Environmental health policy evolution in the United States: Can the passage of the Clean Air Act (1970) inform the Green New Deal (2019)?

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to understand the political and social circumstances that predicate health policies to either pass through the US policy process and become law or remain gridlocked.

Introduction: Provides insight into the only comprehensive federal climate policy proposal, the Green New Deal, as well as the Clean Air Act, a previous federal health policy that has largely succeeded in creating positive impact.

Methods: Philosophical and sociopolitical concepts relevant to health policymaking and agenda-setting are applied with John Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Framework to critically analyze the policy environments that enabled the Clean Air Act and are currently stalling the Green New Deal.

Results: The positive effects of the Clean Air Act have likely complicated the current battle against climate change. The clean air act reduced visible smog and observable air pollution in America but was unable to tackle pollution less obvious to the eye: helping only people who were wealthy enough to live far away from areas with high pollution. The gradual drift of climate issues onto the policy agenda has surged since the conception of the Green New Deal but not enough to overcome political opposition and catalyze federal climate reform within US governance.
INTRODUCTION

Climate change inequalities

A growing body of evidence supports that the health risks of climate change are unequally distributed, affecting certain populations with incommensurate severity. Hsiang et al. (2017) found that market damages increase quadratically with global mean temperature increases, and these increasing costs generate a transfer of value northward and westward—into richer countries and out of poorer ones. Tessum et al. (2019) discovered that air pollution in America is disproportionately caused by white people’s consumption of goods and services but disproportionately inhaled by black and Hispanic people; i.e., those contributing less to the problem suffer more from it. As the top cumulative emitter, the US ought to bear the greatest imperative for curbing its emissions and must be liable for preventing domestic and global climate apartheids; without equitable climate reform, the wealthy will continue buying escape from adverse health impacts of climate change, and the poor will continue to perish (Gignac and Matthews, 2015). The 2018 IPCC report concluded that limiting global warming to 1.5°C will require immediate and widespread reform of land, energy, industry, transportation, infrastructure, and cities. Global human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide would need to reach net-zero by 2050—a goal only possible through unprecedented structural and societal changes (IPCC, 2018). Climate reform cannot occur without considering the socioeconomic and health effects of both the climate crisis and the mechanisms used to mitigate it. Consequently, all policy solutions aiming to address climate change fall under the umbrella term ‘health policy’.
The Green New Deal

In response to the 2018 IPCC report, progressive Congress representatives are asking for a Green New Deal (GND), the only existing federal climate reform proposal. The GND is a proposed stimulus program aiming to mitigate climate change; it is a pair of resolutions in the 116th Congress—House Resolution 109 and Senate Resolution 59—introduced in February 2019 and sponsored by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Ed Markey. In March 2019, Markey’s resolution failed to advance in the US Senate with a margin of 0-57.

The GND calls to complete the following in order to mitigate climate change:

- Meet 100% of power demand through zero-emission sources by 2050;
- upgrade infrastructure (buildings, transport, power grids, agriculture, etc.) to build climate resilience and eliminate emissions
- It also emphasizes the paramount role of economic inequality in these mitigation efforts and:
  - Provides all US people with high-quality health care; adequate housing; economic security; and access to clean water, clean air, healthy food, and nature;
  - acknowledges the climate crisis as a systemic injustice;
  - creates millions of good, high-wage jobs through which the above objectives will be achieved

Clean Air Act

As the GND has met a stalemate in the policy-making process, this research looks to learn from the Clean Air Act’s universal political support and positive health impact. The Clean Air Act
(CAA) is one of the nation’s most influential environmental health laws and is administered by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), with reliance on state governments. It has five components:

- National Ambient Air Quality Standards (pollution ceilings) were established, targeting major pollutants\(^2\) that threaten public health;
- New Source Performance Standards were established to determine how much pollution should be allowed by different industries of different regions;
- Specified standards for controlling auto emissions were established;
- State stewardship over emission reductions was expected; however, the EPA took over administration for uncompliant states;
- A provision for citizen suits\(^3\) was established (the CAA was the first major US to include this) (EPA, 2017).

While establishing air pollution regulations is not congruent with the social reform ambitions of the GND, the CAA’s environmental regulatory standards are still integral to the population’s health outcomes related to air pollution exposure. For this reason, the CAA also falls under the umbrella of ‘health policy’ and we can look back to learn from the sociopolitical contexts that were fruitful in passing this federal health policy. Great progress has been measured since the birth of the CAA; however, its health impact data has been produced by the EPA, and this conflict of interest should be noted. Using the modeling strategies available at the time, the EPA provided a detailed retrospective analysis of costs and benefits from the years 1970 to 1990, which showed that the benefits obtained from compliance with the CAA far outweighed the costs of implementation,

\(^2\) sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, ozone, and lead.

\(^3\) A lawsuit by a private citizen to enforce a statute.
estimating that the CAA resulted in national air pollutant, premature death, and bronchitis reductions (EPA, 1997).

**OBJECTIVES**

- Explain the importance of health policy progress regarding the threat of climate change.
- Discuss comprehensive climate reform (the GND) and the political impasse it faces.
- Discuss a previous federal environmental health policy (the CAA) with intent to analyze the mechanisms through which policy can be successfully implemented.
- Review a framework used to analyze the policy environments of the CAA and GND.
  - Enlist philosophical theorists’ approaches to analyzing power in US society.
- Conduct policy analysis.
  - Analyze the policy environment which allowed the CAA to create change.
  - Analyze the policy environment which has stalled the GND’s policy progress.
- Synthesize and compare findings, theorizing why the CAA has passed through the policy process while the GND has not.
- Provide recommendations to key stakeholders for improving health policy (specifically comprehensive climate policy) viability in the US.

**METHODS**

**Policy analysis**

In this research, *policy environments* are defined as the social, political, temporal, and/or power-related circumstances that may or may not result in policy change. Buse et al. define analysis
as “separating a problem into its constituent parts so to better understand its whole” (2012, p. 211). This approach is used to analyze the following policy environments:

- The policy environment that supported and passed the CAA (1970)
- The policy environment that has stalled the GND (2019)

John Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Framework (MSF)

John Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) is applied to explain the role of each policy environment in creating or impeding policy changes. The MSF is a tool for understanding agenda-setting and policy change through three separate streams, explained in Figure 1 by Beland & Howlett (2016). This particular analysis framework was chosen because of its relevance to US federal policy analysis; it was designed and explained by Kingdon through contexts idiosyncratic to the US governance system (1984). The MSF was also chosen for its flexibility, which allows users to explore policy analysis without detailed coding or advanced test hypotheses. Most importantly, the stream metaphor is basic enough for non-experts to understand and apply; the MSF’s simplicity is its primary value as a heuristic for specialist or transdisciplinary policy analysis.
According to Kingdon, the three streams typically flow independent of one another; if they intersect a policy window is opened, creating an opportunity for actors to advance agendas on the issues they care about to orchestrate policy change (1984). Kingdon describes this process as agenda-setting, or the critical times when “solutions become joined to problems, and both are joined to favourable political forces” (1984, p. 21).
Further Conceptual Background

Gramsci argues that the state and ruling capitalist class—the elite—use norms to maintain power, developing a hegemonic culture through ideology rather than explicit force. They subordinate others through intellectual and moral leadership, making connections and compromises with other forces; this joining of forces is called a bloc, or the basis of consent to a certain social hierarchy (Gramsci, 1999). In the case of 20th and 21st-century US capitalism, the dominant bloc is a neoliberal and elite-owned society. Hegemonic blocs reproduce what Foucault called “power-knowledge”—knowledge as a manifestation of power and power as a function of knowledge. In the US context, knowledge is produced by those who have benefited from class-restricted power exercised through public institutions and government, limiting the range of acceptable knowledge in political discourse.

RESULTS

Clean Air Act—evolution

Politicians and the public alike have varied on whether environmental health problems warrant ambitious effort; however, history has ebbed and flowed with social and political events that inspire motivation for change. The following analysis groups these contextual events into the MSF streams (outlined in Figure 2), highlighting how the issue of air quality made it onto the policy agenda and created a policy window.
FIGURE 2 CONTEXTUAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS (CAA) GROUPED INTO THE MSF STREAMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSF stream</th>
<th>Contextual events &amp; influences (policy environment)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>Post World War II (WWII) pollution disasters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-WWII economic prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Policy response to the problem stream: the CAA of 1970</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orchestrated by policy entrepreneurs: Sen. Ed Muskie, John Ehrlichman, and John Whitaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>President Nixon’s agenda re: 1970 &amp; 1972 elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental movement (1970s &amp; 1980s)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Executive influence (post-Nixon)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own construction.

**Problem stream**

*Events, or ‘perceived problems’ that brought addressing air quality onto the policy agenda.*

Post-WW2 pollution disasters

Americans became outraged as they started to recognize the consequences of industrial pollution post-WWII; the sentiment was triggered by a series of disasters, including the smog episodes of the 1950s and 60s that killed hundreds and sickened thousands more in Los Angeles, New York, and other major cities (Science History Institute, 2019). Distress compounded in 1969, when an offshore oil well spilled into the Santa Barbara Channel, compromising the appearance and health of the community and aquatic ecosystem. Residents held noisy protests
and demanded oil drilling bans, urging people to destroy oil-
company credit cards and boycott gas stations (Easton, 1972).
The spill shocked Americans, according to historian J. Flippen,
“placing environmental protection on the front burner in a way
it never had been before, turning a concerned public into an
activist one” (2012, p. 25).

As public anxiety heightened, scientific research emerged on
anthropogenic threats to the planet; Malthusian perturbations
about population growth and fears accompanying nuclear
innovation drew attention to the delicacy of life on Earth (Kline,
2011; Taylor, 2016). This scientific concern forged another
dimension of national unrest; it added an array of invisible
pollutants (radiation, PCBs, acid rain, heavy metals, etc.), all
possibly more poisonous than the familiar signs of pollution
American could see and smell (Flippen, 2012). The press supplied
the public with the latest scientific findings and mass agitation
further fueled the increasingly savvy scientific community to
build up investigation into pollutants and their health effects
(Kline, 2011). This positive feedback loop created conditions
where support for environmental policy could be easily evoked.

Post-WW2 economic prosperity

It is likely that pollution concerns were also conceived
by rapid suburbanization post-WWII when industrial
manufacturing boomed and the resulting economic prosperity
created a burgeoning middle class and levels of inequality that
were relatively low relative to the 21st century. Working-class
families were purchasing time-saving appliances, food, and cars;
simultaneously, paid vacations, regular work schedules, and an
expanding highway system made national parks accessible. After
exposure to the leisurely escape of the outdoors, suburbanites
became alarmed when environmental accidents destroyed nature
and concerned about the effect of pollution on their children, property value, and communities; historian Adam Rome argues that the apprehension over environmental degradation solidified into a social movement because of counterculture protests, student radicalism, and discontented middle-class women (2001).

**Policy stream**

_Policy proposed to address the pollution crisis—the CAA._

President Nixon’s environmental agenda was operated by his aides; John Ehrlichman and John Whitaker were Nixon’s top domestic advisors, political moderates, and outdoors-lovers (Whitaker, 2003; 1976). They convinced Nixon to address pollution concerns, convincing him it would be a grave political mistake not to do so; they also held Nixon’s unwavering trust and were often the bridge between the White House and those lobbying for pollution regulations (Whitaker, 1976; Rome, 2013). Advised by his aides and aware of public disdain for pollution, Nixon created the EPA opening doors for the 1970 CAA’s policy framework.

Anxiety around access to clean air led to policy initiation from Sen. Edmund Muskie, an environmentalist who worked with scientists and activists to draft the CAA of 1970 (Rome, 2013). The CAA passed unanimously in the Senate and overwhelming in the House, signed into law by Nixon (Schmalensee and Stavins, 2019). This political support sustained for several years, stimulating a slew of other environmental regulation policies during the Nixon administration (Dunlap, 1992). Over the next fifty years, the CAA of 1970 and its amendments would strengthen the original CAA, helping to reduce total emissions—even as the nation’s population and economy grew. The 1977 Amendments were passed by a voice vote in the Senate and a vote of 273-109 in the House (Schmalensee and Stavins, 2019).

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In 1990, CAA amendments passed in the House and Senate with bipartisan majorities; over 90% of Democrats supported the amendments, as did 87% of Republicans (Schmalensee and Stavins, 2019).

**Politics stream**

*National and international influences that pushed the CAA’s legislative success.*

**1970 and 1972 federal elections**

Nixon took office as voters began to deeply care about pollution. In 1965, only about 33% of Americans agreed that air pollution was a serious problem; by 1970 the figure reached about 70% (Dunlap, 1991). Politicians from both parties were suddenly incorporating pollution regulation into their ideological positions; however, it’s not clear whether this stemmed from a general concern for American land and life or from individual re-election aspirations. Regardless of intent, there was “only one word, hysteria, to describe the Washington mood on the environment issue in the fall of 1969,” Whitaker later wrote (1976).

Those close to Nixon disclosed that he cared little for the environment but was consumed by his political ambitions (Haldeman, 1994). Nixon was intimidated by Muskie, a charismatic New Englander who was rising as an early favorite for the 1972 Democratic presidential nomination (Goldstein, 2015). Muskie’s ambitious environmental agenda unnerved Nixon as he sought to gain credibility for the Republican party (Thomas, 2016). As pollution crises transpired, Nixon complained to Ehrlichman about the Senator’s popularity and developing environmental proposals; this gave Ehrlichman
and Whitaker liberty to delegate policy strategy addressing environmental health (Whitaker, 2003). As environmental and anti-war action swelled, Republicans’ electability slumped for the upcoming 1970 midterm elections (Abramowitz, 1985). Amidst anti-pollution fever, air pollution legislation transpired into a promising strategy for augmenting Republican support and staving off election losses.

Environmental activism—1970s and 80s

Lateral to Nixon’s smoldering rivalry with Muskie, environmental activism exploded; in April of 1970, twenty million Americans participated in the rallies and protests of Earth Day (Hays, 1987). Environmental Action, a young activist group, organized the nationwide Earth Day events; they continued to fight for environmental laws and corporate reform and drafted the CAA of 1970 with Muskie (BioScience, 1974). Environmental Action named the Dirty Dozen—12 Congresspeople identified as anti-environment—and called on voters to express their distaste at the voting booths the Dirty Dozen campaign was widely covered in the big newspapers, editorials, and political humor columns (Hays, 1987). Seven of the 12 were unseated in the November elections of 1970, clearing the way for the CAA to pass later that year (New York Times, 1970).

Post-Nixon executive influence

President Carter supported the CAA of 1977 along with ecological conservation efforts, but environmental progress and stewardship decelerated during Reagan’s more pro-market, anti-regulation presidency as the administration tried to weaken the CAA’s pollution standards. However, a Democrat-controlled Congress tempered Reagan’s deregulatory leadership (Fredrickson et al, 2018). There was an upswing in executive
support as H.W. Bush proposed the 1990 amendments at the end of his term, campaigning on environmental protections against environmentally conscious Clinton in the 1992 presidential election (Schmalensee and Stavins, 2019).

**Synthesis**

- The CAA—one of many federal environmental policy solutions that received bipartisan support (policy stream)
- Heavy activism, election pressure, and checks-and-balances, among other influences (politics stream)

These three streams coexisted, converging to create a policy window conducive to passing and implementing the CAA of 1970. When passing the CAA of 1970 and amendments, there was overwhelming bipartisan support from Republicans and Democrats, as well as consistent executive response (apart from Reagan) to issues prioritized by the radical environmental movements of the 1970s and 80s. During these decades, the US government functioned through Montesquieu’s checks-and-balances; for instance, the legislative branch cushioned the blow of Reagan-era leadership by vetoing industry efforts to weaken the CAA.

Increased access to higher education, community organizing, and other opportunities to shape government dissolved some of the power-knowledge norms. There was no social consent on health degradation by war and capitalism; intense activism set the expectation for pollution regulation and unsupportive policy-makers often lost re-election. While the elites maintained vast financial resources, their fear of the democratic process prevented a hegemonic political bloc from crystallizing. Since power-knowledge had trickled down the socioeconomic ladder, the playing field was more even than ever before. Government belonged to the people, and the proof lies in the CAA and
plentitude of environmental policy passed in the late 20th century.

Two themes transpired as major determining factors of the CAA’s support and success:

- A fearful yet emotionally invested social movement that relentlessly demanded policy change.
- A reasonably representative government—if policy-makers did not appease the qualms of the majority, they often lost re-election.

**Green New Deal: Evolution**

Despite pollution regulation’s high seat on the policy agenda in the late 1900s, health and climate policy has since stalled. This portion of the analysis illustrates the current climate discourse in the US and is outlined in Figure 3. Contextual social and political events have been grouped into the MSF streams to show how the policy environment of the 21st century is not favourable for pushing climate reform (the GND) through the US policy process.
FIGURE 3 CONTEXTUAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND POLITICAL EVENTS (GND) GROUPED INTO THE MSF STREAMS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSF stream</th>
<th>Contextual environmental and political events (policy environment)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>A missing social movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>GND proposal (including recent iterations released by political candidates)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>2018 &amp; 2020 federal elections</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Industry and ideological interference</td>
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<td></td>
<td>GND response; party polarization</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Embryonic social movements (domestic and international)</td>
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</table>

Source: Author’s own construction.

**Problem stream**

*Since no mass mobilization has formed against the ‘perceived problem’ (climate change), policy entrepreneurs have acted in response to another problem—a lacking social movement and stagnation of climate reform progression.*

**Where is the social movement?**

The post-WWII disasters rallied public outcry and pressured politicians to pass the CAA and other pollution regulations. Today, there have yet to be events that mobilize millions of Americans to demand climate reform from the government. Although the frequency of natural disasters has risen, the
resulting destruction has not been coupled with climate change (McAdam, 2017). After systematically reviewing the impact of exposure to climate-induced extreme weather events, Konisky et al. summarized that “evidence is mixed, but generally finds that personal experiences have, if anything, a short-term effect on climate concern” (2016, p. 535). Similarly, a comparative case analysis by McAdam found that out of six communities impacted by extreme weather events, just one began a subsequent community discourse around climate change, though not to a level that increased local climate activism or policy change (2017).

After taking a closer look at the socioeconomic state of the US, the lack of social activism for climate reform becomes even more unsurprising. According to the Congressional Research Service, if present-day poverty calculations were updated to reflect increases in expenses since the 1960s, the poverty thresholds would be over three times higher than the current thresholds (Gabe, 2015). The median household income in 2018 was $61,372 and the current poverty threshold for an average size family is $21,330; this indicates that the median household income lies below the real poverty threshold (ASPE). This is supported by a recent CareerBuilder report, which found that almost 80% of Americans live paycheck-to-paycheck (2017). If anxiety about immediate survival affects most Americans, it is no wonder they are not riddled with fear over climate change—a very present threat that has been long characterized by a futuristic narrative (McAdam, 2017).

Policy stream

Policy solution for moving around policy gridlock to address climate change.

The GND’s ambiguity corroborates that the proposal is not an antidote for climate change but a platform from which to
brainstorm applied climate policy. It challenges the traditional factions of important issues, coalescing what needs to be emphasized: climate mitigation as the canopy under which the country achieves economic security, healthy communities, social and racial equality, and overall human flourishing.

The GND’s vagueness also leads one to believe that policy entrepreneurs predicted its pitfall in the policy process but have assembled the proposal as a mission to bypass policy gridlock using one of Kingdon’s main theories: that problems are more likely to be taken seriously if a solution is demonstrated to exist. The GND is the seedling of a solution: part of a mission to move the discourse on climate reform in the direction of what is needed to materialize the IPCC’s conclusions.

Politics stream

Factors influencing the US political discourse and policy impasse of the GND.

2020 US federal elections

The country is already surging with speculation over how the 2020 elections will unfold. The three highest-polling Democratic presidential candidates (Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, and Joe Biden) have released versions of the GND. Their plans parallel the original policy’s principles but reach further—actualizing the goals with clearer methods and specific resource allocation. Regardless, an extremely consequential election looms against climate-denying Trump. He will have the support of powerful elites and industry players who often trend against progressive policies like the GND, threatening prospects for climate reform.

Industry and ideological interference
If reified, the GND could obliterate existing energy, agriculture, health care insurance, and other oligopolistic industries. These industries have spent billions of dollars on political lobbying to advance the welfare of their respective markets (Harkins, 2014). These types of financial contributions became the norm after several post-CAA Supreme Court decisions\(^\text{10}\), which established legal frameworks for sanctioning billions of private and corporate dollars to campaign funding. As a result of these landmark cases, there is an indisputable opportunity for class, industry, and thus, ideological interference on the process by which US policymakers are elected.

**GND response; partisan polarization**

Among the public, polls\(^\text{11}\) have indicated that the principles of the GND are popular but the overall proposal may be viewed negatively for its liberal conception. Polling by Change Research and two climate communication organizations found that anywhere from 65% to 80% of registered voters support the GND’s principle of rapidly transitioning to a zero-emissions economy (Gustafson, 2018; Roberts, 2019). However, the Change Research poll indicates that support plummets to 43% when people are asked about the overall GND proposal, without mention of its goals or specifics. Support was also stronger among Democrats than Republicans. The partisan-skewed disdain for the GND may have been fostered by the mainstream media. A media analysis found that Fox News disproportionately used propagandist rhetoric when covering the GND, claiming that the proposal would eliminate cows, cars, and airplanes (Media Matters, 2019). Martin and Yurukoglu also found that Fox News increases Republican voting odds for centrist and Democratic viewers (2017). Fox News is one of the most consumed media outlets in the country, and their messaging likely yields exorbitant power.

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11. See Appendix for poll figures and survey questions.
over popular consensus (TVNewser, 2019). This is a presumable roadblock to social mobilization for the GND.

**Embryonic social movements**

The Sunrise Movement is made up of youth-led climate activists fighting for the GND. They focus on pressuring powerful politicians whose climate action they deem unacceptable; most notably, they staged a sit-in at the offices of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and California Sen. Diane Feinstein. Both events caught the attention of the mainstream media and trended on social media platforms.

Recognizing present climate-induced tragedies\(^\text{12}\), international climate movements have attracted the attention necessary to create change. UK activist group Extinction Rebellion’s theatrical civil disobedience has convinced the UK parliament to declare a climate emergency and pledge to begin strategizing effective mitigation policy (Harvard, 2019). Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg has captured the attention of the world and inspired millions of students to strike, raising climate change awareness and holding politicians accountable for neglecting their futures. Extinction Rebellion and School Strike 4 Climate movements have trickled down to American youth, with organizing chapters in dozens of US cities and plans to participate in the upcoming months’ global climate demonstrations.

**Synthesis**

In response to concerns about climate change, progressive politicians have called for the GND. They’ve set a lofty standard for the measures necessary to effectively mitigate climate change: aggressive industry and social reform. Progressive hope has gushed with 2020 Democratic nominee campaigns, many
of who are pledging to follow through with the GND’s goals. Nonetheless, US politics still operates through election funding and lobbying. Ironically, this is characterized by plutocracy rather than democracy—the self-identified linchpin of US governance. This maintains a bottleneck of political capital, sacrificing the livelihood of the majority to legitimize the agendas of a few. Unlike the converging streams of the CAA, this bottleneck has prevented a policy window from opening.

As concentrated political capital subjugates the policy-making process, the branches of federal government have become ideologically homogeneous, resembling a quintessential example of Gramsci’s hegemonic bloc. The conservative authority in the presidency, Congress, and the Supreme Court have abolished the integrity of our checks-and-balances. Mass economic insecurity reinforces social consent to kleptocracy through power-knowledge, or institutional norms of elite and corporate leverage. Within the bloc, the media distorts public opinion by selectively shaping the GND. In health policy scholarship, this is synonymous with Luke’s third dimension of power: thought control, or the capability of controlling what people think is right, leading to unquestioned acceptance of biased information (and in this context, consent to inadequate climate action). The GND’s future depends on whether policy entrepreneurs can refashion the norms that propagate the current bloc, unravelling its power-knowledge alliances and strengthening the immature social movements organizing to build a counter-bloc.

The following two themes have emerged as determining factors of the GND’s gridlock:

- A policy-making process disproportionately powered by those opposing regulation (and thus, climate reform).
- A constituency whose political influence is much lower per capita than the minority of the opulent class.
DISCUSSION

This policy analysis aimed to understand how US federal health policies either:
- pass through the policy process and create positive health impact, or
- become stalled in the policy process.

By applying the MSF to the policy environments surrounding the CAA and GND, this paper analyzed the social, political, and institutional dynamics directing each policy’s evolution. The theories of hegemonic blocs, power-knowledge, and resulting uniformity of government have provided a lens through which to conceptualize the role of class power in US policy-making.

The results of this research provide insight to those confronting climate change, a time-sensitive public health threat. By considering US history, we can critically analyze why and how the desires of people exercised influence over policy-makers. By comparing past federal health policy-making to present-day attempts, we can discern the processes through which the elite class commands political power.

The main conclusion drawn from this analysis is that federal health policies surmount obstruction to become law when their issue invokes proximate fear, rallying the public to demand relief; social movements are only sustained when fear is obvious and injustice is irrefutable. Additionally, government branches will only respond to social movements when their powers are diversified; their authority must depend on maintaining a direct and positive relationship with the public rather than one skewed by aristocratic influence over traditionally democratic processes, such as elections and media dissemination.
Limitations

Due to the recentness of the GND proposal and its limbo in the policy process, it has no health effects. This limited the analysis as lived consequences of the GND are hypothesized; the research was also limited by the scarcity of research and policy analyses focused on the GND’s aspirations. This left an academic niche to fill that had to be supplemented by other bodies of literature, such as history, political science, and social determinants of health.

Comparing air pollution policy with the scope and complexity of climate policy is disproportionate. Air pollution, while its health consequences are severe, is one of the many co-existing causes and effects of climate change. The climate crisis is a nexus of issues not only detrimental to public health but is foreseeably apocalyptic.

Due to the nature of policy analysis, this research is also limited by its subjectivity. The MSF has hosted criticism; for instance, Howlett et al. support an expansion of the MSF to a total of five streams, allowing better linkage with elements inherent to the agenda-setting process, such as agency, power, and ideology. To address this void using the original MSF, the philosophical and sociopolitical works of Gramsci, Foucault, and Montesquieu are employed. However, their theories have been critiqued like all others and analytical bias was unavoidable.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are targeted efforts to circumvent the health impacts of climate change by enlisting key stakeholders to propel policy changes and political support for the GND. Note that this list is not exhaustive.

- In April of 2019, New York City Mayor Bill DeBlasio announced the city’s commitment to OneNYC 2050, or the “NYC Green
Environmental health policy evolution in the United States: Can the passage of the Clean Air Act (1970) inform the Green New Deal (2019)?

New Deal”, a $14 billion-dollar investment to secure the city’s future against the present and upcoming climate challenges “with bold actions to confront our climate crisis, achieve equity, and strengthen our democracy” (2019). This policy change indicates that local policy-making is a way to evade federal gridlock and initiate climate reform. It is recommended that the city, climate NGOs, and research institutions commit to gathering data on the health effects of this initiative. If OneNYC 2050 reaps positive health results, measuring and communicating the impact will strengthen the argument for feasible climate reform at all levels of government.

As this research emphasized the central role of social movements in demanding policy change, it is recommended that those committed to pushing climate reform are contributing to activist groups like Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion with funds, community engagement, and coverage (social media, news appearances, articles, etc.) The more human-power these movements accumulate, the more influence they will have on policy-making. Since galvanizing social movements require the public to be emotionally invested, it is also recommended that movements like Represent US (eliminating political corruption) and the Poor People’s Campaign (ending economic injustices) are invested in to combat the hegemonic bloc. These organizations are committed to abolishing issues that not only suppress the voice of the people but are maybe better suited for community organizing—their focal points are more conspicuous; they are growing movements that a climate movement could be piggybacked to.

It is recommended that progressive candidates in swing states craft effective digital messaging campaigns. Crooked Media, a political media company, found that certain messages were more effective than others at inciting adversarial views of
the incumbent President (2019). Utilizing such information will be crucial in drafting messaging that will have a higher likelihood of electing a climate-friendly executive administration. If the US is going to adopt policies strong enough to slow catastrophic warming, climate activists and political candidates will need to employ a communications strategy that is just as effective as that of climate reform opponents. Otherwise, a divide will continue to exist on climate action (an issue most people agree on). Similarly, it is recommended that progressive politicians, candidates, and voters work to increase voter turnout in key populations—millennials, gen Z, hispanics, and blacks—all groups of voters that tend to lean left but do not vote with the frequency of their older, whiter counterparts (Pew Research, 2019). Helping election reform and voter turnout organizations, such as Fair Fight, will increase the likelihood of obtaining climate-friendly power in Congress and the White House.

This research alludes to the abstractness of the climate crisis and its entanglement with issues of economic inequality and scarcity of accessible healthcare, food, and employment. It is recommended that policy entrepreneurs begin to advocate for climate reform through these greater existential crises; immediate and blatant fears are more galvanizing than multifarious ones such as climate change. Rather than suggesting policy solutions through the lens of climate change (as the GND does), it may be more effective to mitigate climate change through the lens of other policies. The only major policy entrepreneur to adopt this strategy is Senator Warren, who has released 5 different policies that incorporate the philosophy of the GND but are not centered around climate change, instead marrying it to plans for industrial reform, ‘economic patriotism’, and national security (Warren for President, 2019).
Finally, it is recommended that further research be conducted on the policy environment of the GND and other macro-level policies to identify more opportunities to shape policy change. We recommend employing these guiding methodologies, which this research did not have space to explore:

- Conducting a stakeholder analysis of the US climate discourse to further understand the ideological alliances barricading reform, as well as to detect other power or class dynamics at play.
- An ethnographic investigation into the ‘corridors of power’ to demystify the informal mechanisms through which policy agendas are set (54). This may reveal new ways for policy entrepreneurs to open policy windows.

CONCLUSIONS

While some have conducted analyses of the CAA’s evolution, there have yet to be comparative analyses with intent to inform current climate policy aspirations, such as the GND. The country’s ability to address the climate crisis through health policy reform has consequences on the increasingly stratified socioeconomic and population health statuses of the country.

This research has highlighted the importance of looking beyond policy analysis as a problem-solving endeavor to critically evaluate the power dynamics influencing past and present policy agenda-setting and decision-making. The findings indicate that the elite and conservative power-knowledge consensus is responsible for the climate crisis and is the barrier to change; and reform efforts will only survive if this consensus is disassembled or transformed. The policy environment surrounding the climate discourse is extremely nuanced and there is lots of transdisciplinary work to be done to organize the public behind a mass mobilization for climate reform, while systematically prying
apart the bloc and power-knowledge norms that are intercepting comprehensive climate policy.

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