HEATHER HURLBURT WITH CHAYENNE POLIMEDIO

CAN TRANSPARTISAN COALITIONS OVERCOME POLARIZATION?

Lessons from Four Case Studies

APRIL 2016

About The Authors

Heather Hurlburt directs New Models of Policy Change in New America's political reform program. She leads research into how policy advocacy is adapting to be effective in our current environment of intense political polarization, guiding advocates and funders who seek to navigate politics effectively on behalf of policy solutions.

Previously, she held senior positions in the White House and State Department under President Bill Clinton, worked on Capitol Hill, and held several non-profit leadership positions at the intersection of policy, advocacy, and politics.

Chayenne Polimedio is a program and research assistant for the Political Reform Program, where she focuses on issues such as money in politics, congressional reform, lobbying, voting structures, polarization, civic participation, and transpartisanship. She comes to New America by way of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where she worked as a Junior Fellow for their Democracy and Rule of Law program. There, she focused on foreign policy, kleptocracy, and political reform in a number of countries. Prior to Carnegie, Chayenne also worked for the United Nations Population Fund in New York.

About New America

New America is committed to renewing American politics, prosperity, and purpose in the Digital Age. We generate big ideas, bridge the gap between technology and policy, and curate broad public conversation. We combine the best of a policy research institute, technology laboratory, public forum, media platform, and a venture capital fund for ideas. We are a distinctive community of thinkers, writers, researchers, technologists, and community activists who believe deeply in the possibility of American renewal.

Find out more at **newamerica.org/our-story**.

About New Models of Policy Change

New Models of Policy Change starts from the observation that the traditional model of foundation-funded, think-tank driven policy change–where ideas emerge from disinterested "experts" and partisan elites compromise for the good of the nation–is failing. Partisan polarization, technological empowerment of citizens, and heightened suspicions of institutions have all taken their toll.

But amid much stagnation, interesting policy change is still happening. The paths taken on issues from sentencing reform to changes in Pentagon spending to resistance to government surveillance share a common thread: they were all a result of transpartisan cooperation. By transpartisan, we mean an approach to advocacy in which, rather than emerging from political elites at the center, new policy ideas emerge from unlikely corners of the right or left and find allies on the other side, who may come to the same idea from a very different worldview. In transpartisan coalitions, policy entrepreneurs from the ideological corners recruit endorsers and test ideas, eventually bringing them into the policy mainstream at the local, state and national levels. Unlike traditional bipartisan coalitions, which begin in the center, the established, centrist politicians and institutions are often the last to recognize and embrace a transpartisan vision.

The New Models of Policy Change project studies the successes, failures and key figures of this "transpartisan" approach to policy change. It produced a set of case studies identifying the circumstances under which this approach can flourish, as well as those under which it falls short. Case studies include: criminal justice reform, Pentagon spending reduction, climate change and 'climate care,' and opposition to Common Core education standards.

The project also produced a practitioners' handbook, identifying qualities that equip think tankers, advocates and civic entrepreneurs alike for a world in which more and more of our policy advocacy must cross partisan, cultural, professional and other divides.

The Project is housed in New America's Political Reform program; funded by the Hewlett Foundation's Madison Initiative and directed by Heather Hurlburt, with a steering committee of Mark Schmitt and Steve Teles, who bring to it extensive experience in academia, government service, policy advocacy, and non-profit leadership.

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Heightened partisanship, declining confidence in institutions, and the rise of issue polarization have taken a toll on decades-old models for promoting policy change through centrist bipartisan coalitions. With traditional paths of policy entrepreneurship and compromise blocked, new ideas are not finding their way into the system, and outdated policies and structures are not being replaced.

The New Models of Policy Change project at New America studied one model which is producing interesting policy change at the local and national level: transpartisanship.

In a transpartisan approach, coalitions are not built outward from centrist political elites. Rather, policy proposals are championed by unlikely allies from the right and left, who may have very different ideological justifications for the same policy. Policy entrepreneurs recruit political endorsers from one or both sides. Thus, ideas are validated as legitimately liberal, progressive, conservative and/ or libertarian—not as a watered-down-compromise among ideologies—before they reach the legislative fray. Allies and supporters can then be recruited from multiple factions without compromising their core ideological stances.

The New Models of Policy Change project studied the successes, failures, and key figures of this emerging approach to policy change. It produced a set of four case studies (criminal justice reform,

Pentagon spending reduction, climate change and 'climate care,' and opposition to Common Core education standards) identifying the circumstances under which the transpartisan approach can flourish, as well as those under which it falls short. These are the lessons we learned:

- Contemporary bipartisanship succeeds when it is as politicized as the new partisanship—giving elected officials political rationales for policy choices that transcend politics.

- Issues can and do become less polarized—when a common policy solution is presented with ideological legitimacy for left and right alike.

- Successful policy entrepreneurs take time to understand where a proposal fits in the political landscape—whose ideological or political base it helps or hurts, what aspects of party discipline it may threaten—of both parties.

- Although outsider coalitions are likely to struggle to implement new policies, they pose a potent and under-appreciated threat to existing policies and longstanding bipartisan coalitions.

- At both the state and federal level, personal relationships are still the lubricant that lets coalitions operate—or whose absence breaks them down. Transpartisan methods can be a gateway to rebuilding relationships in an era of oppositional politics.

The project also identified a set of qualities shared

by successful transpartisan entrepreneurs: they are curious, open-minded listeners, but they are also firmly-grounded in their own beliefs (often quite ideological ones) and have clear goals in mind. Our interviews suggested that these qualities are increasingly essential for think tankers, advocates, and civic entrepreneurs alike as more and more policy advocacy must cross partisan, cultural, professional and other divides.

To date, transpartisan coalitions have had their greatest success in what is also their best-known model, criminal justice reform. That effort was able to combine issue type, time horizon and resources, and strategic planning in a way no other has—yet. Other coalitions do continue to score significant tactical victories, to expand at state and local levels, and to hold major potential for blocking and reversing centrist policies. The emergence of major ideological struggles within both parties, however, forecasts a political environment in which conditions that favor transpartisan organizing will more frequently be present. This report offers a first primer on using transpartisan methods to assemble effective coalitions around positive policy alternatives.

INTRODUCTION

With Congress and the American public sharply divided along partisan lines, and parties better-disciplined and more ideologically-homogenous than in the past, traditional paths of policy entrepreneurship are blocked. Wonks, activists, and philanthropists have grown increasingly frustrated in recent years at their inability to move new ideas into the system, or replace outdated policies and structures. The pathway by which legislators could reach to think tanks for policy ideas perceived as non-ideological, and then build coalitions based on regional preferences, district composition, or flat-out interest tradeoffs has largely disappeared. Instead, policy ideas come wrapped in ideologies— which often seems to preclude their adoption across coalitions broad enough to pass.

But the path to policy innovation is not completely blocked. In recent years, strange-bedfellow coalitions built from the outer edges of one or both parties have been responsible for reforms to sentencing in the criminal justice system, changes to how the United States conducts electronic surveillance, and several years' cuts to the Pentagon budget. In individual states and municipalities, such coalitions have overseen broad criminal justice reforms, opened electric monopolies to competition from solar producers, and overturned the Common Core State Standards for K-12 education.

Enthusiastic proponents of "transpartisan" cross-ideological coalitions have asserted, in recent years, that they offer a work-around to the twin ills of policy gridlock and political polarization. However, there has been little focused study of how, and whether, transpartisanship works. New America's New Models of Policy Change project studied a range of attempts at left-right coalitions, and the

cadre of policy entrepreneurs who build them, in order to answer three questions:

- Has the political environment in fact shifted decisively and durably away from traditional-model centrist bipartisan coalitions and toward transpartisan pairings anchored at the edges of one or both parties?

- How useful is transpartisanship, under what conditions, and for what problems?

- When it works, what makes it work, and can policy advocates develop those skills or qualities?

We conclude that shifts in the political landscape—the culmination of three decades of political and demographic change—have made centrist bipartisan coalitions newly vulnerable to disruption. In decades past, policy entrepreneurs used a single playbook across many issue areas: invest in a community of experts and a base of research, develop support among establishment players and institutions, and use that credibility to build a coalition of centrists in Congress. Heterogeneity within each party enabled the great reform coalitions associated with 1960s anti-poverty and civil rights legislation, 1970s post-Vietnam reforms to intelligence, and environmental progress from the 1970s through the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments. This is no longer the case. Today, change requires a broader template of strategies and more attention to understanding how the issue will land in the partisan politics of both sides, both to form effective coalitions and for coalition maintenance.

The New Models of Policy Change project looked at four case studies, and conducted more than a dozen practitioner interviews, to make a first attempt at understanding the prospects and limitations of "transpartisan" coalition-building. We identify conditions under which these coalitions seem to do better: issue positions that are not central to coalition maintenance for one or the other political party, significant time and financial resources, and bases of popular support and activism outside Washington. We describe an emerging cadre of transpartisan entrepreneurs. They and their organizations share a set of traits—curiosity, openness, clear ideological points of view—that seem to make them more successful at this work.

We conclude that transpartisan coalitions have not fulfilled the hopes for major policy implementation that seemed to be held out by the best-known example, criminal justice reform. Those we studied had more power to disrupt than to construct alternative policies. We also note, however, that two conditions which make transpartisanship successful may be on the rise: the emergence of major ideological splits and factional struggles within both parties, and growing energy at state and local levels for policy solutions that escape partisan pigeonholes. If both trends continue after the 2016 elections, **transpartisan organizing will be a more and more productive tool to assemble coalitions around positive policy alternatives.**

Today, change requires a broader template of strategies and more attention to understanding how the issue will land in the partisan politics of both sides

THE GAP TRANSPARTISANS SEEK TO FILL

The Landscape for Policy Reform Coalitions

Heightened polarization—the increased ideological homogeneity of both elected officials and the public within the two political parties—is well-documented, and frequently cited as a reason for the decline in centrist coalition-building and policy entrepreneurship. According to a landmark 2014 Pew study,[1] one in three Republicans and two in five Democrats now register as perfectly ideologically consistent with their parties—for the GOP, triple the rate of ten years ago.

Ideologically-sorted parties do not by themselves explain policymaking gridlock. The current levels of party polarization are matched by other periods in American history and are also within the ranges seen in other industrialized democracies. What is unprecedented, as Carsey and Layman have documented,[2] is the number and range of different policy issues that have become subject to polarization. While we often think of polarization in terms of its effects on institutions—the House, Senate, or voting public—considering polarization across issues yields a different set of insights and potential responses.

Take national security, formerly one of the least-polarized areas in American political life. In the 2008 presidential campaign, both candidates and the sitting President had closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay and ensuring the United States did not torture among their policy goals. Today, both issues divide along purely partisan lines. Views of the President's nuclear deal with Iran polarized sharply[3] just over the years it took to negotiate (and not because the public kept up with the details of the 1000-page agreement). The Brookings Institution documented a similar shift in the composition of American public support for Israel, with waning Democratic support and burgeoning enthusiasm among GOP evangelicals.[4] In 2001, 41 percent of Republicans and 48 percent of Democrats favored easing drug sentencing laws;[5] by 2014, those percentages had moved to 48 percent of Republicans and 66 percent of Democrats.[6] In 2015, Pew found that while net public support for building a fence along the full length of the U.S.-Mexican border had changed little, its partisan composition had changed dramatically,[7] as Republicans gained in enthusiasm and Democrats shifted away. Support for the death penalty is declining[8]—but exponentially faster among Democrats and independents than Republicans.

Issue polarization has made reaching across party lines for compromise bipartisan deal-making highly risky for legislators and opinion leaders.

Legislators are subject to more party discipline and from multiple quarters, as power has shifted from committee chairs and party elders to a broader group of donors and ideological groupings.[9]

Where once committee chairs and party elders could hold sway on particular issues, members are now more likely to take their cues from popular figures whom the public perceives as arbiters of what is a true conservative or liberal view. Here, polarization is asymmetrical. While the left still tends to look to elected officials, research has documented the considerable extent to which conservative media figures have supplanted elected officials in public perceptions of who leads the movement.[10]

The agenda-setting and disciplinary role played by conservative media since 2008 has little mainstream precedent.[11] Local political figures and media entrepreneurs built both grassroots networks and financial support independent of the Republican establishment and policy elites. Elected officials came to believe, and fear, that crossing these new networks could cost them their jobs. Once that happened, these new influencers gained the ability to set the terms of the debate.

The Challenge to Traditional Bipartisan Coalitions

Existing bipartisan coalitions are thus intensely vulnerable to sudden pressure. Because ideological pressure tends to build from outside power centers in, coalition members and organizers who don't follow partisan politics closely have found themselves surprised, and unprepared to react when opponents emerge. The decades-old bipartisan Congressional consensus in support of U.S. admission of refugees from conflict zones, for example, seemed to collapse overnight after the fall 2015 Paris terror attacks—but fear-mongering about migrants entering the United States to conduct attacks had been a feature of political, as opposed to policy, dialogue on the right since at least 2014. Evangelical organizers on climate related to our interviewers[12] how, as pressure mounted in the run-up to a vote on cap and trade legislation, energy

interests pressured evangelical leaders to rein in their environmentalist colleagues—a development for which the broader environmental movement was completely unprepared.

Policy entrepreneurs and their donors put intense effort into giving emerging policies bipartisan roots in the last decade, only to see them redefined along starkly partisan lines in the public mind. Health care reform, with its conservative intellectual parentage and roots in Mitt Romney's Massachusetts, is one example. Another is the Common Core State Standards[13] for K-12 education, developed as a technocratic initiative with broad GOP buy-in, that are now intensely opposed by Republicans and derided as "Obamacore." Human rights groups built a bipartisan coalition to ban the use of torture in interrogations, and close the detention center at Guantanamo Bay—and actually lost ground with GOP officeholders and voters.

> **Policy entrepreneurs and their donors put intense effort into giving emerging policies bipartisan roots in the last decade, only to see them redefined along starkly partisan lines in the public mind.**

The increased value placed on ideological orthodoxy has also made it more difficult for policy entrepreneurs to engage in efforts to lure factions from the other party. Many of the major cross-party initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s, such as crime policy, welfare reform, and school choice, were driven by conservative thinkers and political entrepreneurs, who creatively used policy to split their opponents and build coalitions. In both the cases of school choice and welfare reform, conservatives patiently recruited liberal allies and built a record of change at the state and local level. Over the last decade, conservative engagement in this kind of ideological "fishing" in liberal waters has declined dramatically –education reform being one counter-example whose end may be marked

by the recent decision to replace key elements of No Child Left Behind that once enjoyed bipartisan support. Instead, the transpartisan initiatives that have succeeded in recent years have been enabled by fissures among conservatives. Their originators have been different constellations of libertarian entrepreneurs, mainstream foundations and advocacy organizations, and leading liberal political figures.

What Is Transpartisanship Good For?

The classic bipartisan initiative brings research from avowedly non-partisan policy experts to leaders in both parties and is explicitly presented as non-ideological, or a compromise between ideologies. Transpartisanship, by contrast, skirts the decline of centrist elites by relying on policy proposals embraced by ideological figures as authentically "left" or "right"—even as policy entrepreneurs recruit figures from the left and right to bring the ideas into the policy mainstream at the local, state, and national levels.

Frustration with gridlock, and the rise of independent power centers on the left and especially on the right, has sparked a number of interesting efforts at cross-party coalition building in recent years: a wide range of criminal justice reform issues, including sentencing,[14] imprisonment of juveniles,[15] solitary confinement,[16] prison rape;[17] policing reforms, including both police tactics and militarization;[18] campaign finance;[19] attempts to reform intelligence-gathering, surveillance,[20] and targeted killing practices; Pentagon budget reductions; energy and environmental issues, including the cap and trade bill,[21] and solar power generation; and pushback to the centrist education reform coalition.[22]

Four Cases

We looked in detail at four cases of attempts at policy change by assembling coalitions from the outside of one or both parties in, rather than the traditional bipartisan center-out method.

Our in-depth study of four different transpartisan coalitions, interviews of a dozen transpartisan entrepreneurs, and review of numerous other efforts found that the criminal justice coalition is, as yet, unique in delivering such broad policy change.

The **criminal justice reform** coalition has had transformative results. In the project's case study, Johns Hopkins' Steve Teles and David Dagan present a new and carefully-documented history of how a concerted effort to shift views on crime among conservatives was fueled by explicit partnerships between conservative and progressive activists, and quiet funding and research support from centrist and liberal foundations. The authors show that these partnerships took root at the state level long before transpartisan initiatives on crime made headlines in Washington. The cross-party collaboration began in Texas, where a string of elections that delivered complete control of state government to the GOP both emboldened activists within the party and drove progressive reformers to consider different approaches.

The study documents how the partnership built in Texas and moved nationwide. One of its major funders, the Pew Charitable Trusts, credits these concerted efforts with achieving sentencing reforms in 31 states. New states continue to look at sentencing reform. Left-right coalitions in Texas and elsewhere say that they are branching out and tackling new challenges together. For them, breaking gridlock through transpartisanship is a reality, even as further progress at the federal level is uncertain.

We did identify significant accomplishments among other transpartisan organizing efforts, in blocking or reversing status quo centrist policies and achieving tactical legislative victories. The **Pentagon budget campaign,** like the work on criminal justice reform, was a carefully-planned collaboration among funders, advocates and policy wonks. Unlike the locally-driven criminal justice work, however, it arose at the national level in response to the arrival in Washington of Tea Party budget hawks and its funding was smaller-scale and over a shorter time

New America's "Strange Bedfellows" case study series. Clockwise from top left: "How Conservatives Turned Against Mass Incarceration" by David Dagan and Steven Teles, "The Sequester, the Pentagon, and the Little Campaign that Could" by John T. Bennett, "Parallel Play in the Education Sandbox" by Patrick McGuinn and Jonathan Supovitz, and "Spreading the Gospel of Climate Change: An Evangelical Battleground" by Lydia Bean and Steven Teles.

period. Its founders identified this electoral shift as an opportunity to promote Pentagon reforms and brought together progressives, libertarians and Tea Party organizers, wonks, and grassroots activists, beginning in 2011. Organizers made a point of scheduling strategy retreats and thought carefully about the transpartisan nature of the coalition. Coalition members take credit for rallying votes from left and right to keep defense spending under the across-the-board spending cuts mandated by sequestration. This resulted in four years of declining defense spending and the greatest one-year decline in decades. [23] Additionally, they told our author, John Bennett, that the pressure exerted by a cross-partisan reform campaign contributed to progress on long-delayed reform initiatives aimed

at controlling Pentagon compensation, health care, and procurement costs.

After 2014, however, the coalition's political base shifted, making the field less hospitable. As concern with national security rose in the wake of ISIS' rise and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, traditional defense hawks in both parties succeeded in restoring significant funding through off-budget "contingency" funding. The return of security as a hot political issue in the run-up to 2016 elections heightened this trend, as the leadership of both parties valued national over fiscal security and pressured members of Congress to conform.

This case of modest short-term achievement that also produced lasting infrastructure and relationships that cross party lines contrasts with our third case, a look at the opposition to the **Common Core**. These standards for K-12 education were developed as a classic bipartisan initiative— non-partisan policy experts supported by centrist funders and political actors and an extensive body of research literature. When first conservative media figures and then left-wing activists seized on Common Core as a way to highlight other sources of grassroots anger, the centrists lacked a counter-narrative or a plan for engaging with the public. Fringe opposition swelled into a force that convinced governors to reverse their positions and seven state legislatures to overturn or suspend the standards. The political pressure they generated made Common Core an epithet in the GOP presidential primary, and drove federal legislation barring the government from using federal dollars to incentivize adoption of the standards.

Although left and right opponents combined were able to disrupt the status quo, the longer-term results look far less impressive. Forty-two states and the District of Columbia[24] are still using Common Core; several others adopted state standards which Core proponents and opponents agree are Core by another name. Our study uncovered no evidence of any lasting infrastructure or even relationships across party lines among opponents.

Our final case, a partnership between environmental groups and evangelical builders of

a movement they called **Climate Care**, ended in short-term failure. From 2005-2009, mainstream environmental funders believed that a small group of evangelicals who had been building a generation of young pro-environment activists within their churches might hold the key to passing federal climate legislation. The funders quietly supported the evangelicals and then, when the Waxman-Markey legislation to reduce emissions through a "cap and trade" program began to gain steam on Capitol Hill, pushed them to issue public statements aimed at shifting the votes of conservative Senators.

However, as our case study documents, the strategy failed to understand how evangelicals are organized—or the relative role of pastors and oil producers in the conservative coalition. Leading conservatives asked evangelicals to silence their pro-climate colleagues; and because the Climate Care movement had not had enough time to build large-scale support among congregants, the evangelical leadership was able to stymie the coalition without backlash.

The effort failed as the strategy was not well-matched to the realities of evangelical organizing or to the importance of fossil fuel producers in the conservative coalition; and evangelicals and climate activists did not get familiar enough with each other to understand and correct these flaws. Like the Pentagon budget campaign, however, participants in this effort continued their work even as funder interest and national attention shifted away and continue to insist that their efforts, and the connections they built, will yield valuable outcomes longer-term.

What We Learned

Policy change does happen, even under conditions of gridlock and polarization. Our study shed light on how the contemporary policymaking process can best be understood by students of politics and would-be participants alike. We consider those lessons next; then, in part two of this report, we offer a specific set of lessons for making the most of transpartisan strategies, whether as a funder, advocate, or issue expert.

First, in contrast to the twentieth century model of technocratic experts explicitly marketing policies as non-ideological, our period of strong issue polarization demands that policies be sold through ideology. This central lesson of transpartisanship helps understand where prospects for bipartisanship remain, and how existing bipartisan coalitions can be defended. The year 2015 saw two headline-grabbing deals which suggest a role for bipartisanship going forward—the negotiations between Sens. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) that produced successor legislation to No Child Left Behind, and after years of failed efforts, a two-year bargain between outgoing House Speaker John Boehner and the White House to end budget wrangling. It's worth noting that these two cases represent, rather than forward policy movement, truces which blocked pressures from wings of one or both parties. Bipartisan elites relied much more on political analysis rather than outside expertise in making their choices to engage, and what policies and interests to protect.

> **Policy change does happen, even under conditions of gridlock and polarization. Our study shed light on how the contemporary policymaking process can best be understood.**

Can Transpartisan Coalitions Overcome Polarization? Lessons from Four Case Studies

9

Our project's study of how the bipartisan coalition in support of the Common Core national school standards came under attack by transpartisan activists operating in parallel also offers important lessons about coalition management: Common Core advocates hadn't planned outreach to the public, and were outflanked by activists using social media; they were unaware of political dynamics within the GOP that triggered and then grew conservative outrage; and they let their initiative become closely identified with a sitting president, which research has shown to have a dramatically polarizing effect on policies under this and previous presidents. They neglected to offer elected officials ideological validation with which to counter their opponents. This case offers an important lesson for those seeking to preserve existing bipartisan coalitions. In the contemporary environment, bipartisanship will succeed when it is as politicized as the new partisanship—giving elected officials political rationales for policy choices that transcend politics.

Second, issues can and do become less polarized when a common policy solution is presented with ideological legitimacy for left and right alike. Transpartisan organizing can play a role in lessening ideological polarization around an issue, or in identifying issues that are less polarized outside the Beltway, giving partisan elites "cover" to change positions.

> **Bipartisanship will succeed when it is as politicized as the new partisanship—giving elected officials political rationales for policy choices that transcend politics.**

Issue polarization is an expression of party members' increased desire to identify with what they believe to be party orthodoxy on a wider range of specific issues—and their ability, through cable news, social media, and the rise of ideological

media celebrities, to be more specifically informed than was the case in decades past. Transpartisan coalitions work by giving party members the opportunity to connect a new position with a well-established group or figure on the left or right. When a labor union endorses an education reform proposal, for example, that communicates to liberals that the position is a liberal one; a positive statement from a well-known FOX News host or commentator communicates the same to a conservative audience. The idea is not communicated to either side as a compromise or partial victory, but as fully aligned with existing ideology.

Casual observers know the coalition for criminal justice reform as a headline-grabbing affair involving the Koch Brothers from the right and left-wing luminaries such as Van Jones. But the Beltway phase of the effort builds on a less visible decade or more of effort among conservatives at the state and local levels, and then, state by state, building ties between conservative reformers, traditional progressive groups, and funders. Conservatives who did not fear for their own conservative bona fides launched a major effort to shift views within their own party on sentencing and other reform issues. Over time, their success at moving mainstream conservatives also moved—though more slowly—mainstream Democrats who had adopted tough-on-crime policies a decade earlier and previously resisted calls for change when they came from left-wing groups alone. Critically, these efforts coincided with a significant secular decline in crime rates and the political salience of crime. Transpartisan organizing took advantage of that opportunity.

We are currently watching the beginning of another such case of "depolarization," where public opinion moves and presents an opportunity for transpartisan entrepreneurs to help politics catch up. The first years of the Obama administration saw partisan polarization of views on climate change, helping doom the 2009 cap and trade bill as well as the transpartisan initiative this project has studied. In the last year, however, it has become apparent that views on the underlying science of

climate change are less polarized—majorities of the public across partisan lines now believe the planet is warming, and our ground-breaking discussion of the political dynamics around evangelicals and climate surfaced the quiet dialogue among both conservative intellectuals and Republican party officials on the need to move the party's positioning.

Third, in an environment in which more policy issues are politicized than in the past, successful policy entrepreneurs take time to understand where a proposal fits in the political landscape—whose ideological or political base it helps or hurts, what aspects of party discipline it may threaten—of both parties. This kind of analysis uncovers possibilities for transpartisan alliances, sometimes. Sometimes, instead, it highlights the long term challenge of finding any political champions for an idea. It is also vital for existing coalitions, as it prevents unwelcome surprises of the sort experienced by pro-Common Core reformers, who failed to anticipate[25] how a narrative around educational standards would stir hostility on the right. Funders, advocates, and issue experts stressed this challenge over and over—many policy wonks, small non-profits, and philanthropies are ill-equipped to map and anticipate political dynamics and power shifts and indeed see such thinking as excessively politicized or even off-limits under U.S. tax law. But an anonymous comment from an education reformer highlights how much this matters:

> "Shame on us, really, because it was very naïve... I think many of us would say that we expected there to be some backlash from the right but not for it to be as politicized as it eventually became."[26]

Fourth, although outsider coalitions are likely to struggle to implement new policies, they pose a potent and under-appreciated threat to existing policies and taken-for-granted bipartisan coalitions. Both Bennett's Pentagon budget case history and McGuinn and Supovitz's study of Common Core opposition show relative outsiders using outsider tactics—whether new members of Congress

refusing to fall in line behind committee chairs, non-establishment donors threatening primaries, or local activists swamping official opponents on Twitter and Facebook—to block the implementation of policy as usual. But in neither case was there an alternative policy with coalition-wide agreement, which made it possible for important elements of prior policies to survive the transpartisan "assault."

> **Successful policy entrepreneurs take time to understand where a proposal fits in the political landscape – whose ideological or political base it helps or hurts, what aspects of party discipline it may threaten.**

Fifth, at both the state and federal level, personal relationships are still the lubricant that lets coalitions operate—or whose absence breaks them down. Our case studies found coalitions whose members had taken time to get to know and trust each other stayed together, while those that had not, splintered. We discuss at greater length below the strategies successful transpartisan organizers use. What needs emphasizing here is the hunger, across partisan lines, that this project uncovered for structured environments in which people could come together to discuss common problems. Pentagon budget case author Bennett documents a less tangible impact of transpartisan coalition-building, which he calls "capital-building": developing relationships and trust across partisan lines. Interviews found advocates who had gotten to know each other through the budget campaign partnering "around issues from Syria to surveillance to prison reform." Similarly, key coalition members in Texas' criminal justice work told us they planned to work together on education reform and other issues.

A TOOLKIT FOR TRANSPARTISANS

Across the four case studies, as well as interviews with more than a dozen practitioners whose experience spans decades and numerous additional issue areas—at the local and national levels—we identified a set of strategy, advocacy, leadership, and funding practices which open up new possibilities for coalition-building, and often make the difference between success and failure.

Successful coalition entrepreneurs analyze the politics of their issues to identify appropriate coalitional strategies; employ a particular set of effective advocacy practices; empower leaders who are skilled coalition-builders; and benefit from long-term time horizons and donor support. Though we identified this set of practices specifically for transpartisan coalitions, many of our interlocutors affirmed that the openness, flexibility, and political awareness they seek in partners are assets for any kind of policy advocacy work in today's polarized and media-driven environment. Shahid Buttar, whose work at the Bill of Rights Defense Committee brought together city councils from progressive college towns and rural conservative strongholds around civil liberties issues, sees them as key to advocacy in a multi-cultural society:

> "This model of organizing across differences is relevant beyond politics. In a polyglot society, you need to incorporate people with lots of different perspectives. Diverse coalitions in this sense give you the difference between access and influence."

Matching Issue to Strategy

Transpartisan coalitions function best under particular circumstances. We identified several factors—all of which were present for criminal justice reform—that we believe gave the criminal justice coalition a "perfect storm."

They exploit shifts within a party or between the parties. Teles and Dagan identify the moment at which the GOP achieved full dominance in Texas state politics as the one in which party insiders began to challenge its tough-on-crime orthodoxy. Similarly, our study of opposition to Common Core finds that the departure from office of a number of moderate GOP governors, and the replacement of both GOP and Democratic governors who had participated in the standards' creation by GOP incumbents who identified less with the GOP establishment, was both a cause of weak defense of the standards and an opening for opponents.

They choose issues that aren't essential to either party's coalitional maintenance. Teles and Dagan establish that, with crime rates declining and elite attention elsewhere, criminal justice was no longer a central issue for either party. This was particularly true in Texas, where GOP hold on state power for the foreseeable future made "wedge issues" a less urgent priority. Unlike the hydrocarbon industries and their role in blocking evangelical climate action—documented for the first time by Bean and

Teles in our climate case—the "prison industrial complex" proved relatively impotent. And the declining success of the Pentagon budget coalition can be linked closely to the rising political salience of national security issues for both parties, after the rise of ISIS and the approach of the 2014 and 2016 elections.

They frame their proposals into a libertarian-liberal sweet spot. Criminal justice reforms fit squarely into a niche where left and right ideologies overlap, around personal liberty and distrust of excessive state authority. The vast majority of transpartisan coalitions fit one or more of three frameworks: personal liberty (sentencing reform, anti-surveillance), shared moral values (ending sexual violence in prison, shaping a moral case for fighting climate change) or simply spending less money (sentencing reform, Pentagon budget coalition).

They take advantage of popular support and activism outside Washington. While the criminal justice reform movement drew a great deal of attention at the federal level, its largest impacts by far have come in the states. The most enduring transpartisan projects have benefitted from local activists who were working on the issue before it was trendy and nationally-known, and will likely continue to do so when it leaves the headlines. In contrast, the speed with which a small band of evangelical climate care advocates succumbed to popular pressure from conservative leaders, and the inability of Pentagon budget campaigners to build the issue's national salience, point to the limits of transpartisan coalitions that are built from the top down, or the Beltway out. While the effort to build a coalition between the environmental movement and evangelicals in the run-up to the 2010 Congressional vote on cap and trade failed, we have seen partnerships between libertarian conservatives and liberal environmentalists flourish around increasing access to solar power, from California to Georgia and Florida.

They have resources and infrastructure to take the long view, and build trust and influence over time. Teles and Dagan document how mainstream funders gave their grantees years to build steam slowly—the phenomenon that seemed to appear from nowhere in Washington in 2015 rested on years of cooperation and trust at the state level. By contrast, evangelical climate organizers told Bean and Teles that they never felt understood by their environmental partners—and when they believed their efforts were being rushed, they weren't able to affect broader coalition strategy. Transpartisan initiatives have longer-range staying power only when they either entail significant contact and deliberate effort to develop ways of working together or when the attention they garner mobilizes mainstream or elite actors—as in the case of anti-testing backlash moving into influential suburban school districts.

Key Advocacy Practices

Transpartisanship, then, is not a cure-all. Even where the political environment and the contours of an issue seem to favor a transpartisan approach, the majority of efforts we reviewed failed to live up to their promise. Interviews with practitioners, observers and funders revealed a set of five practices—building blocks for successful transpartisanship—that will empower advocates, analysts, and funders to make the best strategic choices in today's polarized and media-driven environment.

1. *Scope and analyze the political environment: Who has power, who has influence, who has intensity, for and against your position?*

Coalitions that failed or ran into difficulty, from the centrists promoting the Common Core to the attempted Creation Care partnership between environmentalists and evangelicals, consistently overlooked or misunderstood their opposition's strength and sources of power. Bean and Teles document[27] how environmental funders mistakenly pushed a top-down evangelical strategy, believing that statements of support from well-known figures would result in shifts in mass opinion. Instead, advocates were caught between their unconvinced base and their angry political allies in the GOP.

2. Value relationships over transactions, and make space and time to build trust.

Successful transpartisan efforts develop gradually and with intention. Advocates and groups with dissimilar ideological lenses don't successfully jump into practical partnerships. Stuart Butler, senior fellow at Brookings (and formerly at the Heritage Foundation), stressed: "The only way you can do it is very slowly...Engagement on one issue builds a track record that then opens the door to working on other issues." Ana Yañez-Correa, former executive director of the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, told New America how her conservative partners on criminal justice reform had come to be some of her most trusted allies—but only after years of working together on sentencing reform. The Pentagon Budget Coalition held a confidential offsite retreat to build confidence among left and right members. By contrast, case study author Lydia Bean remarked that not only were evangelicals "not at the table" for climate coalition decision-making, "they weren't even at the kids' table."

3. Clarify goals, stick to shared objectives.

Numerous transpartisan entrepreneurs told us that effective "strange-bedfellows" coalitions take the time to set clear, limited goals and then stick to them—avoiding internal strife over issues on which they do not agree. The coalition which produced the largest single-year drop in Pentagon spending since the end of the Korean War, for example, explicitly agreed at its offsite retreat to focus on the budget topline—not on cutting specific programs, or what to do with the savings. As Brookings' Stuart Butler put it, "Set no-go lines and be clear about them. Be open to discussing anything, including areas of disagreement, but in time outside work time."

4. Be opportunistic, ready to take advantage of exogenous shifts.

In all of the cases we looked at, reformers who had dedicated years to an issue recognized a moment where the political landscape shifted to allow an opening—sometimes a shift that they initially perceived as a significant threat or disappointment.

The consolidation of GOP control of Texas state government was part of what drove progressive prison reformers to make common cause with conservatives, even as it opened the playing field for conservatives to change views within their own movement. Liberal and libertarian advocates of Pentagon spending cuts had known each other for years, but never seen reason to organize together—until the arrival of a bloc of fiscally-conservative Tea Party Republicans changed the political equation. Equally, transpartisan organizing requires adaptation as new partners learn about each other—something that didn't occur in the climate care or anti-Common Core cases—limiting their impact. Michael Ostrolenk, a colleague of Grover Norquist's and veteran of transpartisan organizing on Pentagon spending, civil liberties, surveillance and other issues, commented on the challenges of flexing with circumstance: "If people approach as, "we have a fully-formed campaign and we need some conservatives on our side," that will fail and I will cringe. Start earlier, and incorporate the perspective of the other side on how the campaign should be organized and framed."

5. Promote leaders with key personal qualities.

Interviews with a dozen leaders with extensive track records of building cross-party coalitions highlighted a number of shared personal qualities—not all qualities commonly associated with conciliators or policy wonks. Successful transpartisans are curious, open-minded listeners who like people. Conservative Lawrie Chickering stressed: "The worst mistake you can make is to stop listening to people...because transpartisanship is about them, not about you." But they are also ideologues who have a strong drive to win on the issues about which they care. "My focus was on outcomes, values, ideology rather than accrual of personal power," said progressive funder Anna Lefer Kuhn. "The strongest partisans make the best transpartisans. The people who run around saying they aren't partisans are being driven by biases they aren't aware of," said Nader-Raider-turned-transpartisan-activist Jim Turner.

Time and Funding Horizons

Transformational coalitions require long-term, and transformational investment of attention and money. Short-term, purely transactional coalitions are unlikely to succeed at complex or long-term tasks—that is, any policy change requiring implementation and oversight will likely be beyond them. The project's four cases fall along a clear spectrum, with the years of fiscal and relationship-building put into criminal justice work at the local and national levels on one end, and the easy-come, easy-go "parallel play" of the anti-Core advocates at the other. In between are the shorter-term and smaller-dollar, but equally intentional, efforts of Pentagon budget coalition organizers and donors and the effort to use center-left foundation dollars to speed up the slow long-term work of the climate care evangelical leaders. The visibility and destructive power of the anti-Common Core effort highlights one scenario in which even coalitions with little or no formal structure or investment can produce results; however, the failure of the partnership between evangelical climate care activists and mainstream environmentalists, and the relatively rapid peaking and petering out of the Pentagon Budget Coalition, suggest that short-term time horizons are inappropriate for coalitions whose goals include complex policy formation.

> **Transformational coalitions require long-term, transformational investment of attention and money. Short-term, purely transactional coalitions are unlikely to succeed at complex or long-term tasks**

These observations pose several significant challenges to current habits of organizing and funding policy advocacy. The most transformative coalition we studied, on criminal justice reform, benefited from years of large-scale financial and intellectual support from several large, mainstream foundations, who were content to stay behind the scenes. The Pentagon budget coalition enjoyed similarly dedicated and hands-off support, but on a much smaller scale and over a shorter time period, which didn't allow it to establish a presence outside the Beltway. We saw no evidence that anti-Core groups were interested in funding for joint work. And while they were quite effective at short term destruction, our authors judged their medium-to-long-term effects to be very limited—a warning against the idea that transpartisan coalitions can be built on the cheap, and an important insight for thinking about the defense and strengthening of mainstream centrist coalitions against real or potential transpartisan opposition. Finally, we found that the discrepancy between the pace of change foreseen by funders and "Big Enviro" groups on the one hand, and evangelical climate care advocates on the other was one of the major reasons for that movement's disappointing under-performance during the cap and trade debate.

In sum, funders and strategists will need to regard transpartisanship as a tactic which requires its own set of medium- to long-term investments in capacity and trust-building. It is an important part of the arsenal of responses to polarization, but it is not a cost-saver or a shortcut. Joan Blades, the co-founder of MoveOn, compared the ideal entrepreneurial nature of transpartisan funding with her experience leading a software company: "fund five projects, and know that you'd have to give a couple a joyful funeral."

But although it will be very challenging to obtain all of the necessary conditions, experience shows coalitions getting interesting results with only some of them in place. As long as polarization keeps mainstream spaces for policy cooperation closed, transpartisanship will continue to be an interesting option on the policymaking and advocacy landscape.

LOOKING AHEAD

This work coincided with a period in which issue polarization and partisanship hit new peaks. What happened has often been described as "gridlock," but the blanket despair associated with the phrase camouflages a more complex reality. Nationally but especially at local levels, political and policy entrepreneurs embarked on a flood of experiments aimed at devising work-arounds to move new policies, defend existing ones, or simply re-open lines of communication.

In the last two years, establishment leaders have in turn learned how to blunt transpartisan pressures—reasserting themselves on Pentagon spending and limiting the effects of anti-Common Core activism, among other issues. However, these developments should not be mistaken for a pendulum swing back toward the centrist coalitions of the past. As Mark Schmitt has written,[29] "the old rules [that] lead to the same happy idea: American politics calibrates and centers itself, and it usually pulls parties and most politicians back from the extremes" are gone. The changes in American politics are real and permanent. The "median voters" who anchored the center are not voting, or simply gone. Redistricting and voting restrictions have decreased their impact. The loosening of campaign finance restrictions and the proliferation of partisan media have empowered ideological purists and their enforcers. As a result, the ideological pressures on House, Senate and state-level candidates show no signs of abating.

What we are seeing, however, is a splintering, perhaps even a large-scale realignment[28], along ideological lines within both parties. That was the dynamic that underlay our successful cases: debates within the GOP about what it meant to be tough on crime and, for a briefer period, whether officeholders could be genuine "fiscal hawks" without also taking a tough look at defense spending.

Presidential election years are notoriously bad for nuanced policy discussion and for moving legislation, and 2016 is no exception. What is exceptional is the range and substance of policy debates within each of the parties. Education, ethanol, foreign policy, entitlement reform, defense spending, health care, campaign finance reform, and trade policy are just some of the areas where defining a standard Republican or Democratic position is harder than it was a year or two ago.

The insights of this project tell us that the winter's more colorful primary fights—and the deeper dynamics behind them—can provide leading indicators of issues where it's worth investing in strange bedfellow coalitions.

Other leading indicators will include issues with lower-than-expected partisan salience; issues such as deregulating to encourage solar energy that are attracting transpartisan enthusiasm at the state level; and issues such as climate change where

party leaders (in this case, the GOP) are insistently questioning their own candidates' positions.

Finally, our work offers a clear answer to the question of what policy wonks do with their time when the election cycle and partisan rhetoric seem to close every formal avenue of policy change.

First, take the time to identify ideological fissures in areas of interest and dig deeper into where the policy ideas, and political power, behind them are coming from. Both analysts and practitioners have much work to do in developing and training to analyze and strategize along these lines, whether through methods like "power mapping" developed and promoted by non-violent democracy activists in Syria and elsewhere, or through new methods the field develops.

Second, our case studies and interviews were unequivocal as to the benefits of time invested in building relationships and understanding the perspectives of peers who share interest in an issue but come from different ideologies. They affirm, as well, the necessity of sharpened skills in political scoping as part of long-term strategizing. Often, the actors who are developing the best new policy solutions are unfamiliar with the issue's coalitional and identity politics. We are seeing alongside this particularly divisive election campaign a strong undercurrent of calls for more productive government; no attempts at reforms or reconciliation will be successful without the kind of understanding and strategic thinking that transpartisanship highlights.

Notes

1 "Political Polarization in the American Public," Pew Research Center, June 12, 2014, accessed February 18, 2016, http://www.people-press.org/files/2014/06/6-12-2014-Political-Polarization-Release.pdf.

2 Thomas Carsey and Geoffrey Layman, "Our Politics is Polarized on More Issues Than Ever Before," The Washington Post, January 17, 2014, accessed April 12, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/17/our-politics-is-polarized-on-more-issues-than-ever-before/.

3 Scott Clement and Carol Morello, "New Poll Shows How Sharply Partisan the Debate od Iran Deal Has Become," The Washington Post, September 1, 2015, accessed March 23, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/new-poll-shows-how-sharply-partisan-the-debate-on-iran-deal-has-become/2015/08/31/1f0f0790-501c-11e5-9812-92d5948a40f8_story.html.

4 Martin S. Indyk, interview by David Rothkopf, The Brookings Institution, August 26, 2014, http://www.brookings.edu/research/interviews/2014/08/26-us-israel-relationship-indyk-rothkopf.

5 "America's Changing Drug Policy Landscape," Pew Research Center, April 2, 2014, http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/04-02-14%20Drug%20Policy%20Release.pdf.

6 Ibid.

7 Sara Kehaulani Goo, "What Americans Want to Do About Illegal Immigration," Pew Research Center, August 24, 2015, accessed February 29, 2016, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/08/24/what-americans-want-to-do-about-illegal-immigration/.

8 "Wider Partisan Gap on Death Penalty," Pew Research Center, accessed March 23, 2016, http://www.people-press.org/2015/04/16/less-support-for-death-penalty-especially-among-democrats/4-16-2015_02/.

9 Lee Drutman, "The House Freedom Caucus Has Some Ideas on How the US House Should Operate," Polyarchy (blog), Vox, October 20, 2015, http://www.vox.com/polyarchy/2015/10/20/9570747/house-freedom-caucus-process-demands.

10 Markus Prior, "Media and Political Polarization," The Annual Review of Political Science 16 (2013): 101–27, accessed April 13, 2016, doi: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-100711-135242.

11 Berry, Jeffrey M. and Sarah Sobieraj, The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

12 Bean, Lydia and Steve Teles. Spreading the Gospel of Climate Change: An Evangelical Battleground. Washington, DC: New America, 2016. Accessed March3, 2016. https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/11649-spreading-the-gospel-of-climate-change/climate_care11.9.4f0142a50aa24a2ba65020f7929f6fd7.pdf.

13 Michael B. Henderson and Martin R. West, "Partnership and Public Opinion on the Common Core," The Brookings Institution, April 16, 2015, accessed April 3, 2016, http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/04/16-chalkboard-common-core-west.

14 Steve Benjamin and Gregory A. Thomas, "Congress Must Pass the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015," The Hill, February 3, 2016, accessed March 16, 2016, http://thehill.com/opinion/op-ed/268129-congress-must-pass-the-sentencing-reform-and-corrections-act-of-2015.

15 Robert Barnes, "Supreme Court: Life Sentences on Juveniles Open for Later Reviews," The Washington Post, January 25, 2016, accessed April 13, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts_law/supreme-court-juveniles-sentenced-to-life-have-option-for-new-reviews/2016/01/25/06e3dfc2-c378-11e5-8965-0607e0e265ce_story.html.

16 Laura Wagner, "Obama Bans Solitary Confinement for Juveniles in Federal Prisons," NPR, January 25, 2016, accessed March6, 2016, http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/01/25/463891388/obama-announces-reforms-to-solitary-confinement-in-federal-prisons; Maurice Chammah and Shaka Senghor, interview by Hari Sreenivasan, PBS, podcast audio, January 26, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/citing-second-chances-obama-pledges-solitary-confinement-reform/.

17 Dylan Stableford, "President Obama: Prison Rape is no Joke," Yahoo News, July 15, 2015, accessed March 9, 2016, https://www.yahoo.com/politics/president-obama-prison-rape-is-no-joke-124157225836.html.

18 Sarah Breitenbach, "Push for Policing reform Expected in Upcoming Legislative Sessions," Stateline (blog), The Pew Charitable Trusts, December 17, 2015, http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2015/12/17/push-for-policing-reforms-expected-in-upcoming-legislative-sessions.

19 "Campaign Finance Law Quick Reference for Reporters," Federal Election Commission, accessed April 2, 2016, http://www.fec.gov/press/bkgnd/bcra_overview.shtml.

20 Patricia Zengerle and Warren Strobel, "NSA Surveillance Reform Bill Clears Hurdle in Senate," Huffington Post, June 2, 2015, accessed April 13, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/02/usa-freedom-act_n_7493980.html.

21 "Cap and Trade," US Environmental Protection Agency, accessed March 5, 2016, https://www3.epa.gov/captrade/.

22 Jeff Bryant, "The Revolution is Here," The Washington Post, May 17,2013, accessed March 9, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/05/17/the-revolution-is-here/.

23 See graph on p.3 of John T. Bennett. The Sequester, the Pentagon, and the Little Campaign That Could. Washington, DC: New America, 2015, accessed March 3, 2016. https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/9826-the-sequester-the-pentagon-and-the-little-campaign-that-could/PentagonBudgetReform_Option2.6de75538a2884e019c0bbf1cb78cfae2.pdf.

24 "Standards in Your State," Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed March 28, 2016, http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/.

25 Patrick McGuinn and Jonathan Supovitz. Parallel Play in the Education Sandbox: The Common Core and the Politics of Transpartisan Coalitions. Washington, DC: New America, 2016, accessed April 3, 2016. https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/12298-parallel-play-in-the-education-sandbox/common_core_1.13.e146c9a3e44b4dcea030bf4ac1efda59.pdf.

26 Anonymous comment from an education reformer interviewed by Heather Hurlburt in 2015.

27 Bean, Lydia and Steve Teles. Spreading the Gospel of Climate Change: An Evangelical Battleground. Washington, DC: New America, 2016. Accessed March3, 2016. https://static.newamerica.org/attachments/11649-spreading-the-gospel-of-climate-change/climate_care11.9.4f0142a50aa24a2ba65020f7929f6fd7.pdf.

28 Lee Drutman, "American Politics Has Reached Peak Polarization," Polyarchy (blog), Vox, March 24, 2016, http://www.vox.com/polyarchy/2016/3/24/11298808/american-politics-peak-polarization.

29 Mark Schmitt, "Trump Did Not Break Politics", Campaign Stops (blog), New York Times, January 4, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/04/opinion/campaign-stops/trump-did-not-break-politics.html