

CHAPTER I

IDEOLOGY AND SELF-INTEREST

The United States is beset by many serious domestic and international challenges, many of which are decades-old. Over the years, details change but the continuity is remarkable. This study begins in 1961 with the presidency of John F. Kennedy. In the 1960s, during the presidencies of Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon, intense national debates occurred over a wide range of domestic issues including separation of church and state (especially prayer in public schools), freedom of protected and unprotected speech, labor relations, privacy rights, racial discrimination (segregation and voting rights), the rights of those accused of crimes, crime reduction, the rights of those found guilty of crimes (especially the issue of capital punishment), gun control, urban blight and housing shortages, agribusiness subsidies, international trade, monopolies and anti-trust, deficit spending by the federal government, federal spending growth, economic growth and inflation, the federal tax structure especially with regard to fairness and the impact of taxation on economic growth, government regulation of business, the minimum wage, unemployment, education funding and the quality of public schools, air and water pollution, transportation problems such as traffic jams and funding problems in mass transit systems, abortion, consumer protection, availability of health care, and transportation safety. This list is suggestive but not exhaustive, and each of these policy areas contains sub categories.

Fifty years later the problems associated with these policy areas are still with us and remain subjects of conflict. These problems were not ignored by the federal government or the states and localities. To the contrary, all of them were addressed in the 1960s and intervening decades to the present, and many were at least partly resolved. In some cases, initiatives meant to deal with these problems were relatively successful, but in other instances they failed.

With time we have learned something about what works and what does not, but the lessons of experience are not absolute. What we

learn depends to a substantial degree on our self-interest and ideological perspectives. For example, a company that sells its products abroad (such as Caterpillar, a manufacturer of heavy earth movers) is likely to favor free trade. Caterpillar's policy position would probably be that increases in U.S. tariffs on imports generate increased tariffs by foreign governments against U.S. exports including Caterpillar products. Self-interest would dictate this position. As another example, those who might have no association with companies hurt by or benefitting from international trade, but based on economic theory and experience, might believe that free trade helps the U.S. and world economies overall. This is an ideological position that would be as immune from counter arguments as the identical self-interested policy position held by Caterpillar. Whatever lessons experience with international trade has taught over past decades is filtered through self-interest and/or ideology.

As valuable as social scientists can be in evaluating highly complex social and economic problems, they are not immune from the biases of self-interest and ideology. For example, the question of whether firearms owned by law abiding citizens increase or decrease violence has generated a substantial literature containing statistical issues that can be comprehended only by those with considerable research training and experience. But virtually all of these methodologically sophisticated pro- or anti-gun control studies reveal biases in prefaces, early paragraphs, and first chapters. For example, the pro- or anti-gun control positions of Kates & Mauser (2007), deSouza, Macinko, Alencar, Malta, & Neto (2007), Moorhouse & Wanner (2006) and Kleck & Patterson (1993) are obvious in early pages and throughout their works.

Policy analysts sometimes try to convey the impression that their work is scientifically objective by criticizing the self-interest and ideological agendas of others. For example, a study of welfare policy (Marmor, Mashaw, & Harvey 1992, 1) begins with a criticism of the "persistent pessimism" of "antigovernment ideologues." After reading this sentence on page 1, paragraph 1 our suspicion that the authors are ideologue-champions of welfare programs is aroused. To

their credit, the authors observe near the end of their study that ideology permeates their work, and they propose a rule which reads: “Ideology Drives Analysis.” (p. 237, italics in original) They continue: “Each bit of social welfare policy talk must...be examined for its ideological perspective. Only in that way can the critical observer begin to understand how such talk is to be interpreted.” (p. 237) However, after making this perceptive and useful point the authors renew their attack on conservative critics of welfare programs and then briefly and gingerly criticize liberals. They close with a portrait of themselves standing objectively astride both left and right (p. 238). We would, by the way, supplement the Marmor, Mashaw, and Harvey rule by asserting: Ideology and self-interest drive analysis.

This work by Marmor, Mashaw, and Harvey is only one example. We could have selected public policy analyses in virtually any field (e.g., gun control, education, criminal rights, or international trade) with the same result except that many authors would not have been as honest. This is not to suggest that almost invariably biased policy studies have no value. They often contain useful data and analysis, but most such efforts should be seen as weapons fired at the other side, not objective science. Since we will be arguing that self-interest and ideology are at the center of debates concerning how initiatives can resolve policy problems, we must examine these concepts to understand how they affect public policy.

Self-Interest

Self-interest portrayed as the only motive of political behavior extends back to Niccolo Machiavelli (1977) and Thomas Hobbes (1909) whose works appeared in the 1500s and 1600s, respectively. Self-interest as the lone or primary motivation of interest groups (Bentley 1967, first published in 1908; Truman 1960, first published in 1951) and individuals also has a long history and remains a popular idea among scholars and journalists (e.g., Downs 1957; Almond 1991; Buchanan & Tullock 1967, 9; Bowler, Donovan, & Karp 2006; DeMesquita 2009).

At first glance, self-interest seems to be an intuitively correct way to explain events in government, but in practice its meaning is often

unclear because it is frequently defined broadly to encompass all behavior (Monroe 1991, 4-6). Whatever an individual or group does is viewed as self-interested (Truman 1960; Olson 1973; Barry & Hardin 1982; Hylland 1992, 52; Buchanan 1972 16-22). A definition of self-interest that encompasses all behavior stands on the brink of circularity and triviality (Mansbridge 1990, 254-263; Holmes 1990, 269). The basic logic is that when, for example, a member of Congress supports a bill he or she does so out of self-interest. Question: How do we know? Answer: Because the member of Congress is supporting the bill. This interpretation of self-interest can even mean that charitable giving and greedy selfishness both reflect self-interest, making philanthropy indistinguishable from avarice because both make an individual feel good. All but the most cynical believe that in some sense non self-interested or idealistic behavior can occur, although in practice we may not be able to distinguish precisely between selfish and selfless actions; rapaciousness is often disguised by conspicuous altruism. Self-interested members of Congress often justify votes as brave defenses of high principle when they merely support the economic concerns of their districts or their personal ambitions.

How can the notion of self-interest as the only motivator explain without circularity ethical beliefs such as religious charity? James Buchanan (1972, 19) and Anthony Downs (1998, 19) describe the charitable self-interested person as not valuing himself or herself any more than any other part of society. (See also Arrow 1975, 17; Buchanan & Tullock 1967, 9-18; Mueller 1997; Olson 1973, 6, fn 6). This is a standard reserved for saints.

In wrestling with the distinction between self-interest and non self-interest Amartya K. Sen (1990, 31) offers a distinction between sympathy and commitment. Sympathy means that our concern for others affects our own happiness. Sen suggests that sympathetic behavior is self-interested behavior: we gain satisfaction from charitable works. He defines commitment as a "person choosing an act that he believes will yield a lower level of personal welfare to him than an alternative that is also available to him." (p. 32) This distinction has at least two drawbacks. First, it requires that we gain

access to a decision-maker's inner-most thoughts and emotions (Jencks 1990, 53). Indeed, many authors who promote the exclusive use of self-interest to explain political behavior and many others who oppose such a perspective (Mansbridge 1990; Phelps 1975) assume that they can explore decision-makers' thinking. A second problem with Sen's distinction is that it is not consistent with common usage. A definition of non self-interested decision-making that prohibits sympathy (surely a large part of charitable giving and political action on behalf of the disadvantaged) is so narrow as to exclude many acts that most of us would not regard as self-interested. It is not necessary for social science definitions to be consistent with common usage, but when they are radically different, confusion is likely.

Self-Interest and Ideology

We can bypass the theoretical distinctions between self-interested and non self-interested behavior by observing governmental activities such as legislative policy making which, it happens, are also our primary concern. Focusing on legislative policy formulation, interest group activity, and other observable phenomena removes the impossible assumption that we can read decision-makers' minds. We can only study what we can observe.

In the legislative setting most policy proposals are garbed in a concern for the general good or public interest. All significant initiatives intended to promote the public interest are based on general principles that describe the public interest and prescribe how the public interest can be enhanced by the proposed policy. Such general principles are ideologies.

Based on Parsons (1951, 349), Drucker (1974, 43), Mullins (1972, 510), and Freedman (2003, 32) we define an ideology as an action oriented model of people and society. The logical alternative to pursuing the public interest in the light of ideologies would be intuition or case by case judgment, but virtually all instances of policy initiatives that claim to promote the public interest (e.g., consumer protection or tariff increases) are based on ideological strictures, not ad hoc determinations. Teun A. Van Dijk (1998, 8) defines ideologies as: "*the basis of the social*

representations shared by members of a group.” [italics in original] He adds that group members act according to their social beliefs regarding what is “good or bad, right or wrong...” This definition is consistent with most versions of ideology, but it places insufficient emphasis on policy prescription and advocacy.

The logic of self-interest is confined to favoring or opposing a policy because it benefits or hurts me or mine (Buchanan 1972, 19; Downs 1998, 19). Like ideology, self-interest is action oriented, but it is not concerned with the public interest. However, as we have already noted, ideology and self-interest are often linked when ideology is used to camouflage self-interest (Alesina & Rosenthal 1995).

We still have not defined self-interest in a way that permits an observer to label behavior in a legislature or other public setting as either self-interested or non self-interested. Non self-interested behavior includes ideology as well as unsystematic actions such as random charity. We use David O. Sears’ and Carolyn L. Funk’s (1990, 148) definition of self-interest: “(1) short-to-medium term impact of an issue (or candidacy) on the (2) material well-being of the (3) individual’s own personal life (or that of his or her immediate family)”. This definition of self-interest excludes: “(1) long-term self-interest, (2) nonmaterial aspects of well-being (e.g., spiritual contentment, self-esteem, social adjustment, social status, or feelings of moral righteousness), and (3) interests that affect the well-being of the individual's group but not that of the specific individual...” (p. 148). The exclusions fall mostly or entirely in the realm of non self-interested behavior (Stigler 1971; Quirk 1990; Downs 1957, 6-7).

The Sears-Funk definition of self-interest is usable. While differentiating between self-interest and non self-interest is sometimes difficult in practice, it would at least sometimes be possible to accomplish without gaining access to a decision-maker’s mind. Furthermore, the Sears-Funk definition makes relatively clear what counts as self-interest and non self-interest, and, unlike Sen’s odd distinction between sympathy and commitment, their definitions appear consistent with normal usage.

Self-interested behavior is or tries to be rational. By definition a

rational individual pursues a goal in the most efficient manner possible (Lindblom 1959; Downs 1957, 4). The most efficient way may be the least expensive, the quickest, the safest, or fit any number of other situational circumstances (Monroe 1991, 4). Congressional district or state self-interest is usually thought to include such matters as economics, race, and urbanization. This is not a study of the U.S. Congress, but Congress makes a useful environment within which to think about and observe self-interest and ideology because congressional party discipline (as opposed to polarization) is less rigorous than it is in parliamentary settings, and the effects of congressional district or state characteristics on roll call votes can be measured. Partly because of these properties, Congress is one of the most studied areas in contemporary political science.

Reelection is probably most legislators' central self-interested concern (Mayhew & Fiorina 1974; Downs 1957). Gaining personal wealth may also be part of a legislator's self-interest agenda (Caro 2002). The self-interest connection between constituents (with specific economic, racial, and social characteristics) and legislator is often clear. In a democracy the relationship of constituents to legislator requires that the legislator's decision-making to some degree adhere to often self-interested constituent wishes. This is the nature of representative democracy. In addition to self-interest based on economics, race, and the rest, each congressional district and state has certain ideological predilections. A district or state's self-interest will frequently be consistent with those ideological tendencies, and voters often convince themselves that what is in their self-interest also promotes a broader public interest. In practice, it is not easy to separate ideology from district or state self-interest based on economics, race, and social interests. However, on occasion some ideological orientations will be unrelated to conventional self-interest.

Beside constituents living within a district or state, others who play an important part in the state/district-legislator relationship include a legislator's electoral supporters, especially her or his inner circle. Eric Uslander (1999) and others characterize a typical legislator's core supporters as far more ideologically extreme than

the citizenry as a whole, and more inclined to think ideologically (Converse 1964, 206-261; Converse 1975, 4, 75-169; Kinder & Sears 1985, 670; Jacoby 1994, 336-361) although some core supporters might also be more intensely self-interested than ordinary constituents.

Some studies of the part ideology plays in roll call voting distinguish between the ideological orientations of a congressional district or state and a legislator's personal ideological views. A discrepancy between a legislator's ideological views and that of his or her district or state could be common if for example, a substantial minority voted for the legislator's opponent in the last election or sizeable numbers moved into or out of the district; under such circumstances a finding of an ideological difference between legislator and district or state would be trivial. But a difference between a legislator and electoral supporters or inner circle is likely to be narrower. To a significant degree, legislators are creatures of their district or state or at least the parts of the district or state that support them in elections. They often are born and raised there, and even if they come from elsewhere, they may gravitate to locations with which they are ideologically compatible.

The national parties also influence congressional voting. The Republican and Democratic parties are measurably different ideologically (Alesina & Rosenthal 1995; Knuckey 2001, 337-358; Levine, Carmines, & Huckfeldt 1997, 19-34). In addition to these ideological differences, some of the policy positions congressional party leaders take are self-interested in a partisan sense. They are intended to gain the election or reelection of party faithful in the House, Senate, and/or the presidency thereby maintaining their own leadership roles.

Many scholarly and journalistic discussions of self-interest and ideology carry an overt or covert sense that ideologically based behavior is morally superior to self-interested conduct. In an odd parallel, others argue that ideological decision-making is inferior to self-interested decision-making because ideologues are fanatics. Considering that self-interested parties and ideologues can usually be found on all sides of all public policy disputes, it seems likely that

neither self-interested nor ideological decision-making enjoys a monopoly on virtue. Nevertheless, self-interested and ideological players usually approach policy debates from differing vantage points.

Self-Interest and Policy Formulation

As noted above, self-interest is typically the first place practicing politicians, journalists, and political scientists turn for an explanation of congressional votes or other stages in policy formulation (e.g., “follow the money”). However, scholars whose primary concern is self-interest and political behavior have produced surprisingly little understanding of policy formulation beyond obvious observations. For example, they would be likely to observe that a member of Congress representing the Detroit area is seeking federal assistance for the U.S. auto industry or the City of Detroit more out of self-interest more than ideology.

So-called public choice theorists who attempt to explain occurrences in government and politics using economic models based on self-interest have enjoyed little success in producing unobvious insights that are also valid. One of the best known is Anthony Downs (1957, 295) who offered a theory of party convergence during elections. He compared parties to business entrepreneurs trying to produce and sell a product (e.g., a platform or candidate) that will attract the most customers (i.e., voters). Downs (1957, 296) explicitly ruled out the possibility of party members having a goal other than gaining the most votes. Downs’ position was somewhat consistent with casual observations of elections where parties in general elections or individual candidates in primaries carefully trim their positions to attract majorities of voters. However, it is not uncommon to observe ideologue-voters damaging their party’s chances of winning a general election by selecting a candidate in the party primary who is an ideological extremist by the standards of the electorate overall. Assuming that the opposition party selects a moderate who is more likely to win the general election by capturing the ideological center, the opposition party is adhering to Downs’ theory, and the extremist ideologues are learning a lesson that may induce them to change their losing ways in the next party primary.

Downs views ideologies as only a “means to the end of obtaining

votes” (1957, 114). Citizens’ ideological preferences may be real and sincere, but Downsian parties take positions vis-a-vis citizen ideological beliefs only to win elections. Because most voters are ideological moderates occupying the middle of a normal distribution, each party opportunistically targets the ideological midpoint (Downs 1957, 135). Citizens may vote according to various mixtures of self-interest and ideology, but party activists and party candidates transmute citizen attitudes into marketing strategies designed for the sole self-interested purpose of attracting a majority of the electorate.

The reader will have no difficulty supplying examples of the kind of self-interested behavior that Downs describes, but as we noted above, his theories sometimes founder on the well documented fact of ideologically motivated behavior among political activists and professionals. At the national level Downs’ predictions regarding parties gravitating to the ideological center often are incorrect; the major reason is ideology. Countless observers have noted the trend of Democratic Party members of Congress becoming more liberal and Republicans more conservative (e.g., Ladewig 2010; Poole & Rosenthal 2007; Carson, Crespín, Finocchiaro, & Rohde 2007).

Although public choice theorists such as Downs (1957), Buchanan (1989), Richard E. Wagner and James Gwartney (1988), and Robert Higgs (1988) pay relatively little attention to public policy formulation, another group of scholars who also see political behavior as almost exclusively motivated by self-interest study policy formulation attentively. The most prominent among them are the interest group theorists David Truman (1960) and Arthur Bentley (1967). Interest groups (a.k.a. pressure groups) can be ideologically based, but the interest group literature concentrates overwhelmingly on entities motivated by self-interest. Truman (1960, 33) defines an interest group as a number of people who “on the basis of one or more shared attitudes” make claims on other numbers of people with shared attitudes regarding the “establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behavior that are implied by the shared attitudes.” The shared attitudes are the interests (p. 34). Truman, like most public choice theorists and virtually all interest group theorists, devotes little space to defining

self-interest. And, in his comprehensive review of interest group theory, G. David Garson (1978) virtually ignores ideology. All shared attitudes whether self-serving or idealistic are considered self-interest by these scholars. For interest group theorists, ideology is just another interest indistinguishable from economic self-interest. Again, our position and that of many others is that the two differ. The difference is important.

Political Ideology

Earlier we defined ideologies as action oriented models of people and society. The phrase “action oriented” refers to the directions contained in ideologies regarding how political, economic, and societal issues should be resolved (Drucker 1974; Eccleshall, Geoghegan, & Wilford 1984; Van Dyke 1995; Apter 1964a; Reichley 1981; Minar 1961; McClosky 1968; Freedman 2003). Political ideologies contain simplifications of reality or generalizations often called models. Edith Stokey and Richard Zeckhauser (1978, 8) define a model as: “a purposeful reduction of a mass of information to a manageable size and shape...” Ideologies share this characteristic of simplification with all fields of science and engineering. The simplification inherent in models is necessary to such specialists as physicists, aeronautical engineers, economists, and users of a political ideology because the worlds of physics, aerodynamics, economics, and politics are incredibly complex. No one can think about any of these matters without drastically reducing them to whatever basic elements are important to a task at hand (Oakeshott 1984, 227). For example, in aircraft design a foot long solid plastic model of an airplane in a wind tunnel can teach designers critical information about a new shape for a wing. The plastic model cannot fly, but it is a useful simplification for some purposes.

Since our immediate topic is political ideology, we must define political, politics, and other related terms all of which are also important in a study of self-interest. Politics can be thought of as a process of conflict resolution in a society. Conflict is a part of life everywhere and can stem from racial differences, class divisions, geography, natural resource shortages, and a virtually limitless array of other sources. In the world of politics conflict resolution rarely

means conflict ending. Conflict resolution usually results in a temporary reduction in the intensity of conflict. Political issues and the conflict they engender tend to endure year after year, decade after decade, and in some instances century after century.

A widely used definition offered by political scientist David Easton (1968, 430) is that politics is the authoritative allocation of values for a society. Authority refers to the legitimate or acceptable use of power. Society as a whole defines, sometimes by default, what is and is not legitimate. Power may be defined as the ability to get someone to do something they would not ordinarily do (Dahl 1963, 40). The values in Easton's definition of politics may be monetary or less tangible values such as religious freedom or privacy. Some of the allocation of values for a society is performed by the economic system through the marketplace. But, politics and government is uniquely the realm of legitimated power or authority, ultimately backed by the potential or actual application of force, used to decide the allocation of some values. According to Harold Lasswell (1958), politics answers the questions who gets what, when, and how. Those questions are accompanied by conflict, and the authoritative answering of those questions is conflict resolution.

Another term, public policy, also requires definition. Public policy may be thought of as the product or output of government. Public policy consists of laws, rules and regulations, executive orders, and judicial decisions, among other things including actions taken or purposely avoided. Public policy can take the form of taxes, appropriations, requirements for new safety equipment in automobiles, and countless other answers to Lasswell's questions.

Political ideologies, with their action orientation, specify how the conflict resolution process should be structured and the priorities placed on differing values. Also, political ideologies sometimes provide specific answers to Lasswell's questions. People who have accepted an ideology's precepts are sometimes referred to as ideologues, a term often used pejoratively. We use it in a neutral manner with no derogatory meaning attached.

Returning to discussions in previous sections, there are differences between adhering to a political ideology and being selfless

or selfish. Someone who appears to be an ideologue may be entirely selfless, entirely selfish, or a mixture of the two. We cannot know where on the selfless-selfish spectrum he or she resides because we do not have access to his or her mind. However, there is still a valid distinction between ideological behavior and behavior that is purely self-interested. We can observe the content of political ideologies, the characteristics of a political actor's base (e.g., a state's or district's economic characteristics, racial divisions, or degree of urbanization), how votes relate to ideologies and a political base, and characteristics of other legislators depending on the nature of a particular issue. Debates often reveal or suggest the ideological and/or self-interested foundations of initiatives as proponents and opponents make assertions regarding how initiatives will resolve a problem.

Ideology, Self-Interest, and Policy Formulation

How do ideology and self-interest affect policy formulation? In beginning to answer this question we continue our focus on legislative policy formulation while recognizing that policy formulation also occurs elsewhere in government especially in the executive branch. Clearly, district/state constituent and legislative core supporter self-interest as defined by Sears and Funk (1990) are important and sometimes the dominant influences on congressional votes. But we will see that at least sometimes in particular policy areas ideology is as important as or more important than self-interest.

We repeat that in practice separating self-interest and ideology often is not easy. In some instances ideologies merely reflect economic self-interest, race, and other variables that make up self-interest (Downs 1957, 96-97). So, a member of Congress from a port city that benefits from international trade will defend free trade and criticize tariffs using ideologically inspired free market arguments. And, a member of Congress from a rust belt city hurt by international competition will defend tariffs and other constraints on international trade using protectionist theories possibly laced with conservative ethnocentrism, liberal environmentalism, and labor union populism. In these examples ideology is merely a tool for promoting self-interest. That the relationships between self-interest

and ideology are probably not as simple as the ideology-as-mirror-of-self-interest theory suggests is demonstrated by the common observation that there are wealthy liberals, socialists, and revolutionaries as well as working class conservatives.

These apparent anomalies do not prove the independent impact of ideology on political behavior, but they show that factors other than self-interest, one of which might be ideological thought, can affect political behavior. Even if in some instances ideological positions can be predicted by legislators' self-interest, ideology remains the central language by which political actors communicate (Kingdon 1973, 246; Jackson & Kingdon 1992; Drucker 1974, xi, 6).

The importance of ideology in day-to-day politics and government is reinforced by the common use of ideological terminology by journalists and politicians including some of the most pragmatic of both breeds (Schneider 1979, 3-5). The widely respected *CQ Weekly Report* regularly refers to members of Congress as occupying points on the ideological spectrum, and members of Congress as well as presidential candidates commonly characterize themselves and each other using the language of ideology.

Dominant ideology

Marxists sometimes attempt to explain the complicated relationship between class self-interest and ideology with the notion of the dominant ideology. They argue that wealthy elites in western democracies create and promulgate an ideology that convinces the working class to accept capitalism despite its harmful effects on workers (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner 1980, 1). These elites and their ideologue-retainers such as newspaper editors and academics are often unaware of the part they are playing in deceiving the working class. Their role, as they see it, is to understand and explain the operation of the political system, economy, and society. Some play the part of defenders of the status quo (e.g., editors of the *Wall Street Journal*) while others act as critics (e.g., editors of the *New York Times*) even though they are little more critical than editors of the *Journal*. As some Marxists see it, the illusory debate between defenders and critics reinforces the

status quo even more firmly than would a monotone defense of the status quo (Thompson 1990, 55).

Marxist Louis Althusser (1976, 18) sees the dominant ideology as saturating all of society including churches, political parties, labor unions, families, “some schools,” and “most newspapers.” To the degree that it is valid, this thesis goes some distance toward explaining how members of the working class can be conservative, but it does not easily account for the commonly observed radical members of the elite.

John B. Thompson (1990, 90) notes that dominant ideology theorists view any consensus regarding the social order as molded by the all-encompassing dominant ideology. With the dominant ideology being so pervasive, the elite easily controls everything while everyone else is resigned to or unaware of their subjugation. Thompson (1990, 91) rejects the dominant ideology thesis, arguing that:

there is little evidence to support the view that such values and beliefs are widely shared by members of subordinate groups. Hence the dominant ideology thesis, in so far as it presumes the dominant values and beliefs comprise an ideology which works like cement, fails to explain what it seeks to explain, namely, why it is that members of subordinate groups act in ways which do not undermine the social order.

Thompson lodges additional objections against the Althusser thesis: “this theory tends to adopt a *class-reductionist approach to the modern state*. That is, the state is seen, primarily and ultimately, as an institutional mechanism through which class power is sustained.” (92-93, italics in the original) He continues:

It is no doubt the case that some aspects and activities of the state can be understood in terms of the long-term interests of the dominant class, but it could hardly be maintained that state institutions are unresponsive to the demands of other classes and major interest groups, nor could it be plausibly argued that *all* aspects and activities of the modern state...can be analysed in terms of class interests and class relations (p. 93, italics in original). Thompson also objects to the notion that classes are the

only or even the primary centerpiece of power relationships. There are all manner of subordinate-superordinate relationships other than class including sex, age, ethnic origin, and religion. The study of ideology must include them all.

Nicholas Abercrombie, Stuart Hill, and B. Turner (1980) find little empirical evidence to support the dominant ideology thesis. Public opinion polls conducted in Western democracies reveal significant working class resentment against rulers, a phenomenon that would not exist if dominant ideologies were functioning. Workers deluded by a dominant ideology would be satisfied. The resentful workers' failure to revolt is partly due, not to the dominant ideology, but to the market system's strong economic growth combined with redistributational policy reforms such as unemployment compensation and government provided health care (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner 1980, 153). Industrialized societies make the status quo attractive, while revolution produces severe and costly dislocations (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner 1980, 167; Marshall, Newby, Rose, & Vogler 1988, 153). Another barrier to revolt is that alternatives such as the command economies of the old Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites, Communist China, and present day North Korea and Cuba were or are economic failures and political monstrosities. Van Dijk (1998, 181) also finds reason to doubt the dominant ideology thesis:

Much research suggests that the general ideological influence of the media is pervasive, especially in those domains where media users have no alternative ideological sources or personal experiences that are blatantly inconsistent with the dominant ideologies as conveyed and reproduced by the mass media, as is typically the case for ethnic ideologies or foreign policy ideologies. On the other hand, much contemporary research emphasizes that even where such ideological control takes place, media users are active and flexible and able to reject persuasive ideological statements where necessary, or adapt such ideologies to their own needs, interests or circumstances. Indeed, there are many specific examples where pervasive ideological influence of the elites through mass media did not take place at

all.

Van Dijk (p. 181) argues that to understand such mixed results a great deal of information about groups, their ideologies, and their superordinate-subordinate relationship is needed.

Ideology as an aid to self-interested thought

For a purely self-interested politician or ordinary voter a decision is probably little more than the brain referring to the strongest interest or several in combination and acting on it (them). For example, a poor person favors a tax increase on the rich because it may result in more programs benefitting the poor. That is the beginning and end of decision-making. A wealthy individual favors taxes that weigh more heavily on the poor than the rich. An African-American favors affirmative action; a white opposes it. This is what might be described as normal, day-to-day politics based on self-interest. Ideology may serve the purely selfish decision-maker by allowing her or him to make more sophisticated choices than an automatic class, race, sex, or geography based reaction would. As we suggested above, an ideology may also serve as a weapon that can appear to demonstrate that self-interested behavior serves a higher good. In another variant, opposing interests may use ideology to show that apparently selfless behavior is really self-interested.

If ideology can assist the thinking processes of a purely self-interested decision-maker, it can do even more for a selfless one. Ideology can sometimes produce sophisticated causal analysis especially when it uses science. Science often generates unobvious and powerful theories. David Ricardo's Law of Comparative Advantage is such a theory (Sraffa 1970, Chap. VII, 132-137). Ricardo, using a simplified example of England and Portugal, showed that even if both wine and cloth could be produced with less labor in Portugal, it would be beneficial for Portugal to produce all of the wine needed by both countries and England to produce all of the cloth and for the two countries to trade wine for cloth and vice versa. The implication is that free international trade benefits both countries. At the same time, in Ricardo's example cloth manufacturers in Portugal and wine makers in England would presumably be ruined by this free trade arrangement.

A narrowly focused selfish political animal with a short time horizon might seek to buttress a nation's economy by raising barriers to international trade. A selfish liberal or selfish conservative pursuing more than short term political or economic rewards understands that the effect of trade barriers is destructive to everyone except perhaps those associated with a particular sector of the economy. We will see later that there is a liberal-conservative consensus regarding the negative long-term effects of trade barriers although elements in both liberal and conservative communities are flirting with protectionism.

Phillip Converse saw ideology as fulfilling many of the same functions as science. Ideology allows the user to understand the relationships among events, to facilitate the making of consistent judgments over time, and to process information more efficiently than a purely ad hoc approach would allow (Converse 1964, 206-261; Converse 1975, 4, 75-169). For David Apter (1964a, 20) ideology improves a political actor's effectiveness: "Ideas help men to control and change their environment."

Ideology can also protect an individual's or group's self esteem and fulfill other psychological and social functions. Erik H. Erikson (1958, 14) saw involvement in ideology as one of many ways that adolescents resolve identity crises. Robert Lane (1972, 162-163) observed that people need belief systems to give them a sense of their place in the world, and interest groups need belief systems to facilitate team work and give members a reason for supporting the group. The literature on the psychological functions of ideology makes clear that connections between self-interest and ideology are highly complex and subtle (Lane 1969, 99; Stone 1974, 72-92). The children of conservative Republican Party activists will probably become conservative Republicans, but they also might rebel and turn into liberal activists.

Public opinion and voting data

Public opinion polls reveal that the American populace as a whole is not ideologically oriented, but the general public, the politically active public, and political elites differ in the degree to which ideology plays a part in their thinking and behavior

(Box-Steffensmeier & DeBoef 2001). Phillip Converse (1964, 211, 215-216) using survey research data described ideological thought (on a liberal-conservative continuum) as an activity of only 10 percent of the public. Once ideological ideas and policy positions are formulated by (usually conflicting) elites, they are marketed throughout society. As those ideas migrate from elites to the general public much of the logic is lost. What remains among a large majority of the public are unconnected and often inconsistent idea fragments.

Converse's work stimulated a blizzard of studies 20 years of which were summarized by Donald R. Kinder and David O. Sears (1985, 670) who agreed with Converse's finding that few Americans are aware of or use ideological ideas in any consistent way. Nevertheless, among the general public there are "patches of knowledge" amid "expanses of ignorance" that are liberal and conservative.

Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks (1996, 243) found evidence of ideological thinking among voters in presidential elections. Presenting their findings cautiously, they found "persistent liberal/conservative disagreements over policy" with many citizens "predisposed to take one side or the other" in a manner consistent with basic liberal and conservative positions. They also found that ideologies may have a direct impact on peoples' policy positions independent of self-interest (pp. 283, 293). Although they were not fully convinced of the direct independent impact of ideology, the data were consistent with that possibility (1996, 294).

William G. Jacoby (1995) discovered evidence of rudimentary ideological thinking among relatively high percentages of the population. Using survey research data from 1984 and 1988, Jacoby found that more than one-half of the population could correctly place presidential candidates and parties along the liberal-conservative continuum. Roughly one-third also were consistent in the location of themselves, candidates, and parties along the ideological spectrum. Approximately one-quarter, in addition to making accurate and consistent judgments regarding presidential candidates, parties, and themselves, were ideologically consistent

regarding such issues as abortion, guaranteed jobs, school prayer, and government spending. The mirror image of these findings is that beyond locating presidential candidates and parties along the ideological spectrum, two-thirds to three-quarters of the populace could not make accurate and consistent judgments about abortion, guaranteed jobs, and other well publicized issues. In issue areas such as government health insurance, school busing, and the status of women, 80 percent and more could not accurately and consistently say whether a particular policy position was liberal or conservative (Jacoby 1995, 319, 321; Jacoby 1991, 178-205).

John M. Scheb, II and William Lyons (1994) summarizing the literature up to 1994 and adding their own findings conclude that despite the lack of sophistication by large percentages of voters, ideology plays a significant part in voters' evaluations of presidential candidates. Erickson and Wright (2001, 87) find that voters care about the ideological positions of incumbent candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives.

Many public opinion specialists have explored the role that class plays in elections in the United States. Voting based on class is self-interested voting. Jeffrey M. Stonecash (2006, 461) provides a long and useful compilation of studies of class-based voting and adds one of his own. He summarizes this work as finding that class-based voting is of relatively little importance in the United States. Stonecash's own study suggests that steadily increasing income inequality from the late 1960s to 2004 was accompanied by increased class-based voting that peaked in 1996 and then dropped to late 1960s-early 1970s levels. He speculates that this surprising result was due to the distractions of non-class issues such as the Iraq war. Other scholars point to abortion, prayer in public schools, affirmative action, and homosexuality as supplanting class (Stonecash 2006, 463). These issue areas contain substantial ideological components. Studying the 2004 presidential election Laura R. Olson and John C. Green (2006a, 2006b) conclude that, in order of importance, race (a mixture of self-interest and ideology), religion (mostly ideological), income, region (e.g., Midwest), place (e.g., urban), sex, age, and education influenced voting.

Voting based on geography and economics seems often solely motivated by self-interest, but one study found that rural voters display a mixture of self-interest and ideology. James G. Gimpel and Kimberly A. Karnes (2006, 467) demonstrate that based on economic self-interest rural voters should frequently support liberal Democrats, but voting data show growing Republican strength. Thomas Frank (2004) argues that unsophisticated rural voters are being distracted from economic self-interest by manipulative Republicans marshaling irrelevant social issues. Gimpel and Karnes (2006, 468-469) ridicule this thesis as failing to take into account relatively high levels of rural self-employment and land ownership, traits that incline toward supporting conservative Republicans.

Ideology among government elites

Many writers, in addition to ones cited above, have documented the presence of ideological thought among the politically active, especially government officeholders (e.g., McCann 1995; Eldersveld 1968; Fenno 1978; Weber 1989; Langston 1992; Kingdon 1973; Jennings 1992). There is no doubt that government officials and opinion leaders employ ideological thought at least as a tactical device. Their frequent references to their own or their opponents' ideological positions at minimum are evidence of their use of ideology as the language of politics. However, the central question is whether ideology can be used as an independent factor to explain political behavior as self-interest can. The votes cast by members of Congress can be influenced by constituent and core supporter self-interest, constituent and core supporter ideology, legislators' self-interest, and legislators' ideology. Studies to be reviewed below show that the strength of these relationships varies widely from district to district (or state to state), among policy areas, and over time. Also, the strength of these relationships varies among those methodologies and authors. To a significant degree, most legislators vote in ways that reflect self-interest in their district or state as interpreted by them, their core supporters, and probably to a lesser degree by their constituents as a whole (Segal, Cameron, & Cover 1992, 113; Kingdon 1973, 64).

A tight relationship between constituent self-interest and

congressional votes is consistent with democratic theory and common sense. This relationship is assumed, at least as a starting point, by most analysts who study legislative voting behavior. Congressional voting behavior, however, is also related to party coalitions and legislative structure (Koford 1989, 960).

In some issue areas constituency and core supporter pressure may be at least partly ideological (Poole & Rosenthal 1991a, 959). It would be a mistake to conceive, as some authors do, of ideological voting in a legislative setting as confined to a legislator deviating from constituency and core supporter pressure. A legislator might also be representing constituency and/or core supporter ideological preferences to enhance reelection possibilities, or just as importantly, a legislator is likely to be of the same ideological persuasion as a majority of his or her constituents (Uslaner 1999). To the degree that legislators are like their constituents and core supporters, legislator ideological preferences, constituency ideological preferences, and/or core supporter ideological preferences will be the same (Davis & Porter 1989).

There are many examples of ideology influencing congressional votes. Many roll call vote analyses use ideological ratings of legislators issued by ideologically oriented groups such as Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), Americans for Constitutional Action, the National Rifle Association, and the League of Conservation Voters. Scholars use ADA ratings more partly because they have a long continuous track record and because the ADA has broader concerns than some others. Each year the ADA selects a set of key legislative votes (recently 20) in each chamber related to issues of importance to the organization. A legislator with an ADA rating of 100 casts votes consistent with the ADA's preferred liberal positions. Ratings at or near zero represent opposition to ADA positions; those with such ratings are usually characterized as conservatives.

Voting on amendments to the Social Security Act in 1983 provide a useful example of the impact of ideology in the House and Senate. In these votes ideology had a measurable separate impact on voting independent of traditional self-interest variables (Richardson &

Munger 1990). These votes could have represented the legislators' personal ideologies, those of their constituents, or a mixture of the two. Not surprisingly, roll call analysis indicated that senators gave greater weight to their own ideological preferences than did representatives. The probable reason for this difference is that senators, with six year terms, are expected to be more independent of constituents than representatives, and other studies have shown that this independence tends to decline as a senator's term is nearing an end if she or he intends to seek reelection (see also McArthur & Marks 1988).

Defense appropriations votes shed light on the relative influence of self-interest and ideology. Ideology is especially likely to show up on votes on general defense appropriations bills which have few funding implications for specific states, contractors, and labor unions. Ideology is less important and self-interest more important on votes concerning specific expenditures for weapons systems with beneficiaries who can hold legislators responsible for particular outcomes (Nelson & Silberberg 1987; see also Bender 1991).

Liberalism and conservatism are to some degree coherent and consistent bodies of ideas with prescriptions for many different policy areas. The implication of this observation is that a legislator's votes in one policy area can predict votes in other policy areas. One study found that a member's liberal voting record with regard to the economy was highly predictive of his or her votes on racial issues, civil liberties, democracy, and even foreign policy (Schneider 1979). Similarly, voting on coal strip mining related strongly to voting on such seemingly unrelated policy areas as the death penalty, sex education, the neutron bomb, school desegregation, abortion, pregnancy disability, loans to communist countries, and the Panama Canal Treaty (Kalt & Zupan 1984). Explanations of voting on strip mining that relied entirely on economic self-interest (e.g., a state's reliance on the coal industry) were adequate, but explanations that added ideology were much more complete (see also Levitt 1996, 425; Peltzman 1985).

Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal (2007, 1990) have

developed what is sometimes described as an alternative to ideological group scoring. They view legislators' positions as located on an ideological continuum (2007, 3). However, their definition of ideology is quite different from that employed by the roll call studies cited above, ideologically oriented activist groups such as the ADA, and virtually all historians and theorists of ideology. Poole and Rosenthal (2007, 3) assert that: "voting is ideological when positions are predictable across a wide set of issues." Predictable patterns of roll call voting often have ideological origins as Kalt and Zupan demonstrate, but they also can be motivated by party, economic self-interest, and other concerns. Defining ideology in terms of predictable patterns of votes is to broaden the notion of ideology far beyond standard usage. It does not help that Poole and Rosenthal (2007, 3) attempt to narrow their definition with this example: "Someone who favors higher minimum wages is also likely to favor lower defense spending, affirmative action programs, higher capital gains taxes, and so on." They immediately describe this "continuum of ideological positions" as ranging from "very liberal to moderate to very conservative." (p. 3) These examples cannot salvage their excessively broad definition even though when they wrote this sentence in 2007 it was valid for that time. In fact, over a relatively long time span their examples undermine their definition. In the early 1960s liberals or at least some liberals favored increased defense spending (to narrow what John F. Kennedy described as the missile gap), opposed affirmative action (the *New York Times* characterized it as reverse discrimination in an editorial containing that phrase, and favored lower capital gains taxes (Kennedy again). We will revisit Poole and Rosenthal in the next chapter.

The literature on congressional roll call voting is methodologically complex, but it firmly supports the conclusion that congressional votes are influenced by self-interest and ideology in ratios that change over time and from issue to issue. The sources of ideological voting in Congress appear to be both constituents' ideology and the personal ideologies of members. Furthermore, congressional ideological voting can almost completely be described

on a standard left-right or liberal- conservative spectrum. Although scholars interested in the impact of ideology on public policy use legislative roll call votes as their primary data source, other elements of politics and government have also been examined. For example, there is an ideological structure within factions of a state's national party convention delegates (Munger & Blackhurst 1965; Nice 1980). And many accounts of executive branch decision-making include mixtures of ideology and self-interest (Aberbach & Rockman 1976; Whitaker 1996). Government at all levels in the United States is dominated by officials who identify themselves as liberal or conservative out of conviction or as cover for self-interest.

Topics of National Political Debates 1961-2011

When social, economic, or technological problems arise, self-interested groups or ideologues propose initiatives policy departures to resolve them. When problems become sufficiently serious to merit the attention of those in the national policy-formulation apparatus is an important question, but it is not one that we will address systematically. Our focus is on the debate that arises after this agenda setting process begins.

The Appendix lists all of the policy initiatives that have been part of national political debates for the years 1961-2004 as listed in the Policy Agendas Project (PAP) database. The database includes all of the topics that were the subject of congressional hearings in this time period. We have combined the many duplicate items in the original database when the same issue is reconsidered year after year (as most topics are) and others of a highly specialized nature. We have also eliminated routine matters such as appropriations bills. We retain an example ID number (called KEYID in the database) and year associated with each KEYID, but to make the Appendix manageable in size we deleted congressional session, committee, subcommittee, and the number of days of congressional hearings, all of which can be found on-line in the PAP database. We also used our own wording to describe many of the initiatives when we broadened and combined them. The Appendix contains a few items that we added that are not found in the original database; we list "NA" as their KEYID. The initiatives in the Appendix are all long standing

concerns, and the dates from the PAP database entries indicate that some hearings occurred well after the initiatives appeared on the national agenda in such places as *New York Times* and *Washington Post* news stories and editorials.

The last column of the Appendix explains how a given initiative is treated in the study. So, for example, KEYID 51447 (1954) described as “provide public housing for poor” and KEYID 50077 (1958) described as “urban aid-urban renewal-slum clearance” are both treated as part of urban renewal.

The Appendix contains 194 initiatives. Table P.1 compresses these initiatives to 52, the ones we will be covering in this study. So, for example, initiatives such as school lunch programs, antipoverty bills to establish youth employment and community action, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, and occupational training for the unemployed are covered under the general heading of welfare. Doubtless, specialists in these programs—both scholars and practitioners—will object to this treatment, but liberal and conservative positions on them are similar, and we cannot discuss them all in detail. Similarly, the politics of ending race-based voting discrimination and racial segregation are sufficiently alike ideologically that we can just discuss segregation without significant loss of detail.

Whether we combine or separate particular initiatives will not affect this study’s conclusions. We will not be performing statistical analyses that will be dependent on such distinctions.

Implementation Tools

In later chapters we will use topics from the PAP database to examine the implementation tools with which federal decision-makers attack problems. We are especially interested in the effectiveness with which these tools have been applied. The tools include:

- simple legislation or executive orders that prohibit or allow a given behavior;
- simple court rulings that prohibit or allow a given behavior; competition in a market or market-like environment;
- incentives such as tax credits or deductions and disincentives

- such as taxes;
- centralized and of necessity complicated federal bureaucracies or federal government/state government bureaucracies that distribute scarce resources or regulate behavior on a day-to-day basis; and
- federal government/state government police entities to maintain order.

Given the great variety of federal programs, readers might object to the brevity of this list, but there are only a few basic implementation tools. All of the initiatives in Table P.1 were implemented using one or a combination of them.

In evaluating the effectiveness of these tools in particular situations we keep in mind that they are used to promote specific self-interest and ideological objectives. Ideology and self-interest drive analysis. Policy analysis does not and cannot objectively answer the question of whether these tools are effective. If we were to claim Olympian objectivity in determining what works and what does not, our findings would be somewhere between silly and naive. What we can do is observe debates among ideological and self-interested opponents with policy analysis helping occasionally. These debates are often quite revealing regarding the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of initiatives and whether they are worthwhile. Ideologues and interest groups along with policy analysts devote considerable resources to these debates; we can learn from them.

Next Chapter

The next chapter presents a relatively standard history of liberalism and conservatism beginning in the 1600s. Most authors, regardless of ideological orientation, characterize these histories consistently until they describe the nature of liberalism and conservatism beginning in the 1960s. From that decade to the present, historians and political theorists disagree about how to classify major liberal and conservative thinkers, how to interpret their work, and even whether they are important. Some of these scholars are participants in intra-ideological debates that they purport to describe, making them unreliable guides. Making matters more difficult from our perspective, most ideological theorists and

historians of ideology ignore public policy. The nature of liberalism and conservatism and their policy prescriptions are especially prominent subjects of contemporary media and political debates making it important that we clearly define these concepts.

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