Introduction

Millions of parents start each day with a flurry of activity that includes placing their children safely in someone else’s hands for the rest of the day. Regardless of whether parents entrust their children to relatives, friends, or child care providers, working parents are constantly confronted with the difficulties of arranging for child care while they work. They must locate caregivers who can ensure their children’s safety and promote their development. And they must be able to afford the fees, which poses further challenges, especially for low-income working families. Most Americans agree that decisions regarding child care are best left to parents. However, for many families, securing good quality child care is not easily accomplished without the help of family, friends, employers, government entities, and the clout of child care public policies.

The basic premise of this book is that changes in political institutions shaped the politics and outcomes of child care public policies, defined here as federal laws and regulations. Political institutions include Congress and the executive branch. Moreover, changes in organized interests—defined here as national and state organizations representing women, children, labor unions, welfare, education, child care, and other interests—interacted with such institutions to influence child care policy outcomes. Appreciation of how organized interests (also referred to as interest groups) evolved over time further enhances understanding of American child care policies. Championing Child Care offers an alternative to the oft-repeated claim that the increased participation of women in the labor force explains the rising in-
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terest in child care and subsequent legislative developments. Another im-
portant assumption underlying this book is that understanding the politics
of previous child care policymaking episodes helps make subsequent strat-
egies more successful.

This book answers the following questions: How were the politics of child
care legislation affected by structural changes among political institutions?
Which aspects of the relationships among political institutions most influ-
enced the process and outcome of child care deliberations? What patterns
over the past thirty years can be discerned to inform future deliberations
about child care policy?

In the United States, for various reasons, child care historically has not
been a major government priority. This is in contrast to some other indus-
trialized nations, in particular the Scandinavian countries and France, that
offer substantial government support for child care.1 Canada and the United
Kingdom have “moderate” government involvement in child care, more
closely resembling the mix of public- and private-sector child care initiatives
in the United States.2 Differences among countries are partially attributable
to cultural values. Laissez-faire individualism, which characterizes American
culture and political norms, emphasizes free markets and the private sector,
not government subsidies. In the United States policymakers first rely on
markets to cover child care needs. However, because forces of supply and
demand do not always meet the child care needs of many families, govern-
ment involvement becomes increasingly important. Determining the nature
of that involvement generates debate.

Many Americans have a hard time delegating the rearing of children to
others. Publicly sponsored child care often connotes images of parents,
especially mothers, relinquishing their responsibilities and abandoning
their children to institutional facilities. Actually, as the book explains, pub-
licly sponsored child care gives parents the flexibility to use a wide range
of providers, including members of their extended families. A January 1998
poll by Louis Harris and Associates revealed Americans’ continuing am-
bivalence toward child care as a government responsibility. When asked
“Who do you think should be primarily responsible for ensuring that fam-
ilies have access to child care,” 60 percent responded that individuals
should be responsible, 23 percent preferred business or employers, and 15
percent indicated the government.3

Public opinion polls also suggest a persisting unease with mothers of young
children working. In the 1998 General Social Survey conducted by the
National Opinion Research Center, 41 percent of respondents agreed that “a preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.” Each time this question was asked since 1985 men were more likely than women, by 10 to 15 percentage points, to think that way. Given the large and growing number of working mothers, these data reflect a gap between the policy preferences of many Americans and the realities that many families face.

Starting in the late 1980s a new interest in child care emerged that led to the enactment of landmark child care legislation in 1990. This ended nearly two decades of political stalemate. In the mid-1990s work requirements under welfare reform and interest in programs for preschool and school-age children prompted further attention to child care. Discussion of the politics surrounding these different events and outcomes forms the essence of this book.

**Why Study Child Care Politics?**

By the mid-1990s more than 32 million children aged fourteen and under had mothers in the workforce and required some type of child care arrangement, including after-school care. Mothers who did not work may also have placed their children in child care, especially preschool programs. From 1970 to 1997 the total number of children between the ages of three and five enrolled in preprimary programs increased from 4.1 to 7.9 million, representing an increase from 37.5 to 64.9 percent of all children in that age group. With 1.5 million children receiving federal child care assistance and another 13 million being eligible but not receiving support, the politics behind the federal government’s role in this growing sector of American social and economic life warrant explanation.

Child care policymaking encompassed many issues on the political agenda, ranging from tax and budget policies to welfare reform and separation of church and state. It evoked questions about the role of women, the well-being of children, and the balance between federal and state responsibilities. Furthermore, unraveling the story of child care legislation over the past thirty years points to the legacies of past events in current policies. With the federal government spending over $17 billion on child care and related programs in fiscal year (FY) 2001, it is important to understand the dynamics behind these various initiatives (table 1.1).

Studying the politics of child care legislation also points to advantages and disadvantages of specific strategies, such as direct subsidies or tax credits.
The book’s thirty-year span allows for analyses of the puzzles and patterns that characterized the politics of child care legislation during that period. A three-decade overview enables policymakers, scholars, and the public at large to appreciate the strides that have been made in child care policymaking and to debunk common myths. Exploring the politics over time also illustrates how “things are seldom what they seem.” That is, assumptions regarding which party is better for child care and which presidents most advanced child care policymaking may be proved wrong after a closer examination of the politics.

A major premise of this book is that federal child care policies matter. With devolution placing an increasingly large emphasis on state policies, many scholars have lost sight of the importance of federal child care legislation. In fact, the large growth of state child care spending of the 1990s is...
largely due to the funds that states received from the federal child care block grant. In addition, federal policies are important in establishing how far states may go and what they must do to receive federal child care funds. Federal child care policies also set a precedent for coordination among various state and local programs, such as Head Start, public health, education, and social services, all of which are connected to child care and the well-being of millions of families with children.

This book depicts the different problems child care policies addressed and the various ways policymakers defined child care politically. It shows that shifting institutional structures affected who had access to decision makers and who controlled the agenda, and that none of these factors alone determined final child care policy outcomes. This book also illustrates the time and effort needed to convert a social condition (i.e., increasing numbers of children needing regular nonparental care) into a policy problem (child care bills). In the process, unpredictable political forces created opportunities for and impediments to arriving at policy solutions. One example of the unexpected was the support child care legislation received from Republican legislators, even some conservatives. Such nuances emerge once one understands the major themes and details of child care policymaking as presented in this book.

Why Championing?

Why call this book Championing Child Care? Why not just entitle it “The Politics of Child Care Legislation,” which is the book’s primary focus? Including the word “championing” in the title and referring to “champions” throughout the text brings to life the struggles to advance child care legislation. In telling the story of child care legislation, this book explains how certain individuals on both sides of the aisle have been champions. Their endurance, commitment, and perspectives have been invaluable to the advancement of child care policies.

At each critical episode of child care legislation one can identify champions of child care policymaking who were willing to invest time, resources, money, and ideas to improve child care policies. Some of these individuals were presidents or other well-known figures. Other champions were federal bureaucrats, state advocates, or concerned individuals who were less well
known and acted politically to improve the quality of child care. In all cases, it was championing—negotiating, advocating, articulating, and persisting—that made their efforts valiant and important.

Championing of child care is not limited to those at one end of the political or ideological spectrum. In its fullest sense the championing of child care includes liberals, conservatives, and moderates alike. Thus, this book is about the web of child care policymaking, the turbulence it produced, and the different approaches, including tax policies and calls for a return to traditional family values, that child care prompted when it landed on the public or legislative agenda.

Why 1970 to 1999?

The years 1970 to 2000 are a particularly rich time for studying the politics of child care legislation. They are characterized by marked demographic changes, expansion of the child care industry, and significant shifts in the structural and procedural aspects of American political institutions. The thirty years this book covers include three major child care policymaking episodes. The first was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, made infamous by President Nixon’s 1971 veto of legislation featuring a national child care program. The second major episode started in the late 1980s and ended with the enactment of landmark child care legislation in 1990. The third major event was the 1996 welfare act, with its provisions that changed the contours of federal child care policy. Events in the intervening years and after 1996 are also discussed.

Between 1970 and 2000 the legislative and executive branches of the federal government underwent significant changes. Among them were shifts in partisan control of Congress with the 1980 Republican victory in the Senate, its return to Democratic dominance in 1986, and the GOP takeover of both the House and the Senate in 1994. National elections in 1976, 1980, and 1992 switched party control of the White House. The executive branch experienced a centralization of power within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and a changing relationship among OMB and other executive agencies involved with child care.

The last three years of the twentieth century were also marked by tremendous social and economic transformation, which created new interest
in child care. In 1998 the *New York Times* magazine ran a “Special Issue on the Joy and Guilt of Modern Motherhood.” In discussing conflicts between work and home, Andrew Cherlin emphasized the dramatic expansion of child care usage since the 1970s. Between 1965 and 1994, the number of preschool children with employed mothers increased from 3.8 to 10.3 million. In 1995, 14.4 million children under five years of age, comprising 75 percent of all children that age, had some type of regular child care arrangement. Many of these children were in more than one setting per week. Forty-nine percent of children under five years of age were cared for by nonrelatives, including nearly 6 million children who were placed in organized child care facilities (table 1.2). Another 24.7 million children between the ages of five and fourteen had parents employed or in school in 1995. From another perspective, James L. Hymes Jr. chronicled the many changes in early childhood education between 1971 and 1990. The advocacy groups involved with child care grew in number over the same period, while other aspects of their organizing endured.

The demographic change most frequently associated with child care policies was the surge of women in the paid labor force since World War II, in particular since the late 1960s (figure 1.1 and table 1.3). Most significantly, employment rates for women with children under the age of six soared from 25.3 percent in 1965 to 62.3 percent in 1996. The rate also more than doubled for women with children under the age of three, for whom participation rates in the labor force increased from 21.4 to 59 percent over the same time period. By 1996 employment rates for women with children aged six years or older were well above 70 percent. Although most women worked full time, many were employed part time. During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s those seeking stronger government investments in child care often cited the increasing number of working mothers to justify their cause. But as this book demonstrates, child care legislation was about much more than growing numbers of working women. If the number of working women alone determined child care policy outcomes, we would have arrived at different solutions many years ago.

One of the most dramatic changes in family life since 1970 was the more than doubling in the number of children raised by only one parent, rising from 8 million to almost 20 million in 1996. Most of these single parents are women who typically have fewer relatives to assist with child care. They often are in low-paying jobs or are the sole breadwinners for
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of arrangement</th>
<th>February 1965</th>
<th>Fall 1977&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Winter 1985</th>
<th>Fall 1990</th>
<th>Fall 1995</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of children (in thousands)</td>
<td>3,794</td>
<td>4,370</td>
<td>8,168</td>
<td>9,629</td>
<td>10,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>100&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By father</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By grandparent</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By other relative</td>
<td>36.0&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>30.9&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By nonrelative in child’s home</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By nonrelative in provider’s home</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>23.5&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized child care facilities</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day/group care center</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery school/preschool</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>(NA)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother cares for child at work&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other arrangements</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA Not available
<sup>1</sup>Percentages reported only for children with mothers working full-time
<sup>2</sup>Data include grandparents
<sup>3</sup>Includes mothers working for pay at home or away from home
<sup>4</sup>Data only for the two youngest children under 5 years of age
<sup>5</sup>Includes 15.7 percent in family day care and 7.8 percent in care by other nonrelatives.

their household. Since the 1970s single mothers have had lower labor force participation rates than their married counterparts, but the 1996 welfare reform could change this.

Many leading economists have shown that despite upward mobility for many Americans, the income gap persists.\(^\text{17}\) During the 1980s families and incomes at the lower end of the income distribution “lost ground” while those at the top gained. At the same time, high- and low-income families made more strides than those in the middle.\(^\text{18}\) These trends raise questions regarding who should benefit from state and national child care policies.
### Table 1.3 Labor Force Participation Rates of Women by Age of Youngest Child, Selected Years, 1950–1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All children under age 18</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under age 6</th>
<th></th>
<th>Under 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Age 6–17</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Under 6</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1950</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1960</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1970</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1975</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1980</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1985</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1986</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1987</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>72.0</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1988</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1989</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1990</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1991</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>58.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1992</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1993</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1994</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1995</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1996</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Federal child care policies have targeted poor and low-income families who spend a proportionately higher share of their income on child care. But many middle-class families also face challenges of arranging suitable care for their children.

Finally, in 1998, despite the nation’s economic largesse, 18.7 percent of all children under eighteen lived in families with incomes below the
federal poverty level. (In 1998 the official poverty threshold for a family of four was $16,660.) The 13.3 million children in poverty in 1998 comprise a 3 million increase in the overall number of children who were poor since 1979. Poverty rates among children below age six are higher than those for older children. In 1997, 22 percent of all children under age six lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty level, and another 20 percent were in families with incomes below 185 percent of the poverty threshold. These data reflect an overall drop in the child poverty rate from its high in 1993, but rates are still above those reported in the early 1970s. Children in poverty are at risk for many physical, social, cognitive, and emotional problems. Early childhood programs offer many benefits, especially for disadvantaged children, and are important in reversing possible deleterious effects of poverty.

In response to these social and economic trends the child care industry grew dramatically over the past three decades. Between 1977 and 1990 the total number of center-based child care programs tripled from 18,307 to 55,960, with enrollment quadrupling from 897,000 to 3.8 million children. In 1999 states reported 102,458 regulated child care centers, nearly a 16 percent increase from 1991. Family child care providers, most of whom were unregulated, also grew in number although at a slower rate than center-based care. In 1999, 290,667 regulated family child care providers were reported in the United States; most were small family child care homes.

One of the most significant changes for early education programs over the past three decades was the growth of state and local involvement in prekindergarten programs. These programs, which often entailed collaboration among Head Start, public education, and community child care providers, changed the contours of child care policymaking. Finally, over the past thirty years, new knowledge emerged about the impact of child care on child development. Political debates in the late 1960s and early 1970s had featured arguments about the harmful effects of child care on children. In the ensuing years empirical data showed that good quality child care was not harmful to children and was perhaps beneficial. Research on early brain development had a significant impact on many aspects of early childhood policymaking, too. This book integrates these political, social, economic, and empirical developments in deciphering the politics of American child care policymaking between 1970 and 2000.
Context of the Book

Organizing Framework

The author used several frameworks to explain policy change. The book is not meant to confirm any of these theories. Rather they help explain the series of events pertaining to child care legislation over time. Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones’s model of punctuated equilibrium is of particular relevance. \[26\] They explain that structural shifts within political institutions and changing definitions of the policy problem create periods of “relative stability” followed by periods of “rapid change.” \[27\] The latter leave in place new structures to guide subsequent child care policymaking efforts. *Championing Child Care* uses Baumgartner and Jones’s framework in identifying key junctures at which major child care bills were introduced and debated (1971, 1990, and 1996), describing the politics surrounding each of these events, and then identifying the new political structures and the negotiations among individuals associated with them that evolved in the intervening years.

According to Baumgartner and Jones, issue definition is “the driving force” for determining the stability and instability of political systems because it has the potential to mobilize people and groups who were “previously disinterested.” *Championing Child Care* shows how issue definition was fundamental to the politics of child care legislation. Issue definition is essential for engaging new constituencies and framing the terms of the debate. In addition to issue definition, structural changes among political institutions, often as a result of changes in partisan control, may also result in new issues emerging on the agenda or old ones being redefined. Thus, issue definition combined with institutional control “make[s] possible the alternation between stability and rapid change that characterizes political systems.” \[28\]

Scholarship by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith on advocacy coalitions provides another framework for explaining child care politics. \[29\] Advocacy coalitions are composed of “people from a variety of positions (elected and agency officials, interest group leaders, researchers) who share a particular belief system—i.e., a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions—and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time.” \[30\] Under the advocacy coalition framework, policy change requires a time frame of ten years or more, which makes it particularly useful for this study. Opposing coalitions reach a consensus through “policy-
oriented learning,” which “refers to relatively enduring alterations of thought or behavioral intentions that result from experience and are concerned with the attainment (or revision) of policy objectives.” By understanding the variables affecting their belief system and responding to exogenous events, individuals adjust their position.

Between 1970 and 2000 one major advocacy coalition lobbied for child care legislation. It included some organizations, legislators, and individuals with long-standing, consistent involvement with child care legislative debates. Other participants were marginally involved, and some were more engaged at certain times than others. All members of the coalition accepted the importance of a strong role for the federal government in child care policymaking.

Groups and individuals in the opposing coalition included individuals, legislators, and organizations with a different set of beliefs about the government’s role in the child care arena—one that emphasized parental choice, states’ rights, and minimal government intervention. They did not form a formal coalition and were not as cohesively organized as their liberal counterparts. By the 1990s, partly as a result of policy learning, the views of both sides had converged but only to a very limited extent. Philosophical differences between each camp contributed to ongoing divisiveness in child care policymaking.

Other minor advocacy coalitions also were part of child care policymaking, sometimes in inchoate forms. In particular, the politics of enacting the 1990 child care legislation heightened ongoing conflicts among organizations over separation of church and state. Although this is not presently a key issue for child care (having been resolved, to some extent, in the 1990 legislation), it produced distinct coalitions among organizations participating in child care policymaking in the late 1980s.

In sum, by focusing on issue definition, political institutions, and advocacy coalitions and by taking a perspective that allows for analysis over time, the story of child care politics comes to life. These structures offer vistas through which a host of political and socioeconomic forces can be examined.

What Makes This Book Different

This book fills significant gaps in the policy sciences and child care literature. It differs from the many publications on child care policies, which
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are cited throughout the book, in that its focus is on the politics, not the policy analyses. Its goal is not to tout a particular policy option, such as a universal system, but rather to show the importance of political negotiations in understanding contemporary child care policies.

Other authors wrote historical perspectives on child care and related policies, but typically without the political analysis of this book. Most recently, Sonya Michel offered a detailed history of child care policies since the late 1800s, explaining why the United States failed to establish a universal system of child care. Her work is based on the premises that child care is an undervalued public policy and that universal child care is a desirable goal.

Gilbert Steiner’s books on children’s and family policies analyzed some of the same issues covered in this book. However, his discussions of children and family policy, including but not limited to child care, ended in the late 1970s. Marion Frances Berry’s The Politics of Parenthood covered some of the same terrain as Championing Child Care but did not go beyond 1990. Berry examined the politics of child care and parenthood in the workplace, government, and elsewhere, depicting the prevalence of the “mother-care” tradition and its effect on women’s social, political, and economic status since the early 1900s. In contrast, this book examines the politics of child care in one domain, policymaking at the federal level since 1970, and shows how the themes that Berry presented were among the many factors that influenced American child care policies. Other scholars covered the politics of child care legislation between 1970 and 1990 but not with the breadth of this project.

Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn’s 1987 book on child care is a classic for understanding public and private sector child care policies through the late 1980s. In subsequent comparative analyses of child care and other family policies they demonstrated how the United States differs from, and often lags behind, other industrialized nations. Their recent and most ambitious project offers a multifaceted view of family policies from 1960 to the mid-1990s in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and New Zealand. Family policy experts from these four countries analyzed the relationship between family change and family policy, including broad political, social, and economic developments. Kamerman and Kahn found that none of these four countries had explicit comprehensive national child care policies. Championing Child Care elaborates on many of the political themes for American child care policymaking that Kamerman and Kahn noted in a comparative context.
Edward Zigler’s abundant contributions to the literature on child development and early childhood policymaking are invaluable for anyone examining these issues. William T. Gormley Jr.’s scholarship, especially his book, Everybody’s Children, provides insightful analyses on state regulation of child care following the implementation of the 1990 child care provisions. Championing Child Care also adds to the literature of case studies in social policy formation. Although each case study has a particular focus, taken together this literature enriches our understanding of the public policy process. Theodore R. Marmor’s analysis of Medicare policymaking includes the same period as this book (1970s to 2000) and reaches similar conclusions regarding structural factors that affect policymaking.

Finally, this book is part of a renewed focus on institutions that many contemporary political scientists and historians have favored. This return to institutionalism is not limited to political science; fields such as economics, law history, and sociology have also experienced a renewed interest in the topic.

New institutionalism is different from the so-called old institutionalism that prevailed until the mid-twentieth century in that the political scientists interested in “old institutionalism” viewed Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy of the executive branch, and organized interests as static, emphasizing their rules, norms, and cultures. The old institutionalism focused on the central role of the law in governance and the formal features of the Constitution, such as the presidency and Congress. Scholars also studied the major institutional aspects of political systems, such as whether they were parliamentary, presidential, or federal versus unitary, and offered normative analyses of what comprised good government.

Starting in the 1950s political scientists developed behavioral models of political action that sought to identify what motivated individuals (i.e., voters or public officials) to take certain actions. As a result, economic theories of choice and rationality came to the forefront of political science. According to such theories, political actors were deemed to be “rational utility maximizers.” For example, legislators would vote in ways to maximize their chance of being reelected. Rational choice and behavioral theories tend to reduce collective behavior to individual actions.

For the past two decades, political scientists working under the rubric of the new institutionalism have pursued many different avenues of study. One approach incorporates rational choice, political behavior, bargaining, and politics with the parameters of institutional structures, rules, and procedures.
It examines how such structures and procedures shape the context in which political actors function. Such approaches are relevant to the politics of child care legislation in that rules of lawmaking and the structure of Congress shaped the politics of child care policymaking in many ways. Moreover, changes in congressional structures and rules in the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s influenced both the process and the outcome of the politics of child care legislation in subsequent years.

Another line of inquiry, historical institutionalism, explains how the choices made when an institution or policy is formed (or not formed) create enduring legacies for subsequent policies. Historical institutionalists frequently refer to the concept of path dependency, “in which preceding steps in a particular direction induce further movement in the same direction,” creating a type of inertia of policymaking. The notion of path dependency is relevant to American child care policymaking in that a reluctance to provide government assistance to families with working mothers and young children as early as the beginning of the twentieth century established a precedent that was hard to break. President Nixon’s veto of the 1971 child care bill further contributed to legislators’ unwillingness to endorse a federal child care program. The monumental breaking of that inertia in 1990 with the enactment of the first freestanding federal child care program established a pattern of child care policymaking (block grants to states with certain parameters) that proved difficult to disturb when child care landed on the legislative agenda in subsequent years.

Other institutionalists point to the constitutional structure and institutional fragmentation of American government as explanations for what they consider lags in government involvement in social policies. For example, according to Sven Steinmo, the underdevelopment of the American welfare state can be explained by several institutional aspects of American government. In particular, Steinmo points to the American federalist system, which divides authority between a central government and the states, separation of powers between a legislative and an executive branch of government, fragmentation within Congress, and the large influence of interest groups as factors that impede the creation of a more active government role in the social policy arena. The story of child care policymaking over the past three decades illustrates how many of these institutional constraints shaped the contours of the debates and the policy outcomes. Finally, institutionalism offers an alternative to American exceptionalism as an explanation for the uneven involvement of government in many social policy arenas. As
Steinmo and Jon Watts remarked, “In the end, culturalists offer quite static explanations. What we need is a better understanding of the relationship between what people think about government and what government does (or does not) do.”

Of relevance to the politics of child care legislation, new institutionalism claims that political institutions influence how interests organize, how much access and power they are likely to have, and what positions they might take. For child care, the ability of certain groups and ideas to prevail at specific junctures was related to who had access to decision making. Often this depended on which party controlled Congress or the White House. Other factors, such as the balance between legislative and executive branches of government, also were important.

Political institutions shape the rules and other aspects of the strategic environment, giving priority to certain groups and ideas over others. As Baumgartner and Jones observed, the “structural bias inherent in any set of political institutions” helps explain how certain groups or individuals have an advantage in mobilization and, consequently, in achieving certain policy outcomes. In the chapters that follow, historical institutionalism allowed the author to trace how changes evolved over time; political institutions provided the lenses for understanding how decisions were made.

Research Questions

This book answered several key research questions. First, why did child care legislation take the course it did at each of the critical junctures (1971, 1990, and 1996) and in the intervening years? How did the players interact to enable lawmakers to arrive at these three different solutions? Second, based on the premise that something other than demographic factors determined child care policies, how did institutional structures interact to influence child care policy outcomes? Finally, what do the politics of child care legislation over the past thirty years suggest for the future?

While conducting research for this book, three additional questions emerged that are answered in the final chapter. First, once child care bills were introduced in Congress, why was it so difficult for legislators to pass legislation that a president willingly signed? Second, why were some of the most significant changes in child care policymaking enacted under a Republican president (1990) and a GOP Congress when Democrats were typ-
ically the promoters of government investment in child care? What do the answers to these questions reveal about American public policymaking? Finally, how did organized interests influence child care policies? In particular, if child care was an important policy concern, largely because of the influx of women into the workforce, why were women’s groups not in the forefront of child care advocacy?

These are questions that emphasize the “how” and “why” of child care politics. Answering them also requires knowing “who” was involved and “what” the major issues and sequence of events were. Government documents and archival evidence were useful in answering such questions but only insofar as they revealed aspects of the story that were publicly recorded. Other case study methodologies, especially interviews with individuals who participated in the politics of child care legislation, enabled the author to delve beneath the surface and obtain information that was not otherwise available.

This book’s multiple case studies provided opportunities to compare and contrast three major periods in child care policymaking—1971, 1990, and 1996. This required that the same questions be asked for each case and that there be sufficient similarities and differences among cases to allow analysis. All three cases pertained to national child care legislation involving Congress, the executive branch, and organized interests. Over time, some of the individual players and structural aspects of the institutions changed. Thus, these three cases contained enough similarities and differences to allow a meaningful analysis.

The author conducted interviews with 114 individuals involved with child care policymaking since the early 1970s. This included past or present members of Congress, congressional staff, executive branch officials, interest group representatives from state or national organizations, state officials, and policy analysts from academic or private research entities. Slightly over half of the interviews were conducted in the early 1990s as part of a previous research project. The rest were conducted between 1996 and 1999. Approximately half the interviews were conducted in person and the rest by phone. Some individuals were interviewed more than once to obtain perspectives at different times. To ensure accuracy and avoid the risk of “being co-opted by respondents,” the author made every attempt possible to ask the same question of many individuals, to have key informants review the text, and to obtain feedback from unbiased and well-informed experts.
All interviews were conducted with the understanding that the interviewees’ names and organizations would not be revealed in subsequent analyses unless the author was explicitly granted permission to do so. In such cases, respondents were given the opportunity to review and revise the text that included their citations. The author often asked respondents to review excerpts from the text, even if they were cited anonymously, to ensure that the material was accurate. Quotations in the text without attribution are taken from such interviews, and these sources remain anonymous to protect respondents’ identities. Throughout the text, in order to protect the interviewees’ identities, interviewees are quoted verbatim without notes identifying the source. When interviewees granted permission to be explicitly cited, their names and the dates of the interviews are revealed in the endnotes.

Interviews were not tape-recorded. Instead, the author took handwritten notes that were later typed so as to preserve as much as possible the respondent’s exact words and the interchange between author and respondent. The decision not to tape-record was based on the assumption that people would talk more freely without the tape recorder, a premise many interviewees reiterated. Moreover, interviews were intended to provide insight and clarify certain issues, not to obtain verbatim transcriptions for subsequent analysis of language or content. The advantages of this method in terms of the respondents’ candor and spontaneity outweighed the disadvantages of losing their precise wording.

Overview of the Book

The book takes a chronological approach to child care policymaking. Chapter 2 describes the politics of the 1971 bill establishing a universal and comprehensive child care program, which President Nixon vetoed. The chapter includes the themes that helped place child care on the legislative agenda, differences between how leaders in the House and Senate handled the legislation, alignment of organized interests, and divisiveness within the executive branch that led to President Nixon’s veto. Readers will be intrigued with how some of the key players in these early years went on to obtain high positions within government, party politics, and social policymaking.

Chapter 3 covers the years between 1972 and the late 1980s, describing the ongoing efforts of certain members of Congress to keep child care leg-
islation alive, despite fierce opposition from conservatives, including an anonymous smear campaign. This chapter describes the contentious politics over the establishment of federal child care requirements and the enactment of major child care legislation under the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA).

Chapter 4 illuminates the politics of the most critical juncture in the history of American child care policymaking. It closely follows the path of child care legislation from the late 1980s through enactment in 1990 as a package that included expansion of the earned income tax credit and the creation of two new federal child care programs. The 1990 bill demonstrated the importance of both tax credits and programmatic initiatives as venues for child care policies. This chapter presents the politics among organized interests across the ideological continuum, including but not limited to the major child care coalition, led by the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) and its outspoken president, Marian Wright Edelman. The chapter ends with explanations for the different political outcomes in 1971 (presidential veto) and 1990 (enactment).

Chapter 5 reviews the politics of implementing the child care provisions of the 1990 law. In many ways, regulatory battles mirrored the politics of enactment. The chapter also looks at the impact of President Clinton’s election on child care policymaking.

Chapter 6 examines child care as part of welfare reform, starting with the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994 and the ensuing structural and procedural shifts in Congress. It follows the sequence of events that led to the enactment of welfare reform in 1996, concentrating on how child care was part of those deliberations and how new congressional structures and procedures influenced the legislative outcomes. Differences between this round of child care legislation and the two previous ones are discussed throughout the chapter.

Chapter 7 depicts how child care legislation became part of other issues, including crime prevention, school readiness, tax policy revisions, and the negotiations between states’ attorneys general and the major tobacco companies. In contrast to the 1970s, by the late 1990s most lawmakers, regardless of party affiliation, agreed that the federal government had a role to play in child care policymaking. However, debates continued over federal funding levels, the types of tax reforms that would best meet the needs of families with children, and the type of families that should benefit from various child care policies.
Chapter 8 describes the nuances of child care policymaking at the state level and how federal legislation affected and interacted with states’ decisions pertaining to child care and early education. A book on federal child care policymaking would be incomplete without some discussion of how states implemented such policies and linked them with Head Start, child care, and other early education programs.

The final chapter discusses patterns of child care policymaking over the last thirty years of the twentieth century. It focuses on the structural aspects of American political institutions that both facilitated and impeded the formation of child care policies. The chapter explains why child care policies have come so far since 1970 and identifies opportunities for future advancement. These insights make it possible to look ahead with cautious optimism to the path child care legislation will take in the century ahead.