This project builds on a key distinction that Frank Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones made in *The Politics of Information*. There they distinguished between the broadening of government and its thickening. Thickening is just more government within the traditional public sphere. Broadening is more diverse government—that is, government addressing more policy areas. We realized that the distinction they made had much wider implications than the information-supply argument they offered. It had become increasingly clear to us that the broadening process, involving changes in the scope of what government does rather than just how big it is, was generally overlooked by scholars, political commentators, and policy activists. The powerful and rapid increase in the scope of government from the late 1960s to the late 1970s was so obvious in the US Policy Agendas data we examined that we began to call it “the Great Broadening.” Those changes in the policy terrain from that broadening surely had a transformative effect on the US political system. Moreover, we thought that the Policy Agendas Project had the potential of being harnessed in the study of this transformation, not just in isolating the concept of broadening itself.

The first reactions to our early work on the project were critical. We focused on the effects of “the Great Broadening,” but people naturally wanted to know what caused it. Adding the analysis of causes made the early work cumbersome and confusing, leading to a desk rejection from a major journal (thanks, Jeff!). Nevertheless we ploughed ahead, trying to learn from every comment we received and every new analysis one of us produced.

We’ve adopted an eclectic approach, but it is centered in straightforward graphical analyses of extended time series from the Policy Agendas Project. We aimed at making a set of plausibility claims centering on both the data and qualitative case material from the period. Our argument centers on
extreme policy feedback in which an intense period of policy-making activity deforms the policy terrain (a metaphor used both by James Q. Wilson and Paul Pierson) so severely that the entire course of policy and politics is altered.

We know this book raises many questions and answers only a few. Social science is mostly about open questions. But we do hope to stimulate others to consider a different way of viewing politics and government, one based on seeing politics as a result of policies, where policies can deform the political space in a more profound manner than is currently appreciated.

We incurred numerous debts in the course of this project. An earlier draft was presented at the Duke University Book Symposium, Department of Political Science, Duke University, May 2017, where we received amazingly insightful comments. We particularly benefited from detailed commentary from John Aldrich, David Rohde, Jason Roberts, Sarah Treul, Andrew Ballard, and Bailey Sanders. We especially appreciated how John intuitively grasped the notion of broadening in an extemporaneous comment, when he cited both Bill Riker and Tom Ferguson in the same breath. We also benefited from comments on presentations at Arhus University, the University of Washington’s Center for American Politics and Public Policy, the University of Geneva, the Interdisciplinary Center in Hertzliya (in Israel), and the University of Ljubljana.

We are indebted to Dara Strolovitch and Christina Wolbrecht, who kept reminding us that social movements must have been critical in the Great Broadening until we found a way to study their role. We hope that the idea of sequencing of social movements contributes to their integration into more standard party and public-opinion accounts of policy change. Others who were kind enough to provide comments that helped us clarify and modify our ideas include Bat Sparrow, Hans Noel, Lee Drutman, Clarence Stone, Roy Flemming, Dara Strolovitch, Jeff Isaac, and John Padgett, whose work Jones seems always to be borrowing. Trey Thomas provided invaluable help in the mechanics of calculating the major measures we used in this book.

We benefited enormously from four formal reviews from university presses. Their collective comments were generally supportive, always insightful, and incredibly detailed. We are awed by the time and care with which they reviewed our work, and this book is far better because of their inputs. Thanks to Don Kettl and Laurel Harbridge-Yong, who wrote reviews for the University of Chicago Press, and David Mayhew and Beth Leech, who reviewed it for Oxford University Press. In particular, we appreciate the care that the University of Chicago Press, especially Chuck Myers, gave our manuscript.
Given our heavy reliance on the Policy Agendas Project, we owe our deepest debts to the graduate students at Texas, Washington, and Texas A&M who served as project managers, and the other students, graduate and undergraduate, who participated in the construction of both the database and the website we developed for delivering that database (policyagendas.net). Even more importantly, they were critical in building the research community around the project and assuming responsibility for its health. In particular, we want to acknowledge our deep debt to Michelle Wolfe, who was both a project manager and a contributor to the political communications literature. Her “Stepping on the Gas or Putting on the Brakes” is one of the finest articles in that field. Michelle was tragically killed in September of 2016 by a bolt of lightning.

Our relationship with Michelle represents what we value most in this profession—teaching and learning from our students and our mentors. This book is a special collaboration between three authors at three different stages in their careers: one at the beginning of her career, one at the midpoint (hopefully!), and one who is enjoying the successes of a multi-decade career. In speaking for the latter two, we feel very confident that our mentorship was worthy if our students have learned even half as much from us as we’ve learned from them (and that most definitely includes the former).

While we prize the students with whom we’ve worked, we dedicate this book to our mentors. It is because of their time, energy, and effort that we are who we are today. We’re humbled by their intelligence, kindness, and perseverance.

Bryan Jones owes his usual debt to Frank Baumgartner. But he owes many other debts to those who have tolerated his hardheadedness and left-handed way of viewing the world over the years. That especially includes both Sean Theriault and Michelle Whyman. And he owes a big debt to Diane for her feisty tolerance over the years.

Sean Theriault thanks Dan Palazzolo, Barry Weingast, Paul Sniderman, Dave Rohde, and Bryan Jones for showing him not only what a good political scientist is, but also what a good person is. They have each opened up their hearts (and even their homes) to him—and to Anthony, who has done the same, but on a more regular basis.

Michelle Whyman thanks Bryan Jones for encouraging her to pursue a PhD and offering unfaltering support throughout her education. She owes Sean Theriault her deepest thanks for his mentorship and sterling friendship. She is also thankful to John Aldrich and Dave Rohde for extending their wisdom, advice, and friendship to her. She could not ask for better role models or mentors.