

These surveys measure respondent attitudes on numerous questions regarding social and cultural values. Baker has arrayed these results along two dimensions. The first scales respondents along a continuum between traditional values and secular-rational values. The second dimension provides a continuum between values of self-expression versus survival values. It is along these dimensions that Baker plots the United States along with other nations in the survey. Because the surveys were conducted in multiple waves, he can also track changes over time along these dimensions.

Regarding the trend hypothesis, Baker finds that between 1981 and 2000, the United States exhibited almost no change on the traditional versus secular values scale. As a result, Baker argues that there is little evidence of a decline in America's commitment to traditional moral values. On the other hand, the United States did during this time move significantly toward the self-expression pole of the survival versus self-expression dimension. Thus it seems that Americans have not changed their own values, though they have become more tolerant of the expression of values different than their own.

Baker similarly finds little support for the comparison hypothesis. If anything, America's relative adherence to traditional moral values has become even stronger as a result of the shift of most other industrialized nations toward secular-rational values. Finally, Baker's analysis of the survey data leads him to conclude that the distribution hypothesis is largely false. Americans may perceive that they are polarizing into warring cultural and moral camps, but there is no evidence to suggest that they actually are. He writes, "The social attitudes, cultural values, and religious beliefs of Americans are not polarized; Americans have a lot in common and tend to share the same attitudes, cultural values, and religious beliefs" (p. 108).

In addition to his reporting of these empirical findings, Baker also attempts to answer two analytical questions. First, why the perceived crisis of American values when there is little or no empirical evidence of such a crisis? Baker's analysis suggests that such crises are a periodic feature of American history as technological and economic changes pose challenges to traditional values. Such crises are most acute at the midpoints of these cycles as newer values increasingly compete with tradition ones, but are not yet dominant. This analysis is similar in some ways to cycles of "creedal passion" set out years ago by Samuel Huntington.

The second of Baker's questions asks why is it that the United States is such a global outlier when it comes to moral values. As Baker shows, the United States occupies a relatively unique global position, with a very strong commitment to traditional moral values compared to other industrialized democracies. In fact, on this dimension the United States looks more like some developing nations. Baker attributes this unique position to the peculiarities

of American political culture. As a nation founded on certain ideals, to move away from those ideals would entail a loss of national identity. In contrast, nations founded on birthright status can alter their moral values with no threat to their national identity. Was the United States founded upon a consistent set of ideals? Rogers Smith has argued persuasively that American political culture is the result of the interplay of multiple political traditions, some, as Baker claims, based on certain ideological tenets, but others based on such attributes of birth as sex, race, and ethnicity.

Baker also wants to argue that America's founding values are not the typical Lockean liberal values of democracy, liberty, and equality, but traditional religious values. According to him, "America's traditional values—strong belief in religion and God, family values, absolute moral authority, national pride, and so on—are fundamental to what it means to be American" (p. 54). Such values have played an extremely important role in American political thought and culture, but they are hardly the only ones. Moreover, one can readily argue that certain traditional moral values run contrary to American founding principles. For example, believing that individuals should have the right to control their own bodies and reproductive choices is arguably more in line with the notions of liberty in the American creed than religiously based antiabortion views.

Though his analysis of American political culture is largely unconvincing, Baker's book is nonetheless a useful addition to the literature on political polarization. Like Morris Fiorina, Alan Abramowitz, Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, he succeeds in bringing empirical rigor to bear on a complex topic that is too often reduced to something as simplistic as a red and blue map of state-level 2004 election results. In particular, Baker's use of the Global Values Survey provides a much needed global context to this important topic.

#### **Lessons of Disaster: Policy Change after**

**Catastrophic Events.** By Thomas A. Birkland. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006. 240p. \$44.95 cloth, \$26.95 paper. DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707071010

— Derek S. Reiners, *University of Florida*

*Lessons of Disaster* is a natural follow-up to the author's previous book, *After Disaster* (1997), which examined the extent to which disasters and accidents influence policy agendas within relevant domains. *Lessons of Disaster* is built on this previous work but focuses specifically on whether or not disasters, as focusing events, induce policy learning. The author differentiates between simple policy change and actual policy learning by defining learning as a process by which policy actors incorporate new information and insights revealed by a disaster and purposefully apply it to the design of more appropriate or effective policies. The author also differentiates between three distinct types

of learning—a typology originally developed by Peter May (“Policy Learning and Failure,” *Journal of Public Policy* 12 [no. 4, 1992]: 331–54). The first is *instrumental learning*, which is learning about the viability of policy interventions or implementation designs. Such learning concerns the appropriateness or effectiveness of a policy intervention in the face of a well-defined objective. The second is *social policy learning*, which involves learning about the social construction of a policy or problem. For example, before the event of 9/11, terrorism was defined primarily as a criminal justice issue, whereas the experiences of 9/11 helped redefine terrorism as a homeland security issue associated with acts of war. Finally, *political learning* relates to the development of more sophisticated policy advocacy strategies. For all of these categories, learning applies to individuals. However, nonhuman entities such as organizations can be said to “learn” inasmuch as learning individuals within them are able to steer the organization in new directions.

The book’s conceptual model of disaster-related policy learning draws appropriate elements from well-established policy change literature, including Sabatier’s Advocacy Coalition Framework (see Paul Sabatier, “An Advocacy Coalition Framework of Policy Change and Policy Learning Therein,” *Policy Sciences* 21 [Fall, 1988]: 129–68), Baumgartner and Jones’ Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (see Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*, 1993), and Kingdon’s streams metaphors (John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 2d ed., 1995). The discussion and inclusion of these familiar approaches creates for the reader an easy transition to the author’s own model.

The book’s model of policy learning has six propositions, summarized briefly as follows: 1) policy actors are purposeful and want to address or solve problems revealed by a focusing event; 2) only unusually disastrous focusing events will gain much attention; 3) group mobilization is temporally linked to a particular focusing event (i.e., an event occurs thereby actuating groups); 4) group mobilization is accompanied by an increase in discussion of policy ideas, including theories about causes and potential solutions; 5) there is a relationship between ideas and policy change (policy learning generally excludes unreflective copying and action for the sake of action); and 6) it is possible for learning to decay over time.

The author examines the evidence for policy learning primarily through the passage of legislation, congressional witness testimony, and media attention in four policy domains that are particularly prone to disaster. He organizes these domains into three case studies, each with a separate chapter: 1) domestic terror attacks (with 9/11 as the primary focusing event), 2) aviation security (again with a special focus on 9/11), and 3) earthquake and hurricane policy. In addition to policy learning analysis, each chapter offers a satisfying recent historical back-

ground of the policy domain. Just the right amount of attention is given to the background material—it stays focused, keeping the reader up to date on these policy areas, and does not go too far back in history, nor does it confuse the reader with excessive testimony. The chapters also configure data in clear and concise charts and figures.

One minor criticism is that the conclusions related to his policy learning analyses are not always clear—the reader is sometimes left wondering if policy learning occurred or not. However, it seems likely that this is because, in reality, the difference between ad hoc policy responses and genuine learning (insofar as it satisfies the author’s strict definitional conditions) is sometimes difficult to determine, rather than a problem with the author’s perspicuity. Another related challenge is the fact that policy learning in the selected domains (although it may occur) is not necessarily reflected in the model presented in the first chapter. In particular, due to the nature of these domains (which generally lack multiple concentrated interests and are dominated by those with scientific expertise), group mobilization may not occur or may only occur within already embedded organizations (i.e., “inside mobilization”). The author is aware of this fact and explains that, compared with other disaster prone domains, such as nuclear power and oil spills, “in the domains addressed in this book, mobilization occurs among a much narrower group of actors. As we have seen, all four domains engage ‘policies without publics’” (p. 164).

Nevertheless, the author finds evidence of some policy learning, following focusing events, in all domains—although to differing degrees in each. In the terrorism domain, major instrumental (legislation) and social policy learning (problem definition and causal narratives) took place soon after 9/11. However, many of the “new” policy instruments were taken from the shelves of previous commissions and policy entrepreneurs à la Kingdon’s policy streams process. The aviation security domain experienced similar changes, as the primary focus shifted from bombs to hijacking and, moreover, shifted “from treating aviation security as the domain of the transportation sector to seeing it as a national security problem with national consequences for policy design and implementation.” Learning in the earthquake and hurricane domains has tended to follow a somewhat different path. In these domains, focusing events do not appear to have a robust effect on learning. Rather, learning is more incremental, perhaps due to political-institutional factors that include the distributive nature (and political value) of disaster relief in the federal government, the relocation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency within the Department of Homeland Security, and the fact that few groups have an incentive to lobby for policy change at the federal level.

This is a valuable book for students of disaster policy and for students of policy change more generally. The

author makes it clear what is and is not demonstrable through this study and also makes appropriate suggestions for further research. *Lessons of Disaster* is perhaps slightly more suitable for policy academics rather than practitioners. However, after reading this book, it is hard not to become an advocate for aggressive disaster mitigation, as opposed to the preponderant paradigm of disaster relief.

**Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream** By Janice Fine. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006. 316p. \$49.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.  
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— Oren M. Levin-Waldman, *Metropolitan College of New York*

The notion that immigrants need institutions of support as they try to make it in the U.S. economy is certainly nothing new. At the turn of the century, Jane Addams and the Settlement House Movement, beginning in Chicago with Hull House, made it their mission to provide the types of support that would ease immigrants' transition into American life. Janice Fine's *Worker Centers* is essentially a primer for activists on the role of worker centers as institutions designed to provide support to low-wage workers, especially immigrant workers in metropolitan areas. Defining worker centers as community-based mediating institutions that provide support to low-wage workers, Fine considers the effectiveness of these centers in improving the lives of low-wage workers. She also raises an even larger question: Just what institutional mechanisms are necessary for integrating low-wage immigrants into American civil society so that they can derive the benefits of ongoing economic representation and political action?

Fine's central thesis is that worker centers have arisen in part because of the absence of preexisting institutions that can both integrate low-wage immigrants into American civil society and furnish them with a means toward economic stability and self-organization. In recent years, they have come to fill the void left by the decline in institutions, most notably labor unions. About 9% of worker centers were founded explicitly to fill the gap left by the decline of unionization in particular industries, and another 14% were founded in connection with unions and union organizing drives. However, these centers are about more than union-style protections: They seek to provide a range of services including legal services to recoup unpaid wages or enforce mandated minimum wages, lessons in English and workers' rights, advocacy, and organization among others. Though there are different types of worker centers, the vast majority of these centers have grown up to serve predominantly or exclusively immigrant populations.

This book is certainly packed with a lot of information about the origins of these centers, what they do, who is recruited and how they are recruited, their relations with other organizations such as labor unions, and how they

attempt to influence public policy in a quest to attain immigrant rights and social justice. Finally, it offers some assessment about their role in the new global economy. For organizers, this is no doubt useful information. Missing, however, is the place of these centers within the broader literature on the role of institutions. In the end, the book offers a larger assessment of the worker center movement, but it does not really situate these centers within the context of larger social movements, such as the Settlement House movement that preceded it. The reader is thus left to ponder the following questions: What historically has been the role of institutions in organizing otherwise disfranchised workers into the economy? How do these centers effectively respond to the decline of unions? Many immigrant centers do conduct organizing campaigns, and Fine offers as one example the Restaurant Workers Association of Koreatown (RWAK), which sought from 2004 to 2005 to build power in industry by establishing a strong organization of restaurant workers that would improve industry standards. What is important about RWAK is that it grew out of Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates and its 2001 informational campaign about California's new minimum wage of \$6.25.

Though Fine certainly discusses the various economic transformations and demographic trends, such as the shift from manufacturing to services, globalization, the increase in immigration, and the decline in unionization, she does not really address the fundamental question of how such centers might then form the basis for resurrecting the union movement. Yet, she argues that the workers these centers cater to are very much on the next frontier of organizing. Therefore, the question of how these centers would fit into the union movement and the tradition of union organizing is critical. Indeed, it would have been beneficial to understand just how such centers really are an extension of that tradition of social movements. She observes that the challenge for those seeking to organize workers—worker centers, unions, and other community organizations—is to find “leverage points” within employment relationships and to identify “effective strategies for bringing pressure to bear” (p. 102). This begs the question: If worker centers exist to serve immigrant workers, do they then form the foundations of organizing these workers into effective coalitions to achieve justice for workers? If, as some have suggested (e.g., see Ruth Milkman, “Immigrant Organizing and the New Labor Movement Los Angeles,” *Critical Sociology* 26 [nos. 1–2, 2000]: 59–81; Zaragoza Vargas, *Labor Rights are Civil Rights*, 2005), low-wage immigrant workers might be ripe for organizing, just where do worker centers fit in? Unfortunately, these questions remain unanswered largely because of the failure to engage the vast literature on organizing and the role that such institutions might play as a constituent base of support.

From all appearances, this work has the appearance of a scholarly work. It is replete with a bibliography and there is