

ENDEAVORS, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND BREAKDOWNS

Paul C. Light
New York University

Background paper prepared for “Restoring the Public’s Trust: Delivering on Public Policy Goals,” convened by the Volcker Alliance from September 22-25, 2013 with the Salzburg Global Seminar.

For citation purposes, this document should be referred to as:
Paul C. Light, “Endeavors, Achievements, and Breakdowns,” New York, NY: The Volcker Alliance, 2013

If a society is measured by what it asks its governments to do, the United States and many global nations can be very proud, indeed. Name a significant domestic or foreign policy problem, and most governments have worked hard to solve them. In some instances, governments have been highly successful in their endeavors. In others, they have been unable to honor the promises they made, be it because of flawed policy designs or poor implementation.

This memo looks to past government successes and breakdowns to gain insight into potential areas of improvement for the U.S. federal government. This effort asks four broad questions: (1) What types of endeavors has the federal government undertaken? (2) What has the federal government actually achieved? (3) How has the federal government broken down between 2000 and 2012? (4) What might the Volcker Alliance do to strengthen government's ability to deliver success? Although the examples cited here are specific to the United States, the memo's framework and lessons have relevance worldwide.

1. What Government Tried to Accomplish

Congress, the president, and the federal Judiciary have asked the U.S. federal government to aim high over the past seventy years, and it has been successful in many respects. According to my analysis of the major statutes tallied by *Congressional Quarterly* each year, Congress and the president added almost 600 major laws to the statute books between 1945 and 2000, which is the time period I used in my book, *Government's Greatest Achievements*.¹

Working from this list, I was able to compact almost all of the 600 statutes into fifty endeavors such as providing financial security to older Americans, reducing disease, or guaranteeing voting rights. Some of the endeavors involved a single statute or two, such as Medicare for older Americans, Civil Rights Act, or Social Security reform. Others involved multiple statutes enacted over the years to combat disease, build hospitals, develop the interstate highway system, raise the minimum wage, and combat communism. (See Table 1 for the list of endeavors enacted from 1945 until 2000) Congress and the president also expanded the list of statutes over the past twelve years in spite of increasing polarization and a challenging political climate. (See Table 2 for the list of endeavors enacted between 2000 and 2012)²

The U.S. federal government has undeniably taken on a larger role in society over the last century. Yet some would argue that government has yet to adequately address many of the most pressing problems of the twenty-first century, including rising levels of national debt, CO₂ levels, obesity rates, and healthcare costs. Further, major failures in existing government structures consistently threaten to derail past achievements. While the U.S. government has done a great deal over the past seventy years, there is certainly much left to do.

2. What Government Achieved and Why

¹ Readers should note that this list does not include presidential executive orders or federal judicial decisions. See Paul C. Light, *Government's Greatest Achievements*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2002.

² The 2000 table includes all defining statutes listed by Congressional Quarterly enacted between 1943 and 1999, while the 2012 table includes all major statutes listed by Congressional Quarterly dating back to 2000.

There are many ways to measure the federal government's ultimate success in converting its endeavors into achievements. Some experts look at trend lines in measures such as patents, smoking, graduation rates, and even highway fatalities, while others look to the nation's leading historians and political scientists for ratings of each endeavor. (See Tables 3 and 4)

Why have some endeavors become reputational achievements, while others ended up at the bottom of the list? Although there is no clear answer, several patterns emerge when government's noteworthy achievements are compared against its least fulfilled promises.

- First, the most successful achievements ultimately earned bipartisan support. Although some were launched after bitter ideological debates, the opposing parties eventually accepted the core ideals of the endeavor and banded together to support expansion to other areas. Even contentious statutes such as the Voting Rights Act had at least some bipartisanship sponsorship composed of moderates in both parties.
- Second, most of the achievements involved a steady progression of additional legislation that expanded the endeavors to cover new realities. Just as the interstate highway system grew mile by mile, so did the effort to combat disease, reduce pollution, and regulate campaign spending. To be sure, there were setbacks along the way—the Supreme Court's rejection of campaign finance controls being one of the most recent. But the progress was mostly steady as the federal government made gradual headway to wear down big problems.
- Third, the federal government's most successful achievements attained broad consensus among the three government branches on both the size of the problem and the need for action. Although Congress launched the majority of the endeavors, all three branches tended to coalesce around action. There was also substantial give and take between Congress and the president on both the substance of each statute and its implementation.

Regardless of their perceived success, the past endeavors indicate that setting achievable goals and building consensus are two key factors that may maximize the likelihood of success. Endeavors do not implement themselves, of course. A great deal of hard work, leadership, and collaboration is necessary to tackle difficult issues. Examining past endeavors can shed great light on ways to enhance government in the future.

3. Where Government Broke Down

Government faces many challenges on its road to success. There are times when a policy is so complicated, and opposition so strong, that its law cannot be implemented by even the most effective agency. Other times, government agencies are weakened such that even the most thoughtful policy cannot be implemented. When issues involving both policy design and management coexist, large-scale breakdowns frequently occur. These highly visible failures hugely undermine perceptions of government success.

The American public appears to pay more attention to government failures than to government success. Government breakdowns involving deaths, scandals, and ethical breaches are highly salient and receive substantial media attention, while many of government's greatest

achievements are quickly forgotten or taken for granted. Well-publicized breakdowns not only shake the public's confidence in public institutions, but may also discredit many of government's past achievements.

Preventing breakdowns is essential for supporting future government success. The first step towards this goal is to examine what factors have historically contributed to government breakdowns. The following discussion is based on a simple two-step process: (1) identify a set of perceived breakdowns based on public opinion, and (2) explain the underlying problems that appear to have led to each failure.

The list of 32 perceived breakdowns comes from the Pew Research Center's News Interest Index, which monitors public interest in the stories of the day. (See Table 5 for list and Table 6 for descriptions)³ In turn, the assessment of underlying problems involved a detailed history of each breakdown based on historical assessments such as blue-ribbon commission reports, Government Accountability Office reports, and congressional investigations.

The research uses a framework of past government failures to identify areas for improvement and stimulate thinking about the factors affecting government success. The analysis identified fifteen factors within five general categories that might contribute to any given breakdown (See Table 7 for the three core questions asked in each of the five categories)

- **Policy Design:** This first contributor to breakdowns involves problems arising from the policy itself. Relevance of the policy to the problem at hand (design), the presence of clear warning signs within the policy's primary agency (vulnerability), and the location of its mandated authority by Congress (placement) are three factors that help set the stage for success or failure before the policy is even passed into law.
- **Resources:** This second contributor to breakdowns involves the basic resources needed for successful implementation. This includes money (budget), people (human capital), and other needed resources, such as technology (capacity).
- **Structure:** This third contributor to breakdowns involves bureaucratic structures. Communication between the top and bottom of agencies (chain of command), acquisitions (contracting and outsourcing), and inter-agency focus (duplication and overlap) are three key factors that contribute to government success or failure.
- **Leadership:** This fourth contributor to breakdowns involves factors related to gaps in political leadership. Leadership skills and experience (expertise), overall performance of leaders (effectiveness), and problems within the presidential appointments process (delays and vacancies) all fall under this category.
- **Culture:** The final contributor to breakdowns involves organizational culture. The government's clarity of purpose (mission), the amount of lobbying, political, and campaign

³ According to the Pew Research Center's ongoing tracking polls, the public said it followed 34 stories about government "very" or "fairly closely" between 2000 and 2012. Two of the 34 were about government success (Firestone Tire Recall and Mars Rover Landing) and 32 were about government failures. (See Table 5)

pressure impacting implementation (corruption), and the presence of clear measures of results (organizational performance management) may all play a role in driving government success or failure.

These five broad categories provided the scaffolding for a chart that identifies the contributors to each breakdown. (See Table 8 for full chart of results) Readers should note that the chart makes no effort to identify *the* most important contributor in each of the 32 breakdowns; rather, it merely shows the contributors that were clearly identified in historical analysis.

Looking across the five areas described above, the interaction between “high policy” and policy delivery is clear. 30 of the 32 breakdowns involved both policy and administrative problems. (See Table 8) Policy cannot succeed without successful implementation, and vice versa. They are two sides of the same coin.

Looking next at each of the 15 sub-contributors, the Volcker Alliance faces a daunting inventory of potential targets for action. The most common is policy vulnerability, which can be found in 20 out of the 32 breakdowns, and indicates that the policy itself was outdated or insufficient for addressing evolving conditions or demands. Despite almost a decade of warning, for example, the U.S. did not have a national response plan fully in place on September 11th 2001.

The second most frequent target is information technology, generally the lack thereof, which can be found in 19 out of the 32 breakdowns. The massive recall of 473 consumer products in 2007, including imported toys is an example of a breakdown that could have been potentially prevented had the Consumer Product Safety Commission been equipped with sophisticated information technology systems to target risks.

The third most frequent target is the chain of command, which can be found in 18 of the 32 breakdowns. Lack of communication between regional offices, for example, exacerbated the Gulf Oil Spill disaster of 2010. Without a clear internal chain of command, the Minerals Management Service Agency (MMS) experienced inconsistencies in program implementation, regulatory interpretation, and enforcement policies. These conditions aggravated many of MMS’ other shortcomings, leading to the largest accidental oil spill in history.

Additional factors commonly cited as triggers of U.S. government failure included appointee effectiveness (18 out of 32), performance measurement (18 out of 32), duplication & overlap (17 out of 32), and placement of authority in “high-risk” agencies (15 out of 32).

It is important to note that this analysis is only a preliminary attempt to identify leverage points for improving the performance of the U.S. federal government. These 15 sources of potential failure hardly exhaust the potential explanations for the breakdowns at hand. Nor does this analysis allow for further review of the initial spark for failure. Additional examination and analysis will be necessary to extrapolate on these initial findings.

4. Where the Volcker Alliance Might Focus

This analysis confirms the Alliance’s concern with pulling policy analysis and administration together into an integrated field, and shows that government success hinges on *both* strong policy design and effective policy delivery.

The Volcker Alliance cannot tackle this interaction without first identifying a select number of issues to concentrate on. The research provides many ideas for public sector improvement. The question here is what might be done to address (1) the prevalence of potential breakdowns embedded in the statutes that set government policy, (2) failures based on the lack of investment in a host of resources needed to execute the policy, (3) failures in basic administrative systems such as performance measurement and management, and (4) problems in the leadership of government agencies?

It may be, for example, that the Volcker Alliance can do little to affect duplication and overlap—others have tried with little or no success at all. Perhaps the Alliance would have a much greater impact by providing support to other advocates through research and advocacy. Regardless of where the Volcker Alliance decides to focus, it will be most effective if it takes into account its own capacity for affecting change. Thus, the next question is where the Volcker Alliance should concentrate its scarce resources, and which of the sources of breakdowns constitutes its most important review.

ENDEAVORS, ACHIEVEMENTS, AND BREAKDOWNS

CHARTS AND FIGURES

Table 1: Government’s Greatest Endeavors by Domain, 1945-1999

Domain	Classification	Defining Statutes (Prior to Year 2000)
Civil Rights & Civic Life	Crime Control	Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (1968; 1994), Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (1993)
	Devolution	State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act (1972), Unfounded Mandate Reform Act (1995), Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (1996)
	Government Performance	Civil Service Reform Act (1978), Federal Managers’ Financial Integrity Act (1982), Government Performance and Results Act (1993), Federal Acquisitions Streamlining Act (1994)
	Government Transparency and Control	Administrative Procedures Act (1946), Freedom of Information Act (1966; 1974), Inspector General Act (1978)
	Public Discrimination	Civil Rights Act (1964), Open Housing Act (1968), Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)
	Voting Rights	24 th Amendment (1964), Voting Rights Act (1965), 26 th Amendment to the Constitution (1971)
	Workplace Discrimination	Equal Pay Act (1963), Age Discrimination Act (1967), Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)
Domestic Economic Development	Agricultural Prices	Agricultural Act (1948; 1961), Agricultural Trade and Development Assistance Act (1954), Food Security Act (1985)
	Budget Deficit	Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act (1985), Omnibus Budget Reconciliation (1990; 1993), Balanced Budget Acts (1995; 1997)
	Deregulation	Airline Deregulation Act (1978), Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (1999)
	Employment	Employment Act (1946), Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (1973), Job Training Partnership Act (1982)
	Financial Regulation	Insider trading and Securities Fraud Enforcement Act (1988), Financial Institutions Reform, Recovery and Enforcement Act (1989)
	Financial Security for Older Americans	Supplemental Security Income Program (1972), Employment Retirement Income Security Act (1974), Expansions to Social Security (1950; 1954; 1956; 1961; 1962; 1965; 1972; 1977; 1983; 1990)
	Tax Reform	Revenue Act (1964), Economic Recovery Tax Act (1981)
Environment & Energy	Air Quality	Clean Air Act (1963), Motor Vehicle Pollution Control Act (1965)
	Energy	Atomic Energy Act (1954), Trans-Alaskan Pipeline (1973), Natural Gas Wellhead Decontrol Act (1989)
	Hazardous Waste	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (1976)
	Water Quality	Water Pollution Control Act (1948; 1972), Water Quality Act (1965; 1987)
	Wilderness Protection	Wilderness Act (1964), Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968), Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972), Endangered Species Act (1973), Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (1980)

Source: Light, Paul, “From Endeavor to Achievement and Back Again: Government’s Greatest Hits in Peril,” To Promote the General Welfare: The Case for Big Government. Steven Conn (Ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 173-196.

Table 1 (continued): Government’s Greatest Endeavors, 1945-1999

Domain	Classification	Defining Statutes (Prior to Year 2000)
Health	Consumer Protection	Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act (1962), Fair Packaging and Labeling Act (1966), Consumer Product Safety Act (1972)
	Healthcare for Older Americans	Medicare (1965), Catastrophic Health Insurance for the Aged (1988)
	Healthcare for the Uninsured	Medicaid (1965), Children’s Health Insurance Program (1997)
	Health Infrastructure	Hospital Survey and Construction Act (1946), Mental Retardation Facilities Construction Act (1963), Heart Disease, Cancer and Strokes Act Amendments (1965)
	Hunger and Nutrition	National School Lunch Act (1946), Food Stamp Act (1964), Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (1972)
	Preventive Health	Polio Vaccine Act (1955), National Cancer Act (1971)
	Safe Food and Drinking Water	Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (1947), Wholesome Meat Act (1967), Safe Drinking Water Act (1974)
	Workplace Safety	Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act (1969), Occupational Safety and Health Act (1970)
International Relations	International Development	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (1945), Act for International Development (1950), Peace Corps (1961)
	International Trade	Bretton-Woods Agreement Act (1945), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (1961), North American Free Trade Agreement (1993)
	Post-WWII Reconstruction	International Monetary Fund, NATO treaty (1949), Foreign Assistance Act (1948)
International Safety & Security	Arms Control	Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1963), SALT/ABM Treaty (1972), Intermediate Range Nuclear Force Treaty (1988)
	Cold War	Aid to Greece and Turkey (1947), Korean and Vietnam Wars, NATO (1949)
	Humanitarian Aid	United Nations Charter (1945), Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid (1986), Kosovo Intervention (1999)
	Middle East Stability	Gulf War (1991)
	National Defense	Department of Defense Reorganization Act (1958), Department of Defense Reorganization Act (1986), Authorization of tactical and strategic weapons systems
	Veterans of War	Serviceman’s Readjustment Act (1944), New GI Bill Continuation Act (1987)
Socioeconomic Issues	College Access	Higher Education Act (1965), Higher Education Amendments (1972)
	Home Ownership	Housing Act (1950), Housing Act (1959), Tax Reform Act (1986)
	Housing Development	Housing Act (1949), Housing and Community Development Act (1965; 1974)
	Immigration	Immigration and Nationality Act (1952), Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986), Immigration Act (1990)
	K-12 Education	National Defense Education Act (1958), Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), Head Start (1967)
	Poverty	Appalachian Regional Development Act (1965), Demonstration Cities Act (1966)
	Science and Technology	National Science Foundation Act (1950), Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (1958), Communications Satellite Act (1962)

Table 1 (continued): Government's Greatest Endeavors, 1945-1999

Domain	Classification	Defining Statutes (Prior to Year 2000)
Socioeconomic Issues (continued)	Space Exploration	National Aeronautics and Space Administration (1958), Apollo Mission Funding (1962), Manned Space Station Funding (1984)
	Transportation	Federal Airport Act (1946), Federal Aid to Highways Act (Interstate Highway System) (1956), Airport and Airways Development Act (1970), Urban Mass Transportation Act (1970), Rail Passenger Service Act (1970), Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (1991)
	Welfare	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (1996)
	Working Poor	Periodic Increases to the Minimum Wage (1968; 1981; 1990; 1997), Earned Income Tax Credit (1975), Family Support Act (1988)

Table 2: Progress on Government’s Greatest Endeavors, 2000-2012*

Domain	Classification	Defining Statutes Since Year 2000
Civil Rights & Civic Life	Campaign Reform	Federal Elections Law Reform (2000), Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (2002), Honest Leadership and Open Government Act (2007)
	Crime Control	Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (2005)
	Government Performance	E-Government Act (2002)
	Government Transparency	E-Government Act (2002)
	Public Discrimination	Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment (2008)
	Voting Rights	Help America Vote Act (2002)
	Workplace Discrimination	ADA Amendments Act (2008), Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act (2008), Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act (2009), Don’t Ask Don’t Tell Repeal (2010)
Domestic Economic Development	Agriculture	Farm Security and Rural Investment Act (2002), Food Conservation and Energy Act (2008)
	Budget Deficit	Increase the Public Debt Limit (2002; 2003; 2004; 2006; 2007; 2011)
	Deregulation	Leahy-Smith America Invents Act (2011)
	Disaster Preparedness	Disaster Mitigation Act (2000), Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Recovery from Terrorist Attacks on the United States (2001), SAFE Port Act (2005), Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (2006)
	Employment	Unemployment Insurance Extension (2008), Worker, Homeownership, and Business Assistance Act (2009), American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009), Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act (2010)
	Financial Regulation	Sarbanes-Oxley Act (2002), The Housing and Economic Recovery Act (2008), Emergency Economic Stabilization Act (2008), Truth in Lending Act Amendment (2009), Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (2010)
	Financial Security for Older Americans	Pension Protection Act (2006)
	Tax Reform	Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act (2001), American Jobs Creation Act (2004)
Environment & Energy	Energy	Energy Policy Act (2005), Tax Relief and Health Care Act (2006), Energy Independence and Security Act (2007)
	Wilderness Protection	Water Resources Development Act (2000), Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act (2007)
Health	Abortion	Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act (2003), Unborn Victims of Violence Act (2004), Fetus Farming Prohibition Act (2006)
	Consumer Protection	Food and Drug Administration Amendments Act (2007), Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (2009)
	Healthcare for Older Americans	Medicare Prescription Drug Improvement and Modernization Act (2003)
	Health Care for the Uninsured	Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (2010)

*Methodology: Defining statutes are those that are listed in the overview chapter of the U.S. Congressional Quarterly Almanac.

Table 2 (continued): Government’s Greatest Endeavors, 2000-2012

Domain	Classification	Defining Statutes Since Year 2000
Health (cont.)	Hunger and Nutrition	Food Conservation and Energy Act (2008)
	Preventive Health	United States Leadership against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Act (2003), Pandemic Flu and Medical Biodefense Countermeasure Liability Legislation (2005)
	Safe Food and Drinking Water	FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (2011)
International Economic Relations	International Trade	Act to Authorize Extension of Nondiscriminatory Treatment to the People’s Republic of China (2000), Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (2005), Free Trade Agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea (2011)
International Security and Safety	Arms Control	India Nuclear Pact (2006), New START (2011)
	Humanitarian Aid	Plan Colombia (2000)
	Middle East Stability	Authorization of Use of Military Force Against Iraq (2002)
	National Defense	Aviation Security Act (2001), Implementing the Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act (2007)
	Veterans of War	Veterans’ Benefits Improvement Act (2008)
	War on Terror	Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists Joint Resolution (2001), USA PATRIOT Act (2001), Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution (2002), Homeland Security Act (2002), Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (2004), Military Commissions Act (2006)
Socioeconomic Issues	College Access	College Cost Reduction and Access Act (2007), Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008), American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009)
	Home Ownership	Worker, Homeownership, and Business Assistance Act (2009)
	Immigration	American Competitiveness in the 21 st Century Act (2000), Secure Fence Act (2006)
	K-12 Education	No Child Left Behind Act (2002), Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act Rewrite (2004), Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act (2007)
	Poverty	New Market Venture Capital Initiative (2000), American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009)
	Transportation	Air Transportation Safety and Stabilization Act (2001), SAFETE Act (2005), Federal Rail Safety Improvements (2008)
	Working Poor	Minimum Wage Act (2007), Small Business Lending Fund (2010)

Table 3: Government has Made Strides on Key Social Indicators since 1960

Domain	Social Indicator	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2011
Civil Rights & Civic Life	Births to Unmarried Women Age 15-17 (per 1,000)	N/A	17.1	20.6	29.6	23.9	16.8	N/A
	Persons Volunteering (% age 16 and older)	N/A	N/A	N/A	20.4	N/A	26.3	26.8
Domestic Economic Development	Real GDP per Person (2005 dollars)	15,648	20,802	25,618	32,085	39,718	42,646	42,620
	Patents Issued to U.S. Residents (per 1,000 population)	42.3	50.6	41.7	56.1	103.6	132.5	131.9
Health	Life Expectancy at Birth (age)	69.7	70.8	73.7	75.4	76.8	78.7	78.7
	Infant Mortality (per 1,000 live births)	26	20	12.6	9.2	6.9	6.1	6.1
	Cigarette Smokers (% of age 18 and older)	N/A	39.2	32.7	25.3	23.1	19.3	19.0
Socioeconomic Issues	High School Graduates (% of age 25-34)	58.1	71.5	84.2	84.1	83.9	87.2	87.9
	College Graduates (% of age 25-34)	11.0	15.5	23.3	22.7	27.5	31.1	31.5
	Property Crimes (per 100,000 households)	N/A	N/A	49,610	34,890	19,043	12,542	13,871
	Murder Rate (per 100,000 persons)	5.1	7.9	10.2	9.4	5.5	4.8	4.7
	Safety Belt Use (%)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	71	85	84
	Highway Fatalities (total number)	36,399	52,627	51,091	44,599	41,945	32,999	32,367

Source: Office of Management and Budget. Performance and Management, Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2010.

Table 4: Top 50 Most Successful Government Endeavors, 1945-1999*

Classification	Year 2000 Success Rating
Post-WWII Reconstruction	82%
Voting Rights	61%
Transportation	40%
Cold War	36%
Public Discrimination	34%
Budget Deficit	33%
Veterans of War	29%
National Defense	26%
Healthcare for Older Americans	24%
Preventive Health	23%
Middle East Stability	21%
Financial Security for Older Americans	20%
Science and Technology	20%
Space Exploration	20%
Home Ownership	18%
College Access	15%
International Trade	15%
Safe Food and Drinking Water	14%
Deregulation	13%
Workplace Discrimination	13%
Agricultural Prices	11%
Consumer Protection	11%
Financial Regulation	11%
Hunger and Nutrition	11%
Water Quality	9%
Workplace Safety	9%
Air Quality	8%
Wilderness Protection	8%
Health Infrastructure	8%
Tax Reform	8%
Energy	5%
International Development	5%
Arms Control	4%
Devolution	4%
Health Care for the Uninsured	3%
Working Poor	3%
Crime Control	3%
Government Transparency	3%
Hazardous Waste	3%

*Methodology: A survey was mailed to 1,039 college and university professors, who were selected for their research interests in twentieth century American history or American politics. The survey asked respondents to rate a list of 50 endeavors on their relative successfulness, difficulty, and importance. Respondents were all members of the American Historical Association or American Political Science Association. The final response rate was 43%.

Table 4 (continued): Most Successful Government Endeavors, 1945-1999

Classification	Year 2000 Success Rating
Immigration	3%
Welfare	3%
K-12 Education	2%
Employment	2%
Government Performance	1%
Humanitarian Aid	1%
Poverty	<1%
Housing Development	0%

Table 5: Varying Levels of Public Interest in Government Breakdowns, 2000-2012*

Breakdown	Date	News Interest (Percent very + fairly interested)
September 11th	2001	96
Financial System Collapse	2008	92
Hurricane Katrina	2005	91
Gulf Oil Spill	2010	88
Wartime Contracting: Fraud, Waste, and Abuse	2003-2011	83
Columbia Shuttle Disaster	2003	82
Code-Orange Terrorism Alert Controversy	2004	81
Mine Accidents: Sago, Crandall Canyon, Massey	2006-2010	80
Minnesota Bridge Collapse	2007	80
USS Cole Bombing	2000	79
Fort Hood Shooting	2009	78
Failed Search for WMDs in Iraq	2004	76
Christmas Day Bomber	2009	73
Abu Ghraib and Enhanced Interrogation Techniques	2001-2004	71
Breakdowns in Food Safety	2006-2010	71
Flu Vaccine Shortage	2004	71
Benghazi	2012	67
Toxic Toys and the Year of the Recall	2007	67
Enron / Worldcom	2002	66
Wounded Warriors	2007	62
Madoff Ponzi Scheme	2008	60
Vioxx Scandal	2004	59
Pet Food Recall & Counterfeit Heparin	2007-2008	56
Shoe Bomber	2001	54
Los Alamos Security Breaches	2000	52
Secret Service Prostitution Scandal	2012	51
Southwest Airlines Groundings	2008	49

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Pew News Interest Index, Washington, D.C., 2013, <http://www.people-press.org/category/publications/weekly-news-interest-index/>.

***Methodology:** The News Interest Index is an ongoing project of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press which builds on the Center’s longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories and examines news interest as it relates to the news media’s agenda.

Table 5 (continued): Varying Levels of Public Interest in Government Breakdowns, 2000-2012*

Breakdown	Date	News Interest (very + fairly interested)
CIA Agent Leak (Valerie Plame)	2003	48
U.S. Attorney Firings Scandal	2007	48
Blackwater	2007	40
GSA Clown Conference	2010	39
Operation Fast & Furious	2011	37

Table 6: Overview of Government Breakdowns, 2000-2012

Breakdown	Agencies Involved	Description	Outcome
9/11	Department of Defense; Intelligence Community; Justice; State, Federal Aviation Administration	Al-Qaeda operatives hijacked four commercial airliners on September 11, 2001, and they crashed two into the World Trade Center twin towers and one into the Pentagon.	-Loss of 2,977 lives
Financial System Collapse	Treasury; Securities and Exchange Commission; Office of the Comptroller of the Currency; Federal Reserve; Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation; Commodity Futures Trading Commission; Office of Thrift Supervision	Mortgage lenders raced to make large numbers of risky loans to customers without proper checks, and then they securitized these loans to sell to financial consumers. Financial institutions started to have liquidity problems, as these assets were devalued, and the markets crashed as investors lost confidence.	-The Troubled Asset Relief Program is now estimated to cost taxpayers \$25 billion
Hurricane Katrina	Department of Homeland Security	A category 3 hurricane made landfall in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama on August 29, 2005. The storm surge from Katrina overtopped and breached the levees protecting New Orleans, leaving 80% of the city under water and many residents in need of emergency evacuation.	-Loss of at least 230 lives -Economic damage estimates exceed \$100 billion
Gulf Oil Spill	Minerals Management Service	On April 20, 2010, a methane explosion rocked the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform located off the Louisiana coast and continued leaking for 87 days before attempts to stop the leak succeeded.	-11 workers were killed -4.9 million barrels of oil leaked into the Gulf
Wartime Contracting	Department of Defense; State Department; United States Agency for International Development	The military relies heavily on contractors to carry out its missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, spending over \$200 billion a year.	-Between \$31 and \$60 billion lost due to waste and fraud by these contractors
Columbia Shuttle Disaster	National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)	The space shuttle Columbia, after completing its 16-day mission, disintegrated upon reentry into the Earth's atmosphere.	-All seven crew members died
Code Orange Terrorism Alert Controversy	Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	The DHS Secretary was pressured by high-level cabinet members to raise the threat level under the Homeland Security Advisory System to high in August of 2004, just days before the Democratic National Convention.	-Additional daily operational costs of federal agencies rose by between \$190 and \$3.7 million
Mine Accidents	Mine Safety and Health Administration	Three separate mines experienced explosions and collapses in 2006, 2007, and 2010.	-47 miners and three rescuers were killed between the three mines
Minnesota Bridge Collapse	Federal Highway Administration	On August 1, 2007, a portion of I-35W in Minneapolis, Minnesota, passing over the Mississippi River, suddenly collapsed during rush hour traffic.	-13 people died

Table 6 (continued): Overview of Government Breakdowns

Breakdown	Agencies Involved	Description	Outcome
USS Cole Bombing	Department of Defense	On October 12, 2000, two al-Qaeda suicide bombers crashed a boat filled with explosives into the side of the U.S.S. Cole, a guided-missile destroyer in the U.S. Navy.	-17 sailors died
Fort Hood Shooting	Federal Bureau of Investigations	On November 5, 2009, Army Major Nidal Hasan went on a shooting spree at the Fort Hood deployment center in Fort Hood, Texas, while shouting “Allah is great.”	-13 people were killed
Failed Search for WMDs In Iraq	Central Intelligence Agency	While making the case for the invasion of Iraq, the Bush Administration drew upon a series of intelligence reports that Iraq was acquiring capabilities to manufacture weapons of mass destruction, which turned out to be false.	-Miscalculation of threat that resulted in the invasion of Iraq
Christmas Day Bomber	Intelligence Community, State Department, Transportation Security Administration	On Christmas Day 2009, 23-year-old Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab attempted to detonate explosives that were sewn into his underwear during a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit, but the explosives failed to detonate properly.	-Led to concerns about air travel safety
Abu Ghraib and Enhanced Interrogation Techniques	Department of Defense (DOD); Federal Bureau of Investigations; Central Intelligence Agency	Military kept detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, where they were subjected to extremely brutal and humiliating treatment well beyond any standard of torture or enhanced interrogation techniques, which was only authorized for use in Guantanamo Bay.	-Five detainees died as a result of torture
Breakdowns in Food Safety	Food and Drug Administration; U.S. Department of Agriculture	The period of 2006-2010 saw many cases of food-borne illness, sometimes leading to huge recalls of food products, including beef, peanuts, peppers, and eggs.	-Five people died due to E. coli outbreak in 2006 -1,600 people were infected by Salmonella from egg farms in Iowa -Other cases of illness and death
Flu Vaccine Shortage	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	In October 2004, just as the flu season was getting underway, British regulators repealed the license of a major flu vaccine manufacturer because of bacterial contamination.	-Vaccines were limited to vulnerable groups, such as the ill and elderly, and these groups had to wait in long lines and were sometimes turned away
Benghazi	State Department	On September 11, 2012 a group that may have included al-Qaeda-linked terrorists attacked the U.S. Special Mission in Benghazi, Libya.	-Four Americans were killed, including the ambassador
Toxic Toys and the Year of the Recall	Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)	The most recalls in 10 years occurred in 2007, including the very public recall by Mattel because some of its children’s toys, including accessories for Barbie dolls, were found to contain lead paint. Over 80% of the recalls included products manufactured abroad.	-The CPSC issued a record 473 recalls of consumer products -\$80 million of lost goods due to recalls in fiscal year 2008

Table 6 (continued): Overview of Government Breakdowns

Breakdown	Agencies Involved	Description	Outcome
Enron/World-com	Securities and Exchange Commission; Federal Energy Regulatory Commission; Commodity Futures Trading Commission	Enron filed for bankruptcy on December 2, 2001, and at the heart of Enron's collapse was an elaborate accounting fraud perpetrated by Enron's top executives, whose power was unchecked by Enron's board of directors, auditors, credit agencies, and the public entities dedicated to ensuring market fairness.	-Thousands of people lost their jobs and retirement savings
Wounded Warriors	Department of Defense; Department of Veterans Affairs	A series of Washington Post articles exposed horrible living conditions and nightmarish bureaucracy occurring at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where over a fifth of the military's wounded are treated.	-The over 3,000 soldiers who were seriously injured while serving have found outpatient care to be bureaucratic and impossible to navigate
Madoff Ponzi Scheme	Securities and Exchange Commission	Bernard Madoff ran a Ponzi scheme from at least the early 1990s until finally confessing to the crime in December 2008.	-The fraud grew to \$65 billion, and his investors lost nearly all their money
Vioxx Scandal	Food and Drug Administration	Merck & Co., Inc., an American pharmaceutical company, sold their painkiller Vioxx for five and a half years while knowing for much of that time that the drug doubled the risk of cardiovascular problems in users.	-Between 88,000-140,000 users experience cardiovascular problems, with roughly half dying as a result
Pet Food Recall & Counterfeit Heparin	Food and Drug Administration	Economic adulteration, or the addition, substitution, or subtraction of key ingredients in a product to increase profits, resulted in a poisonous pet food being placed on the market, as well as an impure version of the blood-thinning drug heparin.	-9 cats died during trials and more customers reported losses of pets -81 people died from the counterfeit heparin
Shoe Bomber	Department of Defense; Intelligence Community; Transportation Security Administration	On December 22, 2001, Englishman Richard Reid boarded American Airlines Flight 63 from Paris to Miami and attempted to detonate explosives installed in his shoes, but he was detained by passengers and subdued until the flight landed.	-Drew attention to the poor aviation security measures in place, even after 9/11
Los Alamos Security Breaches	Department of Energy	The Los Alamos National Laboratory experienced a series of security lapses with national security implications, including the disappearance of two hard drives containing nuclear weapon designs and the downloading of sensitive nuclear information on to unsecure computer tapes.	-As much as \$1.3 million of property went missing in 2001 alone, with serious national security implications
Secret Service Prostitution Scandal	United States Secret Service	In April 2012, Secret Service personnel traveled to Colombia to prepare for President Obama's visit to the Summit of the Americas. While there, at least 11 of those personnel solicited prostitutes and hosted them in their rooms at the hotel where they were staying while preparing for the President's trip.	-Poor international image of the Secret Service, who broke the law while on official government business paid for with tax dollars

Table 6 (continued): Overview of Government Breakdowns

Breakdown	Agencies Involved	Description	Outcome
Southwest Airlines Groundings	Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)	In 2008, FAA uncovered safety issues including cracks in the planes' fuselages. Southwest had been knowingly flying these planes for weeks, violating federal regulations and putting passengers in danger.	-46 Southwest Airlines planes were grounded -Southwest paid a fine of \$7.5 million
U.S. Attorney Firings Scandal	U.S. Attorney's Office	Nine (out of 93 total) U.S. Attorneys were asked to resign from their positions in 2006 without warning and without explanation, and a subsequent Inspector General's report found that most of these attorneys were asked to resign from their jobs for partisan political reasons.	-Delays to the justice system
CIA Agent Leak (Valerie Plame)	Executive; State Department	Former ambassador Joseph Wilson was sent to Niger to determine the validity of a tip the CIA received that the Iraqi government was attempting to purchase uranium there. Wilson's trip did not corroborate this intelligence, but when he published an op-ed in the N.Y. Times detailing his findings, the Deputy Secretary of State leaked that Wilson's wife was an undercover CIA operative.	-Valerie Plame's career as a CIA operative was ended, and her work on counter proliferation issues was put in jeopardy
Blackwater	Department of Defense; State Department	The State Department and Coalition Provisional Authority hired Blackwater to provide protective services for U.S. officials in Iraq. Some military commanders reported that Blackwater's aggressive behavior was severely hurting U.S. interests and affecting the attitudes of the Iraqi population.	-Cost \$1.7 million between 2001-2007 -Blackwater employees were involved in 195 incidents involving military review, and were the first to fire in 84% of them
GSA Clown Conference	General Service Administration (GSA)	In October 2010, GSA held an exceedingly wasteful Western Regions Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, including numerous "scouting trips" by multiple GSA employees to Las Vegas hotels, a \$75,000 team-building program, and an angry clown.	-Cost the American tax payers \$820,000
Operation Fast & Furious	U.S. Attorney's Office; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF)	The ATF and U.S. Attorney's Office developed a joint plan, whereby they would not pursue enforcement action against the individual purchasers of weapons in hopes that this would lead to information helpful in building a case against the leaders of powerful Mexican drug cartels.	-U.S. Border Agent was murdered with one of these weapons -Only a few hundred of the 2,000 firearms that were allowed to walk into Mexican drug cartels were recovered

Table 7: Sources of Government Breakdowns, 2000-2012

Policy	Design	Was the policy appropriate to the task? [No clear red flags to policymakers]
	Vulnerability	Was the policy current? [Clear red flags to policymakers]
	Placement	Was the policy placed in a “high risk” agency?
Resource	Budget	Was there enough funding to do the job well?
	Human Capital	Were there enough employees to do the job well?
	Capacity	Was there enough other capacity [e.g., information technology, communications systems, basic material, surge capacity] to do the job well?
Structure	Chain of Command	Was there a clear chain of command between top and bottom of the agency? Did information and guidance move quickly up and down the chain?
	Contracting & Outsourcing	Did contracting and outsourcing of agency functions contribute to the breakdown? Was there effective oversight of contractor performance?
	Duplication & Overlap	Did multiple agencies share responsibility for implementation?
Leadership	Expertise	Were political and career leaders qualified to do their job?
	Effectiveness	Were political and career leaders negligent or incompetent in executing their duties?
	Vacancies & Delays	Were political and career selected effectively and moved into positions with reasonable speed?
Culture	Mission	Did the agency have a clear sense of mission? Was it divided between competing policy goals?
	Corruption	Did money or lobbying affect policy performance or success?
	Performance Management	Did the agency have clear goals, plans, and priorities? Were the results transparent?

Table 8: Sources of Government Breakdowns Chart, 2000-2012

Breakdown	Date(s)	News Interest (Percent Very + Fairly)	POLICY			RESOURCES			STRUCTURE			LEADERSHIP			CULTURE			TOTALS	
			Design	Vulnerability	Placement	Budget	Human Capital	Capacity	Chain of Command	Contracting & Outsourcing	Duplication & Overlap	Expertise	Effectiveness	Vacancies & Delays	Mission	Corruption	Performance Management	Factors Involved (Out of 15)	Categories Involved (Out of 5)
9/11	2001	96		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X		10	5	
Financial System Collapse	2008	92	X						X		X		X	X		6	4		
Hurricane Katrina	2005	91		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	12	5		
Gulf Oil Spill	2010	88		X		X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	9	5		
Wartime Contracting: Fraud, Waste, and Abuse	2003-2011	83		X		X	X	X		X	X		X		X	8	5		
Columbia Shuttle Disaster	2003	82			X	X		X	X			X		X	X	8	5		
Code-Orange Terrorism Alert Controversy	2004	81		X						X		X				3	3		
Mine Accidents: Sago, Crandall Canyon, Massey	2006-2010	80		X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X	X	9	5		
Minnesota Bridge Collapse	2007	80	X		X										X	3	2		
USS Cole Bombing	2000	79	X			X	X			X						4	3		
Fort Hood Shooting	2009	78		X				X								2	2		
Failed Search for WMDs in Iraq	2004	76			X			X		X		X			X	5	4		
Christmas Day Bomber	2009	73	X	X	X	X		X	X	X						7	3		
Abu Ghraib and Enhanced Interrogation Techniques	2001-2004	71		X		X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	9	5		
Breakdowns in Food Safety	2006-2010	71		X	X						X				X	4	3		
Flu Vaccine Shortage	2004	71		X				X			X					3	3		
Benghazi	2012	67			X	X	X	X	X	X		X				8	4		
Toxic Toys and the Year of the Recall	2007	67	X			X	X	X		X		X				6	4		
Enron / Worldcom	2002	66		X			X	X	X		X		X		X	7	4		
Wounded Warriors	2007	62		X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X			9	5		
Madoff Ponzi Scheme	2008	60		X	X		X	X	X					X	X	7	4		
Vioxx Scandal	2004	59		X	X	X	X	X	X			X			X	8	5		
Pet Food Recall & Counterfeit Heparin	2007-2008	56		X		X		X	X							4	3		
Shoe Bomber	2001	54		X	X		X	X	X	X		X				8	4		
Los Alamos Security Breaches	2000	52			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11	5		
Secret Service Prostitution Scandal	2012	51			X		X		X						X	4	4		
Southwest Airlines Groundings	2008	49	X			X						X		X	X	5	4		
U.S. Attorney Firings Scandal	2007	48		X								X		X	X	4	3		
CIA Agent Leak (Valerie Plame)	2003	48										X		X		2	2		
Blackwater	2007	40		X					X						X	3	3		
GSA Clown Conference	2010	39					X			X		X			X	4	4		
Operation Fast & Furious	2011	37	X	X				X		X		X		X	X	7	4		
Factor Totals:			7	20	15	15	17	19	18	10	17	3	18	4	13	5	18		
Category Totals:			42			51			45			25			36			Average: 6.2	Average: 3.9