early as 1943, the NEA Representative Assembly refused to meet in a city that did not provide equal accommodations for minority groups.\textsuperscript{184} This support switched to full-on advocacy in the 1960s, during which both the NEA and AFT worked tirelessly to integrate schools and encourage minorities to become teachers and join the unions. Once ESEA was enacted in 1965, the unions and civil rights groups collaborated to push for increased funding to low-performing schools and further integration. In short, they were on the same team.

But as the 1980s and 1990s approached—particularly after the release of A Nation at Risk—relations grew complicated. As Patrick McGuinn observes, "By the time you get to the 90s you have 30 years of ESEA funding and 20 years of school finance court cases, yet all of the racial achievement gaps are still there."\textsuperscript{185} As a result, civil rights groups began to look around for other strategies that might improve education. Standards-based reform, introduced by Bush and Clinton, became an attractive option. As Raul Gonzalez, Legislative Director of The National Council of La Raza (NCLR), recalls, "The big change for [NCLR] in the 1990s was the advent of standards-based reform... At that point people were forced to look at the old [ESEA] model of measuring inputs without..."

\textsuperscript{184} West, The National Education Association: The Power Base for Education, 103.

\textsuperscript{185} Patrick J. McGuinn, Professor of Political Science, Drew University. Interview with Author, February 17, 2010.
accountability.” It was a simple logic: previous reforms weren’t working, so civil rights groups looked for other options. And the option of standards-based reform looked particularly attractive.

During America 2000 and Goals 2000 this burgeoning rift was not that visible. Civil rights groups did not give much support to America 2000 because of the voucher provision—they have often been suspicious that privatizing the school system is just a means to re-segregate—and their poor relations with Bush and other Republicans. Additionally, they were skeptical that a move towards national testing by Republicans would further stigmatize failing minority students; during the legislative debate, civil rights leaders joined educators and education scholars in issuing a joint statement which called for “hitting the brakes” on creating a national test. This aligned them with the teachers’ unions. For Goals 2000, however, civil rights groups gave their support despite the lack of union enthusiasm. An important reason for this was that NESIC, the organization given the task to certify state testing and improvements, was required to have membership from civil rights groups. But continued Republican opposition watered down the bill, requiring very little of states and thus minimizing its real-world impact; this allowed the teachers’ unions to keep relatively quiet about the bill. And the election of a swath of small-government Republicans to Congress in 1994 reunited the progressives against a common enemy. Thus, there was little visible conflict between

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186 Raul Gonzalez, Legislative Director, National Council of La Raza. Interview with Author, March 5, 2010.
188 Ibid., 193.
189 McGuinn, interview.
these two crucial Democratic blocs. But the introduction of standards-based reform had planted a seed of discord.¹⁹⁰

_No Child Left Behind_. During the 2000 campaign, George W. Bush was acutely aware of the Democratic dilemma on education reform. On one shoulder stood the teachers’ unions, who were staunchly opposed to strong school choice or accountability reforms and were responsible for a huge percentage of campaign contributions; on the other were civil rights groups, who were becoming more supportive of major reform and provided a massive Democratic voting bloc. Bush consciously attempted to exploit this divide. McGuinn writes that “Bush made a very public effort to cast education reform and choice as a civil rights issue and to court the black and Latino vote during the campaign.” It was not coincidental, for instance, that he introduced an education reform proposal at a speech to Latinos in Los Angeles.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, as Bush said at the Republican National Convention, “too many American children are segregated into schools without standards [and] shuffled from grade to grade because of their age, regardless of their knowledge. This is discrimination, pure and simple—the bigotry of low expectations. And our nation should treat it like any other form of discrimination . . . we should end it.”¹⁹² This rhetoric highlighted the growing divide.

In general, civil rights groups bought Bush’s argument and supported NCLB. Key to this was the promise to disaggregate data on racial and economic lines, which would highlight inequalities for certain minorities. The inclusion of English Language Learners—students who are learning English as a second language—as a data category

¹⁹⁰ Gonzalez, interview.
¹⁹¹ McGuinn, _No Child Left Behind_, 159.
was particularly appealing to Hispanic rights organizations. Indeed, Bush put a special emphasis on reaching out to Hispanic constituencies. As Gonzalez elaborates, “[NCLR] had unprecedented access to Bush [and] the DOE. We had a stronger relationship with Bush than we did with Clinton, and even then we do now with the Obama administration.” Disaggregation was less of a priority for groups advocating for blacks, for the simple reason that most urban black children attend schools that are nearly all black; the disaggregation, then, yields little helpful data. But overall there is a tone of support. As Liz Smith, a Senior Policy Advisor to Representative Chaka Fattah and a liaison to the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), puts it, “The message [of NCLB] is that we expect all kids to learn, which is a radical departure from past policies. And the CBC strongly supports it.” On a basic level that is certainly a disagreement with the teachers’ unions.

Yet there was not much of a visible rift during the passage of the NCLB. This is partially because the Bush administration did not involve the unions very much in the debate over the bill. Though the NEA in particular raised concerns about the reliance on high-stakes testing throughout the Congressional debate, their voices were largely ignored. Neither the NEA nor the AFT officially opposed the bill, further papering over the potential conflict; indeed, they seemed to be reconciled that the situation had changed. As NEA President Bob Chase put it, “It's the law of the land now, and we want to make it work. It's unfortunate that different perspectives on how to do that are not

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193 Gonzalez, interview.
being heard.”197 But as the unions worked to undercut the legislation during implementation198 relations began to sour. Particularly damaging to relations were the NEA’s lawsuits which claimed that NCLB was an unconstitutional unfunded mandate.199 As Gonzalez explains, this was an antagonistic act which showed a lack of understanding of the history of civil rights law. “Pretty much every civil rights statute is an unfunded mandate; when you sign up for civil rights laws, you sign up for federal funding. If [the NEA] won that lawsuit, civil rights enforcement would be very difficult. . . This was a hostile and irreconcilable position.”200 In other words, civil rights groups felt that the unions were meddling with a law that they supported and expected to help underachieving students. The NAACP even filed a brief in the lawsuit on the side of the Bush administration, trumpeting the principle that states cannot ignore federal legislation intended to help minorities.201 Fundamentally, teachers’ unions represent teachers, and civil rights groups have many students in their constituencies. That created a major conflict. As Gonzalez continues:

[The unions] will argue otherwise, but it’s a teachers’ union and they have members whom they have to protect. The kids are not part of that union. [The unions] believed that NCLB was making their lives difficult, so they wanted it changed and eviscerated. I’m not saying that they were trying to throw kids under the bus, but they definitely ended up under the bus.202

That viewpoint is not universal among civil rights groups, however. For instance, Smith notes that the CBC has deep loyalty to the unions that cannot be cast aside: “The

198 Packer, interview.
200 Gonzalez, interview.
202 Gonzalez, interview.
teaching profession has always been very important to African-Americans. There are a lot of black teachers represented by teachers' unions, and unions have been important in enforcing civil rights provisions and ensuring middle-class wages [for African-American teachers]. Yet the rift is logical, to some extent: the interests of teachers, even minority teachers, can differ from those of students. When education reform was focused on increased funding, teacher and student interests were aligned; they both supported the idea. But standards-based reform introduced a system where the responsibility for failing students was pointed towards the teachers. And while teachers preferred that the crosshairs be aimed at school budgets and class sizes like before, civil rights groups wanted to try out the new arrangement.

Analysis

It appears that there was a change in the relationship between the teachers' unions and civil rights groups from the debates on America 2000/Goals 2000 and No Child Left Behind. Though the main source of the rift was the rise of standards-based reform, discord was not very visible until after the passage of NCLB, when the unions and civil rights groups ended up taking opposite positions on the merit of the law. The unions' choice to not officially oppose the law made the conflict invisible on paper, their actions spoke louder than their words: the legal challenge of the law was viewed as particularly hostile by civil rights groups.

The essential question, however, is whether the conflict impacted teachers' union political influence. Whether it contributed to the passage of NCLB is unclear. Former NEA President Reg Weaver denies a connection, claiming that "there has been some

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203 Smith, interview.
tension between unions and civil rights groups, but it had no connection to the passage of No Child Left Behind.  

McGuinn, on the other hand, believes the split between the unions and the civil rights movement is "the single most important thing that has happened politically to the unions in the last 20 years" due to the collapse of consensus and thus the teachers' union policy monopoly on education reform. One could argue that the split made it easier for Democrats to vote for the bill: after all, a key constituency of the party supported it. But it is also possible that the bill would have passed anyway, perhaps with a tighter vote. It is all speculation.

What is clear, however, is that the union-driven consensus on education in the Democratic Party has been smashed. For decades the unions were the revered authority on matters of education; their opinions were respected and largely adhered to. Democrats supported increased federal involvement in public education by boosting funding while Republicans stood in opposition. The simplicity of the policy debate made it very easy for civil rights groups to decide on which side they would stand.

But the rise of standards-based reform complicated matters. It forced all interested groups—including civil rights groups—to reevaluate their positions and decide which policy best fit their goals. The presentation of new viable policy options meant that groups with interests in public education could move away from the unions without abandoning hopes for federal education reform. Indeed, the rise of viable alternatives was what broke the unions’ iron grip and stirred up the education policy subsystem.

The rift between the civil rights groups and the unions, then, cannot be viewed in isolation as a factor in political influence. While civil rights groups are a powerful

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204 Weaver, interview.
205 McGuinn, interview.
example, the shift was systemic, impacting the entire education policy subsystem. To put it simply, an important part of union influence was the consensus that their education reform proposals—namely increased funding—were the best route to improving the schools. When that consensus disappeared, it seems likely that a substantial part of union political influence did as well. This issue merits further exploration.

7.2 “Open” or “closed” policy subsystem.

According to Baumgartner and Jones, the extent to which a policy subsystem includes input from outside groups can affect whether policy change occurs. A “closed” policy subsystem—where the few groups that are present support the status quo—is conducive to policy stability; an “open” subsystem that includes more reformist groups is conducive to policy change. Thus, a closed system increases teachers’ union political influence, while an open one could potentially be damaging.

To examine this issue, I analyzed it from two angles: first, the number and nature of the groups directly involved in Congressional policy debate, and second, the extent to which outsiders were involved in the issue. For the first, I analyzed the groups that testified in front of Congress on the subject of improving elementary and secondary education during hearings on America 2000, Goals 2000, and No Child Left Behind. I then determined whether each group was a traditional part of the educational policy subsystem—in other words, against standards-based reform—or a reformist “outsider. I then calculated both the absolute number and percentage of total testimonies from those outsider groups. For the second, I counted the number of times that those pieces of legislation were mentioned in the editorial and opinion pages of US newspapers. If this is indeed an important factor, we’d expect there to be a relatively closed system with low
public involvement during America 2000 and Goals 2000, and a more open system with higher public involvement during No Child Left Behind.

Congressional Hearings

The results of my analysis of Congressional hearings are summarized below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Number of Establishment Groups</th>
<th>Number of Reform Groups</th>
<th>Percentage of Reform Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>America 2000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals 2000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Child Left Behind</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*America 2000.* There was not much testimony from outside groups on the subject of improving elementary and secondary education during hearings on America 2000. Notable groups appearing were the establishment-minded Council of Chief School Officers, which appeared twice, and the reform group Committee on Economic Development, which made its first appearance.

*Goals 2000.* Hearings for Goals 2000 were overwhelmed by establishment groups, including two Teacher of the Year winners. Though the National Retail Federation testified in support of substantive education reform, in general traditional education groups dominated proceedings. Only one out of nine groups that testified was outside of the traditional establishment.

*No Child Left Behind.* The hearings on NCLB for the first time included representatives from charter schools—a school representative, a charter school student,

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206 For complete data see appendix 10.1.
and a parent of a charter school student. This dedication to school choice clearly indicates a move towards more reform-based dialogue. Additionally, there was testimony from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (now institute), one of the leading education reform think tanks. Headed by Chester E. Finn, Jr., the organization has been one of the loudest voices in support of standards-based education reform. Though more than half of the groups testifying were still part of the traditional educational establishment, forty-six percent of the groups were reform-minded.

Opinions/Editorials

Additionally, I calculated the number of times that America 2000, Goals 2000, and NCLB were mentioned in editorial/opinion sections in newspapers while the pieces of legislation were on the national agenda. The results are presented below:

![Graph showing appearances of education reform legislation in opinion/editorial sections of newspapers.](image)


208 I calculated this using a LexisNexis search. The search term was the piece of legislation in quotation marks; the dates I used were January 1 of the early year to December 31 of the following year; and I searched the section search term “Editorial and Opinion.”
The data indicate that editorial activity nearly doubled between America 2000 and Goals 2000. But during the debate on NCLB, the number of pieces more than *tripled*. This indicates a substantial increase in the roster of participants in the education policy debate, meaning that many more people were involved and expressing opinions on the issue. This is timed perfectly with a major policy change, suggesting that it may have diminished teachers’ union political influence.

*Analysis*

There is some evidence that the policy subsystem may have opened up prior to the passage of NCLB. Both the absolute number and percentage of reform groups testifying increased substantially throughout this period, indicating that the government was turning to more varied groups for insight; the participation of charter schools and think tanks in Congressional hearings is also a significant development. Both of these factors make plausible the argument that an increased roster of participants in the subsystem diminished teachers’ union political influence. Providing additional support is the huge increase of mentions of the legislation in editorial sections of newspapers. This indicates that many more individuals were weighing in on education reform and joining the policy subsystem. According to Baumgartner and Jones, this development should begin to break down the policy monopoly and thus diminish teachers’ union political influence. Yet the small amount of data makes it difficult to draw substantial conclusions about the nature of the policy subsystem. Thus, it can only be stated that there is a possibility that the opening up of the policy subsystem contributed to the decrease in teachers’ union political influence. This is a variable that merits exploration in greater depth.
8. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: OUTSIDE INITIATIVE FOR CHANGE

One factor that can impact teachers' union political is the presence of pro-reform forces. In this section I discuss several of these forces: the salience of education as an issue in the public; the extent to which education was discussed by Presidents on the campaign trail; party politics in Washington; and Presidential leadership.

8.1 Salience

One potential explanation for fluctuation in the political influence of teachers' unions is the salience of the education issue for the public. As Paul Burstein notes, it is generally accepted among scholars that public opinion at least has the potential to impact policy: if the public really wants something, it is possible that government will agree to deliver it, regardless of other factors such as party agendas and interest group activity. Thus, if public opinion calls for a policy with which the teachers' unions disagree and it becomes law, public opinion could be considered to have an impact on teachers' union influence.

To test this theory I examined polling data during the Presidential elections from 1988-2008. I gathered questions that asked respondents whether the issue of education was “very important,” “somewhat important,” “not too important,” or “not at all important” in deciding how they would vote in the election. I only used polls conducted by ABC News, NBC News, CNN, The Washington Post, and Gallup; when multiples were available, I averaged their results. The figure below shows the percentage of respondents

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who answered "very important" or "somewhat important," with an additional line adding the two values.

If public opinion were an important determinant of teachers' union influence, we would expect two main results, one for each of my case studies. First, in the election years relevant to America 2000/Goals 2000 (1988 and 1992) we would expect the public to have not viewed education as a very important issue. This is because during that period the unions were able to maintain their status quo; if public opinion were an important factor, high salience would make it difficult to maintain the status quo. Second, we would expect a substantial jump in public appreciation of education as a political issue in 2000, directly prior to the proposal and passage of NCLB; that would suggest that public opinion diminished union influence and spurred the major reform.

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America 2000/Goals 2000. The first expectation is not supported by the data. In fact, during the 1988 and 1992 elections the highest percentage of voters viewed education as “very important” or “important”—87% and 98%, respectively. Despite the importance of education to the electorate, however, there was no significant reform. This suggests that high issue salience of education does not lead to a decrease in union political influence. In fact, it seems to have little impact at all.

No Child Left Behind. The second expectation is somewhat supported by the data. In 2000 there was a substantial jump in the percentage of voters who viewed education as “very important”—40% to 59.5%—and “important”—85%-91%. This suggests that a change in public opinion may have hampered union influence and assisted in the passage of NCLB.

Analysis

The results of my analysis of this variable are inconclusive. Education had massive salience during the debates on America 2000 and Goals 2000, yet no substantial reform passed. Though salience had dropped overall since 1992, immediately prior to NCLB there was a substantial jump in salience. Perhaps the important element of public opinion that impacts teachers’ union political influence is not the absolute salience of education but the change—in other words, if education became a substantially more important issue, the influence of the unions diminishes. This would explain both the lack of reform in the early 1990s and No Child Left Behind. It is also worth noting that different polling questions can lead to conflicting results. For instance a June 2000 poll found that the public ranked education as most important out of eleven issues—a ranking
that had never been achieved before.\textsuperscript{211} This suggests that high salience may have diminished teachers' union political influence and led to policy change, which undermines the conclusions of my data. It is clear that this theory deserves further exploration with different polls and different issues.

\section*{8.2 Campaign Priority}

The connections between political figures, the media, and policy agenda-setting have been heavily studied by political scientists since McCombs and Shaw's groundbreaking 1972 article on the topic.\textsuperscript{212} Though an extended discussion of the issue is not appropriate here, the fundamental idea is that politicians communicate to the public through the mass media, and so media coverage can have a substantial effect on which issues become a priority for legislatures. In the last few decades Presidential candidates—especially with the advent of round-the-clock election coverage—have been successful in using the media to communicate their views to the public, and have even been able to turn their campaign priorities into national policy priorities. It is possible that the extent to which this occurs for education policy could have an effect on whether Congress seriously considers education reform, and thus union political influence.

To study this I tabulated the number of articles on US Presidential elections from 1988-2008 in \textit{The Washington Post} and \textit{The New York Times} that mentioned one of several topics related to education policy. If campaign priority is indeed a significant factor in determining union political influence, we would again have two expectations, one for each of the case studies. First, we would expect small amounts of media coverage

\textsuperscript{211} McGuinn, \textit{No Child Left Behind}, 149.

\textsuperscript{212} Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," \textit{The Public Opinion Quarterly} 36, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 176.
during the relevant elections for America 2000 and Goals 2000 (1988 and 1992), showing that education was not a major campaign priority and thus teachers' union influence was not threatened. Second, we would expect a jump in media coverage during the 2000 election, showing that education was a campaign priority and that led to the passage of NCLB and thus a decline in teachers' union political influence.

America 2000/Goals 2000. The data fit snugly with the first expectation. Education was apparently not a major campaign issue in 1988 and 1992, and union interests prevailed. A lack of emphasis on education protected the status quo.

No Child Left Behind. In 2000 both Bush and Gore claimed that education would be their number one domestic priority, and discussed it often on the campaign trail. This

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213 I used LexisNexis Academic for this search. All search terms are LexisNexis subject terms. My search criteria were as follows: AND US Presidential Elections AND Standardized Academic Testing OR Education Funding OR Education Regulation and Policy OR Primary & Secondary Education OR Primary & Secondary School Teachers OR Academic Tenure OR Teacher Compensation OR Teachers Unions; Sources were The Washington Post and The New York Times; Dates were July 1 – November 7 of each election year.
is reflected in the media coverage of education, which more than doubled from 1996-2000. Education was a campaign priority in 2000, and a short time later union political influence declined as evidenced by the passage of NCLB.

Analysis

There appears to be a strong connection between the priority of education in the preceding Presidential campaign and teachers’ union political influence. When the issue was not prioritized in 1988 and 1992, there was no damage to the status quo; when the issue was stressed by the Presidential candidates in 2000, significant reform legislation passed without union approval. This indicates that a President choosing education as a major campaign priority can diminish teachers’ union political influence.

8.3 Party Politics

One basic factor in determining the likelihood of policy change is Washington party politics. Each political party has a set of ideal policies, but that does not mean they will be able to enact them. Indeed, even when there is unified government—one party controls both Houses of Congress and the White House it can be very difficult for a party to make their agenda into law. Particular combinations of policy and party control, however, can make reform more likely.

I will analyze this variable in two parts. I begin by discussing the party platforms of the Republicans and Democrats during America 2000 (1988), Goals 2000 (1992), and NCLB (2000). Then I will match the party platforms with party control of government for each relevant election. I assume that the conditions most helpful for union political
influence are when one or neither party supports education reform and when there is divided government; the conditions most damaging to union political influence are when both parties support education reform and when there is unified government; and other combinations of conditions have a questionable effect on union influence.\textsuperscript{214} Thus, I expect that in 1988 and 1992 the conditions will either be helpful to union influence or have a questionable effect, and in 2000 the conditions will either be damaging to union influence or have a questionable effect.

\textit{America 2000.} The 1988 GOP platform shares much with traditional conservative education policies. The emphasis is on local control, particularly parental influence: as it says directly, "Parents have the primary right and responsibility for education."\textsuperscript{215} Yet it also includes support for accountability and standards-based reform: "Accountability and evaluation of performance at all levels of education is the key to continuing reform in education. We must reward excellence in learning, in teaching, and in administration."\textsuperscript{216} This smacks of federal intrusion into education, a development that was anathema to many Republicans. Yet, presumably due to the influence of Bush on the Republican Party, this significant departure from traditional policy was present in the platform.

The Democratic Party platform in 1988 dedicates only a single paragraph to education policy, suggesting the low priority of reform on the Democratic agenda. The central aspect of their position is a substantial increase in education funding, as well as a promise to work towards equalizing financing for school districts in each state.\textsuperscript{217} As a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{214} John J. Coleman, "Unified Government, Divided Government and Party Responsiveness," \textit{American Political Science Review} 93, no. 4 (December 1999): 821.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
whole the platform reflects the prevailing view of Democrats at that time: the way to improve education is to change the “inputs” of the system through better and more equitable funding mechanisms.

Goals 2000. The 1992 Democratic platform reflects Clinton’s somewhat un-Democratic views on education reform. For the first time we see smatterings of standards-based reform on the Democratic agenda: “It is not enough to spend more on our schools; we must insist on results.”218 There is less detail than the Republican articulation of the same idea, but its mere presence is significant.

The 1992 Republican platform still reflects Bush’s non-traditional views on education reform. There is even an acknowledgment of the radical nature of the policies: “President Bush is leading an education revolution. We applaud the President’s bold vision to change radically our education system.”219 This “bold vision” is similar to the one presented in 1988, with a focus on vouchers and school choice, broad national goals, and the implementation of standards. It is also worth noting that the platform is the first to blast teachers’ unions, specifically blaming the unions for Congress’ failure to pass America 2000. Indeed, the strategies of America 2000 “are opposed by special interest unions which have a power-grip on the policies of the past; more generally, the platform declares that “too many government and union rules have burdened our schools.”220

No Child Left Behind. The 2000 Republican platform represented a return to early 1990s policy. When Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and his small-government allies took over the Republican Party, they took standards-based reform out of the 1996

220 Ibid.
platform. The document even called for the end of "federal meddling in our schools" by eliminating the Department of Education and repealing Goals 2000. But George W. Bush managed to drag the party along with him in pursuing a larger federal role in education. The platform focuses on the historical failures of ESEA, particularly the human element. After $120 billion in federal funding for education, "the achievement gap between [disadvantaged] youngsters and their peers has only widened. The fiscal loss is not a good thing, but the human loss is tragic. We cannot allow another generation of kids to be written off." Though the platform specifically does not advocate for a national curriculum, it calls for "dramatic and swift improvement" in public education through accountability and "meaningful student achievement." These principles—all of which represented clear challenges to the status quo—guided No Child Left Behind.

The Democratic platform in 2000 also trumpeted the importance of education reform: as the platform notes, Presidential nominee Al Gore promised to make education his top domestic priority. His stance included both increased funding and a system of accountability. Indeed, both aspects are necessary for proper reform, and Americans recognize that. Though the platform acknowledges the successes of Clinton's education policy, it also claims that "The time for tinkering around the edges has long passed. We need revolutionary improvements in our public schools." One of these proposed improvements was that "teachers should be answerable for what goes on in their classroom"; furthermore, "Those teachers who do not need the highest quality

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224 Ibid.
standards should not be allowed to sully the reputation of the teaching profession."\textsuperscript{225} This specific mention of holding teachers accountable for student performance is a significant departure—one that certainly threatened the unions.

\textit{Analysis}

Presented in the table below are the data, including whether government was unified or divided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GOP Support for Reform?</th>
<th>Dem Support for Reform?</th>
<th>Unified Gov’t?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>America 2000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals 2000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No\textsuperscript{227}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For America 2000, the results are as expected. Only one party supported reform, and there was divided government; this was the most helpful to union political influence, and indeed union influence was strong. For Goals 2000, however, the ideal conditions are present: both parties support reform and there was unified government. We’d expect union influence to be at its lowest point in that scenario, but no major reform occurred. For NCLB, both parties supported reform, but there was no unified government. This leads to merely questionable impact on union influence, yet major reform occurred.

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{227} There was unified government until June 6, 2001.
The results seem to imply that party politics as measured by party platform and control of government is not a very good explanation for changes in teachers' union political influence; not all of the expectations were met. But there are historical details glossed over by my methodology that are likely relevant. In the 1992 election, Republicans officially supported standards-based education reform largely because of Bush's influence as President. But there was significant dissent within the party, and when Bush lost the election many Republicans became outspoken opponents of the policy. Thus, the apparent conditions that should diminish union influence under Clinton are exaggerated. Additionally, as I have mentioned, in 2000 government was barely divided: the Republicans had complete control until June 2001, when the Democrats gained a one-seat majority in the Senate. Thus, Bush nearly had the ideal conditions for standing up to union influence.

Despite the discouraging results, then, this variable has merit and warrants further exploration.

8.4 Presidential Leadership

In modern US politics, the President holds a uniquely powerful role in defining the policy agenda. Indeed, by defining policy priorities during the campaign and stressing certain issues when communicating with the electorate, the President has significant individual sway in creating policy change. My case studies are not exceptions to this. Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush all played important roles in the advancement of education reform, and thus the diminishing of union political influence. In this section, I discuss in detail the actions of these Presidents in order to
determine which characteristics of their leadership were most important in damaging union influence. If Michael Mintrom is correct in asserting that examining the role of individuals in policymaking "holds considerable promise for those interested in explaining contemporary policy change across a range of settings," we'd expect the Presidents to share leadership tendencies and strategies.

President George H.W. Bush — It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Bush's educational reform agenda was doomed from the start. Besides opposition from Democrats—particularly over his support for vouchers—many members of his own party were against a federal role in education. Yet, at least officially, he managed to shape the Republican position to his preferences. He forced Congress to at least consider the state of the education system and reexamine the federal role. Indeed, he saw himself as an education president; Congress, however, did not follow along.

His willingness to take on the status quo from his position makes him a policy entrepreneur with the potential to impact teachers’ union political influence. By convening a summit in Charlottesville with prominent governors from both parties, he showed a willingness to reach across the aisle to work towards policy change. He also built the set of national education goals—an important, innovative policy that would become law only a few years later. But he was largely acting alone in the federal government, which is not enough in our political system. Even when the "Leader of the Free World" advocates for an issue, there is no guarantee that reform will materialize. His significance lies in his boldness to buck party trends.

President Bill Clinton. Clinton's education policy was undoubtedly colored by his experience as Governor of Arkansas. As often happened during his political career, he

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228 Mintrom, Policy Entrepreneurs and School Choice, ix.
strayed from a traditional Democratic position on education to support standards-based reform. Indeed, he worked closely with Bush in crafting the national education goals that were proposed in America 2000 and Goals 2000. He was able to pull the Democratic Party along as he shifted to a more centrist position; standards-based reform has been a part of the Democratic platform since 1992.

Though Goals 2000 passed, it was a small and fairly weak piece of legislation that did not pose a significant threat to the teachers’ unions. But by establishing standards-based reform as a mainstay of the Democratic platform, he set the stage for major reform in the future. Just as he did with welfare reform, he was willing to compromise some of his positions to get the bill passed. He was also keenly aware of the political realities: a bill that called for too much federal involvement would not have passed, and he was fully aware of that. Additionally, he was willing to take the main elements of previous ideas and add to them. This was particularly evident in his decision to require that NESIC include members of civil rights groups. Even though Clinton did not succeed as much as he wanted, he moved the troops of education reform into position for attack.

President George W. Bush. When George W. Bush won the Republican Presidential nomination in 2000, he was determined to change public perceptions of conservatism. The repeated insistence that government was the problem had left a bad taste in America’s mouth; there were problems that needed solutions, and government was expected to play a role.\textsuperscript{229} Instead of campaigning on a standoffish federal role, Bush

\textsuperscript{229} Maranto, "The Politics Behind Bush's No Child Left Behind Initiative: Ideas, Elections, and Top-Down Education Reform," 111.
trumpeted a “government that both knows its limits and shows its heart.” This philosophy—termed “compassionate conservatism”—was a centerpiece of his campaign.

Perhaps the key manifestation of this idea was education policy. As Governor of Texas, Bush made standards-based education reform a priority, often to the chagrin of conservative Republicans. In fact, as Robert Maranto notes, as Governor Bush had “better relations with Texas’s pro-business Democratic state legislative leaders than with the often hard-Right state GOP.” His concern for struggling students, particularly minorities, was deep and genuine; he saw their hardship and wanted to rectify it.

But Bush’s individual mark on No Child Left Behind is not exclusively due to his policy preferences. As both Governor and President, Bush was focused on progress more than revolution. He didn’t want policies to get bogged down in details; ultimately, his goal was to get something done. As a result, throughout the political wranglings over NCLB, Bush was willing to compromise in exchange for legislative success. His choice to release a 28-page “blueprint” for NCLB instead of a full bill was shrewd; as Andrew Rudalevidge quotes a Democratic staffer, “This was a great political strategy. When you put out legislation, then you’re fighting for colons and sentences and subheadings. The White House had orders: don’t get bogged down in details.” This emphasis on general ideas helped push the bill through. Bush knew that ultimately Congress had to pass the bill for it to become law; ultimately legislators’ preferences were just as—if not more—important than his own.

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233 Rudalevidge, “No Child Left Behind: Forging a Congressional Compromise,” 36.
Besides the content of the bill, an important reason to hand legislation over to legislators is that they know how to get a bill passed. By letting the “big four” handle the bill, Bush greatly increased the likelihood of passage. They were aware that too much outside involvement could derail the bill, and so interest groups—including the NEA and the AFT—as well as other members of Congress were increasingly blocked from the process as it went along. This was especially evident at the end of negotiations, during the drafting of the conference report. As Packer notes, “The ‘big four’ and their top staff negotiated the final bill alone. No one saw the text of the final conference report until 24 hours before the bill was voted on. And in a 1,000 page bill it’s all about the details . . . The NEA had no input.”\(^{234}\) By trying to limit the number of fingerprints on the bill, the “big four” prevented the addition of amendments that would encourage partisan rancor. They crafted a bill that contained major reforms yet was palatable politically. Their

In the final analysis, Bush’s individual effort as a policy entrepreneur had major effect on the passage of NCLB. He brought ideas that were foreign to Republicans—in fact, they resembled those of New Democrats more than anyone else\(^ {235}\) —yet was able to drag his party along. He let Congress do most of the dirty work as he stood on the sidelines, ready to sign whatever landed on his desk.

One of the most confounding realities of NCLB was that most of the bill’s content was not new. Indeed, as Rudalevidge writes, “NCLB collected and encompassed proposals advanced in theory and substance for years, accreting Ronald Reagan-. George H.W. Bush-, and Bill Clinton-era initiatives into a single bill.”\(^ {236}\) Yet Bush put together a

\(^{234}\) Packer, interview.


\(^{236}\) Rudalevidge, “No Child Left Behind: Forging a Congressional Compromise,” 24.
fresh combination of old ideas to build a new education policy regime. He was able to do that by working extensively with members of both parties—the “Big Four” is the most prominent example of this—and encouraging legislative compromises. He also exhibited a humble dedication to making sure a law was passed. By handing his blueprint over to Congress, the more experienced members had the flexibility to do what they had to do to get the bill passed; an important part of this was locking many interested parties—including the teachers’ unions—out of the policy process. The teachers’ unions had been able to block this kind of major reform for nearly two decades. But the innovative, flexible, and consensus-building George W. Bush was the special ingredient that turned ideas into policy.

Analysis

The above discussion yields several important conclusions about the role of Presidential leadership in impacting teachers’ union influence. First, we see in all three Presidents a willingness to deviate from traditional party positions. Clearly defined, stable policy positions can be beneficial to groups that support the status quo; policy debate can be expected to go through the same motions. Thus, moving away from this is important for Presidents. Second, it is important to be willing to compromise. Whether by actually sacrificing some of your favored policy elements for the sake of progress or simply remaining open-minded when meeting with members of different parties, a President eager to lead policy change must recognize the reality that cooperation is required for maximum impact. Third, Presidents should be innovative. Even if the policies up for debate are not new, creative combinations of ideas and methods of
implementation can help garner support. It is important to be innovative but recognize that there is a greater policy framework that has limitations: an idea that is too novel is unlikely to find success. Fourth and last, the impact of Presidential leadership may not be immediately felt. George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton were crucial figures in the advancement of standards-based reform and the decline of union influence even though no substantial reform happened during their Presidencies. It is important to remember that change does not always come quickly; the steps can be small and invisible to the public. But that does not mean that there is no impact.

9. CONCLUSION

In the last two decades, federal education policy has experienced a number of massive changes. After many years of leaving control of public education to local governments, the federal government currently imposes standardized tests, demands educational progress, and collects huge amounts of data on school performance. So why did it take so long? Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, one of the reasons for the delay was the political influence of teachers' unions. Through clever maneuvering and a keen sense of their advantages, the unions were able to build and defend a public education system that worked to their interests. Teachers had phenomenal job security, good salary and benefits, near-complete command over their working conditions, and were not held accountable for student performance. That school-level power combined with a formidable state and national political organization gave them remarkable control over public education. They essentially had veto power over any objectionable legislation.
Yet in 2002 No Child Left Behind, which included several important challenges to the unions’ favorable status quo, was passed into law. So what changed? Why did the unions experience a decline in political influence? In this thesis I attempted to answer this question. I considered two basic explanations for union political influence—“the structure of the policy subsystem” and “outside initiative for change”—and subdivided them into several measurable variables. To do this I compared legislation from the 1990s, a higher point in union influence—America 2000 and Goals 2000—to No Child Left Behind, a lower point in influence. I tested the variables in both to determine which were important in explaining union influence.

9.1 Findings

Independent Variable 1: Structure of the policy subsystem

Coalitions with civil rights groups. Faltering relations with civil rights groups likely led to a decline in teachers’ union political influence. This example was part of a larger systemic collapse of the education reform consensus that was extremely damaging to teachers’ unions.

“Open” or “closed” policy subsystem. There is a possibility that an opening up of the policy subsystem led to a decline in teachers’ union political influence. Though my data indicated that it could be true, it was difficult to draw conclusions from the data set.
Independent Variable 2: Outside initiative for change

Salience. My data indicated that, while the absolute salience of education doesn’t seem to affect the political influence of teachers’ unions, a sudden increase in salience could decrease teachers’ union influence.

Campaign priority. I found that a high priority of education for a Presidential campaign damages teachers’ union political influence; a low priority, on the other hand, contributes to a continuation of the status quo.

Party politics. At first glance, my data indicate that party politics has a negligible impact on teachers’ union political influence. But in my analysis I found complicating factors that could have skewed the results. Thus, party politics remains a factor worth exploring.

Presidential leadership. I found several characteristics shared by Presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush. In my analysis I concluded that effective reformist Presidents deviate from standard party positions, are willing to compromise, and have innovative ideas. I also observed that the impact of Presidents may not be felt immediately.

9.2 Implications and Predictions

One of the benefits of my research is that my chosen variables are quite generalizable. Replace “education” and “teachers’ unions” with any other policy area which includes a dominant interest group and my model can be used to predict a decline in the interest group’s political influence. I also noted several opportunities for further
exploration of my variables. I acknowledge that there are imperfections in my methodology, and welcome critiques and improvements.

I believe there are several theoretical implications from my research. The theories I tested concerning the structure of the policy subsystem—coalitions with civil rights groups and whether the subsystem was “open” or “closed”—were supported by my evidence, with the caveat that it is difficult to draw conclusions from such a small data set. This gives credence to the advocacy coalition framework of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, as well as the punctuated equilibrium framework of Baumgartner and Jones. My research concerning the factors which contribute to outside initiative for change also has some theoretical benefits. While the relevance of Kingdon’s politics stream in the policymaking process is assumed, the relative importance factors that contribute to the appropriate political circumstances for policy change are debatable. My research raised doubts about the significance of salience of a policy issue, instead suggesting that the change in salience may be the driving factor in diminishing interest group political influence. Campaign priority of an issue was also supported by my research as an important factor in challenging interest group influence. Though my research seemed to call into question the importance of party politics as a factor, I concede weaknesses in my methodology. The lack of nuance was particularly a flaw: party platforms address policy priorities in general terms that may not be reflected in legislation; the simple criterion of whether government was unified or divided does not account for the size of the majority or other nuances in Congressional politics. My conclusions on the characteristics of Presidents who show policy leadership are intended to be building blocks for a larger structure to be added to by other scholars. Mintrom has identified many important
characteristics; there are certainly more that have not been identified. What is clear, however, is that the role of Presidential leadership merits further consideration.

More generally, my research supports the contention that interest group political influence is not strictly due to group characteristics. Indeed, the political circumstances and context can be crucial factors. Especially given the view described by Theodore Lowi and others that interest groups control policymaking, it is easy to overstate the inherent influence of interest groups. But if there is potent outside initiative for change, my research suggests, even the most powerful interest groups will have difficulty maintaining their political influence.

At the moment, it appears that the political influence of teachers' unions is continuing to decline. Despite the election of a Democratic President—something the unions hoped would bring the status quo back in line with their interests—federal policy continues to go against them, with standardized testing, linking student performance to teachers, and charter schools certain to be in the next ESEA reauthorization. In a sense, the battles against those reforms have already been lost: both Republicans and Democrats see them as essential components of federal education legislation. The education policy subsystem is settling into a new status quo, and it is considerably less favorable to the unions than the previous model.

In regards to education reform in the Obama administration, it is difficult to apply my model directly; my model measures strictly a decline in influence, and so the variables are not reversible. For instance, the campaign priority of education in 2008 is considerably lower than it was in 2000. That does not necessarily mean, however, that we

should expect a steep increase in union influence during the Obama administration, or at least the same kind of influence. Indeed, the types of education reforms the unions have historically opposed seem to be inevitable at this point.

So where do the unions go from here? Again, several key battles have been lost, and their veto power over education legislation seems to have vanished. But that doesn’t mean that they will be powerless. They still have huge membership, massive funding, control over local contracts, and remain an extremely important part of the Democratic caucus. Regarding the last of those, despite the unions’ harsh words towards Obama, it is extremely unlikely that they will begin to support Republicans; their desire to cut spending is irreconcilable with the basic union desire for more funding. Though it is tempting to claim that given this reality the unions have no political leverage, that is not the case: they can always choose to stay home on election day, forgoing their normal phone banking and get-out-the-vote efforts. The Democrats do not want to lose that political organization, and so are unlikely to ignore the unions completely.

But, beyond the partisan politics, there is another reason why the teachers’ unions will never be completely locked out of education reform politics: you can’t reform education without teachers. Though the unions have often become a punching bag for critics of public education in the US, the reality is that the unions represent the people who are implementing the reforms; if they don’t embrace a policy, it will never work. Policymakers are fully aware of this. And so, regardless of partisan strife and pointed language, education policy and teachers’ unions will always be tied together.
## 10. APPENDIX

### 10.1 Congressional Hearing Data

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- National School Boards Association |
| July 24-25, 1991  | Elementary, Secondary, and Higher Education                      | - Council of Chief State School Officers  
- Committee for Economic Development |
| **GOALS 2000**     |                                                                 |                                                                           |
- National Center for Research in Mathematical Sciences Education, University of Wisconsin  
- Howard University |
| April 22, May 4, 18, 1993 | Hearings on H.R. 1804, Goals 2000: Educate America Act          | - National Retail Federation  
- University of Michigan School of Education |
- 1993 National Teacher of the Year  
- 1992 Kansas Teacher of the Year  
- San Francisco Unified School District |
| **NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND** |                                                                 |                                                                           |
| Mar. 2, 2001      | Improving Academic Achievement with Freedom and Accountability   | - Noble Street Charter High School  
- parent of charter school student  
- Chicago Charter School Foundation  
- Chicago Public Schools  
- Illinois Board of Education |
| March 8, 2001     | Measuring Success: Using Assessments and Accountability To Raise Student Achievement | - Business Coalition for Excellence in Education  
- Educational Testing Service |
| March 13, 2001    | Department of Education FY2002 Budget Priorities                 | - Thomas Fordham Foundation  
- Arizona Department of Education |
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11. WORKS CITED


Weaver, Reg. Former NEA President. Interview with Author, February 18, 2010.