



## Introduction to the Policy Agendas Project

This memo introduces the University of Washington's Center for American Politics and Public Policy's Policy Agendas Project, its data sets and data tools, and the Center's fellows programs.

The Policy Agendas Project (PAP) is an online data resource center available to the public that allows users to trace, graph, and download policy change in the U.S. since the Second World War. Policymaking activity in each data set is coded according to the same policy content coding system, making it possible to compare the policy processes over five decades.

Common uses of the PAP data sets include studying institutions and processes by conducting unique analyses in a stand-alone fashion; using data sets as indices for source materials (CIS, CQ Almanac, etc.); and, identifying trends to supplement case studies on specific subtopics using textual descriptions and keyword searches.

The Topics Codebook and the Committees Codebook are the two common codebooks that apply to multiple datasets. The Topics codebook details the major topic and subtopic policy codes found in all the core datasets, excluding the Budgets data set. The major topics and subtopics are the main feature tying all the Policy Agendas Project data sets together. There are 19 major topics and 225 subtopics and each of the topics and subtopics are assigned a unique number. The Committees Codebook explains the meaning of the committee and subcommittee codes in the Hearings, CQ Almanac, and Public Laws data sets. These codes identify the congressional committees that are associated with a particular record in each of the datasets and each committee is assigned a unique number. Each data set also has its own codebook detailing the variables within.

## Data Sets

*"Core" data sets include Congressional Hearings, Congressional Quarterly Almanac, Public Laws, New York Times Index, and Budget.*

*Congressional Hearings* This data set contains information summarizing U.S. Congressional Hearings from 1946 through 2004, currently with 81,959 records. Using the Congressional Information Service's (CIS) Annual Abstracts, each hearing is coded using the Topics Codebook major topics and subtopics. Other key variables include a source identifier, and the committee(s) and subcommittee(s) corresponding to each hearing.

*Congressional Quarterly (CQ) Almanac* This data set contains information from all articles in the main chapters of the CQ Almanac from 1948 through 2002, currently with 13,603 records. CQ articles typically cover one legislative initiative, although some articles can span multiple related initiatives. Each record is coded using the major topic and subtopic policy content codes found in the Topics Codebook. Other key variables include bill numbers, public law number, and if applicable, committee and sponsor information.

*Public Laws* This data set contains information from the CQ Almanac about each public law passed from 1948 through 2004, currently with 18,499 records. Each record is coded using the major topic and subtopic policy content codes found in the Topics Codebook. PAP provides a dynamic



link to the full text (104<sup>th</sup>-108<sup>th</sup> Congresses) and bill summaries (93<sup>rd</sup>-108<sup>th</sup> Congresses) of public laws through THOMAS and other public domain websites. This data set also provides the “most important laws” from 1948 through 1998, as identified based on CQ lines per story (with adjustments).

*New York Times Index* This data set contains a systematic random sample of all New York Times Index summaries from 1946 through 2003, currently with 44,344 records. Articles are coded using a modified major topics scheme from the Topics Codebook.

*Budget* This data set contains annual data, in current and fiscal year dollars, from the U.S. Budget Authority from fiscal year 1947 through 2004, currently with 6,670 records. This data set is coded using modified Office of Management and Budget functions (20) and subfunctions (76) to be consistent over time.

*“New” data sets include the Congressional Bills Project, Gallup’s Most Important Problem, Executive Orders, and State of the Union Speeches.*

*Congressional Bills Project* This data set contains information on all public and private bills introduced from 1947 through 2000, currently approaching over 400,000 records. Each bill is coded using the major topic and subtopic policy content codes found in the Topics Codebook. Other key variables include sponsor, committee(s) and subcommittee(s) information, and Poole and Rosenthal’s ICPSR member ID to merge information about bill content and progress with sponsor information, including institutional position and biographical data.

*Gallup’s Most Important Problem* This data set contains all responses from Gallup’s Most Important Problem Survey from 1947 through 2004, currently with over 4,000 records. The data is available in both annual and quarterly formats. Survey responses are coded using the major topic and subtopic policy content codes found in the Topics Codebook, with the addition of one major topic code (25) for “Don’t Know” or “Other.” Only annual data may be accessed through the web-based data tools at this time.

*Executive Orders* This data set contains information on each executive order issued from 1945 through 2001, currently with over 4,000 records. Each order is retrieved from the Code of Federal Regulations and National Archives and Records Administration website and is coded using the major topic and subtopic policy content codes found in the Topics Codebook. Other key variables include whether the order was issued in a time of divided government, and whether the order was issued at the beginning or end of a presidential term.

*State of the Union Speeches* This data set contains information on each quasi-statement in the Presidential State of the Union Speeches from 1946 through 2005, currently with 18,839 records. The official text is coded using the major topic and subtopic policy content codes found in the Topics Codebook. Other key variables include whether the president delivered the speech is outgoing, and whether the speech was given in a time of divided government. PAP provides a dynamic link to the full text of each speech.



*“Newest” data set is Supreme Court Cases*

*Supreme Court Cases* Based on Harold J. Spaeth’s “The Original U.S. Supreme Court Judicial Database,” this data set is one of the most comprehensive of its kind. This data set tracks the policy agenda of the Supreme Court from 1953 to 1998, currently with over 8,960 records. Cases are coded using the major topic and subtopic policy content codes found in the Topics Codebook. This data set was created with the intent of answering agenda-setting questions of the U.S. Supreme Court.

## **Data Tools**

*Policy Analysis Tool* This web-based tool allows users to chart and analyze policy trends over time. Users can analyze attention to different policy topics across venues, utilizing the tool's access to all of the Policy Agendas Projects' data sets. In addition, several of the data sets include filters which if selected will narrow your search. These filters are not mutually exclusive and records can be selected based on any number of characteristics. A tutorial is available to introduce users to the Policy Analysis Tool and its chart-making capabilities.

*Budget Trends and Budget Distributions Tools* Both web-based tools enable users to graph budget trends over time. The Budget Trends Tool charts the budget and budget changes in fiscal year 2004 and current dollars for the total budget and its functions. The Budget Distributions Tool charts the percent of the total budget that each function and subfunction comprises, allowing comparisons of budget priorities over time. A tutorial is available to introduce users to both tools.

*Mixed Policy and Budget Tool* This web-based tool allows users to track policy trends from our core data sets and the budget authority data set simultaneously. PAP provides a budget-policy crosswalk so that users may compare the policy topic codes with budget functions and subfunctions. A tutorial is available to introduce users to this tool and its chart-making capabilities.

## **Fellows Program**

*Undergraduate Fellows Program* The Center for American Politics and Public Policy provides undergraduates with the opportunity to conduct research side-by-side with professors. Many undergraduate fellows are trained to code PAP data sets and often utilize PAP's data sets in the design and completion of their required independent research project, which is showcased annually in the UW Undergraduate Research Symposium.

*Graduate Fellows Program* One of the Center's objectives in seeking outside support has been to support promising public policy and American politics graduate students financially, in order to facilitate their development as nationally recognized researchers. Our students are participating in national conferences and training programs; they are passing their qualifying exams with distinction; and the quality of their work is being acknowledged through the award of nationally competitive fellowships, and peer-reviewed publications.



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August 29, 2006