



# Pathways of Power (American Government and Public Policy)

*Timothy J. Conlan, Paul L. Posner, David R. Beam*

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While civics textbooks describe an idealized model of “how a bill becomes law,” journalists often emphasize special interest lobbying and generous campaign contributions to Congress; and other textbooks describe common stages through which all policies progress, these approaches fail to convey—much less explain—the tremendous diversity in political processes that shape specific policies in contemporary Washington.

Bridging the gap between textbook models of how public policy should work, and how the process actually works in contemporary Washington, *Pathways of Power* provides a framework that integrates the roles of political interests and policy ideals in the contemporary policy process. This book argues that the policy process can be understood as a set of four distinctive pathways of policymaking—pluralist, partisan, expert, and symbolic—that draw upon different political resources, appeal to different political actors, and elicit unique strategies and styles of coalition building.

Revealing the strategic behavior of policy actors who compete to shift policies onto pathways that maximize their resources and influence, the book provides a fresh approach to understanding the seeming chaos and volatility of the policy process today. The book’s use of a wide universe of major policy decisions and case studies, focused on such key areas as health care, federal budgeting, and tax policy, provides a useful foundation for students of the policy process as well as for policy practitioners eager to learn more about their craft.



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