

EMPOWERING VOTERS

Written By
Maggy MacNicol

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EMPOWERING VOTERS

**A Beginner's Guide for
Citizens, Policymakers, and Future Advocates**

THE WORLD IN THE MAKING PROJECT

**Written By
Maggy MacNikol**



*In loving memory of my mother and
father*



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Why I wrote this book?

Dear fellow citizen, I am Maggy MacNikol – a proud 58-year-old lady. Apart from being a multifaceted identity beyond mere titles, I am a dedicated policy advisor and a persistent agent of change. Improving society and relentlessly pursuing the common good have become more than a job – it's my lifetime commitment!

With years of extensive experience, I've worked across diverse platforms, engaging with various stakeholders in government, nonprofits, and the private sector. I am a dedicated individual with a burning passion for improving the quality of life of people and working towards creating a better future for all. This journey has instilled in me a profound understanding of the complexities of societal needs and how they can be addressed.

Through this immersive experience, I have arrived at a firm conviction that genuine, impactful change doesn't come easily or accidentally. It requires meticulous planning, precise targeting, and effective management. It's about creating public services and relevant policies that aren't merely words on paper but tangible pathways to a better life for all.

My work is fuelled by a passion for justice, equality, and human dignity, and it's guided by an unswerving belief in the power of well-crafted policy. I know meaningful progress can only be achieved through collaboration, empathy, and a focus on what truly matters to the people and community. In my view, the pursuit of the common good isn't a vague ideal; it's a concrete goal, reachable through dedication, intelligence, and hard work.

Those of you who have been involved in aspects of transformation – your business, organization, public or private institutions – know the difficulty of crafting a successful solution, particularly those who will serve the public and citizens like you. Public officials and public servants play a vital role in citizens’ daily lives, working diligently behind the scenes to ensure the smooth functioning of society. They create and implement policies that are aimed at promoting the welfare of the community, from maintaining public safety to providing essential services like healthcare and education. By listening to the needs of the people and responding with empathy and efficiency, public servants bridge the gap between government and citizens. Their work, often unnoticed, is fundamental in building trust within a community and making sure that the government’s actions align with the needs and values of the people they serve.

I learned an important life lesson that voting matters and those we select with our vote can make our lives extraordinary or miserable. As such, I deeply value the power of my vote. When it comes time to cast my ballot, I approach the decision with great care and consideration, recognizing the weight of responsibility that comes with exercising my right to vote.

Public officials often make important decisions that have a huge impact on our daily life. Failed decisions by public servants can have far-reaching and often devastating impacts on our lives. Whether due to poor planning, lack of understanding, or misguided intentions, these mistakes can lead to inefficient services, wasted resources, and a loss of trust in institutions. For those who are affected, this may translate into inadequate healthcare, failing education systems, or unsafe living conditions. In the broader community, these failures can erode confidence and foster a sense of disillusionment and cynicism. The effects of these failed decisions underscore the immense responsibility public servants hold and the critical importance of competence, integrity, and accountability in their work.

Despite being elected to serve the public and improve the lives of citizens, some public officials fall short of fulfilling their purpose. While they may make substantial decisions, these actions often do little to create significant positive change for the people who elected them. Instead of improving citizens' lives, these decisions sometimes lead to confusion and emotional stress without truly addressing the underlying issues. This lack of tangible improvement can result in a growing sense of time-waste among voters, who entrust officials with the power to rule and govern. Ultimately, the failure to make real and meaningful progress in the lives of people undermines the very essence of public service, and our trust in institutions and in those who we vote.

What are the “basics” we all, as citizens, need to know before we cast our ballot? How do the elections and our participation or non-participation as voters influence the delivery of public services?

Starting to write this book, I realized that I had embarked on a very challenging journey. First, while I tried to study in depth what books are available to help citizens make informed choices as voters, I must say – it is an empty page. Apart from some elementary text written in some electoral campaign or some administrative to-do list for the voter to register to have an ID presented at the voting station, almost “zero” books are available that will offer some understanding of why voting is important, how to decide which options are suitable and essential for you as citizen and voter, and how it is possible to hold public service and elected officials accountable for promises they make in the electoral campaign.

Second, throughout my career, I realized that public officials face significant challenges serving their terms once elected. What is at their hands is a belief that through the legislative process, they will manage to implement objectives they committed in the electoral campaign. But the reality is that this expectation is too difficult. Throughout my career, I realized that policy leaders almost always

lack a framework, methodology, and toolkit for implementing their ideas. Often even a conceptual understanding of the problems of ordinary people, which are results of public policy solutions taken years ago, is mission impossible, as the public administration in charge lacks tools and approaches to understand the real challenges that citizens have. It is of utmost importance to not forget that there is a constant shift in societies, as if they were living bodies, contributing to many changes. What was relevant years ago, is not relevant anymore, so it's not just about having books to read, but it is also to have something that takes account of all of today's problems.

I found another gap in my project devoted to voters. Most books on the public goods, policies, and how they are implemented have a conceptual rather than an application-oriented focus. They serve the purpose of different academic courses – such as public management, policy analyses, or public governance – in universities to teach theory to students who dream big of embarking on a career in public service. Usually, the authors are academics and experienced practitioners and practical examples are largely missing. No matter how interesting, the information they present is typically communicated through some type of model rather than a detailed methodology and supporting toolkit. In other words, the books available that will teach and help policy leaders, elected officials, and heads of Departments portray policy implementation, let alone provide an inspiration to use in the real-life situations, are very limited.

Overall, in a simple scan of literature accessible to ordinary citizens and voters, gaps on this subject are everywhere. What matters for citizens and voters? What type of transformations in the society citizens and voters are looking for? How to ensure the transformation in practice that matters to people? How to ensure that the transformation is aligned with the promises made by elected officials?

In my 30 years long experience in transformation of the social sector, I have supported departments, agencies, and government bodies in developing strategies and tools tailored to their specific needs while considering the broader policy objectives. And this is also about a deep understanding of the different sectors within the government and how they interact with each other, as well as an ability to identify the key drivers of change in each sector.

I felt my experience has been a real-life laboratory, constantly engaging with high-level government officials and grassroots interactions with ordinary people as users of public services. Learning from the best in governance and public policy can provide valuable insights and knowledge to benefit my future endeavours. Working with Ministers and heads of Departments can be both challenging and rewarding, as it allowed me to contribute to essential decision-making processes. Additionally, discussing directly with citizens how public decisions change their lives for good or bad is a rare and impressive know-how, which is worthwhile to be put on paper.

And this is why I decided to embark on this journey – drafting a book that will help me capture incredible experience from practice in making public decisions possible while working with and for those we vote for. To clarify, dear reader, I do not belong to any political party. Instead, I look at public services from the ordinary people’s perspective and what the judgment is for a good public policy that makes a difference in people’s lives. This is why I find this book writing enriching professional experience, and it has been surprisingly joyful but challenging.

Let us work together to create a brighter future for all, remembering that our votes matter!

The book as a beginner's voters' guide: for citizens, for policymakers, and all that care for our joint future

I invite you to join me in my real-life laboratory that can turn our lives into miracle!

Although it's essential to recognize that your life's direction hinges on your personal talents and dedication, it's clear that many still find it challenging to make significant shifts towards their life goals. Success isn't solely about embracing responsibility and focusing on self-improvement. It also involves a deeper comprehension of the external factors that can support you in achieving your ambitions, as well as the societal changes that benefit us all.

By reflecting on my real-life experiences, let me try to help you to discover one different perspective, which I do believe will help you to generate new strategies for overcoming obstacles, building resilience, and creating a life you love. I learned that this also involves a comprehensive understanding of the key external factors that can either facilitate or hinder your progress in life. These factors may include the social, economic, and cultural environment that surrounds us. Moreover, advocating for positive social change can create a more conducive atmosphere for individual and collective success. In this way, personal development and societal progress are interconnected, each influencing and reinforcing the other. Together, they form a comprehensive approach to success that recognizes both the importance of personal effort and the broader context in which we all live and strive.

The book is a beginner's guide for citizens who want to know more about the power of their vote and how to make better decisions when voting. The book does not cover all issues, but rather, it is a selection of critical issues that, based on my point of view, a citizen needs to be aware of to make an impact with the vote. Please, do not expect a book that will cover everything – from the history of democracy to the current state of politics in the country. On the contrary, the book is a selection of key issues, that based on my real-life experiences will help you to be better oriented in making decisions when voting.

Another important issue to keep in mind – the book does not even deal at all with political parties and analyses of their proposals. Very often, they have been saying too much and doing too little. We need to change that course and make them work for us to ensure their promises are made realities. So this book will provide you as a reader with a set of tools that will strengthen your understanding of being a voter – a citizen with democratic right to decide with your vote.

The book emphasizes the importance of civic engagement and encourages readers to get involved in the political process beyond voting. It provides resources for citizens to contact their elected representatives, join advocacy groups, and become informed on political issues. Overall, the book is a valuable resource for citizens who want to make a difference in their communities and use their votes to shape the future of their local communities, their country, and their nation.

This book is not a receipt for action. But it is a reading for you as a citizen, to become aware of different points of view and what matters in any elections that has a significant impact on your life. If you are a policymaker, then this book will help you to understand better the complex environment of making decisions and how they impact people's lives.

How to make the maximum from reading this book?

The first issue to keep in mind when reading the book is that elections and voting are not just about politicians and government officials; it's about us, the people, and how we fit into the system. We might not all be experts in political science, but we all live under the rules and regulations set by those in authority. In other words, keep in mind that while we as ordinary people are not dealing with politics and policy-making, the politics and policy-making are heavily dealing with our lives! And this is the core of each chapter – but from different dimensions. Whether it's making sure our voices are heard when possible, understanding what our leaders are doing on our behalf, or finding ways to make sense of the complex processes that turn ideas into laws, these issues are your starting point for thinking how to benefit from this book, making you more aware and engaged as a citizen and as a voter.

At the beginning of each chapter, you will find short stories, where the key actors are Fabio, Alice, and Mayor Sabina Bianchi. I initially portrayed Fabio as a character marked by apathy towards the voting process, firmly entrenched in the belief that his individual voice could not influence the broader political landscape. His scepticism serves as a barrier to participation, reflecting a broader sentiment of marginalization among people who feel detached from the society and community. On the other side is Alice defined by her optimism and her ability to inspire change in others, demonstrating a deep understanding of the significance of each vote. Mayor Sabina Bianchi emerges as a transformative figure within the narrative of Greenville's elections for a Mayor, embodying the spirit of innovation and inclusivity. She is characterized by her forward-thinking approach, understanding that genuine engagement goes

beyond mere campaigning. Unlike her opponent, Davide Rossi, who represents a bit of an old-fashioned ruler, Sabina seeks to revolutionize the way politics is conducted and perceived in Greenville. Greenville is a city marked by socio-economic divides and systemic challenges and is a focus of the short stories.

At the end of each section, you will find “LAB Guideline,” associated clearly with the chapter dimension. The objective of the guideline is not only to help you summarise the key issues in the chapter, but also to encourage you to think deeply about each real life dimension and what does it mean for your role as a citizen, how you relate to it, and what you can do to bring brighter joint future. By examining these guidelines, you will get number of ideas and gain insights into your role in the society and how you can actively contribute to a better future. Whether you are directly involved or simply wish to understand how you can contribute, reflecting on these guidelines can direct you towards a more proactive and informed role in shaping the social landscape of your community.

So, take some time to examine these “LAB Guidelines.” You might find that they spark new ideas, raise new questions, or even inspire you to learn more about how you can make a difference in your community. Being an active and informed citizen isn’t limited to one particular system of government; it’s about understanding how things work, asking questions, and finding ways to participate in the decisions that affect our lives. These questions are a way to explore what that means for each of us.

The “Thinking LAB” are questions for reflection that you will find after each “LAB Guideline.” They are vital checkpoints for you in the ongoing journey of understanding the complexity and the net in which we find ourselves as voters. Going deeper into the reflective questions will foster a culture of learning and improvement, which you will experience right from Chapter 1. In this light, reflective thinking becomes not just an intellectual exercise but a practical and

essential one in achieving sustained success and growth. These questions are meant to get you thinking about how you, as an ordinary citizen, interact with and influence the systems such as education, healthcare, and transport in your everyday lives. From understanding what your rights and obligations are, to knowing how decisions are made by those in power, these questions ask you to reflect on your role in the bigger picture of the society.

CHAPTER 1

Your role as a voter in a changing world

This chapter emphasizes the profound impact of elections on people’s future, highlighting the critical role of citizens’ votes in shaping community, regional, and national directions. It underscores the importance of informed voting, considering not only electoral campaigns but also the deeper discussions on public and private sector roles and the realization of policy commitments in everyday institutions. The chapter pinpoints a need for new engagement framework for voters, recognizing the bidirectional influence between politicians and voters. It calls for a more knowledgeable electorate, capable of understanding and participating in the policy-making process to ensure effective governance and the realization of societal goals.

Fabio’s voting dilemma

In Greenville – a small town, there lived a man named Fabio who harboured a deep indifference towards politics. Never once had he cast a vote in any election, rooted in the firm belief that his singular contribution held no power to change the outcomes that unfolded on the grand stage of the local, regional, or national decision-making. To him, the act of voting was nothing more than a waste of time on matters that seemed distant from his immediate reality.

Fabio’s perspective was challenged one day when his very close friend Alice, aware of Fabio’s longstanding apathy, approached him with a plea to reconsider his stance for the upcoming election. Alice, armed with patience and understanding, attempted to peel away the

layers of Fabio's indifference by highlighting the direct impact that political decisions have on both their lives and the fabric of society at large. In a cosy coffee shop, amidst the rich aroma of coffee and the low echoes of conversations, they sat at a corner table. The relaxed atmosphere served as a perfect backdrop for their deep conversation.

"Hey, have you thought about voting in the upcoming election?", Alice asked.

"Nah, I don't see the point. My one vote isn't going to change anything," Fabio responded.

"I used to think that way, but what if everyone thought their vote didn't matter?" Alice said.

"That's a stretch. I just don't want to waste my time on something that doesn't impact me," Fabio responded.

"But it does impact you, more than you think," Alice responded.

"It all seems the same no matter who wins. Plus, I don't like any of the candidates," Fabio remained unconvinced.

"It's hard when no one seems to represent what you want. But by not voting, you're letting others decide for you," Alice made her point.

"I guess I never saw it that way. But one vote still seems so insignificant," Fabio reflected.

"Maybe, but it's about more than just the outcome. It's about participating."

"True... I hadn't considered the collective power of those 'insignificant' votes," Fabio responded.

"Exactly! And it's not just about the present. It's about shaping the future," Alice elaborated.

“I suppose sitting out doesn’t really help anyone, not even me,” Fabio admitted.

“That’s the spirit! And who knows? If more people vote, maybe we’d see better candidates,” Alice encouraged Fabio.

“Alright, you’ve convinced me. I’ll vote this time. But I’m holding you accountable if this doesn’t go well,” Fabio concluded.

“Deal. But remember, it’s about making your voice heard, regardless of the outcome,” Alice concluded.

“Right. My voice. My vote. I’ll do it,” Fabio declared confidently.

As they continued their coffee, turning to lighter topics, Fabio looked thoughtful, embracing a newfound sense of responsibility.

As the election neared, however, the consequences of Fabio’s choice to remain on the side-line began to crystallize before his eyes. The possibility of an undesirable candidate winning sent ripples of concern through his previously unmoved convictions, leading to a profound shift in perspective. He realized the value of every vote, including his own, marking a departure from his past of detachment. He learned a vital lesson about participatory governance, recognizing that democracy thrives on the active engagement of its citizens. Every vote is essential for shaping our lives and our society, a testament to the power of individual action.

“Voting is the expression of our commitment to ourselves, one another, this country, and this world.”

- Sharon Salzberg¹

¹ For more information on Sharon Salzberg see the “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book.

The changing landscape of our world

There are various reasons why life seems to be moving faster than before. One reason is that the world has grown more prominent in population, markets, trade flows, and competition. Demographic, economic, and technological factors are at play. As an example, between 2015 and 2022 only, the world experienced significant population growth, with notable changes in demographic trends. In 2015, the global population stood at approximately 7.3 billion people, and by 2022, it had surged to an estimated 7.8 billion. This increase of roughly 500 million people over seven years highlights the ongoing expansion of the world's population.²

Changing levels of fertility, mortality, and migration influence the age composition of populations. Globally and for individual countries or areas, the share of population above the age of 65 years is projected to increase, while the share below age 25 is projected to decrease between 2021 and the end of the century. Already, most populations face decreasing numbers of working-age persons (from 25 to 64 years) relative to the number of older persons (65 years and over), and within a few decades, this trend is expected for all countries and areas of the world.³

Recent years also brought an extraordinary shift in the urban landscape. As people seek new opportunities and a better quality of life, the population living in cities has more than doubled over the past 40 years, from 1.5 billion in 1975 to 3.5 billion in 2015. This trend is expected to continue and is projected to reach 5 billion by 2050, corresponding to more than half of the global population. To accommodate population growth, cities tend to either expand or densify, which can have both economic and environmental impacts

² The United Nations publishes comprehensive population data and projections on its official website, including the World Population Prospects report (<https://population.un.org/wpp/>).

³ UN Population Division Data Portal. *Interactive Access to Global Demographic Indicators*. Accessed 1 November, 2023.

by increasing mobility demand, CO₂ emissions, energy consumption, and cost of services.⁴

The Internet and mobile phones have had a significant disruptive impact worldwide. They revolutionized communication, connecting people across the globe instantly, and fostering understanding and collaboration. They have democratized access to information, making knowledge and learning resources available to everyone at the click of a button.

According to available data, a substantial majority, accounting for 67.1% of the global population, utilizes mobile phones, and the count of distinct mobile users reached 5.31 billion as of the beginning of 2022. Over the past year, the worldwide total has expanded by 1.8%, resulting in an additional 95 million new mobile users compared to the same period the previous year. Global Internet users have surged to 4.95 billion by the start of 2022, signifying Internet penetration has now reached 62.5% of the world's entire population. This trend is substantiated by an increase of 192 million Internet users, representing a growth rate of 4.0% over the past year. In January 2022, the global count of social media users stood at 4.62 billion, encompassing 58.4% of the world's total population. However, it's essential to recognize that the term "social media users" may not necessarily correspond to unique individuals.⁵

Local shops are disappearing and e-commerce has flourished, providing convenience to consumers and opening new markets for businesses. Total e-commerce sales have consistently increased in the last few years, driven by factors such as the rise of online

⁴ Banquet A. *Revealing Urban Transformations With AI and Satellite Imagery*. Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities (OECD). Blog published 30 October, 2023. <https://oecdstatistics.blog/2023/10/30/revealing-urban-transformations-with-ai-and-satellite-imagery/>.

⁵ *DIGITAL 2022 Global Overview Report*. Accessed 1 November, 2023. Available at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report>.

marketplaces, increased Internet penetration, and the convenience of online shopping. The rise of online education has made quality education accessible to those who may not have access to traditional educational institutions. It has made remote work possible, providing flexibility for employees and expanding opportunities for employers. The Internet has been instrumental in disaster response and humanitarian aid, enhancing coordination and speeding up relief efforts. By supporting environmental initiatives like smart cities and energy management, the Internet plays a role in promoting sustainability and combating climate change.

Information and communication technology has led to economic and social disruptions, with more changes expected in the future. People from all walks of life, whether in bustling urban centres or remote rural areas, find themselves adapting to new ways of living and working. Industries are evolving, new careers are emerging, and even our daily interactions are being reshaped by the digital landscape. The rapid pace of technological change affects business practices, how people work, and the skills required to succeed. Advances in low-cost high-density batteries, high-density storage media, and very high-speed networking have made distances seem shorter. These changes are transforming the ways how people live, work, learn, and interact with the government and within communities.

Social and economic systems as key components of your life

Governments and organizations are racing to develop policies that can harness the positive aspects of this change while mitigating its negative effects. Yet, despite these efforts, many people feel a sense of anxiety and uncertainty, struggling to find balance in a world that seems to be moving faster than ever. The challenge of the modern age is to embrace this rapid transformation, using it as an opportunity for growth and innovation, rather than a source of stress

and disconnection. It's a global phenomenon that calls for collective action, empathy, and a renewed focus on what connects us as human beings.

And what determines the governments and organizations? What is the starting point? A country is a nation, a body of land with one government. There are many countries in the world: places that have a central government and a common identity.⁶ Based on the United Nations—' Montevideo Convention, a state must meet the following four criteria: it must have a territory, with a permanent population, subject to government control, and the capacity to conduct international relations (sovereignty)⁷. So, the context in which you live and your everyday life is defined by these four critical elements for your country, which significantly impact your life and your well-being as a citizen. And not only these four. Any country context also relates to economy and business environment, and how well your country is doing about its Gross Domestic Product⁸. It also includes social system of the country – education, health, your rights and obligations as an employee or employer.

Both social systems and economic systems are fundamental components of any society, shaping how individuals interact with one another and how resources are allocated. A social system encompasses the norms, values, and institutions that govern human behaviour and relationships within a society. It defines roles,

⁶ <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/country>

⁷ The official United Nations website provides the full text of the Montevideo Convention, along with information about signatories and parties (https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=III-3&chapter=3&clang=en).

⁸ Gross Domestic Product or GDP: The United Nations System of National Accounts is an internationally recognized framework for measuring economic activity. It provides detailed guidelines for calculating GDP, ensuring consistency in data reporting across countries. U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), which is responsible for calculating GDP in the United States, defines it as “the value of the goods and services produced by the nation's economy less the value of the goods and services used up in production.”

expectations, and the framework for social interactions, including family structures, education, religion, and cultural practices. Social systems play a crucial role in shaping social cohesion, identity, and the distribution of opportunities and resources among members of a society.

In contrast, an economic system refers to the mechanisms and structures by which a society produces, distributes, and consumes goods and services. Economic systems can take various forms, including market economies, where private individuals and businesses determine production and distribution, and planned economies, where the government exerts significant control over these processes. The choice of an economic system profoundly influences factors such as wealth distribution, employment opportunities, and overall economic well-being within a society. As an example, Italy operates under a social market economy, which is a type of mixed economy that combines elements of both a market economy and a welfare state. Although predominantly market-driven, with a strong emphasis on private enterprise and competition, Italy is known for its comprehensive social welfare system, which provides a safety net for its citizens. It includes universal healthcare, unemployment benefits, and a generous pension system.

Together, social and economic systems create the foundation for how individuals interact and live within a community, impacting not only their material well-being but also their cultural, social, and emotional experiences. The relationship between these systems is complex, as economic structures can both shape and be shaped by the values and norms of a society's social system, making them integral aspects of the broader social fabric.

Unlock your full potential as a voter in the changing world

There is one external factor that probably has the biggest impact of all. It's important to note that the future of any single citizen is impacted by the outcomes of elections and those who occupy the public offices. Citizens have the power to vote for the individuals they believe will govern and make decisions that align with their values and needs. The role of citizens in the democratic process is crucial, as their votes hold the power to elect officials who will shape the course of their communities, regions, and countries. So, while the government certainly plays a significant role in shaping an individual's future, the power of the citizen vote in elections, be it local or national, cannot be underestimated in determining the direction of the communities, regions, and countries.

The importance of this civic duty cannot be overstated, for it is the very foundation of democracy. Each individual's ability to make informed choices, to take part in public discourse, and to cast a vote in line with their convictions and values is a vital aspect of maintaining and enhancing the societal structure. To achieve this, we must embrace our role as active and aware citizens, understanding the dynamics that drive change and the principles that should guide our choices. This includes not only political awareness but also an understanding of economic, social, and cultural factors that contribute to the fabric of our community.

Your voting decision is very much based on what you hear and what you understand based on electoral campaigns. Are electoral campaigns enough to make informed choices? Electoral campaigns are the competitive efforts by candidates and political parties to win voter support in the period preceding an election. Candidates use a variety of techniques to reach the voters, from public appearances and rallies to the use of mass media advertising. In one way or another, it is an organized effort of the public officials,

policymakers, and those running for a public office to influence decision-making process of the electorate and get majority of the votes. And this is where your vote counts. While electoral campaigns offer crucial insights into the priorities of the upcoming Cabinet or Parliament, they often amount to mere empty assurances and promises, of which we, the citizens, may not even be aware. Discussions that delve deeper into the specific needs of citizens, along with the responsibilities of both the public and private sectors, require more thorough examination and detail. The focus for such a talks will differ from one country to another, from one local community to another.

As a voter in this ever-changing landscape, you need to understand better how you can unlock your full potential as a citizen, empowering you to take control of your legacy, present, and future. Though individual responsibility, talents, and dedication are essential to personal growth, it's clear that many still find it difficult to make significant strides towards their life goals. Success is not merely about self-improvement and taking personal responsibility; it also involves recognizing and understanding the external factors that can contribute to your achievements. Embracing this holistic perspective is a step towards the social change that benefits us all.

You also need to understand deeper that the policy commitments you hear in the electoral campaigns get realized in hospitals, career centres, employment bureaus, university aula, school laboratories, and classrooms. Furthermore, an agenda and political commitments that you hear in the electoral campaign cannot be implemented and nothing can be done if the voices and needs of medical personnel, teachers and professors, security officers, and police officers are not involved as an integral part of the policy process.

There are a number of questions related to the positioning of a political brand, and this is very complex. Nowadays, political leaders are perfectly equipped to define the characteristics of their

political brand. To succeed in the political arena, they must understand, identify, and utilize the most appropriate mechanism of communication to create an accurate perception of their political image in the market that is strictly linked to the characteristics of their brand and to reach these targets.

Gradually, as citizens and voters, we are becoming aware that a new framework is emerging that focuses on both citizen as a consumer and “product” orientation in the realm of politics. This framework has been recognized and applied as a means to understand and strategize how politicians can more effectively position and present themselves to the public and voters. At the heart of this framework lies the understanding that influence within a political environment is bidirectional. This means that politicians are influenced by voter sentiment, while voters are simultaneously influenced by the actions and statements of politicians.

The dynamic nature of this relationship requires a careful balance, recognizing that a politician’s stance must reflect the needs and desires of the electorate, but also acknowledging that politicians themselves have the power to shape public opinion. By employing this theory, political figures can cultivate a more engaged and responsive relationship with voters, striving for alignment in goals and values, and ultimately creating a more robust democratic process.

Through voting, individuals have the power to elect representatives who align with their values and visions for the future. Yet, this endeavour is not without its challenges. To really make a difference when voting, people need to know more about how the government and its policies work. This means learning how policies are made, put into action, and checked to see if they work well. Knowing this helps voters get involved in important issues right from the start and follow them through to the end. It also means they can keep an eye on what’s happening with these policies, see if they’re working as

intended, and make sure the people they've elected are doing their jobs properly.

LAB GUIDELINE 1: Embrace your power as voter

- Living in an era of constant change, the stakes are high, and the responsibilities manifold. As citizens, we are endowed with specific rights and obligations that empower us to shape the society we inhabit. Remember, among these rights the power to vote stands out as an essential tool for self-expression and governance. It provides an opportunity for every person to influence public policy and the decisions that affect our daily lives and our collective future.
- In this ever-evolving landscape, where the world undergoes its own metamorphosis, our actions and choices as individuals and as a society become pivotal. We find ourselves at the nexus of change, where the outcomes of our decisions ripple through time and space, leaving a lasting imprint on the world we pass on to future generations.
- The world's transformation is not merely a spectator's role for us; it's an active and participatory journey where we contribute to shaping the narrative, values, and direction of our shared local and global community. As we navigate the complexities of this evolving world, it is important to recognize the potential we hold, the responsibility we bear, and the capacity we possess to ensure that the metamorphosis we witness is one that leads to progress, equity, and a better world for all.

Thinking LAB

1. How do you perceive the impact of the complexity of the world, which is moving faster, on your daily life and your community?

2. What is the significance of voting as a tool for self-expression and governance in today's rapidly changing world?
3. How do you perceive the impact of your voting decisions on your daily life and the broader society?
4. Considering the high stakes and manifold responsibilities of citizens in an era of constant change, how do you engage with your rights and obligations to shape the society you live in?
5. Reflect on a time when a decision made through the voting process had a direct impact on an aspect of your life. How did this experience influence your views on the importance of participating in elections?

CHAPTER 2

Lessons on leadership and society from the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena

This chapter is about travelling back in time and getting to know the remarkable work of Lorenzetti in medieval Siena. His work in the 13th century on a fresco – called Allegory of Good and Bad Government – underscores that poverty is not an isolated issue; it erodes the fabric of communities and nations, depriving people of essential services and opportunities for advancement. On the other end, Good Government depicts a society where justice and the rule of law prevail. Leaders are shown to be fair and just, fostering trust and cooperation among the people. This chapter focuses on the powerful visual narrative, which Lorenzetti communicates through the far-reaching effects of good and bad governance. It offers a timeless reflection on how leadership shapes the welfare and destiny of society.

Alice and Fabio’s trip to the medieval city of Siena in Tuscany

Alice and Fabio were getting ready for a small trip from the hills of Tuscany, where they came for a few days sightseeing trip from Greenville. Tuscany is a magnificent Italian region, known for its picturesque landscapes, with vineyards and olive trees. All around is the land dedicated to growing grapevines for producing wine. Tuscany is famous for its vineyards, making some world-renowned wines such as Chianti, Brunello di Montalcino, and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. From the top of the hill overlooking the vineyards, the view is simply breath-taking. The rolling hills are covered in lush

and vibrant green grapevines, sometimes stretching as far as the eye can see.

As Alice and Fabio were riding towards Sienna, they witnessed perfectly placed small towns and villages dotting the countryside in the distance, adding to the charm of the serene view. The whole scene is a perfect harmony of natural beauty and human cultivation. It feels like a peaceful haven untouched by the world's chaos. The day in Siena started with a warm cup of coffee and freshly baked Panforte at a local bakery. Panforte translates as 'hard bread.' It dates back to the Middle Ages, when it was popular with the wealthy and spiced with exotic flavours imported from the Far East.

As they were getting excited about their experience, Alice started to surf the Net to find out what to expect from Sienna. By visiting Piazza del Campo and Palazzo Pubblico, visitors can gain a unique perspective on Siena's rich cultural heritage and experience the enduring legacy of these iconic places. Whether you're a history admirer or simply in wonder of the stunning architecture and artwork on display, a trip to the Palazzo Pubblico is an experience not to be missed, and these are the key recommendations by travel agents.

Siena is also famous for its stunning Cathedral, considered by many to be the most extraordinary Gothic building in the world, with glittering mosaics, intricate marble pavements, and frescoes by artists like Raphael, Bernini, and Donatello. The city's rich artistic heritage is also reflected in its many museums and galleries, which contain some of the most outstanding art, including sculptures, paintings, and artefacts from the Medieval and Renaissance periods.

As Alice and Fabio were wandering around the shops, picking up souvenirs and admiring the beautiful architecture, they ended up in the city's historic centre, which is home to several landmarks, considered one of the world's most beautiful medieval squares, flanked by magnificent palaces and surrounded by cafes and

restaurants. Piazza Del Campo and Palazzo Pubblico are two iconic landmarks in the beautiful city of Siena in Tuscany, Italy. Together, they form the heart and soul of the city, representing this charming region's history, culture, and traditions.

As they strolled towards the ancient walls of Siena's Palazzo Pubblico, the excitement was noticeable between Alice and Fabio. The city's rich history seemed to echo through the bustling streets, leading them to the heart of its past glory.

Alice, with a guidebook in hand, looked up at Fabio, her eyes sparkling with excitement. "Can you believe we're about to see the 'Allegory of Good and Bad Government' by Ambrogio Lorenzetti? It's not just an art; it's a window into the political and social life of 14th century Siena."

Fabio, sharing her enthusiasm, nodded. "I've heard it's his greatest masterpiece. The way Lorenzetti depicted the effects of governance on the city and countryside is ground-breaking. It's almost like stepping into a visual guide of medieval political thought."

Alice flipped a page in her guidebook, her finger tracing the lines of text as she spoke. "Exactly. These frescoes are more than just beautiful; they're a historical testimony, reflecting the urban planning, customs, and even the political propaganda of the time. It's fascinating how art can serve as such a powerful medium for communication."

Fabio, always curious about the artists behind the masterpieces, chimed in. "But who was Ambrogio Lorenzetti, really? Despite the brilliance of his work, so much about his life and influences remains a mystery."

With a thoughtful nod, Alice replied, "It's intriguing, isn't it? While his early works show the influence of Duccio, his brother Pietro, and Giotto, Lorenzetti's 'Allegory' stand out for their unique perspective

on governance and society. It's a vivid portrayal that invites us into the world of 14th-century Siena.”

As they reached the entrance of the Palazzo Pubblico, Fabio glanced at Alice, a smile spreading across his face. “Ready to dive into the allegorical world Lorenzetti created and explore the ideals of governance and its impact on society?” Alice grinned back; her excitement undiminished. “More than ready. Let's uncover the messages Lorenzetti intended to convey with his art.”

Together, they crossed the threshold, leaving the modern world behind to immerse themselves in the rich Siena's history, guided by the enduring legacy of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's “Allegory of Good and Bad Government.”

“The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.”

- Thomas Jefferson⁹

Bridging centuries and the relevance of Lorenzetti's Good and Bad Government in 21st century governance

The 12th and 13th centuries are significant for Siena and the development of this city. During this time, a small town on a hill became identifiable – politically, religiously, culturally, and economically. Politically, its people embraced an increasingly republican system of representative government that gave hundreds of citizens some say in civic affairs. Siena became a place of opportunity, offering anyone with a skill and talent a chance to make a living, participate in something extraordinary, and build a new city. Such growth was unprecedented in Europe for a city with only a few streamlets and no significant water sources.

⁹ For more information on Thomas Jefferson, see the “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book.

The Sienese government that oversaw this age of building, art, innovation, and good governance was referred to as the Nove, or the government of the Nine, the number of participants comprising its chief governing body. No other period of Siena has been so richly studied as the age of the Nine, owing to the fascinating body of evidence that survives and the great achievements of the age, and as a result, we are able to understand in some detail how Siena's government worked under the Nine. The first thing that must be said about the Nine is that it is nearly impossible to point to specific individual members of this body who were particularly influential in shaping the city and its governance. This is because the city adopted a series of strict rules that kept any individual, family, or corporation from wielding too much power or influence. While the Nine were a representative body, selected from the merchant and working class, they were not elected by the citizenry.¹⁰

Instead, every two months, a new Nine were selected by a small commission of men, all of whom held some sort of privileged position in the city, either due to their economic clout or their political experience. Specifically, several leaders of the city's Council of Mercanzia, as well as the members of the Nine finishing their term of office, took the lead in putting together the next group of the Nine. Thus, the successors to the Nine were selected not by the people but by its elite. This helps explain the regime's remarkable stability: not beholden to the whims of the masses, the ruling class pursued an effective, rational, and consistent course of action in their handling of civic affairs, while pursuing their collective interests in a way that benefited the common good. One way in which the system kept any family from obtaining too much influence was through the adoption of strict rules that heavily restricted the ability of families to dominate the Nine. For instance, there were rules prohibiting anyone from holding office for a set of

¹⁰ Mario A, Bradley F. *A History of Siena (Cities of the Ancient World)*. Page 46.

terms.

To ensure the integrity of the process and that no single family could monopolize political power, the laws required that the podestà and Captain of the People be foreign born and thus, not attached to a local family or party. These officials were tasked with overseeing the selection process for each new group of Nine governors. The two-month term of service for the office of the Nine means that a total of 98 men served on the Nine each year! For such a system to work, where each person held office for only 60 days, it was essential for the ruling class to develop a culture of collegiality, where hundreds of men representing their respective families could work together to advance their shared interests. The General Council, comprising 300 men from the city's families, met in the Palazzo Pubblico to debate domestic politics or foreign affairs, and they advised the Nine on pressing issues of the day.¹¹

Piazza Del Campo is a unique and picturesque town square, known for its distinctive fan-shape that slopes gently towards the square's focal point – the iconic Tower of Mangia. It is surrounded by elegant buildings that reflect the medieval architecture of Siena and is a popular meeting place for tourists and locals alike. Palazzo Pubblico, on the other hand, is a grand palace situated on the west side of the Piazza Del Campo. It was built in the 13th century and served as the seat of the government of the Republic of Siena, the Nine. Today, it is home to the Civic Museum of Siena, where visitors can learn about the city's political, artistic, and historical significance.

Piazza Del Campo and Palazzo Pubblico have played an essential role in the cultural and political life of Siena for centuries. They are both well-loved by historians and tourists alike, and continue to be an inspiration for artists and writers who are drawn to the timeless

¹¹ Mario A, Bradley F. *A History of Siena (Cities of the Ancient World)*. Page 47.

beauty and grandeur of these impressive landmarks. Overall, the connection between these two landmarks is a profound one, reflecting the importance of politics, history, and culture in shaping the identity of the city of Siena. Together, they embody the very essence of this beautiful and charming region, captivating visitors from all over the world with their unique charm and rich cultural heritage.

The Palazzo Pubblico was built between 1297 and 1310, during a period of economic prosperity and political stability in Siena. The building was designed to represent the power and influence of the city-state, with its grand façade adorned with ornate decorations and statues of important political figures. One of the most striking features of the Palazzo Pubblico is the Torre del Mangia, an imposing tower that rises 88 metres above the city. Built in the early 14th century, the tower was used to alert the city of impending danger and to signal important events, such as the arrival of foreign dignitaries.

The interior of the Palazzo Pubblico is equally impressive. Visitors can wander through the grand halls and impressive chambers, which are adorned with magnificent frescoes and paintings that tell the story of Siena's rich history. One of the most famous pieces in the Palazzo Pubblico is the "Maestà," a stunning fresco by Ambrogio Lorenzetti that depicts the Madonna and Child surrounded by saints, angels, and various figures representing the wealth and power of Sienese society. But what is more striking about the work of Lorenzetti is his capability as a painter to depict the Government of Siena from the 13th century.

But who is Ambrogio Lorenzetti? The Sienese painter Ambrogio Lorenzetti was born in Siena around 1285. It is not known who Ambrogio's master was, but his early works show a great influence from the art of Duccio, his brother Pietro, and Giotto. Between 1338 and 1339, Ambrogio created what is still considered his greatest

masterpiece today: the Allegories of Good and Bad Government and their Effects in the City and in the Country, in the Sala dei Nove of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena. These works represent an important testimony from a historical point of view and representation of political thought, urban planning, and the customs of the time, almost as if it were a message of political propaganda.

Palazzo Pubblico and principles of governance depicted in Lorenzetti's frescoes

Allegory of Good and Bad Government and their Effects in the City and in the Country, in the Sala dei Nove, also called Sala della Pace, of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena. The fresco cycle on the three walls of the Sala dei Nove depicts an allegory that was painted between 1338 and 1339. Originally, the cycle was considered to represent War and Peace, but it was later named the Allegory of Good and Bad Government. The longer wall opposite the entrance features the Allegory of Good Government, while the shorter wall has a window that provides natural light illuminating the opposite wall. The effects of Bad Government in both urban and rural contexts are depicted on the wall opposite the entrance.

The way public affairs are managed can have immediate effects on the state of Peace/War and Good Government/Bad Government. While one is intended for the common good, the other may be subordinated to the private interests of the administration, resulting in injustice, discord, and fear. Even the seasons are used as metaphors, with spring and summer representing the fertility and prosperity brought about by good government, while autumn and winter symbolize its absence. To further analyse the effects of Good government, it is important to understand its allegorical representation. The use of light in the painting is not only natural but also symbolic of the wisdom and justice that guide good governance, located on the left-hand side of the artwork.

Lorenzetti's use of figures and details in his paintings to depict the conditions of a well-governed city is truly impressive. His artwork reflects an imaginary world that is both historical and spatially accurate, yet non-existent. The way he creates artistic narrative units to portray a realistic vision of utopia is truly remarkable. The medieval city of Sienna and its relationship with the countryside is depicted in a very harmonious manner, illustrating a sense of order and stability. The details of the landscape seem to reflect Sienna, yet the features are not specific to any particular city or countryside. This reinforces the notion that the artwork is an idealized vision of a well-governed city and its surrounding territory.

The Palazzo Pubblico's fresco in Siena, known as the Allegory of Good and Bad Government, illustrates the disastrous consequences of corruption, abuse of power, and mismanagement. Considering specifically the aspects that are of our concern here, a quick look at Bad Government quickly reveals its ethical and political consequences. The fresco clearly portrays the Tyranny that has defeated Justice, discord and war are common situations, as are the sins that follow, including cruelty and betrayal.

In the scene depicting the Bad Government, the figure of a frail and emaciated old man, representing injustice, sits on the throne. The artwork depicts a tyrannical ruler sitting on a throne with a goat by his feet, which is considered a symbol of corruption. The goat in the fresco represents the corrupt practices of the Tyranny and suggests that he takes bribes and uses his power for personal gain. The goat's presence is significant since it was considered an unclean animal in the Middle Ages, making it a symbol of moral depravity.

The representation of a corrupt leader accepting a gift of a goat, therefore, communicates that they are willing to accept bribes and partake in corrupt practices for personal gain. His entourage is a group of deviant and corrupt figures, who engage in dishonest practices like collecting bribes, embezzling public funds, and

extorting people. Meanwhile, in the foreground, citizens suffer from the oppressive consequences of bad governance, with plague, famine, and poverty rampant in the streets. The fresco also depicts the poor living in dilapidated houses, with no access to clean water or proper sanitation. They are shown working hard in the fields and markets with little to no protection or support from the government. Overall, the portrayal of poor people in the Bad Government fresco is one of struggle, poverty, and neglect. This reflects the overarching theme of the fresco, which is the negative effects of bad governance on society as a whole.

The fresco effectively portrays the negative effects of corruption on society, both from a material and moral standpoint. There is a clear divide between the rich and poor, with the former receiving preferential treatment and the latter falling victim to the whims of the corrupt officials. The theme of greed and self-interest is central to the Allegory of Bad Government, with the depiction clearly signifying the eroding values of honesty and public service.

Overall, the Allegory of Good and Bad Government in Palazzo Pubblico serves as a warning of the perils of unchecked power and corruption. It highlights the importance of accountability, transparency, and ethical leadership in maintaining a healthy and prosperous society. The fresco serves as a reminder of the importance of integrity and good governance in society. It highlights the danger of tyranny and the corruption that often accompanies it. The Tyranny with the goat as a present for corruption is an important artwork that has stood the test of time and reminds us of the importance of ethics and good governance. Despite being over 700 years old, the fresco's message remains relevant today, urging us to remain vigilant against abuses of power and to work towards building institutions that prioritize the public good above personal gain.

The artwork also represents a call to action for citizens to stand up against abuses of power and demand transparency and accountability from their leaders. On the other end of the story is Good government. And this depiction, as presented in the artwork, showcases a remarkably harmonious relationship with its surrounding countryside, portraying a vivid sense of order and stability that permeates throughout the scene. This portrayal is meticulous in its attention to the landscape's details, which, while echoing the essence of Sienna, simultaneously transcend the specificity of any one city or its rural surroundings. Such a representation suggests that the artist's vision extends beyond a mere photographic replication of Sienna and its environs. Instead, it ventures into the realm of idealization, crafting an idyllic tableau that embodies the quintessence of a well-governed city nestled within a prosperous and orderly territory.

LAB GUIDELINE 2: Understand the echoes of Good and Bad Government in contemporary society

- Lorenzetti's fresco of Good and Bad Government is a vivid depiction that is true even nowadays. In our fast-changing world, the cities, villages, regions, nations, and countries are facing pressing challenges – environmental damage and climate change, the digital revolution, demographic transition, migration, and social inequalities – and all are often on the front line to deliver solutions to people. Remember, these challenges are addressed on various levels of public affairs, from local action to national policy frameworks, and global agendas. Incumbents and appointed public workers all deal in one way or another with the challenges of our fast-changing world.
- Portrayal of Good Government serves as an inspiring vision of harmony, prosperity, and justice, illustrating the profound impact of wise and equitable governance on society. This part of the fresco vividly brings to life a thriving community where the

principles of good governance have nurtured a sense of peace and well-being among its citizens, depicting a society where justice and the rule of law prevail. Judges and leaders are shown to be fair and just, ensuring that equity and accountability are at the heart of governance, thus fostering trust and cooperation among the people. This harmony extends to social relations within the community, where mutual respect and civic responsibility flourish under the umbrella of good governance.

- Bad Government is all together in one fresco, allegory, effect on the city, effect on the countryside. Everything is broken down: broken windows; ruined houses; poverty – nothing is happening.¹² It portrays the effects of bad governance on the people, especially the poor. The poor are shown suffering and struggling to make ends meet. Some are shown as sick and in need of medical attention. The effects of poverty are far-reaching. It affects not only individuals but also entire communities and countries. People living in poverty often lack access to basic necessities, such as food, water, shelter, healthcare, and education. This can reduce their quality of life and limit their opportunities for economic growth and prosperity. Poverty can also lead to increased levels of crime, violence, and social unrest, creating a cycle of poverty and desperation.

Examples:

1. Access to Quality Education:

Good Governance: A local government ensures that schools in less affluent neighbourhoods receive targeted investments. This includes increased funding for educational resources, facility renovations,

¹² Drechsler W. *Il Buon Governo Senese: Classic Aspects of (Alternative) Public Service Delivery. An IASIA Keynote Speech.* e-journal, Developments in Administration. ISSN 2466-8877.

and incentive programs to attract experienced educators. These measures aim to level the educational playing field, providing all students with the opportunity to succeed.

Bad Governance: Neglect by local authorities leads to a deepening divide in educational quality. Schools in disadvantaged areas suffer from a lack of resources, outdated materials, and overcrowded conditions, as funding is disproportionately allocated to more privileged districts, exacerbating educational inequities.

2. Access to Quality Healthcare:

Good Governance: Recognizing the critical need for accessible healthcare, the local health department collaborates with non-governmental organizations to open a community health centre in Greenville. Offering a range of services at minimal or no cost and deploying mobile clinics to remote locations ensures comprehensive healthcare coverage for all community members.

Bad Governance: Cuts to healthcare funding result in the shutdown of essential clinics in Greenville's most vulnerable areas. Without efforts to bridge the healthcare service gap, residents are left without nearby medical facilities, facing significant obstacles to receiving basic healthcare services.

3. Access to Infrastructure:

Good Governance: The city council allocates substantial funds specifically for the revitalization of Greenville's infrastructure. Prioritizing projects, such as road repairs, public transportation enhancements, and the beautification of public spaces, the council involves the community in the decision-making process to ensure that the most critical needs are addressed first.

Bad Governance: Despite the evident deterioration of infrastructure in Greenville, local government actions neglect the pressing needs of its less affluent neighbourhoods. Resources are

instead channelled towards non-essential, high-visibility projects in wealthier areas, leaving fundamental infrastructure issues like potholes, unsafe bridges, and inadequate public transport unattended, to the detriment of the community's overall development and safety.

Thinking LAB

1. How do Lorenzetti's depictions of Good and Bad Government resonate with current societal issues and the reality in which you live?
2. In what ways can contemporary societies learn from the consequences of good and bad governance illustrated by Lorenzetti?
3. How you can apply the principles of governance depicted in Lorenzetti's frescoes to address today's social challenges?
4. Can you list elements of Lorenzetti's Allegory of Good and Bad Government in current urban planning and policy-making?
5. What is the role of citizens in ensuring good governance, as inspired by Lorenzetti's depiction of a harmonious society?

CHAPTER 3

Going behind the curtain and unveiling the process of community change

The chapter will support you in becoming aware that when you vote, you are, in the first place, facing choices offered by the policymakers in a number of public sectors. And this is about your health, kids' education, well-being, roads, and the environment around you. The chapter will help you as citizen of any country in the world to evaluate and compare options offered by those who sit for elections. This will help you how to evaluate those who are competing for a public office, like different political candidates, who are on their road to sit in the Congress or the Parliament or in the local administration and make proposals to identify, improve, strengthen, develop and implement solutions to achieve better school system, better health, and well-being of the citizens.

Elections for a Mayor in Greenville

In the vibrant and diverse city of Greenville, the election for Mayor held a significance far beyond a mere political event. It resonated through every street and home, signifying a pivotal moment for a city at a crossroads – a city grappling with challenges that transcended mere politics. This contest, featuring candidates Davide Rossi and Sabina Bianchi, symbolized a city at a crossroads, grappling with challenges that transcended mere politics.

In the heart of Greenville, towering skyscrapers house prosperous businesses and luxurious penthouses. Just a few miles away, narrow streets wind through neighbourhoods where families work tirelessly

to make ends meet. This divide goes beyond economics, permeating the fabric of daily life, affecting education, transportation, and opportunity.

The school system in Greenville faces significant challenges. In wealthier districts, schools gleam with state-of-the-art technology and abundant resources, offering a world-class education. However, in less affluent areas, schools are often overcrowded and underfunded, with dedicated teachers struggling to provide their students with the education they deserve.

Transportation is another point of contention in Greenville. The city's sprawling layout has led to a reliance on cars, creating traffic congestion and pollution. Public transportation exists but is often seen as inadequate, especially in poorer neighbourhoods where service is sporadic and unreliable. This has led to a sense of isolation for many residents, limiting their access to jobs, healthcare, and recreational opportunities.

Yet, amidst these challenges, Greenville pulses with life and resilience. Community organizations work hand-in-hand with local government to bridge the gaps and find solutions. In a place where the rich and poor lived side by side, and where the school system and transportation network were as uneven as the city's skyline, the election became a reflection of Greenville's very soul, a decision that would determine the path of community engagement, inclusivity, and complex policy-making.

As the elections approached, the citizens of Greenville looked to the future with hope and trepidation, aware that the choices they made would shape not only their city's leadership but the very direction of their community. In the city the politics was deeply personal, and the path ahead was one that must be navigated with care, understanding, and a commitment to the common good.

Davide, the incumbent, had a reputation for steadfast traditionalism.

He stood by the established ways of Greenville and was proud of his contributions. His campaign focused on his record, emphasizing physical town meetings, flyers, and billboards. Yet, there was a growing discontent among some citizens, particularly those who felt left behind in the decisions Davide made.

Sabina, a newcomer, wanted to challenge the status quo. Her fresh ideas resonated with younger voters, but she knew that winning this election meant more than clever social media campaigns. Sabina understood that many citizens were perplexed by the labyrinthine policy process. They felt disconnected from the decisions that impacted their lives.

In a ground breaking move, Sabina organized online town halls and workshops to educate citizens about voting rights and the policy process. These weren't merely campaign rallies but interactive sessions where people could learn, ask questions, and discuss complex policies in a simplified manner. Her team released easy-to-understand materials, engaging videos, and infographics on social media, demystifying what had once seemed impenetrable.

Davide began to realize that the landscape was changing. In a town hall meeting, he encountered questions about voter ID laws, gerrymandering, and citizens' rights that he hadn't expected. The political process in Greenville was no longer just about choosing a candidate; it had become a conversation about empowerment and understanding.

Election day approached, and the buzz was not just about Sabina and Davide but about what kind of governance and community engagement Greenville wanted to foster. The polling stations were filled with citizens who were not just casting a vote but were actively participating in shaping the town's future. They were voting not only for a candidate but for an approach that embraced transparency, inclusion, and an informed citizenry. This was a moment when Greenville's citizens recognized that their votes had the power to

create a new dynamic between government and governed, one where complexity was met with understanding and where policies were made not just for the people, but with them.

When the results came in, Sabina's victory was more than a triumph of one candidate over another; it was an endorsement of a new way of engaging with politics and policy that matters to the citizens. Many citizens later reflected that Sabina's approach had not only swayed them to vote for her but had also made them feel like active participants in their town Greenville for the first time. In the end, the elections for Mayor in Greenville were a lesson in how political leaders could bridge the gap between complex policy and ordinary citizens. It taught that real change requires not just effective campaigns but a willingness to engage, educate, and empower people to understand and take part in the very processes that shape their lives.

“The ballot is stronger than the bullet.”

- Abraham Lincoln¹³

Voting rights and empowering voices in elections

Citizens have a fundamental right to take part in government and the conduct of public affairs of their countries. They have a right to vote and to be elected in periodic elections without discrimination. The will of the people, expressed through their ballots, provides the basis of authority for democratic government. These concepts are enshrined in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Universal Declaration), Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and other international human rights instruments. They are central to the principle that elections belong to the people and are key features of

¹³ For more information on Abraham Lincoln, see “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book.

any genuine democracy.¹⁴ Having the right to vote is essential because it means that elections are controlled by the people themselves.

In the United States, the right to vote is protected by the U.S. Constitution and various state and federal laws. The 15th Amendment prohibits the government from denying any citizen the right to vote based on race, colour, or previous condition of servitude. The 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920, extended the right to vote to all citizens, regardless of sex. The 24th Amendment, ratified in 1964, abolished poll taxes. The 26th Amendment, ratified in 1971, lowered the voting age to 18. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was extended in 2006, prohibits racial discrimination in voting and is the most significant piece of civil rights legislation in American history. The Act outlaws poll taxes, literacy tests, and other discriminatory practices that had been used to prevent African Americans from registering to vote. It also requires certain states and municipalities with a history of voting discrimination to receive federal approval before making any changes to their voting laws.

In Italy, voting rights are granted to citizens who are 18 years and older. Italian citizens who are 18 or over are eligible to vote in national, European, regional, and local elections. Elections are a fundamental part of the political process, allowing citizens aged 18 and over to vote for their representatives in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Regional and local elections also play an essential role, and the right to vote extends to Italian citizens living abroad. Elections in Italy are seen as a critical way for citizens to engage in their government and have a say in shaping the nation's policies and leadership. All qualified citizens are also allowed to stand as candidates in elections. In addition, Italians living abroad can vote in national elections if they have been registered with their local Italian consulate.

¹⁴ Open Election Data Initiative. *Why Do We Care About Elections*. Page 2.

In Germany, voting rights are an essential part of the political system. Citizens who are 18 years or older have the right to vote in federal elections. This includes choosing members of the Bundestag, which is the main legislative body in the country. Voting in Germany is seen as a civic duty, and the process is designed to be fair and representative. It ensures that people have a voice in government, and the right to vote is protected by law. Whether for local, state, or federal matters, voting is a way for German citizens to have a say in the governance of their country.

India, the world's largest democracy, conducts elections at various levels, including national, state, and local. Citizens aged 18 and over are eligible to vote, a right that is protected by the Constitution of India. The elections are organized by the Election Commission, an autonomous body that ensures fair and transparent voting. India follows a parliamentary system, and voters elect representatives to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha at the national level, as well as to legislative assemblies in individual states. With a diverse population and multiple political parties, elections in India are a complex and vital part of the democratic process, reflecting the country's commitment to inclusive governance and the representation of its people.

For an election to be inclusive, participatory, and competitive – and ultimately, to reflect the will of the people – it is essential that electoral contestants can campaign; citizens can cast informed, secret ballots without fear of retribution; officials can effectively administer the process; and civil society, media, and parties can engage and observe, free from fear and harm.¹⁵

In other words, for an election to be fair, several things must happen. Candidates should be able to campaign without restrictions. Citizens need to be able to vote in private and without fear that something

¹⁵ Open Election Data Initiative. *Election Security*. Page 3.

bad will happen to them because of how they vote. The people in charge of the election must be able to organize it properly. And finally, groups like the media and political parties, as well as ordinary people, should be able to get involved and watch what's happening without worrying about being harmed or afraid.

Change strategies and building the systems that work for citizens

Decision-makers, and those who we elect through our votes, hold a vital position in guiding, developing, and implementing important policies throughout different societal sectors, ranging from environmental issues to education and healthcare matters. These influential leaders possess the ability to comprehend current requirements while planning and managing strategies optimally concerning allocated resources, ensuring equal advancement in all societies.

In healthcare, policymakers determine the accessibility, quality, and affordability of crucial medical services. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced coming up with effective methods to manage epidemics, thus allowing them to revise public health guidelines to accommodate emerging societal transformations. Ensuring programs exist to facilitate those with lesser privileges; a pillar breached because of income and location disparities between rural, metropolitan, and suburban areas neighbourhoods among others. Health insurance prospects and coverage will lean or chip depending on decision-makers.

In the field of education, the government works to make sure everyone has a fair chance to learn and benefit from the culture. This can be done by carefully watching over and improving the way education is planned and paid for. Part of this involves hiring more teachers so that they can be spread out to different places where they're needed. It also means taking steps that match what schools need now. This includes working hard to reduce the number of

people in communities who can't read or write, and looking at issues that students might face, like feeling too much pressure or problems with drugs or bad behaviour. Sometimes, there are campaigns that don't really help, and they can have unexpected effects on how students feel and act. By addressing these areas the government can help make sure that education is a positive force in people's lives.

When it comes to the environment, the role of policymakers is vital in finding solutions and setting standards for businesses to follow. These standards help make sure that companies take care of things like managing waste properly, which, in turn, helps preserve the natural world. Sometimes, though, new or smaller industries might struggle to meet these standards because they lack the resources or experience. This can create stress and challenges for them.

To make things better in the long run, it's important to change strategies and build systems that work well. This might include using scientific methods that focus on what's best for the Earth as a whole. By taking careful risks in trying out new things, and by having clear rewards and penalties based on the results, we can find ways to balance everything and create lasting improvements.

When we vote and elect public officials, we expect them to have good ideas on how to improve our lives. But having a good idea is just the start; what really matters is how these ideas are put into action. Changing large systems, like those in government, is a complex task, and understanding what drives these changes can be tricky. Even if we understand the individual parts of these systems, making them work together in the right way is a real challenge.

It's a common belief that we are responsible for our own lives and that our skills and hard work play a big role in achieving our dreams. However, it's clear that many people still find it difficult to make significant progress towards their goals in life. Even with talent and dedication, achieving success can be a struggle for many. The success isn't only about personal responsibility and self-

improvement. It's also about recognizing the important elements around us that can aid in our success. We should be aware of the social changes that could benefit us all, as these are equally vital in helping us reach our potential and attain the success we all deserve.

When we talk about “service delivery,” we mean the way basic services like education, health, and security are given to communities. The outcomes of these services are measured by both the access to and the quality of the service itself. For instance, if there's an initiative to provide clean water to households, the success would be measured by the percentage of homes that have access to it and the quality of the water. Similarly, if the goal is to monitor a school's performance, the desired outcome would be the children's test scores. These outcomes help us understand whether our elected officials are delivering on the promises they make.

One reason why this is so difficult is that it's hard to figure out the best way to achieve the goals on the ground. There might be great ideas, but turning them into real actions that work is not easy. To understand why, we can look at this issue from the point of view of change and what does it mean in real-life situations. This involves observing how policies are made, planned, and carried out. It's a complicated process, and understanding how to make it all work smoothly requires a deep understanding of not only the goals but the way the whole system operates.

It is a challenge to make things better in local communities and countries

Basically, there are two main things that make this so challenging: First, the way policies are made and carried out and second, how changes are managed on the ground. Both of these need to be understood and handled carefully to really improve things in our communities and nations. These processes are like a journey that turns new ideas into rules and actions that can make our lives better. Through this text, we will refer to them as the “policy process”.

This journey, or the “policy process,” depends a lot on the elected officials and those we vote for. A classic definition of the policy process contains the following basic elements: policy agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, policy assessment, policy adaptation, policy succession, and policy termination.¹⁶ Of course, each of these elements has a complex cycle of different relationships, where the cornerstone of shared interests is to solve a well-known problem, which hinders a system, and therefore handicaps a society.

The first starting point of this journey is setting the agenda. This is actually putting the problems on the table and in public. This is usually done by elected and appointed officials – only after that can they act on solving the problem. This part of the journey requires exploring not only the potential solutions but also the strategy and tactics of how to go about it. This is an extremely important part of the journey that is policy process – exploring the alternative approaches that exist to solve the problem. These alternatives can be presented differently in the form of position papers, strategic documents, laws, regulations, executive orders, etc. How this is done very much depends on the policy “culture” of the country. The process of “mapping” policy alternatives should involve all stakeholders who have a stake in solving the problem.

After a policy is figured out and chosen, it’s time for the policy to be adopted. This is when the people in charge, like the Parliament, a governing board, or the government itself, officially say “yes” to the plan. Most of the time, more than half of them need to agree for the policy to be adopted. Once they agree on the policy, it’s handed over to a specific part of the government to make it happen. This could be a ministry or agency, for example. They use people and money to put the plan into action. Think of it like building a house:

¹⁶ Dunn W. *Public Policy Analysis: An Introduction*. Prentice Hall; 2003.

first, you need to agree on the design, and then you bring in the builders and buy the materials to actually construct it.

Policy implementation is like putting a big plan into action, and it's often the trickiest part of the whole process. Imagine you've chosen the best idea for fixing a problem. Now you have to figure out exactly how to make it happen. In some countries, certain government departments, like Ministries, pick specific groups to take charge of making the policy work. In other places, high-ranking officials like Ministers might sign contracts with agencies, giving them the responsibility to carry out the plan.

But how does all this get done? The main goal is to make sure that government organizations do more good things for the people. Whether it's in the short run or the long run, the idea is to make life better for everyone by making the best use of public resources. It's like cooking a big meal: you have the recipe, but now you need to carefully mix the ingredients and cook them just right to create something delicious.

LAB GUIDELINE 3: Shape the journey towards improved life through roadmap to be followed

- The people we vote for and elect, like mayors and governors, have a really important job in deciding what happens in our communities. They make big decisions in areas like healthcare, schooling, and taking care of the environment. These leaders have the responsibility to figure out what people need now and in the future. They then have to make plans and use money and resources in a fair way so that everyone benefits. But, as we saw earlier, this isn't easy to do. Remember that making the right choices and managing change are tough tasks, and that's why getting things to improve in our local areas and countries can be so difficult.

- By voting, citizens can voice their opinions and concerns towards issues that affect their communities and can ultimately elect leaders who share similar values and beliefs. This can have a major impact on policies enacted by the government which can influence the lives of everyday citizens for years to come. Voting is like having a say in how our towns and cities are run. When we take part in elections, we're choosing the people who make decisions about things like schools, hospitals, and safety. It's our way to help decide what happens in our community and make sure that things are done the way we think they should be.
- The journey or policy process is like a roadmap that leaders and elected officials follow to make things better for everyone. It starts with setting the agenda, where they figure out what problems need to be solved. Next, they formulate the solutions by coming up with ideas and plans to fix those problems. Once they decide on the plans, they adopt the policy and start putting it into action, which is known as implementation. Along the way, they check to see if the plans are working through policy assessment and make changes if needed, called policy adaptation. Then, they plan for what comes next. Throughout all these steps, leaders work with different people who care about the issue. The goal is to solve problems that are getting in the way of our communities and society. It's like putting together a puzzle, where all the pieces have to fit just right to make things better.

Examples:

Access to Quality Education:

- **Policy Problem:** Disparities in educational resources across neighbourhoods lead to underfunded and neglected schools in less affluent areas, exacerbating educational inequality.
- **Policy Solution:** Implement a targeted resource allocation strategy that prioritizes schools in need, ensuring equitable access to quality education through funding adjustments, hiring initiatives for qualified teachers, and infrastructure renovations tailored to close the educational gap.

Healthcare Accessibility:

- **Policy Problem:** A significant healthcare service gap exists in underserved areas, with residents facing limited access to essential medical care due to a lack of nearby facilities and services.
- **Policy Solution:** Develop and execute a plan for the establishment of community health centres in underserved areas through collaborations between the public sector, private entities, CSOs, and NGOs. This plan should include the provision of comprehensive, affordable healthcare services, along with the organization of mobile health clinics and health education initiatives to ensure widespread access.

Infrastructure Improvement:

- **Policy Problem:** Essential infrastructure in certain neighbourhoods is in a state of disrepair, with issues such as potholes, unsafe bridges, and inadequate public transportation exacerbated by the misallocation of funds.
- **Policy Solution:** Create a community-driven infrastructure improvement program that allocates funds specifically for the development and repair of critical infrastructure in

neglected areas. This program should prioritize projects based on direct community input and assessments of urgent needs, ensuring that improvements directly benefit those most in need and contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

Thinking LAB

1. How would you evaluate your current understanding of the challenges in your community that significantly affect your everyday life, both positively and negatively?
2. Can you describe the specific challenges in your community that are related to urban planning, transport or education and health?
3. Can you list ideas on how the challenges you described in the previous question can be resolved?
4. How can citizens effectively influence the agenda-setting process to ensure that the issues most important to them are addressed by leaders and officials?
5. What strategies can be employed to foster more inclusive and diverse idea formulation for solving community problems?

CHAPTER 4

Identifying the pieces of a puzzle and demystifying the policy process

This chapter will help you to demystify the policy process using education as an example. We will embark on a journey to unravel the complexities of the policy process, using the vital sector of education as our focal point. This chapter aims to demystify how policies are conceived, developed, and implemented within the educational system, shedding light on the multifaceted role education plays in shaping the future of our communities. The reason that I selected education as an example is the fact that it is more than just schools and textbooks; it's a dynamic ecosystem that influences every aspect of community life and individual growth.

The objective is to underscore the importance of community involvement in any policy-making, advocating for a collaborative effort between parents, teachers, students, and policymakers. By understanding the mechanisms behind policy development and implementation, in case of education, you will know how to work out the same approach to any challenge you face in the community and as a citizen empowered to contribute to a brighter, more equitable future for all.

Education in Greenville

Greenville was a town that prided itself on its rich history and close-knit community, where neighbours knew each other by name, and traditions were passed down through generations. Its picturesque streets were lined with charming old buildings, and the town square

was a hub of activity, hosting festivals and community gatherings that brought everyone together. However, nestled amongst the lush greenery and charming architecture, lay an issue that had been overlooked for years. The town's education system was in a dire state, a stark contrast to the values that Greenville held pride in and nobody seemed to have the courage or initiative to address it.

The schools were burdened with outdated textbooks that were often shared among students due to lack of funds. Teachers, underpaid and overworked, struggled to manage overcrowded classrooms, leading to a lack of personalized attention. Facilities were in disrepair, with leaking roofs and broken heating systems, creating an environment that was far from conducive to learning. Even more disheartening was the glaring inequality; children from low-income families had limited access to extracurricular activities and advanced courses. The local curriculum was out of sync with modern demands, leaving students ill-prepared for the challenges of the world outside Greenville.

The system was fractured, making it challenging for every child in the community to access quality education equally. Many young minds, brimming with potential and dreams, found their aspirations stifled by these shortcomings. The discrepancies in resources, outdated teaching methods, and a lack of individualized attention meant that many students were being left behind, their talents unrecognized and undeveloped. Students were struggling, teachers were struggling, parents were frustrated, and the community's faith in the education system was eroding. Mayor Sabina Bianchi could see that this wasn't just a problem; it was a crisis that needed immediate attention.

Though new to politics and policy, Sabina had an unwavering resolve and a heart deeply rooted in her community. The moment she took office, she made it her mission to understand the problems plaguing Greenville's schools. After all, she had grown up there, and

the thought of children in her hometown not receiving a proper education was unacceptable. Her first step was to dive into the heart of the problem. She visited schools, talking to teachers, parents, and students alike. She saw first-hand the outdated textbooks, overworked teachers, and crumbling infrastructure. She heard stories of parents struggling to afford school supplies and students feeling lost in overcrowded classrooms.

But Sabina knew that merely observing wasn't enough. She had to dive into the heart of the community, where the real stories were. So, she organized town hall meetings, creating a platform where everyone's voice could be heard. Parents came forward, sharing heart-breaking tales of children struggling and falling behind. Teachers spoke of overcrowded classrooms, outdated materials, and a lack of support. Students, shy but determined, talked about their dreams and how they feared they might never reach them. There were heated debates, tears, and moments of hope, punctuated by the occasional laughter when someone shared a success story. The process was messy, much like piecing together a puzzle without a guiding image. But Sabina was determined to identify each piece, understanding its shape and how it might fit into the larger picture. She knew that this wasn't just about facts and figures; it was about the lives and futures of real people.

She formed committees with representation from various segments of the community. Teachers, parents, students, local business owners – everyone had a stake in this, and Jane made sure they had a seat at the kitchen table, metaphorically speaking. These were the people who knew what was going on in the trenches, and their insights were invaluable. The committees were tasked with dissecting the problems, brainstorming solutions, and developing actionable plans. They worked tirelessly, fuelled by passion, and a shared vision for a better future. They looked at everything from teacher training to resource allocation, from student engagement to community partnerships. Sabina was there every step of the way,

guiding, encouraging, and sometimes simply listening. It was a true community effort, with everyone rolling up their sleeves and getting their hands dirty, united by a common goal: to build an education system in Greenville that truly served the needs of everyone in the community.

Slowly but surely, the pieces began to fit together. The community identified key issues such as inadequate funding, outdated curriculum, lack of teacher support, and barriers to access for low-income families. But identifying the problems was just the beginning. Now it was time to act, and Sabina knew that the real work lay ahead. Her leadership had brought the community together, but could they turn their insights into action? And how?

“Education’s purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.”

- Malcolm Forbes¹⁷

Getting to the bottom through the lens of education

Education is a complex system that includes various interconnected parts such as students, teachers, curriculum, infrastructure, funding, and community engagement. Identifying the pieces of a puzzle means recognizing and understanding each of these individual components and how they contribute to the overall educational experience. To help you identify the pieces of the puzzle in public policy process and to make you more aware how you can impact the public policies, I will be using education as an example.

A good education system does more than just teach our kids reading, writing, and mathematics. It helps them learn how to get along with

¹⁷ For more information on Malcom Forbes, see “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book.

others, make good decisions, and become responsible adults. It sets them on the path to success in life. But the benefits of a strong education system don't stop at the school gates. It can make our homes worth more, bring in new businesses and jobs, and make our community a nicer place to live. That's why it's so important for citizens and parents to know what's happening in our schools and to work hard for better education in our community.

Are you a parent maybe?

Education is a fundamental right for every child, and it is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that their children receive a high-quality education. Parents are the primary stakeholders in education, and they are in the best position to advocate for their children's educational needs. When parents actively participate in education, they become more informed about the issues affecting their children's learning, and they play a critical role in ensuring that their children receive the best possible education.

When parents are involved in education, they can provide valuable feedback to schools and policymakers on what works and what doesn't. They can also raise awareness and advocate for policies that improve the quality of education in their community. For instance, parents can advocate for policies that provide more resources to schools or that support teacher training and professional development.

Moreover, parents who are engaged in education can also support their children's learning at home. They can provide a conducive environment, resources, and support to help their children succeed academically. When parents are involved, they can help their children build positive relationships with teachers and peers, reduce absenteeism, and foster a positive attitude towards learning.

In conclusion, parents should be informed and actively involved in advocating for high-quality education in their community. The

benefits of parental involvement in education are numerous, and it is crucial for parents to play an active role in ensuring that their children receive the best possible education. They can do this by staying informed, providing feedback, advocating for policies that improve education, and supporting their children's learning at home.

Are you a teacher maybe?

Education is not only a fundamental right for every child but a societal responsibility, and teachers stand at the forefront of fulfilling this mission. Teachers are key stakeholders in the educational process, shaping the learning environment and guiding students on their academic journeys. Their role extends beyond mere instruction, encompassing mentorship, encouragement, and the nurturing of creativity.

Teachers have a direct impact on classroom experiences, adapting lessons to meet the diverse needs of students within their community. Their insights into student performance and needs are invaluable to the ongoing development of educational policies and practices. For instance, teachers can drive initiatives that foster a more inclusive classroom, or propose methods that cater to different learning styles.

Furthermore, professional development for teachers is vital. Continued training ensures that educators are equipped with the latest pedagogical techniques and knowledge, enhancing their ability to support student success. Collaboration with fellow teachers, administrators, and parents creates a supportive network that reinforces the shared goal of high-quality education.

Outside the classroom, teachers often play a vital role in students' lives, helping to instil positive values and a love for learning. They can guide students in building healthy relationships with peers, help them overcome personal challenges, and motivate them to achieve their full potential.

In conclusion, teachers are essential to the successful delivery of education in a community. Their dedication, expertise, and compassion create an environment where learning thrives. By staying informed, engaging in continuous professional development, and working in harmony with parents and other stakeholders, teachers ensure that education is not just a systematic process but a personalized journey that empowers every student. The role of teachers, therefore, is pivotal in shaping not only the educational landscape but the future of the community itself.

Do you own a business or maybe you are an employee in a private sector?

Effective collaboration between government, education institutions, and private sector organizations is critical for the enhancement of the overall education system and the well-being of the students. One of the key benefits of such collaboration is the opportunity for the private sector to extend scholarships, grants, and internships to deserving students, enabling them to gain valuable exposure to the practical aspects of their future work environments.

By offering scholarships for students, private sector organizations can help alleviate financial burdens and make education more accessible to talent from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. These scholarships can be designed to cover tuition fees, accommodation, and other associated costs. Such initiatives enable brilliant students, who may have been forced to abandon their academic pursuits due to their financial situations, to continue their studies and reach their potential.

Additionally, private sector organizations can provide grants to support research and development (R&D) activities, thereby enhancing the quality of education in academia. This support enables educational institutions to improve their facilities, update their equipment, and provide better resources for learning, ensuring

that students have access to cutting-edge technologies and the latest research.

Private sector organizations' internships can also play a significant role in improving the quality of education. By offering students the opportunity to participate in internships, private firms can provide them with valuable practical experience in their respective fields. This experience can help students understand the industry's demands, allowing them to make more informed decisions regarding their future careers.

In conclusion, collaboration among the government, education institutions, and private sector organizations can significantly contribute to the betterment of the education system. Private sector organizations' involvement in providing scholarships, grants, and internships not only helps aspirants achieve their academic goals but also improves the overall quality of education.

Identify the challenges

Just as puzzle pieces must fit together in a specific way to create a complete image, the various elements within the educational system must interact cohesively. This means understanding how teachers relate to students, how curriculum aligns with societal needs, how funding impacts resources, and so on.

In a community with poor education, problems like poverty, health issues, and limited opportunities become the norm. This creates a cycle that's hard to break, holding back not just individuals but the whole community from growth and success. It's a struggle that affects everyone, keeping them from reaching their full potential. In such communities, the literacy rate, as well as digital literacy rates are usually low. The schools in such areas are often overcrowded, underfunded, and understaffed. The curriculum is outdated, and the teaching methods are ineffective. Teachers are not paid well, and as a result, many of the best teachers leave for higher paying jobs

elsewhere, leaving behind less experienced and less effective teachers.

The lack of education in such communities leads to a higher rate of unemployment, poverty, and crime. With little to no opportunities for a good education, students get stuck in low-wage jobs, often working long hours just to make ends meet. The cycle of poverty in these communities is perpetuated as a result. The lack of education also leads to poor health outcomes. People in these communities are often not well-informed about how to prevent illness, and they often do not have access to adequate healthcare. This leads to a higher incidence of preventable diseases and health issues.

The education sector faces several challenges and problems from the community perspective. One of these challenges is an inadequate supply of qualified teachers. Many communities struggle to attract and retain experienced and competent teachers, resulting in a low quality of education that is detrimental to the students and ultimately the community. The lack of qualified teachers in underprivileged communities means that students receive a substandard education, which impacts their economic opportunities and future prospects. This situation perpetuates poverty and inequality, further compounding the problem.

Another problem is a shortage of resources, particularly in underfunded schools. This problem makes it difficult for educators to provide a nurturing and supportive learning environment that fosters the academic and personal growth of students. Resources such as textbooks, computers, and school supplies are often scarce, leaving teachers to struggle to meet the educational needs of their students. This problem has a disheartening impact on students in impoverished areas. They cannot access the same educational opportunities as their wealthier counterparts, which can limit their future success, and hence, handicapping the community's growth. Educators in underprivileged areas must go above and beyond to

close the resource gap, which can result in exhaustion and burnout, ultimately impacting the students' academic performance.

When neighbours and friends in a community take the time to understand what's not working in their local schools, they plant the seeds for positive transformation. It's like gathering around a table to figure out what needs fixing and brainstorming ways to make it happen. These everyday voices aren't just helpful; they're the heart and soul of real change. Their insights bring to life solutions that reflect the true needs and dreams of the community. By identifying what's wrong, they're not just laying the groundwork for a plan; they're constructing a strong foundation for an education system that genuinely nurtures every child in the neighbourhood.

This shared understanding makes it crucial for local leaders and organizations to invest time, energy, and money in education. Like watering a community garden, putting resources into schools can help children grow and flourish. It's a way to break free from limitations, giving families the tools to create a more vibrant and hopeful future for the entire community. It's not just about schools; it's about empowering a community to rise together.

In other words, in the context of a community's education system, every piece of this intricate puzzle has its place and purpose. Teachers must be equipped with the right training and resources to inspire and guide students. The curriculum should be tailored to meet not only the academic needs but also the cultural and social fabric of the community. Funding must be allocated thoughtfully to ensure that schools have the necessary tools, from textbooks to technology, to facilitate learning. Parents and local leaders play essential roles in supporting and advocating for the system, much like the corners and edges of a puzzle that frame the whole picture.

Finding the right fit for each of these pieces of a puzzle requires collaboration, understanding, and a shared vision for education within the community. If even one piece is out of place, the entire

image can be distorted. Therefore, it's essential for everyone involved – teachers, parents, administrators, and local officials – to work together in identifying and addressing challenges. Through this united effort, the community can create an education system where every piece fits perfectly, reflecting a complete and vibrant image of learning that benefits every child in the community.

Identify the opportunities

If a puzzle is missing a piece, the image is incomplete. Similarly, identifying issues within the educational system – such as a lack of resources or inequitable access – allows stakeholders to address these gaps. By recognizing where the “missing pieces” are, targeted opportunities and solutions can be developed.

Once we figure out what's going wrong with education in our community, and understand why these problems are happening, the next step is to decide what we want to make better. We need to have clear and definite goals that tie directly to the problems we've uncovered. These goals need to be things we can check on to see if we've reached them, and they have to aim at making real improvements where they matter most. By setting these goals, we draw up a plan that leads us to improve our schools and the entire community.

For instance, there are many ways to tackle the challenges in education that we've talked about. One method could be to put more money into our schools. This means that the government, perhaps with help from local businesses or community members, would put more funds into education, particularly in areas where there are the biggest challenges. This extra money could help improve buildings, buy new equipment, make the classrooms nicer, and even raise teachers' salaries. All of this could draw better teachers to our schools and reduce the number of students in each classroom, making education in our community stronger and more effective.

Another way to take on the education challenges in our community is to take a good look at what's being taught in our schools. Doing so would enable them to identify the existing gaps and areas that need improvement or modification to meet the demands and needs of the modern world. This may entail a full overhaul or just some minor adjustments to certain sections of the curriculum. The focus should be on instilling practical skills and knowledge, which would facilitate the successful transition of our students into their chosen careers. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that the education, learning, and skills development are relevant, responsive, and beneficial to the present generation and the generations to come. In the end, we want to make sure that our schools are keeping up with the times, not just for our children now, but for all the kids who'll come after them.

Another important piece of the puzzle is taking good care of our teachers. After all, they're the ones on the front lines, helping our kids learn and grow. This means making sure our teachers have what they need, not just in terms of a fair pay check, but in the skills and training to keep up with the fast-changing world. We might need to rethink how we train our teachers, especially when it comes to using all the new gadgets and gizmos that technology is putting in our hands. It's not just about keeping up with the times; it's about making sure our teachers can help our kids become tech-savvy and ready for the future. By looking after our teachers this way, we're building a stronger, smarter community that's ready for whatever comes next.

One way we can improve education in our community is by making sure every child has the same opportunity to learn, regardless of their family's financial situation. It's like opening the doors of the school wide and saying, "Come on in, everyone's welcome here!" We can make this happen by helping families with some of the school-related expenses that can really add up, like books, transportation,

or even meals at school. It's all about creating a level playing field, so every child has a fair chance to thrive and succeed.

Think about it: if a student doesn't have to worry about how to get to school or where the next meal is coming from, they can focus on what's really important – learning. For families struggling to make ends meet, a little help with these costs can be a big deal. It's like giving them an extra hand to hold onto that school bus and make sure their kids are on board. By cutting down on the cost barrier, we're inviting more students in and giving them the chance to chase their dreams. It's one more way we're putting the pieces of the puzzle together to create a brighter picture for our community's future.

LAB GUIDELINE 4: Engage in community issues identification

- Education in a community isn't just a matter of schools and textbooks; it's a complex system that shapes the future of our children and the entire community. The challenges and intricacies of education can sometimes feel overwhelming, and solutions might seem out of reach. That is why carefully looking at the example used above is very important. Remember, I am using education as an example. You can generate very similar ideas, if not almost identical, for understanding other types of problems that bother your community, such as transport, access to health, unemployment, crime, etc.
- The first step to addressing challenges in any policy sector within your community is to clearly identify the issues at hand. It's a task that extends beyond the realms of government officials or sector experts; it requires active participation from community members. Whether it's healthcare, environmental protection, public safety, or urban development, those who live and work within the

community often have the most profound understanding of the problems.

- Identifying the challenges and opportunities involves a comprehensive approach: engaging in dialogue with stakeholders, conducting thorough research, and analysing relevant data. It also hinges on the vigilance and curiosity of ordinary citizens, who play a crucial role by observing, questioning, and sharing their insights. This collective effort is the foundation for developing informed and effective policy solutions that address the real needs of the community.

Thinking LAB

1. Can you describe the challenges and complexity of the education system in your community?
2. What steps could you take to deepen that knowledge or contribute to improvements?
3. How can you become more actively involved in identifying the challenges within different policy sectors?
4. What strategies can be employed to ensure that the voices of all stakeholders, including ordinary citizens, are heard and considered in the problem-identification process?
5. What role you can play as a citizen in uncovering the underlying issues within a community's policy sector?

CHAPTER 5

Strategy to solve the puzzle in policy process

This chapter explores the analogy of public policy as a complex puzzle, where each piece represents a different component crucial to the policy's success. From education to housing, transportation, and healthcare, every policy area is constructed from a number of elements such as laws, regulations, stakeholders, community interests, economic factors, and societal needs. The challenge lies in aligning these pieces to form a coherent, effective whole. Just as in a jigsaw puzzle, a missing or improperly placed piece in public policy can lead to disruptions and unintended consequences, highlighting the complexity in formulation of solutions. The objective is to emphasize that public policies significantly shape individuals' lives and the broader community by establishing the guidelines that regulate various societal aspects.

The Roadmap for excellence in education in Greenville

The time has come for Mayor Sabina Bianchi to turn the town's failing education system around, to make sure that every child in Greenville has the opportunity to learn and grow.

To remember, Greenville was a town that prided itself on its rich history and close-knit community, but beneath the surface lay a growing concern. The town's education system was in dire straits. It was fractured, failing to provide every child with the opportunity for quality education, and the spark of potential in many young minds was being extinguished. For too long, the problem had been ignored, but then Sabina was elected as mayor. And so, with a

determined glint in her eye and a community rallying behind her, she rolled up her sleeves. The real work had just begun.

She began by organizing town hall meetings, creating a platform where everyone's voice could be heard. The meetings were filled with passionate debates, tears, and moments of hope. It was messy, but it was real. Teachers, parents, students, local business owners – everyone had a stake in the future of education, and Sabina made sure they had a seat at the table.

Together, they formed committees to explore the most pressing issues. Was it funding? Curriculum? Teacher training? Or perhaps a combination of these and more? The puzzle was intricate, but as the pieces started to fit together, a picture of hope began to emerge. A new approach to education that put students at the centre, fostered creativity, embraced technology, and prioritized lifelong learning. A system that was flexible enough to adapt to the rapidly changing world and prepare the students for the unknown.

Sabina formed a dedicated committee, an eclectic mix of teachers, parents, students, local entrepreneurs, and even retired educators, each bringing their unique insight to the table. This committee, known locally as the 'Greenville Education Task Force,' became the driving force behind drafting the new education blueprint. Using the insights gathered, Mayor Sabina began to piece together a comprehensive plan, a roadmap for Greenville's educational renaissance. The roadmap focused on several key areas:

1. **Funding:** A significant investment was pledged to improve school infrastructure, provide resources, and increase teachers' salaries. Local businesses were engaged to contribute, weaving the entire community into the fabric of the solution.
2. **Curriculum Development:** A complete overhaul of the curriculum was initiated, making it relevant, responsive, and geared towards the modern world. Collaboration between

educators and industry experts ensured that students were being prepared for the jobs of the future.

3. **Teacher Training and Benefits:** Emphasizing the pivotal role of teachers, the plan included robust training programs, aligning them with technological advancements and enhancing their benefits to attract and retain the best talent.
4. **Inclusivity and Equal Access:** A strong focus was placed on ensuring education opportunities for everyone, irrespective of their economic background. Subsidies were provided, tuition fees were reduced, and a conducive learning environment was cultivated.
5. **Community Engagement:** The ongoing involvement of the community was integral to the plan, fostering a sense of ownership and a culture of collaboration, much like the combined effort needed to complete a puzzle.

Under Mayor Sabina Bianchi’s leadership, Greenville’s education system began to transform. The roadmap wasn’t merely a document; it was a living, breathing promise to the town’s children and future generations. Mayor Sabina’s roadmap wasn’t just a strategy; it was a testament to what can be achieved when a community comes together, each person adding their unique perspective, piecing together a solution that serves everyone.

Years passed, and the transformation was tangible. Schools were no longer just buildings but thriving hubs of learning, creativity, and collaboration. Teachers were empowered, parents were engaged, and students were inspired. Greenville’s education system had turned a corner, and it was all thanks to a community that came together, led by a Mayor who believed in the power of collaboration.

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

- Helen Keller¹⁸

¹⁸ For more information on Helen Keller, see “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book.

What do all public policies have in common?

Education is more than a system of schools and classrooms; it's a cornerstone of community life that impacts every aspect of our collective future. The way we educate our children resonates far beyond the school gates, influencing not only their personal development but the overall well-being of the community. This complex web of relationships and outcomes can be challenging to understand, yet it's essential for every community member to engage with it.

When we delve into the intricacies of education, we are also learning how to approach other challenges. By understanding how teachers, parents, students, and policymakers interact in the educational landscape, we equip ourselves with the tools to tackle other community problems. We learn to recognize the various pieces of the puzzle, how they fit together, and how small changes can lead to significant improvements.

Assembling a puzzle requires a strategy, often working around the edges, finding colours or patterns that match, etc. In education, strategic planning involves setting goals, aligning resources, and implementing policies in a methodical manner. It's about knowing which "pieces" to prioritize and how to fit them together to achieve the desired educational outcomes. This thoughtful exploration encourages us to consider our roles, responsibilities, and potential impact within the community. It isn't just about identifying what's wrong; it's about fostering a sense of shared purpose and action. Whether it's education, health, crime, or any other issue, engaging in this process helps us to create more inclusive, supportive, and thriving communities.

Reflecting on education, then, becomes more than an academic exercise. It becomes a model for civic engagement, a pathway to

understanding, and a call to action that resonates across all aspects of community life. By applying the same thoughtful consideration and collaborative spirit to other areas, we can empower ourselves and our neighbours to make meaningful and lasting changes that enhance the well-being of everyone in our community.

Like we have tried to understand the puzzle of education, for you as a reader, it is always useful to keep in mind that, in fact, any public policy is like a unique puzzle. Each policy, whether it relates to education, housing, transportation, or health, consists of intricate pieces that must fit together just right. These pieces include laws, regulations, stakeholders, community interests, economic considerations, and societal needs. The challenge in solving this puzzle is aligning these parts in a way that creates a coherent, functioning whole. Just as a missing or misplaced piece can disrupt a jigsaw puzzle, a misalignment in public policy can lead to unintended consequences or fail to address crucial needs.

Public policies shape the lives of individuals and communities by setting the rules and standards that govern various aspects of society. Thus, understanding and engaging with this puzzle is not just the responsibility of policymakers but all citizens, as the collective effort ensures that policies are crafted to reflect shared values and meet the needs of the wider community. Whether it's housing affordability, efficient city transportation, or equitable healthcare access, the task of aligning diverse elements to create a coherent policy is a delicate and nuanced process.

Think of housing policy as a puzzle that ensures everyone has access to affordable and safe homes. Here, government bodies might create regulations for landlords and provide subsidies for low-income families. Community groups might advocate for more green spaces, and private companies might build new housing developments. The challenge lies in aligning these diverse interests to ensure that

policies benefit all residents without causing undue burdens on any single group.

The puzzle of city transport policy is like coordinating a busy network of roads, buses, trains, and bicycles. Local government might invest in new bus routes, while environmental groups push for more bike lanes. Private car companies might want to expand roads, but that could conflict with residents' desire for quieter, pedestrian-friendly streets. Solving this puzzle means finding the right balance, that is, making travel easy and affordable for everyone while considering environmental impacts and local community needs.

Health policy presents another complex puzzle, aiming to ensure that everyone has access to quality healthcare. Government agencies might work on expanding health insurance, doctors and hospitals focus on providing excellent care, while advocacy groups might push for more accessible mental health services. The challenge here is to create policies that meet the diverse health needs of all citizens, from preventative measures to treatments and support for chronic conditions.

Find out who is who in the dynamics of the policy process

One key element and the first step in understanding any policy process in any public policy domain that is affecting your life and well-being is to learn who the actors or stakeholders are in that particular arena. These stakeholders can range from government agencies, elected officials, and regulatory bodies to private corporations, non-governmental organizations, community groups, lobby groups, and even individual citizens. They each have unique interests, perspectives, and influences, and their roles and relationships shape the dynamics of the policy process. Identifying these players is key to mapping the landscape of a complex terrain, where each player's position and influence help define the rules of

engagement, the power dynamics, and the potential alliances and conflicts that may emerge.

Understanding who the players are in a public policy is not just a matter of cataloguing a list of names and organizations; it's about unravelling the intricate web of relationships, interests, and values that drive the policy process. Recognizing the stakeholders provides insights into the motivations and potential impacts of a policy, allows for more inclusive and representative decision-making, and lays the foundation for targeted engagement and effective communication. By knowing “who is who” in a public policy, policymakers, advocates, and citizens can navigate the complexities of the policy landscape with greater clarity and purpose, ensuring that decisions are not just technically sound but also socially responsive and just.

Whether it's a question of education reform, healthcare accessibility, or urban development, recognizing the stakeholders equips those involved with the necessary insights to foster collaboration, anticipate challenges, and formulate solutions that resonate with the core values of society. Such an understanding elevates the policy-making process from mere technicality to a dynamic interaction that reflects the nuanced fabric of community interests and aspirations. This knowledge serves as a compass, guiding the intricate process of balancing competing interests, weighing ethical considerations, and aligning various aspects of the policy to meet community needs. It ensures that decisions are not just technically sound but also socially responsive and just. In an era where policy challenges are increasingly multifaceted, understanding the diverse actors involved becomes pivotal.

Identify the problems and find out what needs to be fixed

One key element and the second step in understanding any public policy is to learn what the problems are that citizens struggle with,

and what different actors or stakeholders in that particular policy arena share as challenges and problems. These problems can range from systemic inefficiencies and legal constraints to social inequalities and environmental concerns. The stakeholders involved, be they government bodies, businesses, or community organizations, often have varying perspectives on what constitutes a problem and how it should be prioritized. Grasping these multifaceted issues requires a comprehensive analysis of the underlying factors, a clear identification of conflicting interests, and an understanding of the societal context in which these problems exist. It's like piecing together a puzzle, where each problem represents a part of the broader picture, and understanding them in isolation will not present the complete image.

Once the problems are clearly identified and understood, the next step involves crafting solutions that address these challenges effectively. This process is far from straightforward, as it requires the careful consideration of different stakeholder interests, the potential impact on various segments of the population, and the feasibility of implementation. Solving policy problems is not merely about applying technical fixes; it's about creating collaborative pathways that allow for diverse voices to be heard, building consensus, and finding innovative solutions that align with the shared values of the community. Whether it's a matter of affordable housing, efficient public transportation, or accessible healthcare, recognizing the complex nature of the problems and engaging in inclusive dialogue enable the formulation of policies that are not only robust but also resonate with the needs and aspirations of the people they are meant to serve.

Identify the solutions and decide on the strategy

By understanding these dynamics and fostering inclusive, collaborative processes, policymakers can craft more effective, responsive, and just solutions to public problems. It's not just about

finding the right answers but asking the right questions, listening to different voices, and weaving a pattern that resonates with the core values of a community. The success of any public policy relies on the collective wisdom and concerted effort of all stakeholders, reflecting the shared values and aspirations of the community it serves. Just as an artist might carefully select and place each piece in a mosaic to create a beautiful image, the art of policy-making requires the thoughtful integration of different parts to form a meaningful and effective whole. It demands vigilance, empathy, and creativity, acknowledging that each policy, like each puzzle, presents a unique challenge and opportunity to shape our collective future.

Once the policy is finalized, it is submitted to the relevant government authorities for review and approval. This approval process is an essential step in ensuring that a policy is implemented successfully across any sector, whether it's education, healthcare, transportation, or housing. The policy should undergo thorough scrutiny to assess its feasibility and credibility before it can be set into motion. This often involves extensive consultation with stakeholders such as industry experts, community leaders, affected citizens, and regulatory bodies to gain their insights and opinions on the policy's potential effectiveness. These diverse perspectives help in fine-tuning the policy, ensuring that it addresses the needs and concerns of all those involved. Once a consensus has been reached, the policy is presented to the relevant authorities for approval, setting the stage for implementation. This collaborative and rigorous process underscores the importance of a well-considered approval phase in shaping policies that are responsive, robust, and reflective of the collective aspirations of the community.

Implementation plays a vital role in the success of any policy, whether in education, healthcare, transportation, or other sectors. Once a policy is approved, the real work begins: bringing it to life. This means not only communicating the policy effectively to all

stakeholders but also ensuring that they understand their specific roles and responsibilities. The communication must be clear, concise, and accessible so that everyone from government officials to community members can grasp the policy's objectives and what is expected of them. This can often be done through various means, such as training sessions, workshops, seminars, informational websites, or even community meetings.

The aim is to ensure that the policy doesn't just stay on paper but becomes a living, working part of the community. In translating policy into practice, it's essential to provide the resources, support, and guidance needed to enable all involved to contribute effectively. Just as a carefully constructed blueprint guides the building of a house, the implementation process must be thoughtfully designed and executed to construct a policy that stands strong, functions smoothly, and fulfills its intended purpose. It's a collaborative effort that requires attention to detail, coordination, and a shared commitment to achieving the goals set forth, thereby transforming ideas into tangible benefits for society.

Furthermore, the administration should provide the necessary resources required for successful implementation of the policy. This could include financial resources, personnel, and infrastructure. Appropriate structures and frameworks should be put in place to ensure that the policy is enforced as required. This includes monitoring and evaluating the policy's progress to ensure it is meeting the intended goals.

The approval process and implementation of policies in any policy sector are critical for ensuring the success of any given policy. An effective policy must be properly approved, accompanied by effective communication, resources allocated, and a comprehensive structure put in place to ensure its smooth implementation. With these steps in place the policy can have a positive impact by providing guidelines and direction for all stakeholders involved.

LAB GUIDELINE 5: Navigating the complexity through the lens of a puzzle

- Imagine public policy as a unique puzzle, where each piece represents different aspects like laws, stakeholders, challenges, and societal needs. Just like solving a jigsaw puzzle requires patience and understanding, crafting public policies involves piecing together many intricate parts. Remember that just like a puzzle where each piece has its unique shape and place, public policies are tailored to fit the specific needs and challenges of various areas of our lives.
- From the homes we live in and the way we travel around our cities to how we take care of our health, public policies guide and shape our daily experiences. Understanding this puzzle isn't just for politicians and experts; it's for all of us. By engaging with these policies, asking questions, and voicing our opinions, we can help ensure that these puzzles are solved in a way that reflects our shared values and benefits our communities as a whole.
- The policy-making process in the sector is complex. By following a clear and rigorous process of consultation, drafting, and review, policymakers can create effective policies that improve the outcomes of any policy and support the success of all citizens. Discussions and seating around the table with key players are particularly important in this process, as it ensures that policies are informed by the needs and perspectives of those who will be affected by them. Ultimately, a robust process for policy development and review is essential to creating effective solutions that meet the needs of all citizens and support ongoing improvement in society.

Thinking LAB

1. Using the lenses of a puzzle, identify the challenges of your community.
2. Are you aware which strategy has been used by the elected officials in your community to solve the challenges?
3. What collaborative platforms or forums are in place to foster open dialogue and shared ownership of the issues affecting your community?
4. Are there established processes in your community to ensure that insights gathered lead to actionable changes?
5. Reflect on the metaphor of putting together a puzzle. What are the challenges and opportunities in ensuring that all pieces, representing different community interests and issues, fit together to create a better society?

CHAPTER 6

Building bridges and the power of collaboration

This chapter delves into the critical role of civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in bridging the gap among the citizens, the government, and policymakers to address complex societal challenges. Highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts, it explores how collaboration can effectively tackle issues like climate change, poverty, and human rights. The chapter emphasizes the necessity of enhancing policy-making through collective engagement, suggesting that active collaboration with civil society and participation in policy dialogue can lead to more informed and inclusive policy decisions.

Focusing on the significant impact of such collaborations on improving public services in areas such as education, health, and housing – especially for youth and vulnerable populations – the chapter argues for the development of customized frameworks. These frameworks should be adaptable to the unique governance and policy-making contexts of different countries, ensuring that solutions are both relevant and effective.

Alice and Fabio in search for a common ground

In the green valleys of Northern Italy, where the Alps stretch towards the sky, the small town of Greenville found itself at the heart of a debate that rippled across nations. This is where our story

unfolds, about Alice and Fabio, whose lives were intertwined by their divergent views on a single issue: the No TAV movement.

Alice, a spirited environmental activist, was a key supporter of the No TAV movement. Her connection to the land was deep-rooted, passed down through generations who had tilled the soil and cherished the natural beauty of their homeland. To Alice, the proposed high-speed train, slicing through the heart of the Susa Valley to connect Turin in Italy with Lyon in France, symbolized a disregard for the environment and the sanctity of local communities. She saw it as an invasion, a metal serpent that would disrupt ecosystems and upend the lives of thousands, all for a project she believed was mired in economic and ecological short-sightedness.

Fabio, on the other hand, was an advocate for progress and innovation. A young engineer with dreams, he envisioned the high-speed train as a beacon of modernity and a step towards a more connected Europe. Inspired by the success of train networks in the Benelux countries, which had significantly enhanced connectivity and economic growth, Fabio argued that the TAV would bring similar benefits to Italy and France. He saw it as an opportunity to foster trade, tourism, and cultural exchange between the two nations, creating a future where distances were shortened and opportunities expanded.

Their debates were passionate and frequent, often taking place in the town's quaint café, where cups of espresso sat forgotten amidst the fervour of their discussions. Alice would argue that the true cost of the train could not be measured in euros alone but in the loss of biodiversity, water sources, and the heritage of the Susa Valley. Fabio, with equal passion, would counter that the project was a step towards reducing carbon emissions by offering a greener alternative to car and air travel. He talked about economic revitalization, jobs, and the importance of keeping pace with a rapidly changing world.

For Fabio the train was not just a mode of transportation but a symbol of future possibilities.

One afternoon, they found themselves in their favourite café, the air thick with the aroma of espresso and dispute.

“Fabio, how can you not see the damage this train will do? It’s not just about our town; it’s about protecting our environment, our heritage. The Susa Valley deserves better than to be carved up for the sake of convenience.”

“Alice, I do see your point, but you’re missing the bigger picture. This train is about more than just cutting travel times; it’s about connecting communities, reducing road traffic, and yes, even protecting the environment in the long run by offering a cleaner alternative.”

“A cleaner alternative at what cost? Destroying ecosystems, consuming massive resources, and for what? A project mired in controversy and opposition? We should be investing in truly sustainable solutions, not this,” Alice replied.

“But think about the economic boost, the jobs. And it’s not just about us – it’s about future generations. The train network in the Benelux countries revolutionized travel and brought people closer. Why deny ourselves and future Italians and French the same benefits?”

Their debate reflected the town’s divide, a microcosm of the broader struggle between progress and preservation. Yet, beneath their arguments lay a mutual respect and a shared love for their homeland. As the conversation cooled, they both looked out the café window, pondering the future of the Susa Valley. In that moment, they understood that their debate was but one of many, all necessary in the search for a balanced path forward.

“I suppose we both want what’s best for our valley, even if we disagree on what that looks like.”

“Exactly, Alice. Let’s promise to keep this dialogue open, to listen to each other, and work towards a solution that honours both our heritage and our future,” Fabio emphasized.

In the end, their story is not just about a disagreement but about the possibility of finding common ground in the most unexpected places.

“The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members.”

- Coretta Scott King¹⁹

Citizens and their power for social change

Citizen movements are becoming increasingly popular as people recognize the power they hold to create significant social change. Citizen movements refer to collective actions taken by individuals who are passionate about a particular issue and want to bring about change in their communities. These movements can be organized around a variety of causes, including environmental sustainability, civil rights, political advocacy, and social justice.

Citizen movements are compelling because they are driven by the personal and collective experiences of individuals who are passionate about a particular issue. This passion often leads to creative and effective strategies for social change that can challenge established power structures and bring about lasting transformation. As social media and other digital platforms have made it easier for people to connect and share information, citizen movements have

¹⁹ For more information on Coretta Scott King, see “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book.

become increasingly powerful and influential in shaping public opinion and policy. They also offer those who may feel disempowered by traditional sources of authority a means of taking action and making their voices heard.

These movements often work towards addressing issues related to human rights, social justice, environment, and corruption. One of the critical aspects of these movements is their ability to mobilize a large number of people who share a common goal, and they empower their voices to get heard through various forms of activism.

One example of advocates for change is the Sunrise Movement in the United States. It initially started as a protest against the government's inaction towards the climate crisis and is now recognized as a leading organization driving climate change solutions. Thousands of young people across the country participate in the Sunrise Movement's campaigns, which include lobbying, demonstrations, and civil disobedience. They recently played a crucial role in the introduction of the Green New Deal, which aims to create jobs while addressing climate change. The focus is on power through organizing the communities. The movement brings together neighbours, families, classmates, community leaders, and thousands of unorganized young people. Building a mass movement of ordinary people across race and class is the only way to transform society.²⁰

Another movement that deserves mention is Black Lives Matter, founded in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman regarding the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. This citizens' movement has taken on a more prominent role since the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Global protests sparked around the world, including Rome, Paris, and Brussels. Through protests, organizing, and advocacy,

²⁰ <https://www.sunrisemovement.org/principles/?ms=Sunrise%27sPrinciples>

Black Lives Matter is working actively to bring awareness to issues surrounding police brutality and racial injustice and drive policy change. Overall, citizen movements are powerful tools for advocacy, and they offer hope for meaningful social change. With globalization and the social media rise, it is becoming more comfortable for people to get involved and make their voices heard. They demand accountability from those in power and exemplify grassroots movements' strength by mobilizing people to take action towards their shared goals.

The No TAV²¹ movement in Italy represents a significant example of grassroots activism and public opposition to government infrastructure projects. “TAV” stands for “Treno Alta Velocità,” which translates to “High-Speed Train.” The movement specifically opposes the construction of the high-speed railway line between Turin, Italy, and Lyon, France, a project that has been mired in controversy for decades. The No TAV activists argue that the railway is not only environmentally damaging but also economically unviable, questioning the allocation of substantial public funds to a project they view as unnecessary and potentially harmful to the local communities and ecosystems. Originating in the Susa Valley (Val di Susa) in the early 1990s,²² the No TAV movement has since grown into a symbol of wider public resistance against top-down decision-making and the lack of transparent consultation processes. The movement's supporters include a diverse coalition of local residents, environmentalists, academics, and politicians who are united in their commitment to sustainable development and democratic participation in infrastructural decisions.

The No TAV movement's methods of protest have varied, ranging from peaceful demonstrations and public debates to acts of civil

²¹ <https://www.notav.info>

²² <http://www.presidioeuropa.net/blog/tav-movement/> Article, Here is the .pdf document: **About the No TAV Movement and Beyond – A Comprehensive Essay. February 2014.** Accessed 14 February, 2024.

disobedience. Despite facing legal challenges and a strong pushback from the government, the movement has managed to sustain its momentum over the years through community engagement, effective use of social media for awareness campaigns, and solidarity actions across Italy and Europe. The No TAV struggle is not just about opposing a train line; it has become a broader fight for environmental justice, local autonomy, and the re-evaluation of transportation priorities in an era of climate change.

In India, one of the most significant and impactful movements of citizens in recent history has been the farmers' protests that gained widespread attention, especially throughout 2020 and 2021. These protests serve as a powerful example of grassroots organizing and collective action in the country. The movement was primarily a response to three agricultural laws passed by the Indian government in September 2020. The government argued that these laws would modernize the agricultural sector by allowing farmers to sell their produce outside the traditional 'mandi' system (regulated wholesale markets) and enter into contracts with buyers at a pre-agreed price. However, many farmers and critics feared that these laws would undermine their earnings by making them more vulnerable to corporate exploitation and would dismantle the minimum support price (MSP) system that ensured fixed prices for certain crops. The movement was remarkable for its organization and the strategies employed by the farmers to sustain the protest over many months.

These included farmers from different states and backgrounds united under a common cause, showing a remarkable level of solidarity. Community kitchens, medical camps, and makeshift schools for children were set up at protest sites to sustain the long-term sit-in. The movement utilized social media effectively to organize gatherings, spread awareness, and counter misinformation. Leaders of the farmers' unions engaged in several rounds of negotiations with the government, although many of these did not lead to immediate resolutions.

The persistence of the farmers and the widespread support they received both nationally and internationally eventually led to the Indian government announcing the repeal of the three contentious farm laws in November 2021. This was seen as a significant victory for the protest movement and demonstrated the power of organized, peaceful protest in effecting policy change. The farmers' protests in India exemplify how citizen movements can mobilize large segments of the population, sustain a long-term peaceful protest, and eventually lead to significant policy reversals. This movement highlighted the importance of unity, strategic planning, and the effective use of media in advocating for citizens' rights and influencing governmental decisions.

Shifting to cooperation and unlocking the power of citizen engagement

A civil society organization (CSO) is a type of non-governmental organization (NGO) that works to promote the interests of a particular group or cause. Examples of CSOs include charities, advocacy groups, trade unions, and faith-based organizations. Such organizations often work to influence public policy and to provide services to disadvantaged communities. CSOs may receive public or private funding, and they may be structured as non-profit or for-profit entities.

Understanding in greater detail the CSOs and their work can empower citizens and voters to advocate for their own interests and contribute to social change and development. Helping ordinary people engage in meaningful social change efforts also means understanding in greater detail the role that CSOs play in our society. For example, tackling corruption in public sector is difficult; it requires long-term investment and cannot be fixed with traditional approaches to other crimes, such as fraud and theft. While training, policies, and controls are vital, reductions in corruption can only be achieved alongside fundamental changes in culture,

legislation, and structures, which are outside the immediate influence of any single organization. Therefore, CSOs here must play a part in evolutionary change as much as government or public bodies. Civil society includes non-profit or voluntary groups organized locally, nationally, or internationally.

These entities often focus on influencing public policy and offering services to those in need, operating with either public or private funding and can be non-profit or for-profit. Primarily addressing local challenges and serving vulnerable communities, CSOs and NGOs play a critical role in advocacy, especially for youth. They engage in policy dialogue at higher levels, facilitating a bridge between local needs and national decision-making. By collaborating with CSOs, citizens can have a more significant impact on policy than acting alone. These organizations enable the joint development of policies with the government and citizens, though this collaborative effort can be complex.

The critical step is to identify relevant stakeholders and create a strategy for how to engage with them. However, engaging with CSOs to work on raising awareness either of the citizens or local policymakers is a challenging issue from several points of view. One of the biggest challenges is that these CSOs often look only from one segment of the needs of the citizens and local community. Experience shows that they operate in the area of raising awareness about the rule of law, democracy, human rights, climate change, etc. Although many civil society organizations are active, particularly with vulnerable groups, youth, etc., there is a significant lack of a comprehensive understanding of the policy objectives in skills, economic growth, etc. that significantly impacts the well-being of the communities.

However, engaging with CSOs in order to work on raising awareness either of the citizens or local policymakers is challenging issues from several points of view. One of the biggest challenges is

that these civil society organizations rarely understand comprehensive policy objectives in the relevant sector in their local community. Often, they look from one segment of the needs of the citizens and local community. Experience shows that they operate in the area of raising awareness about the rule of law, democracy, human rights, climate change, etc. Although many civil society organizations are active also particularly with vulnerable groups, youth, etc., there is a significant lack of a comprehensive understanding of the of policy objectives when it comes to poverty, education, health, housing, skills, economic growth, etc. all of which significantly impacts the well-being of the communities.

Knowing about CSOs can hold public officials accountable to the needs and concerns of citizens by putting pressure on them to address social and economic inequalities and other issues that impact the community. Understanding CSOs can increase awareness about social, economic, and environmental issues and their impact on society, encouraging voters to be more informed and active participants in discussions about policy and legislation. Among the essential activities implemented by CSOs is advocacy for communities, groups, and sectors, with a particular focus on young people. CSOs also provide non-formal learning to young people and prioritize strengthening their informal education.

Moreover, there is a growing sense of the importance of CSOs not just among themselves, but also among governments. They have realized that these organizations can do part of the work that has traditionally been done by governments, resulting in a win-win situation. Governments are now taking the role of CSOs more seriously and are recognizing the value that they bring to society. They are discovering the opportunities that come from working closely with CSOs and how this can further be strengthened in different contexts. However, with the increasing importance of civil society organizations, it is clear that this sector cannot be ignored. It can play a vital role in driving change, promoting social justice, and

bringing about development. Therefore, it is essential that governments and CSOs continue to work collaboratively to build on the opportunities that have arisen from the challenges in our communities. There's a lot of value in having civil society organizations involved in public consultations and engaging citizens in policy processes. Compared to government entities, CSOs are often better equipped to listen to the needs of vulnerable groups, and leveraging this knowledge can help fine-tune policies to achieve better outcomes.

One emerging area is the growing interest in social accountability and transparency of public budgeting processes. Civil society organizations are playing an increasingly important role in this area, getting closer to citizens and improving transparency and accountability in policy implementation. Overall, there are many ways in which CSOs can be better engaged in policy dialogue and governance, and we intend to explore these further in upcoming publications.

Understanding CSOs and NGOs can foster partnerships between voters, civil society organizations, government, and policymakers to address issues that require a collaborative approach, such as climate change, poverty, and human rights. To simplify, we need to increase policy-making efforts, but the exact approach needs to be determined. One possibility forward could be exploring how to engage in collaboration with civil society, figure out the way they are active in specific policy domain, and consider opting for engagement in policy dialogue related to different challenges that are found in your local community.

This dialogue will help develop more effective approaches to address the issues, such as improvement in education, health, and housing services, particularly with regard to youth and other vulnerable groups. It is important to consider that different countries have different approaches to policy-making and governance, so

tailor-made frameworks need to be developed to suit each country's specific context.

Engaging citizens in shared implementation of solutions on issues affecting their daily lives is crucial to creating a more responsive and accountable government. By working together, citizens and government officials can develop policies that are tailored to the specific needs of their community and address the most pressing concerns. This collaborative approach can also help build trust between citizens and government, as individuals feel that their voices are being heard and their concerns are being addressed.

To effectively engage citizens in this partnership, there are several key steps that governments can take. First, they must be transparent in their decision-making process and communicate clearly with residents about the issues and solutions under consideration. Second, governments should create opportunities for input and feedback from citizens, such as public hearings, forums, and surveys. Third, they should work to build partnerships with community-based organizations to increase access and participation in the policy-making process.

In addition, governments must recognize that citizen engagement is an ongoing and iterative process that requires ongoing engagement and analysis of results. It is not enough to simply involve citizens in the decision-making process; governments must also work to ensure that their input is acted upon and that outcomes are measured and evaluated. This requires a commitment to accountability and a willingness to adjust policies as needed to ensure that they remain responsive to the needs of the community.

Ultimately, engaging citizens in shared implementation of solutions is essential to promoting good governance and creating communities that are more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable. By working together, residents and government officials can identify solutions that are more effective, efficient, and responsive to the needs of the

community, and can help build a stronger and more vibrant society for all.

LAB GUIDELINE 6: Embrace collaboration for enhanced citizen engagement

- CSOs provide the opportunity to shape better policies with collaboration of citizens and the government. However, this is not so easy. In identifying challenges in your local community as a voter is crucial, no matter the sector. Remember that it is important to gain understanding on collaborating with CSOs active in your area or in your sector of interest. This knowledge is key to thinking about how to engage more effectively with policies.
- Fostering policy dialogue and getting citizens involved is good for governments at every step of making and carrying out policies. First, it helps at the start by making it easier to understand public issues and find policy options that people are okay with. Next, during the policy's rollout, involving people helps make sure the policy includes everyone's needs through open conversation. Lastly, getting feedback from the public as they watch and review policy programs and their results is crucial. This feedback is important for making sure public services and goods keep getting better.
- From the initial stages of identifying public issues to the implementation and review of policies, citizen engagement is essential for creating solutions for the challenges that are not only effective but also reflective of the community's needs and aspirations. Fostering accessible and trustworthy channels for participation, along with addressing collaboration gaps, is vital for a thriving community. Such strategies not only enhance voter engagement but also ensure that governance genuinely represents and benefits the

people, thereby strengthening the democratic fabric of society.

Thinking LAB

1. What are some successful examples of citizen-led movements that have had a significant impact on your community?
2. How can citizens hold elected officials accountable and ensure that their voices are heard in the policy process?
3. Are there civil society organizations supporting citizen engagement in government processes?
4. What does it mean for you to be engaged in the implementation of solutions on issues affecting your daily lives?
5. As a citizen and voter, what would be the best way for you to be consulted on issues affecting your daily lives?

CHAPTER 7

From voices to votes: advocacy and lobbying in shaping the future

This chapter explores the significant roles of advocacy groups and lobbying in the political arena. It underscores how advocacy groups are crucial for drawing attention to pressing issues, encouraging voters to prompt their representatives into action, and shaping government policies. By joining forces with advocacy groups that resonate with their principles, voters can enhance their collective voice and impact on topics that concern them. The importance of understanding advocacy is emphasized, enabling voters to ascertain if their elected officials are genuinely representing public interests.

Moreover, the chapter outlines the concept of lobbying as a legal and regulated means of persuading policymakers to adopt policies favourable to certain groups or causes. While lobbying is an integral part of democratic governance, allowing for citizen participation in policy-making, it also carries the challenge of ensuring balanced influence across various interest groups. Through a comprehensive understanding of advocacy and lobbying, voters are empowered to actively engage in the policy process, make informed choices, and ensure accountability from their representatives on critical issues.

Alice and Fabio in action

In the town of Greenville, there are neighbourhoods that are in real decay. The crime and unemployment rates are high, and access to education and healthcare is limited. The poor living conditions often lead to health problems, and life expectancy rates are lower than in

more affluent areas. The streets in these neighbourhoods are often unpaved, and the buildings are dilapidated or temporary structures have been put in place. Overall, the infrastructure is poorly maintained, and there are few public facilities or services. Poverty is a pervasive issue in these neighbourhoods, and it affects every aspect of daily life for those who reside there.

Alice and Fabio, despite their differing views on the No TAV movement, find common ground in their passion for improving the living conditions in the deteriorating neighbourhoods of Greenville. United by their concern for their community, they decide to embark on a journey of advocacy and lobbying, focusing on several key issues that deeply impact the lives of the residents.

In the heart of Greenville, amidst the backdrop of its struggling neighbourhoods, Alice and Fabio found themselves seated at a local café, surrounded by the palpable ambition to initiate change. The air was charged with a blend of concern and determination as they embarked on a conversation that could potentially redefine the future of their community.

“Fabio, we’ve seen the state of our neighbourhoods. The schools barely have resources, there’s no access to basic healthcare, and don’t get me started on the infrastructure. We need to do something.”

“I agree, Alice. The disparities are too visible to ignore. But we need a focused approach. How do you propose we tackle these issues?”

“First, education. Imagine if we could get the local schools the funding they desperately need. More books, better facilities, perhaps even new technology for the students. We could start by raising public awareness, really get the community behind this.”

“Right, awareness is key. And for healthcare, we could organize health fairs to start. It’s immediate relief and raises awareness. In the

long term, we need to lobby for a community health centre. Accessible healthcare could transform lives here.”

“Absolutely. And we can’t forget about the streets and the buildings falling apart. We should document the conditions and share them widely. We need the city council to see what we see every day. Public pressure can push them into action.”

“Documentation, yes. Social media could be powerful for that. We could also draft a proposal for infrastructure improvements. Real, tangible changes we want to see. Then we take it to the council, backed by community support.”

“It’s going to be a lot of work, Fabio. But together, I believe we can make a difference. Education, healthcare, infrastructure – these are basic rights, not luxuries.”

“Alice, I’m with you. This is about our future, the future of Greenville. Let’s get to work. We’ll organize, advocate, and lobby until we see the change we know is possible.”

Their conversation laid the groundwork for a movement that would soon sweep through the streets of Greenville. With a clear focus on improving education, healthcare, and infrastructure, Alice and Fabio were ready to step into the arena of advocacy and lobbying, united by a shared vision for their community.

“It doesn’t matter how strong your opinions are. If you don’t use your power for positive change, you are indeed part of the problem.”

- Coretta Scott King²³

²³ For more information on Coretta Scott King, see “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book

Advocacy allows citizens to have their voices heard

There are as many definitions of advocacy as there are groups and networks advocating. However, each definition shares common language and concepts. Advocacy is a collective voice that can be used to support, protect, and promote the rights and interests of people with different needs. Some examples of people with different needs include unemployed people, people with disabilities, people without housing, etc. From this point of view, advocacy involves speaking out and speaking up for people in need, to ensure that their voices are heard and that their rights are respected. Advocacy can help people to access services, to challenge discrimination, and to secure their rights. It can also help to create positive changes in policies and attitudes towards people with disabilities and to create a more inclusive and accessible world.

One example of an advocacy campaign can be a situation when you as a voter are organized within your local community to pressure the policymakers regarding the development of affordable housing. Housing advocacy groups often lobby local officials to create laws that require developers to include affordable housing units when building new developments. They may also push for laws that require developers to build housing units near transit, which can help reduce car commutes and lower greenhouse gas emissions. The primary goal of advocacy is to bring about meaningful change in society by raising awareness and creating a public dialogue about an issue. Advocacy is a powerful tool to motivate people to take action and can be used to influence public opinion, government policy, and social attitudes. You can use advocacy to inform and educate the public on a particular issue and to mobilize individuals and groups to take action on that issue.

How do you get them interested in specific advocacy objective? You will want to get to know people and organizations that are working towards the same objective as you are. A successful advocacy

requires an organized, well-thought-out approach. This includes identifying the target audience, developing a clear message, and choosing the best ways to reach that audience. It is also important to consider the different ways in which an advocacy campaign can be effective. You will also want to include people who can influence decision-makers in your policy objectives area, and, if possible, make them a part of your network. There are a number of actors and players when it comes to affordable housing policy. As a voter, it is good to have a comprehensive understanding of all these players. This will help you to understand different perspectives on the issue of affordable housing, the key problems local communities are facing, the situation with the homeless and why it is so, etc.

Community advocacy is a type of advocacy focused on addressing specific local issues that affect a particular community. You are aware of this type of advocacy, as typically they are led by local residents who are passionate about the issues that have an impact on their lives. Often, you can find also that some of your neighbours are very passionate about some issues that matter to local community, as maybe they have some personal connection to them. Community advocates often create networks to work together to identify and address the needs of their local community and to develop plans to improve the quality of life in the area. They may engage in a variety of activities, such as holding public meetings, organizing rallies and protests, fundraising, lobbying local government officials, and speaking out in the media. Essentially, community advocacy is when you advocate for your community to policymakers.

While advocacy can be an effective way to create social change, it also faces many challenges. For instance, advocacy campaigns can be expensive and require a lot of resources. Another challenge is that advocacy campaigns are often met with resistance from those who oppose the issue being advocated for. Additionally, advocacy campaigns may not always be successful in achieving their desired

outcomes. In conclusion, advocacy is an important tool for creating social change. It can be used to raise awareness, mobilize people to take action, and influence public opinion and government policy. However, advocacy campaigns are not without their challenges, and success is not guaranteed. For you as a voter, it is important to remember that advocacy is a process and that its effectiveness depends on the effort and resources put into it.

Advocacy is often confused with other concepts that share common elements, such as social marketing, public relations, and public awareness campaigns. Advocacy stands apart from the other approaches because advocacy almost always seeks to induce change in a policy, structure, or activity. Advocacy does not stop at awareness raising. While the public can be the target of an advocacy campaign, in most cases, public awareness is raised to pressure change through a particular policymaker. Another important type of advocacy is legislative advocacy. Advocacy groups can also work to influence the legislative process by pushing for policy changes that address social challenges. This can involve lobbying elected officials, building coalitions with other advocacy groups, and helping to draft legislation that supports their goals.

The Save Nigerian Farmers Campaign was launched in 2018 by a group of farmers in Nigeria who were impacted by the influx of cheaper imported rice that flooded the market. The farmers, who grew locally produced rice, saw their profits rapidly decline as they could not compete with the cheaper imported rice. The campaign called on the Nigerian government to ban imported rice and provide support for local farmers. The advocacy campaign received widespread support from the media and the public, leading the Nigerian government to impose a ban on imported rice and provide financial support to local farmers.

But how advocacy is relevant for you as a citizen and, especially, linked to voting and electing policy leaders who will have a positive

impact on your life and your local community's well-being? Advocacy is a form of action that has been used for centuries to bring about social change. Advocacy is defined as the act of speaking out or taking action on behalf of a particular cause. Advocacy is also an important tool for people who are passionate about a particular issue and want to make a difference in the world. In this chapter, you will be focusing on the role of advocacy in creating social change. How advocacy can be effective in bringing desired changes in the society? What are the key challenges it faces?

One way to link your voting objectives with advocacy is to focus on the importance of issues that matter to your local community, as a starting point. This can help you to develop your own advocacy focus to engage with your neighbours and community citizens to use their voting rights effectively and to raise awareness about social challenges that need to be addressed in your local community. As a voter, it is absolutely necessary to understand the concept of advocacy. Understanding advocacy will allow you to gain a clearer picture of the political environment in which you operate. As advocacy refers to the act of publicly supporting or promoting a particular cause or policy, often through lobbying or campaigning, once you understand advocacy as a voter, you will be better prepared to evaluate political messages being presented to you and will help you to make informed decisions about which candidates and policies to support. Thinking only about affordable housing policies, you may explore further the policy objectives of those who run for the public office.

Lobbying and its pros and cons

It is also important to understand the concept of lobbying. Lobbying refers to the act of influencing policymakers, legislators, or regulators to shape policy decisions or legislation in favour of a particular interest group or industry. Unlike corruption and bribery, lobbying is a legal and regulated activity in many countries. It is

seen as an essential aspect of democratic governance, as it allows citizens to have a voice in the policy-making process. However, it can also be a source of controversy, as it can lead to the disproportionate influence of wealthy or powerful interest groups over policy-making. However, the distinction between the three can be blurred in practice, and there have been instances where lobbying has been used as a cover for corruption or corrupting practices.

“Lobbying” means promoting specific interests by communication with a public official as part of a structured and organised action aimed at influencing public decision making. *“Lobbyist” means any natural or legal person who engages in lobbying; “public decision making” means decision making within the legislative and executive branches, whether at national, regional or local level; “public official” means any person exercising a public function, whether elected, employed or otherwise, in the legislative or executive branches.*²⁴

Lobbying at the local level refers to the practice of attempting to influence the decisions of local governments, such as city councils, county councils, and regional governments. It involves promoting a particular interest or issue to elected officials to gain their support for a policy or project. Local lobbying can involve a wide range of groups, including businesses, non-profit organizations, or individuals who seek to push for specific goals. An attempt by lobbyists to influence public actors may take place in many ways, including, for example, written communications with individual public officials, presentations to groups of public officials, draft reports to public administration, or even telephone calls. The aim of lobbying may be to seek to shape a new public policy with a view to benefiting a particular group or interest or, on the contrary,

²⁴ LEGAL REGULATION OF LOBBYING ACTIVITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC DECISION MAKING, Council of Europe, pg. 7

prevent the formulation or adoption of a new one to maintain the status quo.²⁵

Lobbying can take many different forms. It may include engaging in discussions with local officials or supplying them with supporting materials like reports, studies, or research for a specific issue or project. Additionally, it can involve interactions with the media to rally public support or oppose a particular policy or initiative. Lobbyists at the local level may also organize events, rallies, or campaigns to engage the community and raise awareness about a particular issue. They may also utilize digital tools such as social media and online petitions to mobilize supporters and pressure decision-makers. Shining light on lobbying activity ensures that all actors – from citizens to stakeholders, politicians, and civil servants – are equally aware of when public policy is being shaped, about what, and who is lobbying whom. This will make political players even more accountable. This does not necessarily mean that all lobbyists will be able to exert the same influence.²⁶

One example of lobbying is focusing on activities to ensure increased funding of public transit solutions. Organizations such as Trade Unions of Transit Workers or Employers' Associations of Rail often lobby parliament committees, and regional or city officials to increase funding for expanded transit options, such as speed rail, bus rapid transit, and bike lanes. They may also push for policies such as dedicated transit lanes or increased investment in pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. Lobbying at the local level is an important process that drives local policy decision-making. It allows for local communities to have their voices heard and influence the policies that directly affect them. At the same time, it can be a

²⁵ LEGAL REGULATION OF LOBBYING ACTIVITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC DECISION MAKING, Council of Europe, pg 12

²⁶ LEGAL REGULATION OF LOBBYING ACTIVITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC DECISION MAKING, Council of Europe, pg 13

challenging process that requires significant resources, time, and knowledge of local government structures and processes.

Lobbyists work to persuade lawmakers to support or oppose specific legislation or policies that relate to their organization or interest group. They may use a range of tactics including meeting with legislators, providing research and data to support their position, and organizing events to demonstrate public support for their cause. In summary, advocacy is a broader term that includes activities aimed at raising awareness and building public support, while lobbying is a specific form of advocacy focused on direct communication with policymakers to influence their decisions. Lobbying in all its forms is a legitimate act of political participation. It grants stakeholders access to the development and implementation of public policies and allows policymakers to learn about options and trade-offs. Such an inclusive policy process provides opportunities for more informed and ultimately better policies. However, evidence has shown that at times there is a monopoly of influence by those who have the means to overshadow the interests of others.

Lobbying can have a profound impact on the outcome of public policies and, in turn, on well-being and living standards in societies. By sharing expertise, legitimate needs, and evidence, interest groups can provide governments with valuable insights and data on which to base public policies. Lobbying to strengthen environmental standards, improve road safety, or increase childcare services, for example, can benefit society as a whole. Nonetheless, the abuse of lobbying practices – such as the monopoly of influence by special interest groups, undue influence through covert or deceptive evidence, or the manipulation of public opinion – can result in suboptimal policies and outcomes. An analysis of 300 academic studies showed that such abuse has led, for example, to negative health outcomes, inaction on climate policies, excessive regulation to protect incumbents, or insufficient regulation to correct market

failures or distortions. In addition, the abuse of lobbying practices undermines citizens' trust in democratic processes. (OECD 2021)

In other words, despite the potential benefits of lobbying, many critics argue that it can lead to undue influence and corruption in the political decision-making. Some argue that wealthy and powerful interest groups are able to exert an outsized influence on the policy-making process, while others point to the potential for conflicts of interest and unethical behaviour among lobbyists themselves. While there are certainly valid criticisms of the lobbying industry, it is also important to recognize the important role that lobbying can play in shaping public policy and ensuring that the voices of underrepresented groups are heard in the halls of power. Ultimately, the key to effective lobbying lies in transparency and accountability, as well as a commitment to ethical and responsible behaviour on the part of both lobbyists and government officials.

Lobbying is the act of attempting to influence decisions made by government officials or policymakers. This act can be done either directly or indirectly, with the aim of shaping public policy in favour of a particular interest group or individual/company. It is a legitimate way of promoting a specific issue or viewpoint, but it can also be a source of corruption and unethical behaviour.

Lobbying requires money, as it involves hiring lobbyists to promote a particular cause or advocating for a particular policy. Lobbyists can be expensive, and many large companies and interest groups have dedicated lobbying teams that work full-time to influence decisions made by policymakers. These lobbyists may work for a single organization or may be part of a larger lobbying firm that represents multiple clients. In addition to paying for lobbyists, the cost of lobbying can also include educating policymakers and their staff about a particular issue or policy, as well as investing in media campaigns, research, and grassroots organizing efforts to build support for a particular cause.

The need for money in lobbying has led to concerns about the influence that large corporations and wealthy interests have on policy decisions. Some argue that this system allows the interests of the rich and powerful to dominate over the needs and desires of the broader public. In conclusion, while lobbying can be a legitimate way of influencing public policy, the fact that it requires money raises concerns about how fairly and equitably it functions as a way of shaping decision-making in society. Consequently, those who possess significant funds can utilize them to influence legislation. They succeed in making their desired actions lawful through this administrative tactic. In essence, this approach operates under a veil of bad faith. Rather than adhering to existing laws, they modify them to suit their preferences.

LAB GUIDELINE 7: Engaging with advocacy and lobbying

- In today's complex political landscape, understanding the power of advocacy and lobbying is crucial for voters who wish to actively influence government policies and hold elected officials accountable. Advocacy groups play a critical role in raising awareness about important issues, mobilizing voters to ask their representatives to take action, and influencing government policies. Remember that by aligning themselves with advocacy groups that share their values and beliefs, voters can amplify their voice and make an impact on issues that matter to them.
- It is important for voters to understand advocacy so that they can hold their elected officials accountable. By understanding the messages and goals of advocacy groups, voters can better assess whether their elected representatives are working in the interest of the public or advancing their own agendas. With an understanding of advocacy, voters can become more involved in the political process, make more

informed decisions, and hold their representatives accountable for the issues they care about. Voters who are familiar with advocacy are also more likely to take action on issues that they care about.

- Grasp the fundamentals of lobbying as a means of influencing legislation and policy decisions. While lobbying is a legitimate part of democratic governance, recognizing its dynamics is key to advocating for a fair representation of interests. Educate yourself on how lobbying works to better understand its impact on policy-making.

Examples

1. Access to Quality Education:

- **Advocacy:** Launch a campaign to raise awareness about the disparities in educational opportunities between Greenville's neighbourhoods and more affluent areas.
- **Lobbying:** Meet with local government officials and school board members to push for increased funding and resources for schools in Greenville, including the renovation of facilities and the hiring of more qualified teachers.

2. Healthcare Accessibility:

- **Advocacy:** Organize community health fairs to provide free medical screenings and health education, highlighting the need for better healthcare services.
- **Lobbying:** Work with health advocacy groups to lobby for the establishment of a community health centre in Greenville that offers affordable healthcare services.

3. Infrastructure Improvement:

- **Advocacy:** Use social media and local media outlets to document and publicize the poor infrastructure conditions, rallying community support for change.
- **Lobbying:** Develop a proposal for infrastructure development, including paving streets and repairing buildings, and present it to city councillors and relevant government departments.

Thinking LAB

1. Describe advocacy and give examples why is it important for citizens to engage in advocacy movements.
2. How can citizens effectively advocate for social or political change on local and national levels?
3. What are some challenges that citizens face when engaging in advocacy work and how can these be overcome?
4. Describe the role that citizen-led advocacy groups play in shaping public policy and decision-making.
5. How have technology and social media impacted the ability of citizens to advocate for change?
6. Describe the difference between advocacy and lobbying.

CHAPTER 8

Critical role of the context in decoding the vote

This chapter underscores the pivotal role of local to global contexts in shaping voter behaviour, emphasizing the significance of addressing immediate community issues for impactful policy-making. It illustrates how economic, social, and political environments dictate voting preferences, highlighting the varied profiles of voters influenced by their specific circumstances. Furthermore, it discusses the rising engagement in climate and environmental activism, reflecting a global commitment towards sustainable development as outlined in the Agenda 2030.

The chapter suggests that understanding the multifaceted role of context – ranging from local reality of the voters to global sustainability efforts – is crucial in decoding voting behaviour and engaging effectively in civic and environmental activism. Through this lens, the chapter calls for a deeper comprehension of how various levels of context – from immediate surroundings of poverty or wealth to global economic and environmental policies – impact the electorate and underscore the critical intersection between individual objectives and systemic challenges in shaping a sustainable future.

Alice is voting

As Greenville town was preparing for electing a mayor, the citizens were getting ready to cast their vote. Living in a poor community, Alice faces daily financial challenges and sometimes struggles to

meet basic needs. Limited job opportunities and lack of access to quality education make it difficult for her to break the cycle of poverty. Growing up, she faced limited opportunities due to the lack of resources and lack of access to quality education in her neighbourhood. Her parents struggled to make ends meet, which made her aware of the challenges faced by low-income families. She has a deep understanding of the hardships faced by low-income individuals and families.

As a voter from a poor community, she is not strongly aligned with any particular political party. She is likely to make decisions based on individual candidate characteristics, their proposed policies, and their ability to address the needs of people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. One of the key reasons Alice is interested in voting is that she wants to support a candidate who shares her views on education. She has always been passionate about the power of education and believes that it is the foundation for a thriving society. Alice has researched the candidates' stances on education and has narrowed down her choices based on their policies.

Alice, a passionate environmental advocate from a humble background, and Fabio, a young engineer from a wealthy family, found themselves engaged in a spirited discussion at a local café.

“You know, Fabio, coming from where I do, I’ve seen first-hand how lack of resources and education can stifle a community. This election, for me, is about more than just choosing a mayor. It’s about electing someone who truly understands the importance of accessible education for everyone.

“I get your point, Alice. My upbringing was quite different, I won’t lie. Greenville has been good to my family. But, seeing your passion for these issues has opened my eyes. What do you think is the most critical issue the candidates should address?”, Fabio asked.

“It’s definitely the environment for me. Our town, our world, needs leaders who prioritize sustainability and education on environmental issues. We need practical solutions, not just talk. I want to support a candidate who sees the value in investing in our planet and our people,” Alice answered.

“That’s admirable, Alice. I’ve been involved in some engineering projects aimed at sustainable development, but I’ve never considered how my vote could also reflect my commitment to the environment.”

“Exactly, Fabio! Your projects are important, but imagine having a mayor who supports and expands on those initiatives. Someone who ensures that all children in Greenville, regardless of their background, grow up understanding the importance of protecting our environment.”

“You’ve given me a lot to think about, Alice. I’ve always believed in using my skills for good, but I haven’t been as proactive in other areas, like voting, where I can also make a difference.”

“It’s never too late to start, Fabio. We all have different strengths and come from different places, but in the end, our combined efforts can lead to real change. This election is a chance for us to shape the future of Greenville, together.”

“I’ll definitely think more critically about my vote now. Thanks, Alice. Your perspective is truly inspiring.”

“Thank you, Fabio. Remember, every vote counts. Let’s make ours work for the environment and for the education of our community.”

As the conversation drew to a close, both Alice and Fabio left the café feeling more enlightened and motivated. Alice, with her unwavering determination to bring about change, and Fabio, now viewing his vote as a powerful tool for environmental and

educational progress, looked forward to the election with renewed optimism.

"The vote is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have. Every voice matters, and we must not shrink from the imperative to make our voices heard."

- John Lewis²⁷

Poverty, well-being, and wealth

To improve citizens' lives through policy, addressing local issues should come first, before national or global concerns. This includes problems in your neighbourhood, community, and family. It's important for policymakers to focus on reforming schools, healthcare, roads, and other infrastructure to have a significant impact. However, these interventions should not be random but rather coherent and integrated to address obstacles to citizen well-being.

Voting is deciding for your future. The citizen as a voter is different from country to country, from one local community to another. The reason for that is the fact that the environment in which you vote is very much predefined in terms of a territory that is governed by particular sets of rules. It is also shaped very much by the population of that territory, subject to the control of a government and the capacity to conduct international relations (sovereignty). In other words, the context in which you live your everyday life will very much determine your behaviour as a voter.

You can now assume – it matters a lot if you are a voter where economy and business flourish or you are a voter in a deprived country and community. Your well-being as a citizen has

²⁷ For more information on John Lewis, see “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book

tremendous impact on your profile as a voter. Any country context also relates to economy and business environment, and how well your country is doing in relation to its Gross Domestic Product. Additionally, the social system of the country – education, health, your rights as employee or your rights as employer – also plays an important role.

Since its establishment in 1945, the World Bank has been dealing with issues of poverty and well-being, and we are able to understand them and especially how to measure them. For three decades the number of people living in extreme poverty – defined as those who live on less than \$2.15 per person per day at 2017 purchasing power parity – was declining. But the trend was interrupted in 2020 when poverty rose due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis. The number of people in extreme poverty rose by 70 million to more than 700 million people. The global extreme poverty rate reached 9.3%, up from 8.4% in 2019. (World Bank 2022)

There are many different concepts of poverty and well-being. Poverty is a global issue that affects millions of people around the world. And global discussion takes place and can continue forever. Poverty takes many forms, such as inadequate access to basic necessities like food, water, housing, healthcare, and education. For example, people are better off if they have a greater control over resources. But which resources?

You are considered poor if you lack a control over commodities in general or a specific type of goods that are essential to contribute to a reasonable standard of living in a society. This can refer to access to food – due to a very low salary you have constraints to afford healthy food, and you are forced to buy cheap food – with lots of additives that provide a very long shelf life of products. Poverty is a deprivation of essential assets and opportunities to which every human being is entitled. But it is important to understand that well-being and poverty are not only about money and salary. They are

also related to poor health and education, lack of social interactions, low self-confidence, and feeling of powerlessness and disengagement.

As an example, if you have a sick family member, and if you can provide not only basic healthcare but also better medicine and better daily care, then this can be taken as an important indicator of your and your family's well-being. While judging or measuring poverty, one can also focus on the nutritional status of the family members, the incidence of specific diseases, or life expectancy for different groups within the population. Education can also have a significant impact on well-being or poverty. As an example, one country or local community can measure the well-being of its citizens based on the level of literacy, including digital literacy, as the defining characteristic, and the level of education – primary, secondary, and higher education. Another way to measure could be by comparing the number of years of education completed to the expected number of years of education that should be, in principle, completed.

Poverty is caused by a variety of factors, such as economic inequality, lack of access to resources, and environmental factors like climate change and natural disasters. Economic inequality is a major factor contributing to poverty, as the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen. Low-income households often lack access to basic resources, such as food, clean water, and healthcare, making it difficult to escape poverty. Additionally, environmental factors such as climate change and natural disasters can cause poverty by damaging infrastructure, displacing people from their homes, and reducing access to resources.

Let's have a look at the poverty rates in some nations. As an example, in the United States, the poverty rate in 2021 was 11.6%, with 37.9 million people in poverty. According to the U.S. Census Bureau report, neither the rate nor the number of people in poverty was significantly different from 2020. Poverty status is determined

by comparing annual income to a set of dollar values (called poverty thresholds) that vary by family size, number of children, and the age of the householder (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). In Europe, these numbers are much higher. As an example, in the European Union (EU), in 2021, 95.4 million people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion; this was equivalent to 21.7% of the EU population. Over one in four people in Italy, 25.2%, were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This figure is up from 24.9% in 2020 and is above the EU average of 21.6%. People are considered in this category if they live in households at risk of poverty, in severe material and social deprivation with a very low level of work intensity. The highest rates were registered in Romania (34%), Bulgaria (32%), and Greece and Spain (both 28%), while the lowest were in the Czech Republic (11%), Slovenia (13%), and Finland (14%). (EUROSTAT 2023)

There are several potential solutions to poverty, such as increasing access to education, improving job opportunities, providing basic necessities, and investing in infrastructure. Education is an important factor in fighting poverty, as it provides individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to obtain a better job and improve their quality of life. Improving job opportunities is also important, as it can provide individuals with a reliable source of income and decrease their reliance on government assistance. Additionally, providing basic necessities such as food, clean water, and healthcare can help improve the quality of life for those living in poverty. Finally, investing in infrastructure can create jobs and improve access to resources, making it easier for individuals to escape poverty.

In conclusion, poverty is a global issue that affects millions of people around the world. It is caused by a variety of factors, such as economic inequality, lack of access to resources, and environmental factors. The effects of poverty are far-reaching, leading to decreased quality of life, increased crime and violence, and social unrest.

There are several potential solutions to poverty, such as increasing access to education, improving job opportunities, providing basic necessities, and investing in infrastructure. Addressing these issues is essential to improving the quality of life for those living in poverty and reducing its effects on entire communities and countries.

On the other hand, if you are considered rich, the assumption is that you have access to a large amount of money and resources, allowing you to live a luxurious lifestyle. If you belong to this group of people, it may be the case that you belong to a rich family that with generations lives in wealth. Then you have another challenge in the society – you may be perceived always to have a privilege and often seen as powerful and influential in society.

The truth is that very likely your wealth often comes from several sources. Maybe you have inherited wealth, as you belong to a rich family whose wealth was passed down from one generation to the next. Or maybe you are rich because you took a risk and invested in a start-up or real estate. Being rich, you often have access to exclusive services and opportunities that are not available to the general public. In these circumstances, you are often viewed as having an unfair advantage in society, as your wealth and resources often give you an access to exclusive opportunities and services that are not available to the general public. This can include access to the best education, healthcare, and other services that are not easily accessible by those with limited resources. Being rich, you also often have access to powerful connections and networks that can help you succeed in business, start-ups, and other ventures.

Despite you having many advantages, being rich also creates a unique set of challenges in your everyday life. You are always faced with a pressure to maintain and grow your wealth, and this can be overwhelming and very stressful. The reason is that you are bound with some societal norms, and you need to live up to the expectations of your peers and family. There is also another set of

challenges to being rich; you are also often faced with scrutiny from the public, and you are often subject to gossip and rumours. The reason for this is the struggle to manage your wealth responsibly and ethically, as there is a lot of responsibility that comes with having a large fortune.

Responsible and ethical management of wealth also means that you are not engaging in any illegal or unethical practices to earn more profits. It means that you are transparent in your dealings and are not exploiting any loopholes or engaging in any corrupt practices.

Furthermore, responsible and ethical management of wealth also includes being mindful of the impact that your investments and business decisions have on the environment. Are you investing in companies that are harming the environment or contributing to climate change? Are you taking steps to reduce your own carbon footprint? In conclusion, managing your wealth responsibly and ethically means considering the impact of your actions on the wider community, the environment, and society as a whole. It means prioritizing sustainability and social responsibility over short-term profits and being transparent and honest in your dealings.

Overall, being wealthy comes with both advantages and disadvantages in society. On the one hand, monetary resources afford individuals access to exclusive opportunities, excellent education, and healthcare. On the other hand, however, the wealthy also face heightened pressure and scrutiny from the public eye. In recent years, there has been a growing trend towards responsible and ethical wealth management practices among the wealthy, making it increasingly necessary to ensure that resources are being used in a way that benefits society.

The environment and climate change

Another trend that has emerged in recent years is a focus on protecting the environment. Both the wealthy and the poor are involved in their own way in climate and environmental activism. Many groups have decided, particularly since the signing of the “Green Deal,” to take action and support individuals or groups engaged in protecting the environment or addressing climate change. This involves identifying climate issues on different levels, from local communities to the global scale, and developing strategies to raise awareness and produce solutions that address these issues. Do you see yourself as someone who is engaged in climate activism or environmental protection? Then you can join the efforts to protect the planet and secure our future.

If you are involved in local grassroots efforts, you are likely aware of the impact that plastic pollution has on beaches in the countries. The sight of these beaches littered with abandoned water bottles is disheartening, and the amount of plastic is so overwhelming that it seems impossible to clean up or make any significant changes in the foreseeable future. This issue not only affects the aesthetic appeal of beaches but also has harmful effects on the lives of animals in the water and on the shore, as the plastic acts as an insulation blanket and disrupts the daily temperature cycle of the sand.

The environment and climate are issues that affect everyone, regardless of wealth or social status. Climate change has a significant impact on soil quality, agriculture practices, and food security. Although agriculture contributes to the greenhouse effect, the changing climate is likely to challenge agricultural production, which could lead to rising levels of malnutrition and food insecurity in the future. To combat this issue, it’s essential to acknowledge that access to healthy diets is a fundamental human right that must be upheld. However, estimates suggest that 3.1 billion people around the world cannot afford healthy diets, which creates a significant

challenge for global food security. Addressing these issues will require a collective effort to ensure both sufficient food production and access to healthy diets for all.

Climate change impacts each of us in various ways, ranging from severe droughts and increased temperatures leading to forest fires to cyclones causing floods and damaging harvests. Such effects are interconnected, as water scarcity is just one part of a larger ecosystem. In response to these dire consequences, some individuals have become full-time climate activists. However, whether we are wealthy or not, the reality is that climate change has far-reaching consequences that affect every citizen. As such, we must work together to create a sustainable environment that can be preserved for generations to come, whereby human stewardship does not succumb to poor decision-making.

Importance of the Agenda 2030

The key document that drives the global agenda is “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Department of Economic and Social Affairs.” It is a commitment of Heads of State and Government and High Representatives, which came to life during the meeting at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 25 to 27 September, 2015. The new global Sustainable Development Goals have been adopted.

This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. The focus is also on eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, which is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. The objective is, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just, and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and

girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources.

Sustainable, inclusive, and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity, and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities, are integrated in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, which clearly demonstrate the scale and ambition of this global and universal Agenda. They are balance of the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social, and environmental.

The significance of the Agenda 2030 and 17 Sustainable Development Goals is the unprecedented scope and significance for global development, as they are accepted by all countries. They are applicable to all, taking into account different national realities, capacities, and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. These are universal goals and targets that involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike.

The Agenda 2030 envisages a world in which every country enjoys sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. A world in which consumption and production patterns and use of all natural resources – from air to land, from rivers, lakes, and aquifers to oceans and seas – are sustainable. One in which democracy, good governance, and the rule of law, as well as an enabling environment at national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection, and the eradication of poverty and hunger. One in which development and the application of technology are climate-sensitive, respect biodiversity, and are resilient. One in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and other living species are protected.

Our shared principles and commitments

All countries made commitments to work to build dynamic, sustainable, innovative, and people-centred economies, promoting youth employment and women's economic empowerment, in particular, and decent work for all. Eradicating forced labour and human trafficking and ending child labour in all its forms are also among the objectives. All countries stand to benefit from having a healthy and well-educated workforce with the knowledge and skills needed for productive and fulfilling work and full participation in society. The objectives also include: to strengthen the productive capacities of least-developed countries in all sectors, including through structural transformation; to adopt policies which increase productive capacities, productivity, and productive employment; financial inclusion; sustainable agriculture, pastoralist, and fisheries development; sustainable industrial development; universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy services; sustainable transport systems; and quality and resilient infrastructure.

The Agenda 2030 and 17 Sustainable Development Goals are a wonderful policy idea. But at the same time, these commitments are not easy to achieve, as they depend on a number of factors. The United Nations is regularly publishing progress reports on the Agenda 2030. At the midpoint of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the world is not on track to meet most of the Goals by 2030. There has been progress in some areas, however, progress against a very worrying proportion of targets is either moving much too slowly or has regressed.

The last available Progress report from May 2023 clearly indicates that it is time to sound the alarm. At the mid-way point on the way to 2030, the SDGs are in deep trouble. A preliminary assessment of the roughly 140 targets with data shows only about 12% are on track; close to half, though showing progress, are moderately or

severely off track; and some 30% have either seen no movement or regressed below the 2015 baseline.²⁸

By 2030, 575 million individuals are projected to still be living in extreme poverty, and only one-third of countries are expected to achieve the goal of reducing national poverty levels by 50%. Unfortunately, the world is experiencing levels of hunger not witnessed since 2005, and food prices are higher than they were between 2015 and 2019, particularly in certain countries. Legal protections for gender equality are predicted to take another 286 years to become commonplace, and after years of underinvestment and learning setbacks, approximately 84 million children will remain out of school by 2030. Additionally, an estimated 300 million children and young adults will leave school without mastering basic reading and writing skills. The myopic vision of our current economic and political systems becomes even more apparent with the intensifying war on nature, which is closing the window of opportunity for limiting global temperatures to 1.5 degrees and preventing the devastating effects of the climate crisis. Carbon dioxide levels are at their highest in 2 million years, and despite some progress, renewable energy sources are expected to make up only a small percentage of our energy supply by 2030.²⁹

LAB GUIDELINE 8: Understanding the impact of context on voter priorities

- As a voter, recognizing the importance of your immediate environment – your neighbourhood, community, and family – is crucial. Effective policies aimed at enhancing your quality of life must begin with addressing these local

²⁸ SDG Progress Report Special Edition 2023 ADVANCE UNEDITED VERSION-1, May 2023. Available at sdgs.un.org.

²⁹ SDG Progress Report Special Edition 2023 ADVANCE UNEDITED VERSION-1, May 2023. Available at sdgs.un.org.

concerns. Remember that while national and global agendas hold their significance, it's the local issues that directly impact your daily life as a citizen. The emphasis should be on the importance of local issues in the policy process, advocating for a bottom-up approach to policy development that ensures the most immediate and relevant concerns of citizens are addressed first.

- The debate between prioritizing local, national, or global issues often mirrors the chicken-and-egg scenario. However, the essence of impactful governance lies in addressing the needs closest to your home. Elected officials need to prioritize reforms in education, healthcare, and infrastructure that directly enhance citizen well-being. These interventions should not be random but must be carefully planned and integrated to overcome the specific obstacles facing your community.
- By focusing on localized solutions, policymakers can create a foundation for broader national and global initiatives. This bottom-up approach ensures that policies are not only relevant but also effective in improving the lives of their constituents. As a voter, your awareness and engagement with these local issues are paramount in guiding the decisions of elected officials, thereby shaping a community that reflects the needs and aspirations of its residents.

Thinking LAB

1. Describe in a few sentences the challenges you face as a citizen in your country.
2. What sector policies are your problems related to in your local community?
3. Assess on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 min and 5 max point) the following:

- access to education in your local community,
 - access to health in your local community,
 - access to infrastructure and transport services in your local community.
4. In what ways do you think an understanding of policy processes can empower citizens to make informed voting decisions?
 5. Have you ever felt overwhelmed or confused by the complexity of the issues and challenges in your community?

CHAPTER 9

Navigating the currents of political marketing and social media influence

This chapter delves into the intricate world of political marketing, emphasizing the pivotal role of social media in shaping public opinion and electoral outcomes. Beyond the surface-level strategies of electoral campaigns, this chapter uncovers how political entities utilize social media platforms to cultivate awareness, sway voter perceptions, and strategically manage the focus of their messaging.

The concept of “defocusing” is explored as a manoeuvre, where campaigns intentionally divert attention from less favourable topics to highlight their strengths or key issues. This manoeuvre of focus underscores the critical skill of message control in the digital age, where narratives can be shaped and reshaped in real time, responding to the ever-changing dynamics of public discourse.

Furthermore, the chapter guides readers through the process of making informed voting decisions amidst the noise created by the political marketing. It emphasizes the importance of critical thinking and due diligence, encouraging voters to look beyond campaign promises and social media portrayals to understand the true values and track records of candidates.

Elections in Greenville: will the vote change something?

In the last ten years, Greenville residents experienced a serious decline in their town. Typically, with the deterioration of the town,

they became low-income earners who struggle to make ends meet. The crime and unemployment rates are high, and access to education and healthcare becomes problematic. The poor living conditions in the city often lead to health problems, and life expectancy rates are lower than in more affluent areas. Some neighbourhoods started to lack even basic amenities such as clean water, electricity, and adequate housing. The streets are often unpaved, and the buildings are dilapidated or temporary structures have been put in place. Overall, the infrastructure is poorly maintained, and there are few public facilities or services. Poverty started to loom over Greenville, threatening to become a widespread issue and affecting every aspect of daily life for its residents.

To live in a town that has no problems, unlike Greenville, can be an exciting and glamorous experience. In these types of towns, usually local government is successful in implementing effective policies that have boosted the economy, improved public safety, and promoted social equality. Thanks to their economic development initiatives, the citizens of these towns have seen an increase in business growth and job opportunities. Alice and Fabio wanted to see Greenville to develop in this direction, with local government in place that is committed to creating an environment where businesses can thrive, where policymakers understand that a thriving economy is a key component of a successful city, and where incentives for entrepreneurs and start-ups ensure local development possibilities.

Alice and Fabio struggled too, each differently and in their own way. In the meantime, they became aware and determined to exercise their right to vote in the upcoming election. They knew that their vote could make a difference in their community, and they were eager to cast their ballot for the candidates that they believed would make a positive change. They both spent countless hours researching the candidates and their policies, attending local debates, and talking to their neighbours about the issues that

mattered most to them. They discussed their hopes and fears for the future and debated the merits of the different candidates.

In addition, Alice and Fabio were actively involved in their community through volunteering and attending local meetings. They were familiar with the community's needs and concerns and recognized the importance of electing officials who would work to address those issues. They believed that by voting, they could hold elected officials accountable and ensure that their voices were heard when it came to issues such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

As election day approached, Alice and Fabio made sure that they were registered to vote and that they knew where their polling station was located. They were both excited and nervous, knowing that their vote could make a difference. On the day of the election, they woke up early and headed to the polls, eager to cast their vote. As they stood in line, they chatted amicably, discussing the latest news and gossip from the campaign trail.

“Do you think our votes will actually change anything in Greenville, Fabio?”

“I hope so, Alice. If our chosen candidate wins, maybe we'll see the improvements we've been dreaming of.”

“I'm just worried. What if nothing changes? The decline's been going on for too long.”

“But we have to try, right? Change starts with our vote. It's our voice.”

“True. It's about doing our part. For too long, Greenville's potential has been overshadowed by neglect.”

“Exactly. Let's believe in the power of our vote. For Greenville's future, every single vote, including ours, counts.”

Finally, it was their turn to vote. They each stepped into the voting booth and carefully marked their ballot. They had chosen the candidate that they believed would make the biggest difference in their community. Ultimately, the two voters saw voting as an opportunity to create positive change in their community. They understood that every vote counts and that their participation was essential for a functioning and thriving community.

Through their preparation and determination, they were able to cast their vote with confidence, knowing that they had done their part in shaping the future of their community. As they left the polling station, Alice and Fabio felt a sense of pride and accomplishment. They had exercised their right to vote and had made their voices heard. They knew that their vote might not change the world, but it could make a difference in their small town of Greenville.

“Voting is a right best exercised by people who have taken time to learn about the issues.”

- Tony Snow³⁰

Be aware of the political marketing

The American Marketing Association (AMA) officially defines marketing (approved July 2013; www.ama.org) as “the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” Butler and Collins (1994, p. 19) stated that political marketing is “the marketing of ideas and opinions, which relate to public or political issues or to specific candidates.” In general, political marketing is designed to influence people’s votes in elections. Notably, political marketing employs many of the same techniques used in product marketing such as paid

³⁰ For more information on Tony Show, see the “Quoted Voices” section at the end of the book.

advertising, direct mail, and publicity. Political marketing is – marketing designed to influence target audiences to vote for a particular person, party, or proposition.

Political marketing refers to the process of promoting a political candidate, party, or ideology using marketing tools and techniques. It involves creating a positive image of the candidate or party in the minds of target audiences and persuading voters to take action in favour of the candidate’s political goals. Political marketing has become increasingly relevant in today’s complex political landscape where there is intense competition among candidates and parties for votes and support.

The role of political marketing is to effectively communicate the political message of a candidate or party through various channels such as social media, advertising, direct mail, and even door-to-door campaigns. It requires a deep understanding of the target audience and their needs and preferences to craft a message and campaign that resonates with them. Political marketing can be used to highlight the strengths of a candidate, present a particular issue in a favourable light, or even to discredit the opposition.

One of the key areas of focus in political marketing is brand building and management. Political candidates and parties need to build a strong brand image to attract voters and support. This involves creating a consistent message and visual identity across all marketing channels, establishing a strong online and offline presence, and incorporating emotional appeals into the campaign. However, political marketing can also be controversial, as it can involve manipulating information or presenting a skewed view of the facts to gain support. As such, it is crucial for political marketers to remain transparent and ethical in all their communication and tactics.

Political campaigns seek to influence people’s opinions and actions on a particular issue. They both use various communication

strategies such as advertising, direct mail, door-to-door canvassing, and social media to convey their message to the public. Political campaigns rely on building relationships with voters or supporters. In political campaigns, relationships are pivotal in determining the outcome of an election. Voter mobilization, convincing voters to support a particular candidate, and encouraging turnout to the polls all rely on strong relationships.

Politicians can use AI in various ways to support their election. As an example, AI can help politicians process and analyse huge amount of data from different sources, such as surveys, social media, and public opinion polls. This can provide insights into public sentiment, emerging trends, and issues of concern for constituents. AI algorithms can analyse vast amount of voter data, demographics, and campaign finance records to help politicians understand their target audience better. This enables the formulation of effective campaign strategies focused on specific demographic segments or geographic areas.

Political campaigns conduct extensive research on potential voters, including demographics, voting history, and issue preferences. This information is then used to develop targeted messages and outreach efforts. Finally, political campaigns require strong messaging and branding. Political messages are key as they must resonate with the public and mobilize them towards action. A strong brand can help establish credibility and create a sense of identity for the campaign. In addition, branding and messaging are used to differentiate the campaign from its competitors or opponents.

Be aware of the power of social media

It is very important not to underestimate the power of social media. And it is not only about using online platforms to mobilize voters. Social media has become an increasingly powerful tool for mobilizing and organizing voters. Using platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram helps to reach new audiences, share

information and resources, and build momentum for social change, thus providing new opportunities in this unjust world. These platforms also help in creating compelling social media content, engaging with followers and supporters, and leveraging online networks to drive real-world action.

Social media allows politicians to speak directly to voters, bypassing traditional media channels. They can share their thoughts, feelings, and promises quickly and in real time. This creates a situation where citizens and voters can connect directly with politicians and those running for office.

Thanks to social media, politicians have become more adept at using emotional language to connect with people on a personal level. Whether sharing personal stories, appealing to shared values, or expressing empathy with everyday struggles, these emotional connections can build trust and support. People now have unprecedented access to what politicians are saying and doing. Promises made during campaigns can be easily tracked, and politicians' reactions to current events can be seen in real time. This constant exposure keeps politicians more accountable but can also lead to oversaturation and scepticism among voters.

The increased visibility also means politicians must be more cautious about their public image. A simple wrong step can quickly go viral, and public opinion can shift rapidly. Managing this online presence requires careful strategy and constant monitoring. The Internet and social media also present challenges in the form of information, breaking news, misinformation, and fake news. Determining what is true or false can become more complex, potentially influencing public opinion in misleading ways.

There is also the other side of the coin. Social media algorithms can exclude a big group of people from seeing specific content because they haven't been engaged with similar content before. This creates a whole group of people who are either exposed to disinformation

or not exposed to anything, and they end up not voting or making their choices randomly.

Be aware of defocusing strategies

In electoral campaigns, digital platforms have become essential tools for candidates. They use these platforms to spread information and news, aiming to create a favourable environment for themselves. At the same time, these digital strategies can be employed to sow confusion or discredit a rival candidate from a competing camp. This dual-purpose use of technology has fundamentally reshaped modern political campaigning, making the online space a critical battleground for influencing voters.

Some irrelevant issues for political candidates, like in which restaurant he or she was seen yesterday evening and with whom, get shaped in very marketable stories. It all depends on what is needed. Suddenly, all types of media, including TV channels, newspapers, web pages, and social media, are overwhelming voters with stories about politicians that often seem irrelevant to everyday challenges. Rather than focusing on issues that affect daily life, some journalists became masters at crafting stories around trivial matters and shifting the focus of the public. In their stories, they highlight who met with whom, when and where they had lunch, or if a politician was in a specific city to meet an entrepreneur for mysterious reasons. But how do these matter to the fact that instead of 40 hours I need to work 60 hours a week to pay my bills and to feed the family?

Of course, the objective is exactly the one – to shift the attention away from certain issues, topics, or strategies. Let me be even more brutal now...in a brainwashing war among political candidates, often important part of the electoral campaigns we as consumers often end up relying only on political marketing campaigns. Therefore, it is important to note that political marketing and stories selected to be put forward to our eyes and ears are shifting the focus, based on the daily needs – from the real challenges citizens face to

irrelevant issues needed for everyday political marketing. This shift in focus can distract voters from the substantive issues and contribute to a more superficial understanding of the political landscape.

How defocusing is used in public affairs? And what is the role of defocusing in political marketing? Defocusing in political marketing refers to the deliberate shift or diversion of attention away from certain issues, subjects, or aspects, often to avoid scrutiny or to emphasize something else that might be more advantageous for a politician or party. As an example, if a politician is facing criticism or controversy over a particular stance or action, they might use defocusing strategies to shift the public's attention to a different subject. This could include highlighting achievements or emphasizing a different issue that resonates positively with the voters. Defocusing can be used to direct the public's attention towards areas where a politician or party is perceived to be strong. By continually emphasizing these strengths, they can overshadow or minimize perceived weaknesses or unpopular stances. Sometimes, defocusing might involve confusing or muddying the waters on a particular subject. By introducing multiple narratives or conflicting information, politicians can make it more difficult for voters to form a clear opinion on a particular subject, thus deflecting criticism or scrutiny.

In summary, the rise of the Internet and social media has fundamentally changed the way politicians reach and connect with citizens and voters. While this has led to more personalized and direct communication, it also brings new complexities and risks that politicians and voters must navigate. It's a dynamic and evolving landscape that reflects broader changes in technology and society. Defocusing is a common strategy in political marketing, but it can be seen as manipulative or disingenuous. While it might offer short-term gains in terms of public perception, if used excessively or inappropriately, it can lead to a loss of trust and credibility.

Understanding and recognizing defocusing can help voters to be more critical and discerning in their evaluation of political messages and campaigns. As citizens and voters, it is disheartening to see the shift towards defocusing in political marketing. However, we must remain optimistic and strive for change. It is important for us, as empowered individuals, to reject this mistreatment and work towards a system that truly values and addresses our needs. Together, we can make a difference and create an environment that we can be proud of.

So, I asked myself – are we deciding who is better based on social media, AI, and political marketing? Or do we as voters need to know more and go behind the curtain to understand deeper how to prepare ourselves for voting and finally try to change our lives and society for the better?

Deciding for whom to vote

Before deciding to vote, it's important for you to conduct thorough research and evaluate a candidate based on various issues. By doing so, you can make an informed decision and vote for the candidate who you believe is the most trustworthy and capable. When deciding who to vote for, you may consider several factors that could influence your decision. You may listen to the candidates' campaign promises and choose the one whose promises you believe are most feasible and beneficial. You may also be influenced by media coverage of the candidates and lean towards voting for the one who is portrayed in a positive light.

Ultimately, the decision of who to vote for is a personal one for you and can be influenced by a myriad of factors. It's crucial for you to educate yourselves on the candidates and their platforms to ensure that your vote reflects your values and expectations for future leadership. Here are a few tips that can help you make a more informed choice:

1. The political party: You may align with a particular political party and vote for the candidate representing that party. When deciding which political party to support, it is important to carefully consider the party's positions on critical issues such as healthcare, education, and taxation. Additionally, the historical performance and policies of the party, as well as the leadership qualities of its figurehead – such as experience, communication skills, and ability to lead – are pivotal factors in our decision-making process. Ultimately, the choice of which party to vote for is deeply personal, requiring a thoughtful evaluation of how closely a party's values align with our own priorities and beliefs. Choosing a political party to vote for can be a difficult decision, as there are many factors to consider.
2. The candidates' stances: Researching candidates' stances on key issues like healthcare, education, the economy, and social policies allows you to align your vote with your beliefs. By being well-informed about who is running for office and their viewpoints, you can cast a vote that truly reflects your values. This commitment to informed voting is crucial for a democracy that listens to and represents its citizens' voices. Being a responsible voter means understanding your impact on the community and contributing positively to society by making choices that align with ethical and respectful standards.
3. The candidate's past experience: When you evaluate a candidate's suitability for office, consider their experience's depth and relevance. For legislative roles a background in government is beneficial, while school board candidates probably will do better if they have educational or administrative experience. A track record of engagement in

public policies could be useful for assessing their readiness for the job as elected official.

4. The candidate's values: When deciding which candidate to choose, you should seek someone whose values align with yours and who has a consistent track record. If environmental issues matter to you, look for candidates with a history of environmental advocacy. Consistency in their positions and actions is key; indecision or frequent changes in stance could indicate unreliability. The ideal candidate combines relevant experience, a successful track record, shared values, and steadfastness in their views, helping you make an informed choice.
5. Evaluating a candidate's character involves scrutinizing their honesty, integrity, and empathy to determine their trustworthiness. To effectively assess these traits, delve into both their personal and professional backgrounds for any history of scandals or controversies, ensuring their past actions reflect the qualities you value.
6. The candidate leadership style: A candidate who treats people with compassion and understanding, as opposed to displaying selfish or antagonistic behaviour, is more likely to embody the ethical standards and empathetic qualities that are indicative of a leader to whom you can trust.

Imagine a policymaker shaped by their own battles with poverty and inequality, witnessing first-hand the struggles within their community. This experience fuels their drive for crafting policies aimed at eradicating poverty, enhancing access to healthcare and education, and fostering social justice. They tackle systemic issues like racism and discrimination head-on, understanding that true

policy effectiveness stems from empathy and a profound commitment to equity.

A policymaker with integrity embodies honesty, transparency, and accountability, placing the public interest above personal gain. Their decisions are informed by a steadfast moral compass, respect for the democratic process, and an unwavering dedication to fairness and justice for all individuals, irrespective of their status. Open to feedback and constructive dialogue, they engage with stakeholders and the community, upholding high ethical standards and avoiding conflicts of interest. This type of policymaker stands as a beacon of principled leadership, tirelessly working towards a society where every person has the chance to succeed.

LAB GUIDELINE 9: Crafting the voter's landscape

- In the digital age, empowering you as a voter requires a multifaceted approach that emphasizes media literacy, critical thinking, and active participation in the electoral process. To navigate the complex landscape of political marketing and social media influence, it's essential to diversify your sources of information. Remember that by engaging with a wide range of media outlets, you can gain a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of political narratives, which is crucial for making informed decisions.
- Critical analysis of political content is another cornerstone of your empowerment as a voter. This involves scrutinizing the sources of information, understanding the intentions behind political messaging, and verifying the accuracy of content before sharing it. Such practices help combat the spread of misinformation and enable you as a voter to engage with political discussions more thoughtfully and respectfully.

- Understanding the strategies employed by political campaigns, including the highlighting of key issues and the tactical redirection of focus away from less favourable topics, is vital. This awareness allows you to evaluate the substance behind campaign messaging critically. Additionally, thorough research into candidates' backgrounds, beyond their social media presence, enables you to assess their authenticity and alignment with personal values.
- Choosing the right candidate or political party to vote for is a deeply personal decision influenced by various critical factors, emphasizing the importance of being well-informed. It involves a meticulous consideration of the party's stance on key issues like healthcare, education, and taxation, their historical performance, and the leadership qualities of their figureheads. Evaluating candidates extends to researching their positions on crucial societal matters and their past experiences and track records, especially in areas relevant to the role they are vying for. Moreover, a candidate's values, consistency in their positions and actions, character, and leadership style are paramount in aligning your vote with your beliefs and values. This process underscores the essence of responsible voting – making choices that not only reflect personal convictions but also contribute positively to the fabric of society, ensuring that the elected representatives truly resonate with the electorate's expectations for future leadership.

Thinking LAB

1. Reflect on an instance when you encountered misinformation related to politics on social media. How did you identify it as misinformation? What actions did you take in response to it?
2. Reflect on how diversifying your information sources has changed your understanding of political issues. How do you assess your level of media literacy, and what steps can you take to improve it?
3. Reflect on a recent political advertisement or campaign message you encountered. What tactics did you notice being used to influence viewers? How did you critically assess the message's intent and factual accuracy?
4. Think about your preparation process for the last election in which you participated. How did you educate yourself about the candidates and the issues? What could you do differently in the future to enhance your preparedness?
5. Did you change your opinion about a political issue after critically analysing new information? How do you differentiate between emotional and logical reactions to political content?

Closing points for putting it all together

About Greenville

- In summary and looking back, Alice and Fabio knew that their shared passion for change in Greenville and their dedication to researching the issues gave them each a unique perspective on the world around them. And while they may have disagreed on certain policies, they both knew that they shared a common goal: to make their community and their country a better place for all. Both voters took their civic duty seriously and were determined to make a positive impact in the local community through their vote. They prepared for elections by doing their research on the candidates and their platforms, attending local candidate forums, and discussing the issues with family and friends. They understood that their vote could make a difference in shaping the future of their community and wanted to make an informed decision.
- After the election of Mayor Sabina Bianchi, the new town leadership has also taken proactive measures to address social inequality and promote inclusivity. They have implemented programs that focus on education, healthcare, and housing for underserved communities. Their policies are designed to give equal opportunities to all residents regardless of their socio-economic status or background. For Alice, one of the most impactful changes was the increase in her wages. She had been struggling to make ends meet, often having to choose between paying her bills and buying groceries. With the new possibility and new job, she felt more financially secure and was able to focus on her work and personal life without worrying about money. Fabio, a

talented engineer, was able to set up a new business in Greenville, thanks to the new initiatives for start-ups support that the new town administration had put in place.

- Mayor Sabina Bianchi believed firmly in the importance of laying out and pursuing long-term objectives for Greenville, especially in the areas of education, health, and transportation. From her initial days in office, she has recognized that fulfilling the promises made to her constituents is not just a matter of electoral success but of fundamental accountability and progress. The challenge lies not only in the vision but in the execution – bringing together various stakeholders who have the decision-making authority and financial impact required for substantive improvements. Consequently, her initiative to form a commission characterized by youth and diversity underscores a strategic move towards innovative and inclusive governance, setting a promising trajectory for the Greenville future.
- Overall, Alice and Fabio were grateful for the changes that had taken place since the new policymakers had come to power in Greenville. The town felt like a more welcoming and supportive place to live, and both were excited to see what other positive changes would come in the future. As they watched their community flourish, Alice and Fabio knew that their vote had made a difference. They felt proud to be a part of the process and knew that they would continue to exercise their right to vote in the future. Although Greenville’s impressive progress is a testament to the hardworking and innovative policymakers who lead with a strong vision for their community’s future, Alice and Fabio’s story is one that serves as a reminder of the importance of voting. No matter how small or insignificant your vote may seem, it can make a difference in your community and in your country as a whole.

About the patchwork of policy processes and public policy

- One of the biggest challenges I had when drafting this book was how to bring closer to you the real notion of public policies and associated policy process how they impact our lives. They impact a lot, but we do not see that and even we are not aware of it. This is my last call to you as a voter and responsible citizen to pay attention to policy process and public policy.
- Public policy is essentially any decision made by the government and public authorities that affects the lives of people living within a society. However, the average citizen may find it challenging to understand what is the impact on their lives of that public policy because of its complexity and the jargon used in it.
- One of the challenges ordinary citizens face while understanding public policy and policy processes is the language used in the real life on one side and the one used in actual realm of the public institutions. Many may find it challenging to understand legal jargon and the official governmental language used in documents such as bills, regulations, and policies. This complexity can also make it difficult for the average citizen to understand the direct impact of the policy on their lives, leading to a lack of engagement in the process, particularly the vote and voting.
- Another challenge is that there may be different interpretations of the policy due to political affiliations and beliefs of citizens and voters. This can result in a lack of a unified understanding of what the policy entails, making it harder for many to be engaged in shaping better future for their communities.

- There are number of different ways one can improve the basic understanding of policy process and public policies in an election campaign:
 - Have a careful look on the candidates’ platforms and positions: Take the time to research the candidates’ positions on key issues, such as education, health, and infrastructure. Find out what is the exact programme they propose to deal with challenges. Read their platforms and any information they provide about their positions.
 - Attend candidate forums and debates: Candidates often participate in public forums and debates where they discuss their views on important issues. These events provide an opportunity for voters to hear directly from the candidates and to ask questions.
 - Talk to friends and family: Discussing political issues with friends and family can help a person understand different perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of public policies.
 - Read newspapers and magazines: Reading news articles and opinion pieces can help a person stay informed about current events and policies. It is important to read from a variety of sources to get a balanced perspective.
 - Join advocacy groups: Advocacy groups often focus on specific public policy, and joining such groups can provide a person with a deeper understanding of the policy process and public policies, including the arguments for and against them.
- In conclusion, while public policies have a significant impact on the lives of ordinary citizens, they may find it challenging to understand their intricacies due to complexity and differences in interpretation. More efforts should be made to simplify public policies and encourage greater

citizen participation in the policy process, whether through public dialogue or increased awareness of the policies that affect their lives.

About the patchwork of voting and beyond

- It is always important to keep in mind that while political campaigns often dominate the headlines, many of the most impactful social change efforts happen at the local level. How to mobilize voters to get involved in local campaigns, initiatives, and community organizing efforts through identifying local issues and opportunities for activities, as well as strategies for building networks and partnerships with other local organizations and advocates, is equally important. Mobilizing voters at the local level can be a rewarding activity bottom up that can tackle the real challenges of citizens.
- Active participation in the electoral process is paramount. This means not only using social media platforms wisely for advocacy and information sharing but also preparing to vote by being well-informed about voting procedures, locations, and dates. Such active engagement ensures that voters' voices are heard and that their decisions reflect their principles and aspirations for their community and country. Together, these practices form a holistic guide for voters, empowering them to sift through the complexities of political marketing and social media with confidence and to make choices that are both informed and impactful.
- Voting is a vital starting point for social change, serving as a crucial step for citizens to voice their preferences and influence the direction of their society. However, the journey towards meaningful social transformation extends far beyond the ballot box. Active engagement in the legislative process and continuous advocacy are essential for translating

electoral choices into concrete actions and policies that reflect the collective values and goals of the community.

- One of the biggest challenges in mobilizing voters is reaching people across diverse communities and backgrounds. Exploring strategies for building bridges between different groups and fostering a sense of shared purpose and commitment to social change is a very important undertaking. Another issue is the importance of listening to and understanding different perspectives, as well as the role of empathy and connection in building meaningful relationships and coalitions. These ideas certainly will help to build bridges and help how to mobilize voters across diverse communities.
- The first step beyond voting is to identify and prioritize the issues that are most important to you, whether they concern social justice, environmental protection, healthcare reform, or any other area requiring attention. Understanding the existing laws and identifying necessary changes form the foundation of effective advocacy.
- Engagement with elected officials is a critical next step. This can be achieved through various means such as phone calls, letters, emails, and in-person attendance at town hall meetings and community events. Articulating your concerns and presenting your views directly to those in power play a pivotal role in raising awareness and garnering support for your cause.
- Joining or establishing grassroots organizations focused on your key issues can significantly amplify your voice. Collaborating with like-minded individuals can build a collective force capable of driving substantial policy changes. Engaging with civil society organizations and

associations can provide valuable insights and enhance the capacity of citizens to influence policy development and review. Developing a thorough understanding of how to engage effectively in advocacy, monitor policy progress, and participate in policy evaluation is essential for anyone looking to make a lasting impact.

- In summary, while voting is an essential expression of civic duty, it marks just the beginning of a longer commitment to fostering change. Through sustained advocacy, engagement in the legislative process, and collaboration with community groups and civil society, individuals can contribute to shaping policies that align with their values and goals, driving forward the change they wish to see in society.

QUOTED VOICES

Sharon Salzberg is one of the figures in the field of meditation, a world-renowned teacher, and a New York Times bestselling author. She played a crucial role in bringing mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation practices to the Western world. Born in New York City in 1952, Salzberg encountered Buddhism in college and went on to study meditation in India, Myanmar, and Thailand under eminent teachers such as Goenka, Dipa Ma, and others. Salzberg's contributions have significantly influenced the contemporary mindfulness movement, making her an influential figure in spiritual and personal development circles.

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) was an American statesman, diplomat, lawyer, architect, philosopher, and Founding Father who served as the third President of the United States from 1801 to 1809. Before his presidency, he was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence and served as the second Vice President of the United States under John Adams. Beyond politics, Jefferson was an accomplished architect and was deeply interested in science, archaeology, and linguistics. He founded the University of Virginia after his presidency and remained active in American public life until his death.

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) is often regarded as one of the greatest presidents in the history of the United States. His leadership during the Civil War, his emancipation of slaves, and his enduring commitment to the principles of democracy and equality have left a profound legacy. Before his presidency, Lincoln practiced law and served in the Illinois State Legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives. He became a key figure in the formation of the Republican Party. Lincoln was elected the 16th president of the

United States in 1860, a victory that prompted several Southern states to secede from the Union and form the Confederate States of America, leading to the outbreak of the Civil War. He faced the monumental task of preserving the Union, ensuring the abolition of slavery, and setting the groundwork for reconciliation and healing.

Malcolm Stevenson Forbes (1919–1990) was an American entrepreneur, publisher, and flamboyant personality, best known as the publisher of Forbes magazine, a business publication founded by his father. Malcolm Forbes took over the helm of Forbes magazine after his father's death in 1954. He was instrumental in shaping it into a global brand, known for its lists, including the Forbes 400 (the list of the richest Americans) and its rankings of the world's billionaires. Forbes' leadership style was marked by his innovative approaches to business journalism and his ability to blend serious economic analyses with more personal stories of business leaders.

Helen Keller (1880–1968) was an American author, lecturer, and advocate for the deaf and blind. Despite being both deaf and blind due to an illness she contracted as a toddler, Keller overcame tremendous challenges to become one of the most remarkable figures of the 20th century. Keller went on to attend Radcliffe College, becoming the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. She wrote numerous books and essays, including her famous autobiography, "The Story of My Life," which has been translated into over 50 languages and remains in print today.

Coretta Scott King (1927–2006) was an influential American civil rights leader, activist, and author. She was the wife of Martin Luther King Jr., the prominent leader of the American Civil Rights Movement. Coretta Scott married Martin Luther King Jr. in 1953, and the couple moved to Montgomery, Alabama, where they became deeply involved in the civil rights movement, most notably in the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955. After her husband's

assassination in 1968, Coretta Scott King continued to work tirelessly for civil rights, social justice, and non-violent activism.

John Lewis (1940–2020) was an American politician and civil rights leader who played a pivotal role in the struggle for racial equality in the United States. Lewis was renowned for his courage, his deep commitment to justice, and his tireless advocacy for the rights of African Americans. He grew up in Troy, Alabama, in the era of racial segregation. Inspired by the activism surrounding the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., Lewis became deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement from a young age. John Lewis's life was marked by a relentless pursuit of justice, and he remained an active advocate for voting rights, civil liberties, and human rights until his death.

Robert Anthony "Tony" Snow (1955–2008) was an American journalist, political commentator, and government official who served as the White House Press Secretary under President George W. Bush from April 2006 to September 2007. Before and after his tenure in the White House, Snow was a prominent figure in political journalism and commentary. He brought a new level of energy and engagement to the briefing room, often using his wit and media experience to spar with journalists. Despite being the spokesperson for the administration, Snow was appreciated for his efforts to maintain transparency and his cordial relationship with the press.

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This book is not just a product of my efforts but a testament to the love, support, and encouragement my family has provided me. It could not have been possible without you.

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of public policy and its significant impact on the lives of ordinary citizens. Their dedication to making a difference in the lives of ordinary citizens, despite the complexities involved, has been a source of motivation for me.

These conversations have highlighted the need for greater efforts to make policies more accessible and to encourage active citizen participation in the policy process. Whether through public dialogue or through initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of the policies that directly affect their lives, it is clear that more can be done to bridge the gap between policymakers and the public.

By acknowledging the significant role these individuals play in our society and the importance of making public policy more accessible, I hope to contribute to a broader dialogue on enhancing meaningful citizen participation in the policy process. It is a collective effort that requires the input and support of everyone involved, from family and friends to professionals and policymakers.

With heartfelt gratitude, I extend my thanks to all who have played a part in this journey. Your influence has been pivotal in achieving the goal of writing this book and has underscored the importance of collaboration and mutual support in the pursuit of meaningful change in our society.

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