

36. Denise Scheberle, *Federalism and Environmental Policy: Trust and the Politics of Implementation*, revised ed. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004), chap. 7.
37. Teske, *Regulation in the States*.
38. John D. Donahue, *Disunited States: What's at Stake as Washington Fades and the States Take the Lead* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Paul E. Peterson, *The Price of Federalism* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press), chap. 4; Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), chap. 11.
39. William T. Gormley Jr., "Intergovernmental Conflict on Environmental Policy: The Attitudinal Connection," *Western Political Quarterly* 40 (1987): 298–299.
40. Lowry, *The Dimensions of Federalism*, 45.
41. John Dinan, "The State of American Federalism 2007–2008," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 38 (summer 2008): 400–401; Alan Greenblatt, "Southern Water Torture," *Governing* (February 2008): 15–16.
42. Barry G. Rabe, "Environmental Policy and the Bush Era," 417–420.
43. Tom Arrandale, "Tigers No More," *Governing* (April 2006): 68.
44. Klyza and Sousa, *American Environmental Policy, 1990–2006*, 253.
45. Barry G. Rabe, "States on Steroids: The Intergovernmental Odyssey of American Climate Change Policy," *Review of Policy Research* 25 (March 2008): 105–128.
46. Donahue, *Disunited States*, 65.
47. National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), *Setting Priorities, Getting Results: A New Direction for EPA* (Washington, D.C.: NAPA, 1995), 71.

3

Past the Tipping Point? Public Discourse and the Role of the Environmental Movement in a Post-Bush Era

Deborah Lynn Guber and Christopher J. Bosso

It was, some might say, a year of improbable events. In 2007, after languishing for decades on the back burner of American politics, the issue of global warming was thrust into the mainstream at last by a low-budget documentary that in cinematic terms amounted to little more than "a man, a message, and a scary slide show."¹ Within months, those associated with the film *An Inconvenient Truth*, including its narrator—former presidential candidate Al Gore—had earned, in some combination or another, a Grammy nomination, an Emmy award, and two Oscars.² When it was announced later that year that Gore would share a Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts, alongside the experts who had labored long on the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the environmental movement, its chief scientists, and its most prominent champion suddenly found themselves elevated to the ranks of Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, and the Dalai Lama.

If Gore's transition from "presidential loser into Saint Al, the earnest, impassioned, pointer-wielding Cassandra of the environmental movement" was a surprise to some, the public conversion of his political nemesis, George W. Bush, was no less dramatic.³ Ever since Bush's inauguration in 2001, the League of Conservation Voters had branded him "the most anti-environmental president in our nation's history" for his efforts to weaken the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act and his persistent demands to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR).⁴ The Bush administration had long been reticent on the subject of global warming, but when the IPCC's work was finalized in early 2007, its rhetoric—if not its policies—abruptly changed course.⁵ The White House heralded the study as a "landmark" report that reflected a "sizeable and robust body of knowledge regarding the physical science of climate change," including the finding that "the Earth is warming" and that human activities are "very likely" the dominant cause.⁶ In a speech on energy security delivered at the State Department in early autumn, even Bush had to concede that our understanding of the issue had "come a long way."⁷

When the president caught up with his former rival at a White House reception for Nobel laureates shortly after Thanksgiving 2007, and the two fell into a private conversation about global warming that was described afterward as "very nice" and "very cordial," the peculiar event further

underscored the obvious.⁸ It may have been a bad year for the environment and for melting polar ice caps in particular, but for activists who had spent the better part of twenty years pressing the issue onto the public stage, 2007 was a very good year, indeed.⁹

Scientists use the term *tipping point* to refer to the threshold at which a system's state is irretrievably altered. Regarding global warming, some observers believe that moment will come with the destruction of the Amazon rainforests, the collapse of monsoon season, or the loss of sea ice in summer.¹⁰ For scholars who study the politics of problem definition, the concept seems to work equally well.¹¹ In fact, since the publication in 2000 of Malcolm Gladwell's book of the same name, the term has become part of the vernacular of politics, applied not just to the environment, but to situations as diverse as the war in Iraq, genocide in Darfur, consumer confidence in the economy, and candidate momentum during presidential campaigns.¹² Based on that collection of experiences, the phrase can be taken to mean any (or all) of the following:

- The point at which awareness and understanding of an issue reaches critical mass¹³
- The point at which an issue's opponents "throw in the towel" and accept the inevitable¹⁴
- The point at which urgency forces lawmakers to take decisive action¹⁵

With those standards in mind, the year 2007—with its unlikely fusion of science, politics, and old-fashioned Hollywood glamour—may well have marked a long-awaited tipping point for climate change. The IPCC report confirming that evidence of warming was "unequivocal" forced all but the most diehard skeptics to acknowledge scientific consensus on the nature of the problem, if not its precise solution.¹⁶ For some observers, that gave reason to hope that two major and related barriers to action would likewise be relieved, at least over time: the media's stubborn professional commitment to a narrowly construed "norm of balance" in their coverage of global warming, on the one hand, and the public's persistent belief that the science remains unsettled, on the other.¹⁷

In the meantime, however, the shift from science to politics brought an even more advantageous and unexpected twist. In January 2007, on the eve of the annual State of the Union address, the CEOs of ten major corporations urged President Bush to set a mandatory ceiling on greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁸ By November, in what one columnist called "an unprecedented show of solidarity," the leaders of 150 global companies, including Coca-Cola, General Electric, Nike, and Shell, were calling for a "legally binding framework" in which they could invest wisely in low-carbon technologies, without the fear of placing themselves and their stockholders at a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace.¹⁹ Corporate America, its fingers firmly on the public's pulse, apparently wanted government to take the lead.²⁰ At least on the surface, some of global warming's most powerful adversaries seemed poised to become its allies.

Finally, in perhaps the most significant development of 2007, environmentalists had reason to celebrate policy success at last—not in Washington, perhaps, but in a multitude of initiatives passed at regional, state, and local levels (see chapters 2 and 12).²¹ In 2007, thirty-six states had "climate action plans" in place or under development, led by California and its Republican governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, while the mayors of 522 cities had agreed to abide by the standards of the Kyoto Protocol despite the reluctance of national lawmakers to do to the same.²²

By the end of the year, American environmentalism seemed at a crossroads. According to the Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Thomas L. Friedman, it could no longer be dismissed as entirely "liberal," "tree-hugging," "unpatriotic," or "vaguely French." For citizens, corporations, and governments alike, Friedman insisted that being green was now "the most patriotic, capitalistic, geopolitical, healthy and competitive thing they could do."²³ But for the foot soldiers of the movement—those made cautious by decades of disappointment, resistance, and delay—the contours of this new terrain were less obvious and the challenge of deciding what to do next loomed large.²⁴

In this chapter we explore the politics of climate change as emblematic of a new age of environmentalism in the United States, and the opportunities and constraints it imposes on political actors and the institutions they inhabit. In doing so, we look to the vagaries of public opinion on environmental issues, the difficulty of translating broad public support into substantive policy outcomes, and the role of the environmental movement in linking mass attitudes to government action. For everyone involved, much—but certainly not all—of the political opportunity structure shaping environmental policymaking was reconfigured dramatically with the election of President Barack Obama and the enlargement of Democratic majorities in both chambers of Congress. Taken as a whole, the events of 2007 and the results of the 2008 election solidified a momentous shift from the previous eight years. Even so, and even as we argue that the debate over the science of global warming is indeed at an end, a wider and more significant ground war over public opinion, the range of policy options, and the framing of political discourse has just begun.

Motivating the Public on Global Warming

In October 2004, two young activists published a blistering indictment of the mainstream environmental community, under the provocative title "The Death of Environmentalism." In it, they criticized the movement's continued reliance on the same strategic framework it had used with some success since 1970. The first challenge was to define the problem publicly, usually in terms that were narrow and easily recognized as "environmental"; the second was to craft a technical remedy; and the third was to sell the plan to lawmakers through conventional means, such as letter-writing campaigns and direct lobbying. On the subject of global warming, that strategy might

involve forging coalitions with business leaders, encouraging Congress to adopt cap-and-trade programs, or pushing consumers to embrace fluorescent light bulbs and hybrid cars. But first and foremost, it meant communicating the urgency of the problem to a public ill-equipped to understand the weight of scientific evidence. To the authors of the essay, Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, that essential link had become one of the movement's great failures. In their view, tactics that had once worked to address even second-generation problems such as air pollution or acid rain would not mobilize meaningful public support in the fight against global warming.²⁵

While many saw "The Death of Environmentalism" as overly dramatic and needlessly divisive, there was widespread agreement on at least one major point: the environmental movement had become seemingly complacent in harnessing the power of public opinion. As Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club, admitted, "We have inadequately mobilized public concerns and values to create political pressure. As a result decision makers have not been forced to confront the need for fundamental changes in the way our society uses carbon (and other greenhouse gasses)."²⁶ Often overly confident in polls that showed widespread popular support for their proposals, environmentalists were "winning on the issues" but losing politically to more savvy opponents who understood better how to frame those issues to their tactical advantage.²⁷

Within the next three years, much would change—enough, at least, to prompt a writer for *The American Prospect* to say that it was "a world away" from where the country had been when Nordhaus and Shellenberger first penned their critique.²⁸ But the breakthrough of 2007 was started largely from the top down by people like Gore, by those considered "influentials," "legitimizers," or "opinion leaders."²⁹ In writing *The Tipping Point* (2000), Gladwell expressed faith in these agents of change, in "people with a particular and rare set of social skills," and in their power to connect, inform, and persuade others.³⁰ Much of this task seems to have been achieved, yet as scholars of public opinion have long known and environmentalists repeatedly discovered to their frustration, convincing ordinary citizens to *act* on their beliefs is far more difficult than Gladwell imagined.³¹

An Improving Climate for Change?

Few Americans had heard or read anything about *global warming* or *the greenhouse effect* before these terms emerged from the pages of scientific journals and congressional hearing rooms during the famously hot summer of 1988. By 2006, when most major polling organizations had stopped asking the question altogether, 91 percent of those interviewed by the Pew Research Center said that they had.³² Other key indicators also show signs of progress over time. In 1992, when asked how well they understood global warming, 22 percent of those interviewed by the Gallup Organization said "not at all."³³ By the spring of 2008, that number had fallen to just 2 percent. After decades of political debate, public relations campaigns, and media attention,

most felt that they knew the issue either "fairly well" (59 percent) or "very well" (21 percent).³⁴

Today a majority of Americans believe that climate change is real and that its consequences will be serious—a position adopted, not coincidentally, by both major-party candidates for president in 2008, Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain. While roughly 10 percent of those interviewed at any given time insist that global warming "will never happen," those who acknowledge the problem are inclined to believe that its effects will be felt sooner rather than later. In a March 2008 survey, 61 percent of respondents thought that warming trends had "already begun," a result that was 13 percentage points higher than when Gallup first posed the question back in 1997.

For environmental advocates, however, the lack of movement on other measures of public opinion is disappointing. Even with an increase in general awareness about climate change and the immediacy of its effects, relatively few Americans feel a heightened sense of anxiety or alarm, despite the concerted efforts of Gore and others in "making climate hot."³⁵ When asked by Gallup in early 2008 how much they personally worried about each of a dozen different environmental problems, respondents—as usual—placed "the greenhouse effect" second to last, well below various forms of air and water pollution, soil contamination, and habitat loss for wildlife.³⁶ It is a result that has changed little in the past twenty years. In fact, the Pew Research Center found that disinterest in global warming sets the United States apart from other countries. Among the fifteen nations they surveyed worldwide in 2006, concern was lowest in the United States. In a sample that included citizens from Western Europe, as well as India, Russia, Nigeria, and Pakistan, the only other country with an equally low score was China.³⁷

Knowing More, Caring Less

Why do Americans not feel a greater sense of urgency about global warming, especially given their belief that it is a real phenomenon with serious environmental consequences? Experts on public opinion point to several explanations. For one thing, "creeping" threats that occur gradually over time are usually less visible to the untrained eye.³⁸ Also, since voters and taxpayers tend to give priority to immediate problems over long-term uncertainties, climate change may be too far removed from personal experience in both time and space to motivate action.³⁹ For instance, although many of those polled by Gallup believed that warming trends had "already begun," a majority of respondents (58 percent) thought it would not pose a "serious threat" to their way of life within their own lifetimes.⁴⁰ For similar reasons, another recent study found that those who live far away from seacoasts and flood plains were less likely to associate global warming—and the rising tides it will bring—with an acute sense of physical vulnerability.⁴¹

Still others argue that the magnitude of the issue and its technical complexity are to blame. As John Immerwahr notes, what the public is most skeptical about is not the existence of global warming *per se*, but rather their

ability to address the problem effectively as citizens and consumers.⁴² This may help to explain why scholars at Texas A&M University found that the more respondents knew about global warming, the *less* concern they seemed to feel, in part because awareness of the gravity of the problem diminished their own sense of efficacy and personal responsibility. “Global warming is an extreme collective action dilemma,” wrote the authors, “with the actions of one person having a negligible effect in the aggregate. Informed persons appear to realize this objective fact.”⁴³

Finally, even though Americans express confidence in their knowledge about global warming, evidence suggests that misunderstandings abound. In an update to its annual “report card” published in 2005, the National Environmental Education Foundation in Washington, D.C. found that only one-third of U.S. adults were capable of passing a “relatively simple knowledge quiz” that focused on a range of environmental concepts, including biodiversity, renewable energy, and solid waste.⁴⁴ When challenged specifically on the science of climate change, the results are often far worse. In an innovative experiment at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), one team of researchers found that even highly educated graduate students had a poor grasp of global warming, and that the intuitive or common sense approaches they took in selecting trajectories were frequently wrong.⁴⁵

Major polling organizations have struggled with the issue for years. In 1997, when the Pew Research Center wisely asked its respondents how they would describe the “greenhouse effect,” based on what they had heard or read, if anything, more than a third of those polled (38 percent) could not define the concept even in the vaguest of terms, identifying it instead, when presented with a close-ended list of options, as either a “new advance in agriculture” or a “new architectural style,” rather than as an “environmental danger.”⁴⁶ A similar and equally discouraging result was found in the 2000 General Social Survey (GSS), when more than half of those polled (54 percent) believed—incorrectly—that the greenhouse effect was caused by a hole in the earth’s atmosphere.⁴⁷

For environmental activists and climate scientists, correcting such errors is no easy task. Those in the professional environmental advocacy community, in particular, seem to have a deep faith in the kind of rational decision-making that motivates both Gore and the IPCC. As Bryan Walsh, a journalist for *Time* magazine, explains: “It’s the idea that if we simply marshal enough facts, enough data, enough PowerPoint slides, and present them to the world, the will to solve the problem will follow as simple as $2 + 2 = 4$.”⁴⁸ Instead, surveys and other experiments routinely show the opposite, which has led some observers to suspect that knowledge about global warming does not translate automatically—or even easily—into popular concern or increased salience, let alone policy preferences.⁴⁹

To be sure, Americans place genuine value on environmental quality. Yet they also support lower crime rates, better public schools, and a strong economy—among a host of other goals—many of which surpass the environment as national priorities, at least in the public’s perception. Climate

change faces competition for room on a crowded political agenda. As a result, its prominence and relative importance have remained low in the minds of average citizens, not yet generating the power needed to push into the top tier of the nation’s “most important problems,” to borrow a phrase from one of the common measures of issue salience used by pollsters. If that continues to be the case, well-intentioned efforts to raise awareness and to convey information, in and of themselves, will likely fall short in creating a tangible sense of urgency, particularly if other issues—such as the economic crisis that hit in September 2008—seem more immediate.⁵⁰

In the end, however, beliefs about global warming are shaped less by factual knowledge than by a variety of other factors: by elite opinion leaders, media narratives, and political rhetoric, but also by personal experience and assorted “real-world cues,” each of which provides a frame of reference with the power to filter and mislead.⁵¹ For instance, a persistent problem is that people tend to conflate global warming with natural weather cycles, a specious connection that is often encouraged in poorly constructed polls.⁵² In July 2008, 43 percent of those interviewed by ABC News said that weather patterns in their area had been “more unstable” over the past three years, while 58 percent thought that “average temperatures around the world” had inched higher.⁵³ They were also asked about a number of specific incidents, including “flooding in the Midwest” and “severe storms in Southeast Asia.” Roughly half of those surveyed believed that these, too, were a consequence of climate change.⁵⁴

If average citizens are likely to estimate the dangers of global warming by reference to anecdotal changes in the weather, it becomes easy to dismiss the issue as nonurgent, or at least intractable. Based on intuition alone, people tend to accept that weather events—even extreme ones, such as Hurricane Katrina—are uncontrollable.⁵⁵ They are considered natural disasters, or even acts of God. For the issue to generate public concern, and for that concern to move onto the policy agenda, a different “causal story” is required. As Deborah Stone argues, a bad condition does not become a problem until it can be seen, not as accident or fate, but as something “caused by human actions and amenable to human intervention.”⁵⁶

Shooting the Messenger

Unfortunately for the U.S. environmental movement and the growing cadre of scientists that has attempted to define global warming in precisely those terms, the process of problem definition is one easily manipulated, not only by actors with competing political arguments but also by the news media itself. As scholars increasingly point out, journalists no longer pursue the difficult goal of objectivity but instead settle for a “norm of balance,” whereby both sides of an issue are presented without respect to the quality and weight of the evidence.⁵⁷

The effects of such media coverage are instructive. A team of researchers led by Jon Krosnick used President Clinton’s campaign to build support for the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 as a natural experiment on opinion formation by

administering two national surveys, one before the fall debate and one immediately after. They found that while the salience of the issue rose temporarily, the distribution of opinions did not change, nor did respondents feel more knowledgeable on the subject in the end, in part because of the confusing array of viewpoints expressed in the press.⁵⁸ The mainstream media's commitment to this norm of balanced coverage had encouraged people to see climate change as an unsettled area of conflict and confusion rather than as scientific consensus.⁵⁹

A decade later, a majority of Americans continue to believe that substantial disagreement exists among scientists on the subject, despite the unambiguous language of the IPCC report. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago found in its GSS that respondents were far more likely to believe that scientists understood the causes of global warming well, at least compared to elected officials and business leaders. Within the same comparative context, they also thought—by a wide margin—that scientists should have the most influence in deciding what to do about global warming, perhaps because they were the group most likely “to support what is best for the country as a whole versus what serves their own narrow self-interests.” Still, GSS participants sensed a lack of consensus. On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant “near complete agreement” and 5 meant “no agreement at all,” the mean response to a question about the extent to which environmental scientists “agree among themselves about the existence and causes of global warming” fell precisely to the center of the scale.⁶⁰

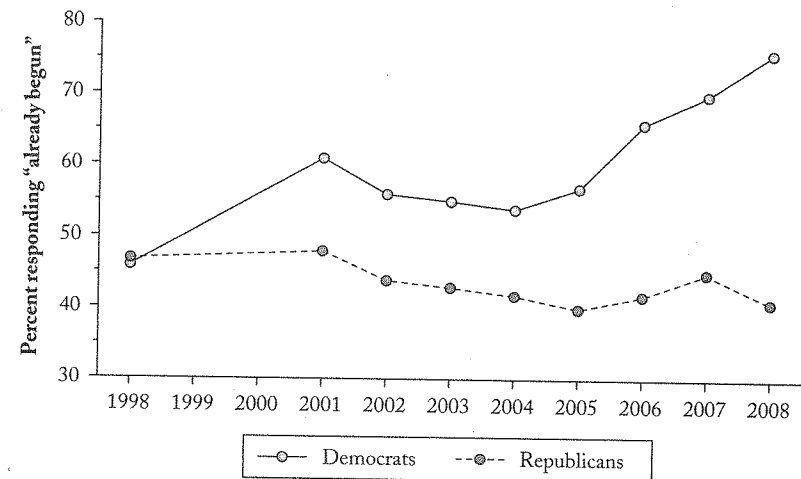
As Naomi Oreskes points out in *Science* magazine, that view was undoubtedly at odds with the facts. She examined nearly one thousand abstracts published in peer-reviewed journals between 1993 and 2003 and found none that disagreed with the consensus position on climate change.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the perception has remained. In discussing the issue with focus groups, Immerwahr may have been convinced that people were waiting for “credible signals from the scientific community.” Yet the inertia of attitudes on the subject suggests that the public's understanding of global warming is not just a function of science but also of the credibility of the participants and of how the issue is framed by opponents and presented in the press.⁶² To put it another way, in politics the messenger always matters.

A Growing Partisan Divide

In following the debate over the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, Krosnick and his colleagues found that opinions changed little overall, but that “beneath this apparently calm surface” there was the hint of a partisan divide, caused by citizens who took their cues largely from the elites they trusted most—an effect that was most pronounced among those who had little knowledge of global warming to begin with.⁶³ At the time, this was an important observation and a relatively new one at that. Roll call votes in Congress on environmental issues had always split strongly along party lines, but the divide among average Americans was generally more subtle and was connected as much to ideological considerations as to the issue itself.⁶⁴

Figure 3-1 A Widening Partisan Divide on Global Warming

Gallup poll question: “Which of the following statements reflects your view of when the effects of global warming will begin to happen—they have already begun to happen, they will start happening within a few years, they will start happening within your lifetime, they will not happen within your lifetime, but they will affect future generations, or they will never happen?”



Source: Riley E. Dunlap. “Climate-Change Views: Republican-Democratic Gaps Expand,” The Gallup Organization, 2008. Retrieved from www.gallup.com/poll/107569/ClimateChange-Views-Republican-Democratic-Gaps-Expand.aspx.

In recent years, however, party polarization has deepened at every level. Between 1997 and 2008, the percentage of Democrats who told Gallup that global warming had “already begun” increased dramatically from 46 to 76 percent. Meanwhile, the number of Republicans who thought the same fell by six percentage points, from 47 to 41 (see Figure 3-1). Over time, Republicans were also increasingly inclined to believe that the seriousness of global warming was “exaggerated” by the media, and that warming trends were the result of natural causes rather than human activity.⁶⁵ In fact, the Pew Research Center found that since the release of *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2007, the number of Americans who believed that there was “solid evidence” of global warming actually declined from 77 to 71 percent overall, due mainly to increased skepticism among Republicans.⁶⁶

For environmentalists, such fundamental differences pose vexing problems for their capacity to connect across the mass public and, by extension, build bipartisan support for policy initiatives. As Riley Dunlap and Aaron McCright point out in a careful study of Gallup data, “partisan polarization is more pronounced among those individuals reporting greater understanding of global warming.”⁶⁷ Indeed, among respondents who said they understood the issue either “fairly well” or “very well,” the correlations between party affiliation and five different beliefs about global warming increased steadily by year

between 1997 and 2008. Those same measures were weaker and more stable across the board for those who said they knew little about climate change.

Not only does information about global warming influence partisans in different ways, so too does a more general education. In April 2008 the Pew Research Center found that Democrats with college degrees were far more likely to believe that global warming was the result of human activity (75 percent), relative to Democrats who did not graduate from college (52 percent). On the other hand, Republicans who attended college were *less* likely than their counterparts to think the same, by a margin of 19 to 31 percent.⁶⁸ While those divisions may well reflect divergence in both media consumption and the effects of people taking cues from the leaders they trust most, it might also be the direct result of elite discourse. In short, it is possible that messengers like Gore have politicized the issue of climate change in unintended and truly unhelpful ways.⁶⁹

What Now? Mobilizing Concern into Action

So far, we have argued that, on the issue of climate change at least, the U.S. environmental movement has reached a tipping point. It is an achievement filled with great opportunity, but one that also poses new challenges for the advocacy organizations that work to translate public concern into political action. First, despite an increase in the number of Americans who acknowledge global warming and its perils, the salience of the issue remains low. For environmentalists, it is a nagging problem that is unlikely to be rectified by ad campaigns alone, despite the well-intentioned efforts of Gore and others on projects like WeCanSolveIt.org.⁷⁰ Second, public perceptions of scientific uncertainty remain despite objective evidence substantiating the reality of climate change. Such beliefs are no longer a function of science itself, but of how the issue is framed—consciously by opponents and perhaps subconsciously by the mainstream media. Finally, global warming has become an intensely partisan issue, a tendency that will have to be overcome if sustainable behavioral responses and policy solutions are to occur over the long haul.

In this regard, and recalling the “Death of Environmentalism” debate discussed earlier, the challenges of framing issues and promoting sustainable solutions fall squarely on the shoulders of the advocacy organizations that comprise the U.S. environmental “movement,” a term of holistic unity that masks diverse values, priorities, and strategic visions.⁷¹ Indeed, environmentalists seem united mostly with regard to a common political enemy. In looking at the history of contemporary environmentalism, one is often struck by the fact that its eras seem marked largely by its ideological foes—Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, Newt Gingrich and the Republican House of Representatives in the 1990s, and, of course, George W. Bush and Dick Cheney in the 2000s. It is no wonder that the authors of “Death of Environmentalism” hit such a nerve: by this reckoning and whatever its other successes, the mainstream environmental movement has consistently failed to translate generalized public support for environmental goals into actual votes for president or Congress.

Whatever the merits of this broader debate—and interest groups as independent actors may have less clout in swaying elections or in lobbying for policy outcomes than any care to admit—the election of Barack Obama and the enlargement of Democratic majorities in both chambers of Congress creates an ostensibly more favorable political context for environmental gains that nevertheless forces activists to rethink their strategies and tactics. As organizations they spent the 2000s fighting and surviving the Bush administration, and through their concerted efforts played no small role in staving off even worse harms than could have occurred. But these were by necessity defensive strategies. The coming of the Obama administration, ushered into power on a seemingly thorough public repudiation of unfettered global free markets and the deregulatory ethos of late twentieth century conservatism, presents environmentalists with their greatest political opportunity in over a generation, a window for major policy change not seen since the early 1970s. For environmentalists the challenge is to capitalize on this window of opportunity and make *politically* sustainable progress on climate change and other major problems on their respective agendas.

To think about these specific challenges, we point to two broad functions that U.S. interest groups theoretically provide: (1) they aggregate and mobilize like-minded citizens, and (2) they represent aggregated interests in government. We then ask how environmental groups generally fare in both instances and, more important, what prospects they have for taking advantage of the political opportunities now before them.

Building a Sustainable Green Coalition?

As any basic government text reminds us, the topography of American politics is shaped by constitutional rules that purposefully fragment political power and by an electoral system that creates a bias toward two-party dominance. As a result, compared to their European cousins, for example, organized interest groups in the United States play disproportionately central roles in educating, organizing, and mobilizing into action relevant sectors of the mass public. Indeed, one can argue that in the American context, interest groups are quasi-parties, providing all but those last elemental functions of parties in parliamentary systems—organizing and running government.

The ability of organized interests to fulfill these functions varies with the sector and the issue, of course. In general, groups aligned with geographically defined and economically based constituencies, such as wheat growers and coal miners, are able to speak to, aggregate, and mobilize their adherents in a more sustained and targeted fashion than are groups whose supporters are more dispersed or whose causes are more diffuse. Moreover, the topography of representation of farmers, unionized industrial workers, and employees in extractive industries like coal, oil, or timber aligns with the geographically based system of electoral representation, notably in the two chambers of Congress.

For all their capacity to educate citizens and maintain a watchful eye on policymakers, environmental groups still struggle to build and sustain the

kinds of geographically situated coalitions that can match the potency of extractive industries. For one thing, environmental goods often are perceived as diffuse, long-term, and intangible even as jobs are not. By default, those defending the economic and lifestyle status quo have the easier task, particularly when the costs of policy change are proximate, tangible, and seem to sit disproportionately on those whose livelihoods are at stake.

Moreover, remarkably few of the nation's major environmental groups maintain local or state chapters—old-line groups like Sierra Club, National Audubon, and the National Wildlife Federation being notable exceptions—so they have been too easily caricatured by foes (and even some friends) as outsiders with few local connections and little legitimacy. Compounding this outsider image is the reality that many environmental groups find it hard to look beyond the educated (and white) middle class that historically contributes the bulk of their political, ideological, and financial support. Battles over issues such as automobile mileage (CAFE) standards, timber cutting in old growth forests, and oil exploration in ANWR too easily feed into an overarching narrative that environmentalism is anti-jobs, if not anti-worker, an imagery of elitism and class warfare adroitly manipulated by self-interested corporations and free-market ideologues.⁷² It was no surprise, for example, that the Bush administration could count among its allies in the fights over the Kyoto Treaty, ANWR, and CAFE standards several of the nation's major industrial unions, an irony given the administration's otherwise spotty record on labor issues.

In many ways the problem of climate change offers environmentalists an unparalleled opportunity to reframe that overarching narrative and, in doing so, forge new and more politically effective coalitions with previously unlikely potential allies, labor unions in particular. For decades, environmentalists and organized labor confronted one another over the stringency of environmental regulation and energy conservation. The wrenching economic changes wrought by global competition, wildly fluctuating energy prices, and dramatic economic dislocation have pushed shrinking industrial unions to seek new allies even as environmentalists look to make inroads among working-class voters in areas where they might share common goals, including an antipathy toward conservatives on issues such as free trade and labor relations.

Such recognition of shared goals—and common enemies—has led to the formation of several so-called blue-green coalitions in recent years. The Apollo Alliance, founded in 2003, brings together old-line environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and National Wildlife Federation and major industrial unions such as the UAW (representing auto workers, among others), United Mine Workers, and United Steelworkers. The Apollo Alliance's goal is to promote a national effort to create more "green" American manufacturing jobs—in "clean coal" technologies, hybrid automobiles, and transportation infrastructure, in particular—and to form a united effort to promote global "fair trade."⁷³ Another coalition is the Blue Green Alliance, between the Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council, on one side, and United Steelworkers and Communications Workers of

America, on the other, which together represent some four million people in a partnership designed to promote job-creating solutions to global warming. This coalition, formed in 2006, has focused its attention to date on building grassroots alliances in key union states such as Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wisconsin.

From a strategic sense, it is notable that the groups involved in these efforts range from the ideologically center-right (National Wildlife Federation) to center-left (Sierra Club)—as opposed to critics of free-market capitalism such as Friends of the Earth—and that they shy away from debates over consumer culture and materialism that tend to alienate working-class Americans. They instead focus on promoting "progressive" trade policies and investing in new generations of "green jobs," themes likelier to appeal to their labor union partners.⁷⁴ In doing so, they seek to reframe the broader issue of climate change away from a problem demanding individual sacrifice and raising the specter of lowered living standards into an *opportunity* for a national investment in science and technology, new jobs, and the promise of a prosperous and more environmentally sustainable future. That the 2008 Obama campaign framed its entire environment and energy platform under the rubric of a "New Energy for America" agenda—or that Obama announced this agenda in Lansing, Michigan—was no surprise to anyone paying close attention to the political and policy opportunities to be created in a blue-green coalition.⁷⁵

Other coalitions are less geographic than philosophical, but no less important to framing the issue of climate change for policymakers. In February 2006 over eighty evangelical Christian leaders, a group historically hostile to what many considered the pagan underpinnings of contemporary environmentalism, announced an "Evangelical Climate Initiative" to fight global warming.⁷⁶ The initiative, opposed by religious conservatives aligned with the Bush administration, expressed support for market-based incentives to reduce greenhouse gases and plans for an educational campaign designed to convince fellow believers that combating global warming was a moral question sanctioned in the biblical injunction for Christians to be good stewards of the Earth. Funds for this campaign came from individuals and, more notably, major foundations like the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Hewlett Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, philanthropies not historically known to support religious causes but that saw an opportunity to create new alliances in a common effort to combat global warming. A related effort by the Evangelical Environmental Network promotes "Creation Care," an overarching theology of "stopping and preventing activities that are harmful (e.g., air and water pollution, species extinction), and participating in activities that further Christ's reconciliation of all of creation to God."⁷⁷ The political importance of evangelical demands for action on climate change are considerable, particularly if they soften conservative opposition to environmental efforts in Congress and in the states. An array of Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and other religious leaders have also called for action on global warming within their respective communities (for example, the U.S.

Conference of Bishops, the Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life, and the Islamic Society of North America) as well as through broader interfaith organizations such as the National Council of Churches and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, cumulatively expanding a supportive if not necessarily unified coalition for policy change.⁷⁸ Mainstream environmental groups, long skittish about partnerships with any particular religious community, may see opportunities in the shifting attitudes of believers as a whole, given President Obama's expressed views about faith and environmental stewardship.⁷⁹

Such alliances are hardly the only story, of course. Confronted with federal inaction, environmental groups worked closely with state governors—and notably with less doctrinaire Republicans like California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger—to foster innovations in energy conservation and transportation, in effect creating a national climate change policy one state at a time.⁸⁰ These initiatives are also leading to the creation of new state-focused organizations and reformulation of some older ones. Of note is Environment America, a Boston-based federation of state advocacy organizations formed in 2007 by two dozen now-renamed “public interest research groups” (PIRGs) with origins in Ralph Nader's Public Citizen of the early 1970s.⁸¹ Knitting the PIRGs into a more tightly integrated federation focused on state-level efforts to promote clean energy and address climate change made a virtue out of necessity, given their search for a renewed mission and sounder finances. In the long run, however, it also must be seen as part of an overall effort by environmentalists to broaden their coalition of support for more assertive efforts to address climate change when the opportunity to do so presents itself.

Representing Interests in Government—Regaining Access?

Another major function of interest groups is to represent their constituencies in government. This role is particularly important for environmentalists, given the political dominance of the two major mass-based parties and the parallel absence of an effective green party. Environmental groups have developed a wide range of organizational capacities—lobbyists to lawyers, as it were—to cover the breadth of available access points at whatever level of government was involved. However, the opportunity to gain access is neither spread equally nor consistently. Moreover, changes in the political opportunity structure, the broader structural and societal contexts of the moment, have potent impacts on who gets access, under what conditions, and to what effect.⁸²

In the previous edition of this book we observed that in the mid-2000s environmentalists confronted a particularly challenging political opportunity structure: an ideologically hostile presidency whose overall policy agenda ran contrary to almost everything promoted by mainstream American environmentalism; an enfeebled Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with little political clout; a Congress dominated by a Republican Party that itself had become defined by its most conservative, anti-environmentalist wing; and, as a result of a judicial appointment process dominated by Republican presidents

going back to Reagan, a federal judiciary that increasingly came to elevate property rights over environmental goods and backed executive branch discretion over public access or, even, its right to know. In sum, we concluded, environmentalists in the Bush era were once again outsiders looking in, a status affecting their capacity to represent their interests in government and requiring of them a range of strategies aimed at reframing issues, providing new solutions, and building new coalitions, all in the hope of repositioning themselves and their values within the broader discourse.⁸³

What do we make of the dramatically reshaped opportunity structure in 2009? The election of Barack Obama is the most significant element in the new equation, in particular because the president defines the agenda. But a nontrivial part of the equation is that Congress is more solidly in the hands of Democrats than it has been in years. Congressional committees with jurisdiction over environmental and energy issues are in friendlier hands, greatly improving the likelihood of agenda-influencing congressional hearings on environmental issues and, for environmental group lobbyists, greater access to the legislative process.⁸⁴ With Obama's election also comes a more accessible federal establishment beyond the White House itself—the EPA and the Office of Management and Budget, in particular—and, finally, one surmises, the appointment of federal judges with views less overtly hostile to environmentalist claims. Even with the lagged effects of the past eight years, including a weakened executive establishment and dozens of Bush administration executive orders that critics fear the new administration will have a tough time rescinding or altering, environmentalists have not encountered such favorable political conditions in over three decades.⁸⁵

Resources. But the new terrain poses its own set of challenges. First is the question of having adequate resources to take advantage of these opportunities. The irony of 2008 is that the same economic conditions that helped to usher in a new political opportunity structure also potentially undermines the capacity of many environmental organizations to take advantage of it. For most groups the immediate concern is the overall effect of the fall 2008 economic meltdown on their finances. Without doubt, most environmental groups will suffer financially from the sudden and dramatic drop in individual wealth at all levels of the philanthropic scale. Groups that depend disproportionately on larger donations will see the most immediate and sharpest declines, while those that had long cultivated a broader base of supporters will have to work that much harder to stay in place. Depending on the overall length and severity of the current financial crisis, some smaller and more narrowly configured groups may not survive.

The still as yet unknown impacts of the current economic crisis follow a period of steady if not spectacular or equally shared growth in environmental group revenues during the 2000s (see Table 3-1), particularly compared to the last half of the 1990s. The groups that generally fared best financially during the 2000s were those that purchase and conserve land (for example, Ducks Unlimited, Nature Conservancy, Conservation Fund, Conservation International), followed by the major multipurpose organizations such as the

Table 3-1 Revenues for Selected National Environmental Organizations, FY 2001–2007^a

| Organization (by year of founding) | Web Site | Revenue (in millions) | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| | | 2001 | 2003 | 2005 | 2007 |
| Sierra Club | sierraclub.org | \$52.2 | \$83.7 | \$85.2 | \$91.0 |
| National Audubon Society | audubon.org | \$98.2 | \$78.6 | \$78.3 | \$116.3 |
| National Parks Conservation Association | npca.org | \$22.8 | \$20.9 | \$31.8 | \$33.2 |
| Izaak Walton League | iwla.org | \$5.2 | \$4.3 | \$3.9 | \$4.3 |
| The Wilderness Society | twls.org | \$24.1 | \$18.8 | \$29.5 | \$32.2 |
| National Wildlife Federation | nwf.org | \$112.0 | \$102.1 | \$112.8 | \$83.6 |
| Ducks Unlimited | ducks.org | \$123.8 | \$125.1 | \$133.0 | \$213.1 |
| Defenders of Wildlife | defenders.org | \$24.1 | \$21.8 | \$26.1 | \$35.2 |
| The Nature Conservancy | nature.org | \$546.6 | \$972.4 | \$800.4 | \$1,017.1 |
| World Wildlife Fund—U.S. | worldwildlife.org | \$118.4 | \$93.3 | \$116.7 | \$160.8 |
| Environmental Defense Fund | environmentaldefense.org | \$42.9 | \$43.8 | \$48.8 | \$94.2 |
| Friends of the Earth | foe.org | \$3.8 | \$3.8 | \$3.6 | \$3.5 |
| Natural Resources Defense Council | nrdc.org | \$55.7 | \$46.4 | \$76.5 | \$75.1 |
| League of Conservation Voters | lcv.org | \$6.2 | \$7.0 | \$8.4 | \$6.6 |
| Earthjustice | earthjustice.org | \$21.5 | \$17.9 | \$19.4 | \$26.1 |
| Clean Water Action | cleanwateraction.org | \$4.4 | \$10.7 | \$11.6 | \$9.7 |
| Greenpeace USA | greenpeaceusa.org | \$14.5 | \$25.9 | \$12.2 | \$15.8 |
| Trust for Public Land | tpl.org | \$154.5 | \$126.5 | \$121.0 | \$220.2 |
| Ocean Conservancy | oceanconservancy.org | \$9.5 | \$8.9 | \$12.8 | \$16.5 |
| American Rivers | amrivers.org | \$5.6 | \$5.5 | \$8.6 | \$7.5 |
| Sea Shepherd Conservation Society | seashepherd.org | \$1.0 | \$1.0 | \$1.1 | \$2.5 |
| Center for Health, Environment and Justice | chej.org | \$1.6 | \$1.0 | \$0.9 | \$1.1 |
| Earth Island Institute | earthisland.org | \$4.5 | \$4.9 | \$3.9 | \$6.6 |
| National Park Trust | parktrust.org | \$3.6 | \$1.2 | \$2.1 | \$1.5 |
| Conservation Fund | conservationfund.org | \$64.2 | \$60.1 | \$65.5 | \$104.7 |
| Rainforest Action Network | ran.org | \$2.4 | \$2.2 | \$2.6 | \$3.6 |
| Conservation International | conservation.org | \$68.9 | \$222.7 | \$117.3 | \$108.2 |
| Environmental Working Group | ewg.org | \$2.2 | \$1.8 | \$3.5 | \$4.3 |

Sources: Annual reports and IRS Form 990.

a. Gross revenues for fiscal or tax years, the use of which varies among organizations.

Sierra Club, Environmental Defense Fund, and Natural Resources Defense Council. By contrast, more clearly ideological advocacy groups like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace continued to struggle financially, suggesting a narrower appeal within the overall fund-raising universe.

Even assuming an eventual economic upturn, a possibly longer-term problem is more strategic, and gets at the heart of so many criticisms of

mainstream environmentalism. The Bush administration may have been the movement's ideological and policy *bête noire*, but it was an easy target against which to mobilize supporters and raise funds. It will be much more difficult for mainstream environmentalists to mobilize supporters against an Obama administration and a Democratic Congress. Against whom will environmentalists rail in making their pitches?

Another problem for many environmental groups is competition from Web-based groups like MoveOn. In recent years such groups have raised staggering amounts of money from small donations and mobilized supporters without needing an extensive (and expensive) organizational structure.⁸⁶ Given MoveOn's general advocacy orientation, an immediate question is how its capacity to shape issue agendas complements or competes with professional staff organizations like the Natural Resources Defense Council, on the one hand, and generalized protest groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, on the other. Longer term, the great unknown is the degree to which these new types of groups can mobilize supporters.

Partisan Dependency. Finally, while an Obama presidency and a Democratic Congress is fortuitous for environmental groups in the short term, coming as it does at the very moment when many will be struggling to stay afloat financially, in the long run they will need to find a way to support the new administration without being perceived as being in the lap of the Democratic Party. To cite an earlier example, the Clinton era debate over ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement divided the major national environmental groups, with critics charging that many of the groups that supported Senate ratification of the treaty did so only to maintain access to the Clinton administration, in which many of their own people had recently obtained positions of influence. By doing so, these groups were alleged to have succumbed to what the writer Kirkpatrick Sale called "the inherently conservatizing pressure to play by the 'rules of the game' in the compromise world of Washington, D.C."⁸⁷ Environmental group leaders might respond that, after years of hard fighting against the Bush administration, they welcome the dilemma of dealing with friends on the inside. But they also know that being seen as too close to those in power might affect their capacity to speak their minds, with consequences for their relations with their own supporters.⁸⁸

The Twenty-first Century Movement?

If the theme of a tipping point that runs through this chapter makes sense, then the 2008 election may mark the end of late-twentieth-century ideological and partisan arrangements. After all, contemporary environmentalism has been defined as much as anything by the overarching ideological and partisan debate over the role of government. If the libertarian, deregulatory strain of conservatism has lost its hold as the dominant narrative, as conservative *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, for one, suggests, its role as contemporary

be in the past.⁸⁹ Perhaps 2008 also marks the transition between the environmentalism that began in 1969 and something new.

If so, a more fundamental question remains: What will a twenty-first-century environmental movement look like? Will it be essentially a variation on the environmental community that emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century, with its wide array of advocacy groups, or will it be very different, dominated by MoveOn-type mass organizations, its adherents mobilized by an online call to arms? This is not a trivial concern, if only because groups like MoveOn seem to be able to reach younger supporters in ways that many older environmental groups have yet to figure out. The baby boomers who drove contemporary environmentalism for nearly four decades, first through their volunteer activism and later through their wallets, will recede in dominance in the future, and all advocacy groups need to decide how to connect with the generations that follow. Environmental groups have shown remarkable capacity to change with the times and technology, but it is not yet clear how the professional staff organizations that came to dominate the national environmental advocacy community will compete with or accommodate the leaner, more agile organizations supported by Web-generated micro-donations.

American environmentalism may well be at the tipping point, with the convergence of mass acceptance of climate change and the game-changing arrival of the Obama administration. It may be the most important moment for environmentalism in a generation. For the organizations that profess to speak for environmental values, where they head from here is the great unknown.

Suggested Web Sites

Apollo Alliance (www.apolloalliance.org) A national coalition of labor unions, environmental organizations, businesses, and community leaders “working to catalyze a clean energy revolution in America to reduce our nation’s dependence on foreign oil, cut the carbon emissions that are destabilizing our climate, and expand opportunities for American businesses and workers.”

Blue Green Alliance (www.bluegreenalliance.org) A coalition of labor unions and environmental groups, led by the United Steel Workers and the Sierra Club, that works at the grassroots in the midwestern industrial states on issues of global warming and clean energy, fair trade, and reducing toxic chemical exposure to workers and residents.

Environment America (www.environmentamerica.org) A federation of state-based environmental advocacy organizations founded in 2007, with origins in the Ralph Nader–inspired “public interest research group” movement begun in the 1970s.

The Gallup Organization (www.gallup.com) A leading provider of polling data on energy and the environment, as well as a host of other economic, social, and political issues.

National Religious Partnership for the Environment (www.nrpe.org) A coalition founded in 1993 by four major religious organizations and alliances that together serve tens of millions of Americans:

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp)

National Council of Churches of Christ (www.nccecojustice.org)

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (www.coejl.org)

Evangelical Environmental Network (www.creationcare.org)

Notes

1. Paul Farhi, “The Little Film That Became a Hot Property: Millions Warmed to Gore’s Environmental Message,” *Washington Post*, October 13, 2007, C1.
2. The producers of *An Inconvenient Truth*—but not Gore—won a 2007 Academy Award for best documentary, and Melissa Etheridge won best original song for the film’s anthem, “I Need to Wake Up.” Gore later won an Emmy in the category of “interactive television services” for unrelated work on Current TV; see Farhi, “The Little Film That Became a Hot Property.”
3. Farhi, “The Little Film That Became a Hot Property.”
4. Erin Kelly, “Environmentalists Hope for Progress with New President,” *USA Today*, April 19, 2008.
5. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, ed. M. L. Parry, O. F. Canziani, J. P. Palutikof, P. J. van der Linden, and C. E. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
6. Office of Science and Technology Policy, “Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Finalizes Report,” February 2, 2007, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/02/print/20070202.html; see also IPCC, *Climate Change 2007*.
7. John Heilprin, “Bush Seeks New Image on Global Warming,” *Associated Press Online*, September 28, 2007; Office of the Press Secretary, “President Bush Participates in Major Economies Meeting on Energy Security and Climate Change,” September 28, 2007, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/09/20070928-2.html. For more on the “evolution” of Bush’s views on the environment, see Peter Baker, “In Bush’s Final Year, the Agenda Gets Greener,” *Washington Post*, December 29, 2007, A1.
8. Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Gore Makes It Back to Oval Office, if Only for a Chat,” *New York Times*, November 27, 2007, A26.
9. Al Gore, “Moving beyond Kyoto,” *New York Times*, July 1, 2007, A13; Elizabeth Pennisi, Jesse Smith, and Richard Stone, “Momentous Changes at the Poles,” *Science* (March 16, 2007): 1513; Stefan Rahmstorf, “A Semi-Empirical Approach to Projecting Future Sea-Level Rise,” *Science* (January 19, 2007): 368–370.
10. Timothy M. Lenton, Hermann Held, Elmar Kriegler, Jim W. Hall, Wolfgang Lucht, Stefan Rahmstorf, and Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, “Tipping Elements in the Earth’s Climate System,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States* 105 (February 12, 2008): 1786–1793. For a more accessible discussion, see Paul Eccleston, “Climate Change ‘Tipping Point’ Within 100 Years,” *The Telegraph [UK]*, February 5, 2008.
11. See B. Dan Wood and Alesha Doan, “The Politics of Problem Definition: Applying and Testing Threshold Models,” *American Journal of Political Science* 47 (2003): 640–653.
12. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000); Daniel Yankelovich, “The Tipping Points,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2006); Thomas L. Friedman, “Iraq at the Tipping Point,” *New York*

- Times*, November 18, 2004, 31; Tania Valdemoro, "Darfur Activists Speak at Holocaust Memorial," *Miami Herald*, April 24, 2008; Reuters, "Consumer Confidence Plunges to 13-Year Low," *New York Times*, September 17, 2005, 6; Joan Vennoch, "Tuesday's Tipping Point," *Boston Globe*, February 3, 2008, C9.
13. Bryan Walsh, "A Green Tipping Point," *Time*, October 12, 2007, www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1670871,00.html.
 14. Peter Brown, Fareed Zakaria, Andrew Klavan, and Brian Loughnane, "As the Mercury Rises, Global Warming Will Lose Its Salience," *The Australian*, January 30, 2007, 13.
 15. Susanne C. Moser and Lisa Dilling, "Making Climate Hot: Communicating the Urgency and Challenge of Global Climate Change," *Environment* 46 (December 2004): 32–46.
 16. Elisabeth Rosenthal and Andrew C. Revkin, "Science Panel Says Global Warming Is 'Unequivocal,'" *New York Times*, February 3, 2007, A1. Ironically, noted skeptic Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., argued that the "man-made global warming fear machine crossed the 'tipping point' in 2007. I am convinced that future climate historians will look back at 2007 as the year the global warming fears began crumbling," http://epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Minority.PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=dc7c65f-802a-23ad-4668-0aec926c60c8.
 17. Maxwell T. Boykoff and Jules M. Boykoff, "Balance as Bias: Global Warming and the U.S. Prestige Press," *Global Environmental Change* 15 (July 2004): 125–136; Jon A. Krosnick, Allyson L. Holbrook, Laura Lowe, and Penny S. Visser, "The Origins and Consequences of Democratic Citizens' Policy Agendas: A Study of Popular Concern about Global Warming," *Climatic Change*, 77 (2006): 7–43; Maxwell T. Boykoff and Jules M. Boykoff, "Climate Change and Journalistic Norms: A Case Study of U.S. Mass-Media Coverage," *Geoforum* 38 (November 2007): 1190–1204; Maxwell T. Boykoff, "From Convergence to Contention: United States Mass Media Representations of Anthropogenic Climate Science," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32 (2007): 477–489; Maxwell T. Boykoff, "Flogging a Dead Norm? Media Coverage of Anthropogenic Climate Change in United States and United Kingdom, 2003–2006," *Area* 39 (2007): 470–481; and Paul M. Kellstedt, Sammy Zahran, and Arnold Vedlitz, "Personal Efficacy, the Information Environment, and Attitudes toward Global Warming and Climate Change in the United States," *Risk Analysis*, 28 (2008): 113–126.
 18. Steven Mufson, "CEOs Urge Bush to Limit Greenhouse Gas Emissions," *Washington Post*, January 6, 2007, A6.
 19. Juliet Eilperin, "150 Global Firms Seek Mandatory Cuts in Greenhouse Gas Emissions," *Washington Post*, November 30, 2007, A3.
 20. Eric Lipton and Gardiner Harris, "In Turnaround, Industries Seek U.S. Regulations," *New York Times*, September 16, 2007, A1; Laura Steele, "Global Warming: A New Twist on an Old Fight," *Kiplinger Business Forecasts*, February 16, 2007, www.kiplinger.com/businessresource/forecast/archive/global_warming__a_new_twist_on_an_old_fight.html.
 21. Barry G. Rabe, *Statehouse and Greenhouse* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); see also Pew Center on Climate Change, "What's Being Done ... in the States," www.pewclimate.org/what_s_being_done/in_the_states.
 22. Pew Center on Climate Change, "Learning from State Action on Climate Change," December 2007, www.pewclimate.org/docUploads/States%20Brief%20Template%20November%202007_.pdf; Anthony Faiola and Robin Shulman, "Cities Take Lead on Environment as Debate Drags at Federal Level: 522 Mayors Have Agreed to Meet Kyoto Standards," *Washington Post*, June 9, 2007, A1.
 23. Thomas L. Friedman, "The Power of Green," *New York Times Magazine*, April 15, 2007; and Thomas L. Friedman, "And the Color of the Year Is . . .," *New York Times*, December 22, 2006.
 24. Christine Russell, "Climate Change: Now What? Scientists Agree It's Real, but There's no Consensus on Solutions. Readers Need a Guide to the Options," *Columbia Journalism Review* 47 (July–August 2008): 45–49. See also Michael Shellenberger and

- Ted Nordhaus, "The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post Environmental World," October 2004, www.thebreakthrough.org/PDF/Death_of_Environmentalism.pdf.
25. Shellenberger and Nordhaus, "The Death of Environmentalism."
 26. Carl Pope, "And Now for Something Completely Different," January 13, 2005, www.grist.org/news/maindish/2005/01/13/pope-reprint/index.html. See also Moser and Dilling, "Making Climate Hot," 32.
 27. Shellenberger and Nordhaus, "The Death of Environmentalism," 11–12, 32.
 28. Kate Sheppard, "Life after the Death of Environmentalism," *The American Prospect*, October 11, 2007, www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=life_after_the_death_of_environmentalism.
 29. Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955); Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith, and Robert E. Denton Jr., *Persuasion and Social Movements*, 3d ed. (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland, 1994).
 30. Gladwell (2000: 33) labels them "connectors," "mavens," and "salesmen." For a similar approach, see Charles T. Rubin, *The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Environmentalism* (New York: Free Press, 1994).
 31. As every president knows, using the "bully pulpit" to shape public opinion is difficult, even for those in the highest positions of power and prestige. See Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); George C. Edwards, *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Brandon Rottinghaus, "The Provisional Pulpit: Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion, 1953–2001," paper prepared for delivery at the 2005 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1–4, 2005.
 32. The question wording used by Pew was as follows: "Now I will read a list of some things that have happened in the world recently. For each one, please tell me if you've heard of it or not." When asked, 91 percent had heard of "the environmental problem of global warming," 9 percent had not. Pew Global Attitudes Project and Princeton Survey Research Associates International, May 2–14, 2006. Retrieved August 27, 2008, from the iPOLL Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut, www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll.html. For more on trends related to global warming, see Matthew C. Nisbet and Teresa Myers, "The Polls—Trends: Twenty Years of Public Opinion about Global Warming," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71 (fall 2007): 444–470.
 33. Nisbet and Myers, "The Polls," 448, table 4.
 34. Gallup Organization, March 6–9, 2008, retrieved August 27, 2008, www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll.html. The 2006 General Social Survey records a similar result. See National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, March 10–August 7, 2006, retrieved September 11, 2008, www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll.html.
 35. Moser and Dilling, "Making Climate Hot."
 36. Gallup Organization, March 6–9, 2008, retrieved August 27, 2008, www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll.html. See also Frank Newport, "Little Increase in Americans' Global Warming Worries," Gallup Organization, April 21, 2008, www.gallup.com/poll/106660/Little-Increase-Americans-Global-Warming-Worries.aspx.
 37. Both countries are leading producers of greenhouse gases. Pew Global Attitudes Project, "America's Image Slips, but Allies Share U.S. Concerns over Iran, Hamas: No Global Warming Alarm in the U.S., China," June 13, 2006, <http://pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>.
 38. Moser and Dilling, "Making Climate Hot."
 39. Scholars have long recognized that attitudes are more accessible in memory when they are personally—as opposed to nationally, or even globally—important. See Jon A.

- Krosnick and Joanne M. Miller, "The Origins of Policy Issue Salience: Sociotropic Importance for the Nation or Personal Importance to the Citizen?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, August 27–31, 2003; Howard Lavine, John L. Sullivan, Eugene Borgida, and Cynthia J. Thomsen, "The Relationship of National and Personal Issue Salience to Attitude Accessibility on Foreign and Domestic Policy Issues," *Political Psychology* 17 (1996): 293–316.
40. Gallup Organization, March 6–9, 2008, retrieved August 27, 2008, www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll.html.
 41. Samuel D. Brody, Sammy Zahran, Arnold Vedlitz, and Himanshu Grover, "Examining the Relationship between Physical Vulnerability and Public Perceptions of Global Climate Change in the United States," *Environment and Behavior* 40 (January 2008): 72–95.
 42. John Immerwahr, *Waiting for a Signal: Public Attitudes toward Global Warming, the Environment and Geophysical Research*, American Geophysical Union, 1999, www.agu.org/sci_soc/attitude_study.html.
 43. Kellstedt, Zahran, and Vedlitz, "Personal Efficacy, the Information Environment, and Attitudes toward Global Warming and Climate Change in the United States," 120.
 44. Kevin Coyle, *Environmental Literacy in America* (Washington, D.C.: National Environmental Education and Training Foundation, 2005).
 45. John D. Sterman and Linda Booth Sweeney, "Cloudy Skies: Assessing Public Understanding of Global Warming," *System Dynamics Review* 18 (2002): 207–240.
 46. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, November 1997 News Interest Index [datafile], November 12–16, 1997 ($n = 1,200$): Q7.
 47. The percentage of respondents combines the responses "definitely true" and "probably true." Nisbet and Myers, "The Polls," 449, table 7.
 48. Bryan Walsh, "A Green Tipping Point," *Time*, October 12, 2007.
 49. Penny S. Visser, George Y. Bizer, and Jon A. Krosnick, "Exploring the Latent Structure of Strength-Related Attitude Attributes," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38 (2006): 1–67; Richard J. Bord, Ann Fisher, and Robert E. O'Connor, "Is Accurate Understanding of Global Warming Necessary to Promote Willingness to Sacrifice?" *Risk: Health, Safety and the Environment* 8 (fall 1997): 339–349.
 50. Immerwahr, *Waiting for a Signal*; see also Krosnick et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Democratic Citizens' Policy Agendas"; Julia B. Corbett, *Communicating Nature: How We Create and Understand Environmental Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2006), 67; Bord, Fisher, and O'Connor, "Is Accurate Understanding of Global Warming Necessary to Promote Willingness to Sacrifice?"
 51. Krosnick et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Democratic Citizens' Policy Agendas"; Christopher Borick and Barry Rabe, "A Reason to Believe: Examining the Factors That Determine Individual Views on Global Warming," *Issues in Governance Studies* 16 (July 2008): 1–14.
 52. Ann Bostrom and Daniel Lashof, "Weather or Climate Change?" in *Creating a Climate for Change: Communicating Climate Change and Facilitating Social Change*, ed. Susanne C. Moser and Lisa Dilling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 32.
 53. Survey by Planet Green, the Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University, and ABC News, July 23–28, 2008, retrieved August 27, 2008, www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll.html.
 54. Forty-five percent thought that "the flooding in the Midwest in the last twelve months" was related to global warming, while 50 percent thought it was connected to "the severe storms in Southeast Asia." Survey by Planet Green, July 23–28, 2008.
 55. Moser and Dilling, "Making Climate Hot," 36; Bostrom and Lashof, "Weather or Climate Change?" 40.
 56. Deborah A. Stone, "Causal Stories and the Formation of Policy Agendas," *Political Science Quarterly* 104 (summer 1999): 281.
 57. This is sometimes called "balance as bias." See Boykoff and Boykoff, "Balance as Bias"; Krosnick et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Democratic Citizens' Policy Agendas."
 58. Jon A. Krosnick, Allyson L. Holbrook, and Penny S. Visser, "The Impact of the Fall 1997 Debate about Global Warming on American Public Opinion," *Public Understanding of Science* 9 (2000): 239–260; Penny S. Visser, George Y. Bizer, and Jon A. Krosnick, "Exploring the Latent Structure of Strength-Related Attitude Attributes," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38 (2006): 1–67.
 59. Boykoff, "From Convergence to Contention"; Boykoff and Boykoff, "Balance as Bias"; Krosnick et al., "The Origins and Consequences of Democratic Citizens' Policy Agendas"; Michael Hanlon, "Apocalypse When? Careless and Exaggerated Stories about Global Warming Play into the Hands of Those Who Wish to Deny That It Is Happening at All," *New Scientist*, November 17, 2007, 20.
 60. Survey by National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, March 10–August 7, 2006, retrieved September 27, 2008, www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezproxy.uvm.edu/ipoll.html.
 61. Naomi Oreskes, "The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change," *Science*, December 3, 2004, 1686.
 62. Immerwahr, *Waiting for a Signal*, 25.
 63. Krosnick, Holbrook, and Visser, "The Impact of the Fall 1997 Debate about Global Warming on American Public Opinion," 239, 254.
 64. See Sheldon Kamieniecki, "Political Parties and Environmental Policy," in *Environmental Politics and Policy: Theories and Evidence*, 2d ed., ed. James P. Lester (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 146–167; Charles R. Shipan and William R. Lowry, "Environmental Policy and Party Divergence in Congress," *Political Research Quarterly* 54 (2001): 245–263; Deborah Lynn Guber, *The Grassroots of a Green Revolution: Polling America on the Environment* (Boston: MIT Press, 2003), chap. 5.
 65. Riley E. Dunlap and Aaron M. McCright, "A Widening Gap: Republican and Democratic Views on Climate Change," *Environment* (September/October 2008): 26–35.
 66. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "A Deeper Partisan Divide over Global Warming," May 8, 2008, <http://people-press.org/report/417/a-deeper-partisan-divide-over-global-warming>.
 67. Dunlap and McCright, "A Widening Gap," 33.
 68. Pew Research Center, "A Deeper Partisan Divide."
 69. Borick and Rabe, "A Reason to Believe"; Newport, "Little Increase in Americans' Global Warming Worries"; Lydia Saad, "Did Hollywood's Glare Heat Up Public Concern about Global Warming?" Gallup Organization, March 21, 2007, www.gallup.com/poll/26932/Did-Hollywoods-Glare-Heat-Public-Concern-About-Global-Warming.aspx.
 70. Andrew C. Revkin, "Gore Alliance Starts Ad Campaign on Global Warming," *New York Times*, April 1, 2008, 8.
 71. For a fuller analysis, see Christopher Bosso, *Environment, Inc.: From Grassroots to Beltway* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005).
 72. See Deborah L. Guber and Christopher Bosso "Framing ANWR: Citizens, Consumers, and the Privileged Position of Business," in *Business and Environmental Policy*, ed. Michael E. Kraft and Sheldon Kamieniecki (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 35–59.
 73. See www.apolloalliance.org.
 74. Press release, "Blue Green Alliance Grows to More Than Four Million," October 9, 2008, *PR Newswire*, via Lexis-Nexis. See www.bluegreenalliance.org.
 75. "New Energy for America," my.barackobama.com/page/content/newenergy.
 76. Laura Goodstein, "Evangelical Leaders Join Global Warming Initiative," *New York Times*, February 28, 2006, www.nytimes.com/2006/02/08/national/08warm.html. See also <http://christiansandclimate.org>.
 77. For more, see the Evangelical Environmental Network, www.creationcare.org.
 78. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Polls Show Strong Backing for Environmental Protection across Religious Groups," pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=121, U.S.

- Conference of Catholic Bishops, www.usccb.org; Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life, www.coejl.org/index.php; Islamic Society of North America, www.isna.net; National Council of Churches, www.nccecojustice.org; National Religious Partnership for the Environment, www.nrpe.org.
79. See, for example, an interchange between Obama and Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals during a CNN-sponsored "Democratic Candidates Compassion Forum," April 13, 2008, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/080413/se.01.html>.
80. See Rabe, *Statehouse and Greenhouse*.
81. See www.environmentamerica.org.
82. See David S. Meyer and Douglas R. Imig, "Political Opportunity and the Rise and Decline of Interest Group Sectors," *Social Science Journal* 30 (1993): 253–270.
83. See also Christopher McGrory Klyza and David Sousa, *American Environmental Policy, 1990–2006* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).
84. See Bosso, *Environment, Inc.*, chap. 5 and figure 5-1; Jeffrey Berry and Clyde Wilcox, *The Interest Group Society*, 5th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 166–168 and figure 9-1.
85. Ceci Connolly and R. Jeffrey Smith, "Obama Positioned to Quickly Reverse Bush Actions: Stem Cell, Climate Rules among Targets of President-Elect's Team," *Washington Post*, November 9, 2008, A1.
86. An observation made by David Karpf in a draft, "MoveOn.Org and the Second Interest Group Realignment," July 2008.
87. Kirkpatrick Sale, "The U.S. Green Movement Today," *The Nation*, July 19, 1993, 94; Michelle Ruess and Tom Diemer, "Environmentalists Split on Trade Policy," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 18, 1993, 4A; see also Christopher Bosso, "Seizing Back the Day: The Challenge to Environmental Activism in the 1990s," *Environmental Policy in the 1990s*, 3d ed., ed. Norman J. Vig and Michael E. Kraft (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press), 53–74.
88. On these dilemmas, see Ronald G. Shaiko, *Voices and Echoes for the Environment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
89. David Brooks, "Big Government Ahead," *New York Times*, October 13, 2008, www.nytimes.com/2008/10/14/opinion/14brooks.html.

4

Presidential Powers and Environmental Policy

Norman J. Vig

We cannot afford more of the same timid politics when the future of our planet is at stake. Global warming is not a someday problem, it is now.

Barack Obama speaking at Portsmouth,
New Hampshire, October 8, 2007

Drill, Baby, Drill!

Chant at Republican National Convention,
September 3, 2008

The presidential election of 2008 may go down in history as the first global election. Not only were people around the world keenly interested in the outcome, but both major candidates espoused far-reaching policies for developing alternative energy sources and preventing catastrophic global climate change.¹ Although high domestic gasoline prices and a deepening financial crisis led to counter-pressures by the fall—especially from conservative Republicans—it appeared that the nation may finally have reached a tipping point on these issues after decades of gridlock (see chapter 3).²

Shortly after the election, Barack Obama called for a vast new public works program that would simultaneously address economic, national security, and environmental issues: "We'll put people back to work rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, modernizing schools that are failing our children, and building wind farms and solar panels, fuel-efficient cars and the alternative energy technologies that can free us from our dependence on foreign oil and keep our economy competitive in the years ahead."³ In December he met with former vice president Al Gore to discuss climate change and declared that "We all believe what the scientists have been telling us for years now, that this is a matter of urgency and national security, and it has to be dealt with in a serious way."⁴ He vowed to create millions of "green jobs" and "repower" America.

Whether President Obama can deliver on these promises remains to be seen. What is certain is that all presidents since the beginning of the modern environmental movement in the 1960s have had a significant, if not always salutary, impact on the course of national environmental policy. Nevertheless, they operate within a system of constitutional and political constraints that limit their power. Many other actors also influence policy development, and