**Policy Attention in State and Nation: Is Anyone
Listening to the Laboratories of Democracy?**

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Abstract

Do patterns of policy attention at the state level influence agenda setting in Washington over the short term? We examine this question by first developing a series of hypotheses about such linkages. We test these conjectures with a data set pooling measures of policy attention at the national and state levels for several years and several policy areas. We find little evidence that changes in state policy agendas in the aggregate influence national patterns of policy attention.

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Federal systems provide ample opportunities for their policy systems to interact. Indeed, perhaps

Morton Grodzins' (1966) most significant contribution to the study of federalism was his observation that

federal systems behave as a structure with many cracks. When policy is impeded or opposed at one level,

it readily flows to another. But these policy systems can support each other as well, providing examples

of policy successes to be emulated and policy failures to be avoided, a process that has led to the literature

on vertical policy diffusion (Karch 2007; Shipan and Volden 2006; Daley and Garand 2005; Tews,

Busch, and Jorgens 2003; Hecht 2001; Mossberger 1999; Boeckelman1992). But much of this prior work

focused on specific policy areas with somewhat mixed results. So that questions remain, especially about

processes of vertical influences within federal systems. For example, before *policy solutions* can diffuse,

policy attention at one level of government must be synchronized with that of another. A broader view

across multiple policy areas may help to reconcile some of these mixed findings. We know little that is

systematic about such processes of shared policy attention across levels of the federal system, especially

in terms of how these separate agenda processes influence each other over the short term. Recently,

however, Baumgartner, Gray, and Lowery (forthcoming 2009) examined how policy attention across a

range of issues as measured by Congressional hearings influence the policy agenda process in the states as

captured by patterns of bill introductions across those same policy areas. They found strong if complex

and varied links over the very short-term, suggesting that the national agenda setting process has

considerable influence on state agenda processes.

Their finding raises the obvious question of whether this direction of influence is reciprocated.

That is, do patterns of policy attention at the state level then, in the aggregate, influence agenda setting in

Washington over the short term? We examine this question by first developing – based on Baumgartner,

Gray, and Lowery's (2009) analysis – a series of hypotheses about such linkages. We then test these

conjectures with a data set pooling measures of policy attention at the national and state level for several

years and several policy areas. Our findings indicate a marked lack of reciprocity. That is, we find little evidence that changes in state policy agendas in the aggregate influence national patterns of policy attention. We discuss the implications of these findings in the final section of the paper.

State Influence on the National Agenda

Let us start with the null hypothesis that state policy activity and the content of the Congressional hearing agenda may well be unrelated to each other. Or rather, given the findings by Baumgartner, Gray, and Lowery (2009) that national attention to issues does influence policy activity in the states, the relevant null hypothesis is that the converse may not be true. Certainly, despite ever more rapid diffusion of policy innovations, not all states focus on the same issues at the same time (Gray et al. 2005). Thus, it is not obvious that the states as whole might influence the national policy agenda in a systematic manner. And even if state agendas moved together in lockstep, much of what attracts the attention of state legislators may well not be what concerns their national counterparts. This would be especially true for a number of issues that are mainly influenced by national policy or on the other hand mainly by state policy. State attention to corrections policy, for example, may be partly related to federal concerns, but the states are the primary force behind corrections policy whereas the federal role is very limited. The reverse is true with regard to other policies of broader national concern, such as nuclear proliferation. Thus, different policy areas of concern to the states feature more or less involvement of the federal government. This might well suggest that, at best, we should expect a more limited impact of state policy activities on the distribution of federal attention to issues in those areas where the states play relatively little role. And last, given Baumgartner and Jones' (1993) punctuated equilibrium model, legislative agendas are quite sticky, changing only periodically and with some difficulty. If so, then it is not clear that the national policy agenda would respond in anything close to a contemporaneous manner to activity at the state level. For example, the collapse of President Clinton's national health care proposal in 1994 arguably did lead to greater state attention to health care, but this developed rather slowly over several years as the realization that the national government was, at least for a time, out of the health care game

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(Gray, Lowery, and Godwin 2007a; 2007b). *In sum, there are plenty of good reasons to not expect to find a strong relationship between levels of state policy attention and such attention at the national level.*

Still, such a tight coupling remains plausible. At the most simple, artifactual level, national and state legislators are politicians who have strong incentives to respond to constituent needs. More to the point, they share the same constituents. Thus, national and state policy agendas might well appear to be coupled as these politicians independently pursue their electoral interests. More substantively, state and national attention to specific policies is hardly segmented in a classic layer cake fashion (Grodzins 1966). Many presumptively state issues – including regulation of heath maintenance organizations (HMOs), the death penalty, abortion, and even the fate of Terry Schiavo – have been the focus of Congressional attention. Federal actions or inactions on all of these issues take place alongside independent state activity. Such independent actions at one level of the federal system may well influence the other. The Defense of Marriage Act of 1996, for example, was both plausibly influence by earlier state activity on this topic and then DOMA influenced subsequent state legislation. And, at least in terms of the impact of federal activity on state policy agendas, these influences can occur rather quickly. Baumgartner, Gray, and Lowery (2009) report that variations in federal policy attention as measured by numbers of Congressional hearings on a topic had a measurable impact on state policy attention as captured by bill introductions on those topics both contemporaneously and with a one-year lag. Thus, it seems reasonable to expect that a similar pattern of influence – but operating in the other direction of the state-federal system – might operate. Indeed, several such patterns are possible.

The first is a simple <u>contemporaneous effect</u> alluded to above with both levels of government struggling simultaneously with a common policy disturbance. In this view, legislative agendas at all levels reflect less each other than real policy issues facing society. Several mechanisms might plausibly insure such a common pattern of response to policy problems. Truman (1951, 511), for example, identified the locus of interest mobilization as disturbances in society. Organized interests engage in political activity to secure redress for these disturbances. More to the point, it is not obvious that

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organized interests seek such redress at different levels of government in a purely sequential fashion. Moreover, legislative entrepreneurs at all levels of government have powerful electoral incentives to monitor their constituents' concerns (Wawro 2000; Weissert 1991; Mintrom 1997). Political parties at all levels win elections by finding issues on which to campaign (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). *If legislators, parties, and organized interests at all governmental levels respond swiftly to the same disturbances in society, then we should see the content of legislative agendas at both the national and the state level changing in a contemporaneous and non-causal manner reflecting the public's concerns.*

A second possible form of linkage is as a <u>substitution effect</u>. In this case, policies are pursued in different venues provided by our federal structure of government in a sequential fashion. This idea was noted by Truman (1951: 323) and further developed, as noted earlier, by Grodzins (1966), who argued that the federal systems can be viewed as a structure with many cracks through which influence may be exercised. Patterns of influence impeded at one level may find opportunities for influence at another.[1] Indeed, state officials often frame their attention to problems as a response to federal inaction. Thus, in justifying his state's more rigorous than average environmental laws, former California Governor Gray Davis (2002) noted that, "The federal government and Congress, by failing to ratify the Kyoto treaty on global warming, have missed their opportunity to do the right thing. So it is left to California, the nation's most populous state and the world's fifth largest economy, to take the lead." Similar responses by the states have been noted in regard to state attention to health policy following the failure of President's Clinton's comprehensive health care proposal in 1994 (Gray, Lowery, and Godwin 2007a; 2007b; Gray, Lowery, Godwin, and Monogan 2005). The best current example is immigration where in reaction to Congress's failure to act in 2007, 1562 immigration-related bills were introduced in the 50

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[1] A harsh form of substitution is *preemption*—when federal action precludes state action on an issue. A good health care example occurred in 1974 when Congress enacted the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), which preempts state laws that "relate to" employee benefit programs (including health plans) unless such laws are part of the traditional state function of regulating insurance. The 1996 DOMA arguably attempted preemption as well in the face of state actions and proposed actions on gay marriage, although less successfully. We do not examine this form of substitution further since it is top-down.

state legislatures in 2007; 240 of them were enacted into law (www.ncsl.com). The number of bill introductions and enactments continued at the same pace in the first half of 2008.

The inverse may be true as well, although examples are perhaps more difficult to identify. One classic example is civil rights where the national government addressed the issue only after the states failed to do so. Nathan (1990) argues that there is an ideological direction to the swing of the federalism pendulum: during liberal periods when society as a whole favors governmental action in a new field or of a new kind, proponents will find it more efficient to concentrate their energy on achieving policy change at the center. But when there is diminished support for governmental action in the society during conservative periods, proponents are likely to be most successful in those states where there happens, for whatever reason, to be support for such action. Thus states will move into policy areas as the national government moves out or does not take the initiative, such as with the environment or immigration.

A third and we think more typical relationship between Congressional and state legislative activity is a stimulation effect reflecting many of the examples we noted earlier. Activity in Washington will necessarily stimulate state law making in those situations, such as the "No Child Left Behind Act," where federal acts have significant consequences for state laws and regulations. The inverse, of course, represents the more classic interpretation of the states as policy laboratories. From adoption of the income tax to regulatory policies, states have often taken the lead in attention to emerging or ongoing policy issues. Such a linkage may better reflect a diffusion of legislative entrepreneurship, where national legislators see that there is electoral hay to be made in following a path already trail-blazed by the states. National interest organizations and party entrepreneurs may mobilize for similar reasons, learning from watching their colleagues in the states. A classic example is the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 which contained the TANF welfare reforms that had percolated up from the states. In the 1980s many states had experimented with "workfare, "learn fare," etc within the AFDC program, and their experiences provided some of the substance of the new federal program and even more important, the political legitimation for stricter policies overall, according to Hecht (2001, 23). Her

analysis showed that nearly 60 percent of states' welfare experiments between 1978 and 1996 were later picked up by the national government (Hecht, 2001, 102). Other scholars place the federal government's receptivity to state policy ideas in the socialization experiences members of Congress had early in their careers. Representatives often served earlier in state legislatures where they internalized state-level policy agendas; once in Congress they bring these ideas to the table, and thus the Congressional agenda comes to look more like the states' (Beckman 1993). In either cases of policy emulation (the stimulation effect) or interests seeking redress at another governmental level (the substitution effect), *legislative activity at the state level may have a strong effect on the pattern of attention to issues at the national level.*

Exploring the State-National Agenda Connection

Design and Data

Examining these hypotheses is difficult given our need to measure both federal policy agendas and the policy agendas of the 50 states over time. Quite simply, generating time series data on the latter is an extremely time-intensive activity. To address this problem, we employ two existing data sets on, respectively, Congressional and state agenda setting in a pooled cross-sectional, time series research design, thereby producing a data set on policy attention to a smaller number of policy topics over a relatively short set of years. These pooled data are described below.

The *dependent variable* in the analysis is change in national policy attention, which we measure by numbers of Congressional hearings from the Policy Agendas Project (www.policyagendas.org), a now standard measure of Washington policy attention (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005). The Policy Agendas Project categorizes hearings into 226 distinct subtopics. To match this data to the measure of state policy attention, as discussed below and presented in Baumgartner, Gray, and Lowery (2009), this data was reorganized into 12 policy areas with clear matches with the state data on policy attention, to be discussed below. In other cases there were a number of policy areas coded by the Policy Agendas Project with no clear match to the categories in our measure of state policy attention. These were necessarily excluded from the analysis. In still other cases, the level of analysis in the state

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data was not as deep or refined as those in the federal data. And finally, the state policy codes simply grouped policies somewhat differently. The latter two situations necessitated combining the national hearings data in new ways. In the end, there were 12 matches between the reorganized Congressional hearings data and the measure of state policy attention. Our Congressional hearings data include, then, information on numbers of hearings on agriculture, banking and finance, communications, education, local government, law, health, insurance, natural resources, transportation, utilities and energy, and welfare. As seen in figure 1, the 12 policy areas vary markedly in terms of number of hearings held on the topics, from only a handful on insurance to more than a hundred in some years on health care.[2]

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

More specifically, we examine proportional changes in the number of Congressional hearings on these12 issues over several years for which comparable state data were available. The years vary somewhat across our analysis given the availability of data on both independent and dependent variables. But on the dependent variables, we examine changes in number of hearings in 1995-1996, 1996-1997, 1997-1998, 1998-1999, and 1999-2000. Given the use of lagged values in the full model, only three sets of change scores are used in our most complete specifications, giving a pooled N of 36 (12 policy areas over three years). In other specifications, the fuller 48 sets of change scores are used (12 policy areas over four years). We have already noted the significant variation in hearings across the 12 topic areas in figure 1. Even more importantly given our attention to percentage changes in number of hearings from one year to the next, figure 1 also suggests that there is more than sufficient variation from year to year within the policy areas to evaluate policy change. That is, the 12 policy topics do not show a common pattern of change across even the few years of hearings we examine, with perhaps the exception of fewer hearings in election years. Indeed, the simple correlation of the pooled 1996-1997, 1997-98, 1998-99, and 1999-2000 proportional change scores with their lagged values is only -0.254, with the negative value of the coefficient reflecting the cycle of Congressional hearings over the election cycle.

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[2] See Baumgartner, Gray, and Lowery (2009) for a fuller discussion of the matching procedure.

The key *independent variable* is change in aggregate attention to the 12 different policy domains

across all 50 states. Our measure is provided by Gray, Lowery, Fellowes, and Anderson (2005), which

builds on the bill count strategy pioneered by Bowling and Ferguson (2001).[3] That is, we measure policy

attention by either the total number of bills on the 12 topics introduced in the state legislatures in each

year from 1995 through 1999 or the number of bill introductions weighted by state size. We will discuss

the latter more fully below. But in either case, change in state attention is measured by the proportional

change in the total number of bills from 1995 to 1996, 1996 to 1997, 1997 to 1998, and 1998 to 1999.[4]

As seen in figure 2, there is considerable variation in policy activity across the 12 topics and

across years within topics. In terms of the former, it should be noted that the patterns of high and low

policy attention in figure 2 for the states only partially map those reported for Congressional hearings in

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[3] Several measures of state agendas were considered. Ferguson (1996) measured the governor's legislative agenda in all 50 states through a content analysis of the 1994 "state of the state" speeches. Fording, Woods, and Prince (2002) analyzed thirty-seven 1999 "state of the state" speeches, identifying nine different policy initiatives pursued by governors. Perhaps the measure best matching our needs is Gerald Wright's collection of roll call data for all 7,424 legislators between 1999-2000 (Wright and Winburn 2002). While each of these measures of legislative agendas has virtues, our analysis requires a measure of legislative activity in many different issue areas, a level of specificity that is not reached by extant measures. Further, we required a measure of the entire state legislative agenda, and not only bills of high priority to governors or those with roll calls.

[4] The bill count data was collected from the "State Full Text of Bills" database on Nexis Academic Universe, a database is maintained by LexisNexis, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc, and is available at http://www. nexis.com. The database contains bill text files for all bills considered by each statehouse in a calendar year and provides a separate listing for each revised version of a bill in the database. For example, Alabama House Bill 175, which appropriated $4,564,831 to the Department of Public Health in 1997, was listed five times in the database: one entry was the introductory version, three were revisions, and the fifth was the enacted bill. In most cases, we used their search terms to code the number of times that a state bill was considered with content germane to each guild's interests. In some cases, however, additional subject or topic search terms were created when the provided search terms did not include a term corresponding with our guild topics. The banking guild, for example, includes both banks and real estate organizations. In such cases, multiple search terms were employed to tap this diversity. The search terms for the 12 guilds were as follows, with the search terms in parentheses: Agriculture (agriculture), Bank (banking and finance, real estate), Communications (media, telecommunications), Education (education), Health (health), Insurance (insurance), Law (legal), Government (local municipality, public employees, police, fire), Resources (gas, oil, minerals), Transportation (highways, transit, airports), Utilities (utilities), and Welfare (social services, charities). Two issues concerning our measure of the size of the policy agenda facing each interest guild deserve further comment. First, we do not believe that the search terms provide a comprehensive count of all of the bills the several guilds attend to as they lobby state legislators. Rather, the measure is designed to tap variations in legislative activity across states and across guilds. After reviewing the issue counts, we are quite confident that they tap this variation. States with extensive natural resources, for example, generated much higher bill counts than those without oil, natural gas, or mining industries. Second, as noted earlier, some bills are counted more than once if they were revised as they moved through the legislative process. Rather than a drawback, we view this aspect of the coding scheme as quite appropriate for our purpose. That is, policy attention should be heightened as bills proceed further on the road toward becoming law. Our coding scheme taps this greater attention.

figure 1. Health policy, for example, has drawn a great deal of attention at both the national and state

level over this period. In contrast, insurance generated very few Congressional hearings, but it has been

the second most active area of bill introductions in the states. And while law has attracted considerable

attention at the national level, it was one of the quieter areas in the states in terms of bill introductions.

More relevant for our purpose, there seem to be few secular trends in the data reported in figure 2 with

the possible exception being the somewhat lower bill counts in the first year of the time series, something

we will address below.[5] There is some periodicity in our ultimate independent variable. That is, the

simple correlation of the pooled 1995-1996, 1996-1997, 1997-1998, and 1998-1999 proportional change

scores with their lagged values is -0.533. This does not seem to reflect the fact that many state

legislatures are either biennial or run only shortened sessions every other year. That is, examining the bill

count data indicates that bill introductions continue in all legislatures over both years of the legislative

cycle. Rather, we believe that this periodicity reflects the same electoral cycle found in the Congressional

hearings data. More importantly, the correlation of -0.533 is sufficiently low as to ensure us plenty of

variation in changes of attention even across our very short time series.

<center>(Insert Figure 2 about here)</center>

To this point, our measure of state policy attention might well be criticized because it is a simple

aggregate of all bill introductions in the states. It weights all states equally. A bill introduced in the Iowa

Legislature counts as much as one introduced in the California Assembly. This is not entirely implausible

given that all states have two U.S. Senators who might pay attention to what their state lawmakers are

doing. Further, in the age of the Internets, good ideas can be rather quickly found anywhere using

Google. Indeed, some smaller states have proven especially innovative – such as Vermont and Maine on

health policy. Still, there are also plausible reasons to expect – given our earlier discussion – that not all

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[5] We are concerned about the 1995 bill count data: its low totals raise the question of whether Lexis/Nexis was getting truly reliable counts this far back. We address this concern by including year dummies in the main model and estimating several models excluding the suspect 1995 data. The problem also highlights, however, one of the difficulties in extending this analysis further in the past.

states will be equal. That is, if legislative entrepreneurship is what matters in the diffusion of attention, then we might expect that policy activity in states with more House members in Washington might be more influential and more likely to vertically diffuse policy ideas if they are attentive to what is happening in their own states. But it might be even more than simple number of legislators. That is, the better developed media market of a larger state like New York might more readily trumpet news about New York state policy activity that piques the interest of a legislator from Utah than his or her own more limited media market does about policy activity in the Utah legislature.

For both reasons, we also employ a weighted bill count indicator that is multiplied by 1997 state Gross State Product in 100 billions. The values for this weighted indicator are reported in figure 3. The broad pattern of attention appears to be quite similar to that reported for the unweighted bill count measure in figure 2 when we attend to the 12 broad topic areas. Indeed, the simple correlation between the weighted and unweighted measure is 0.992. But a substantial part of this high correlation is a function of the significant differences between the several topical groups of annual measures. Thus, all of the proportional changes in health bill introductions are greater than those for natural resources. Considerably more variation is observed when looking at the correlations between the weighted and unweighted measures. That is, while most are above 0.900, the correlations for insurance (0.419), health (0.673), and government (0.764) point to considerably weaker relationships. Indeed, the correlation between the two measures for law bill introductions was -0.074. For this reason, we use both measures. Finally, the simple correlation of the pooled 1995-1996, 1996-1997, 1997-1998, and 1998-1999 weighted proportional change scores in legislative bill introductions with their lagged values is -0.492. Again, we should have sufficient variation in changes of attention over our short time series.

(Insert Figure 3 about here)

To this point, our model includes only one variable – if in a weighted and unweighted form – to explain variation in the proportional change in Congressional hearings. But, based on similar analyses of how Congressional policy attention influences state attention to issues over the short term (Baumgartner,

Gray, and Lowery, 2009), this one variable should be able to tell us a great deal about how short-term changes in state policy agendas influence those at the national level. Most importantly, we include our proportional change in total state bill count variable in the model in both its contemporary and lagged form. If the estimate of the contemporary value of change in state policy attention generates a positive value, this would indicate that both the states and the Congress are responding to pressures for more or less policy attention in the same manner at the same time. This would provide, thus, support for the contemporaneous effect hypothesis. In contrast, none of the hypotheses would lead us to expect a negative estimate for the contemporaneous measure of change in state policy attention. It would not, for example, be indicative of a substitution effect since some time would need to pass in which states failed to respond to some pressure or opportunity for policy change before federal activity could be viewed as a compensatory response. Thus, we use a one-tailed test of this hypothesis.

Inclusion of the lagged value of change in the proportional attention to policy in the states allows us, in contrast, to distinguish the substitution effect and stimulation effect hypotheses. If the estimate of the lagged value is negative, this would suggest that a weakening of state attention to an issue in one year leads to more attention to it in Congress in the following year. Or, more attention to the issue in the states in one year may signal that Congress does not need to be so attentive to it in the following year. This result would support the substitution effect hypothesis; national and state attention to policy issues are replacements for each other. In contrast, a positive value for the lagged measure of change in state attention would provide support for perhaps the most common expectation about the link between federal and state policy processes – the stimulation effect hypothesis. Here, activity in the states would signal to members of Congress that it would be political useful to follow suit or perhaps even to preempt state activity. Given these competing expectations, we employ a two-tailed test for the lagged measure.

We include, of course, several other variables in the model as general controls. First, the lagged nominal value of Congressional hearings is included as a control for ceiling or floor effects in the rate of change in policy attention. That is, the value of a given proportional change in hearings on a given topic

may differ depending on whether there are already few or many such hearings. And we have seen some evidence of periodicity in both the national and state measures of change in policy attention. This is potentially troubling because it could bias our results toward finding a relationship between the two. We also saw (see note 4) that the 1995 observations on bill counts tend to be systematically lower than those for later years. To control for this as well as the artifactual synchronicity associated with the electoral cycle, we include a set of year dummies in the estimating models. Finally in terms of the specification, given the relative skimpiness of the specification in terms of substantive variables, we employ a set of dummies for 11 of the 12 topics as general controls for their unknown difference that might influence the results on our substantive variables. When both set of dummies are added, our pooled model is estimated via LSDV regression. We do not present, however, the results for either set of dummies given their lack of substantive relation to our core hypotheses about the linkage of national and state policy agendas. We also do not include measures of party control of the Presidency or Congress since the GOP was in charge of the latter and the Democrats the former during all of the years we examine. Finally, the model is estimated using robust standard errors clustered on the 12 policy topics.

Findings

The LSDV regression results for the models including the unweighted and weighted proportional change in bill measures of policy attention are presented in tables 1 and 2, respectively. Given their striking similarity, however, they can be discussed together. Across all of the models, the lagged nominal value of number of Congressional hearings produces uniformly negative estimates that are discernibly different from zero in six of the eight models. This, suggests that proportional change in number of hearings is smaller (larger) when there are already large (fewer) numbers. Thus, there is some suggestion of a ceiling/floor effect. Sill, this effect is not especially strong since significant estimates are discernible at only the 0.10 level, a relaxed criterion we employ given the relatively few degrees of freedom.

(Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here)

Turning to our central concerns, the models provide almost no support for any of our substantive

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hypotheses.[6] Model one in each of the tables reports the results for models including both the

contemporary proportional change in bill counts and its lagged value. These models are estimated with

the 36 cases representing change in Congressional hearings from 1996-1997, 1997-98 and 1998-1999, the

cases for which we have complete data given inclusion of the lagged value of proportional change in state

policy attention. In model 1 of both tables, the estimate for the proportional change in state policy

attention are positive, which hints, respectively, at both a contemporaneous and stimulation effect. But

neither is statistically significant at even our relaxed criterion levels. This may be in part a function of

collinearity, although we have seen that the simple correlation of proportional change in state policy

attention and its lagged value is not especially high ($r = -0.533$ for the unweighted measure and -0.492 for

the weighted measure). Still, the 36 cases provide very few degrees of freedom. Thus, the results

reported in columns two and three of both tables exclude one or the other of the state policy attention

variables. Further, given exclusion of one of the other variables, the results in column two and three

include more cases. In column two in both tables, with the inclusion of 12 more cases from 1995-1996,

proportional change in state bills generated the expected positive estimate, but neither is significant. And

in column three of both tables, with the inclusion of 12 other cases from 1999-2000, proportional change

in state bills also generated positive, but no significant, estimates. As a check to see if our inclusion of

the additional cases in models 2 and 3 influenced the results, models 3 and 4 of each table re-estimate

them with the original 36 cases used to estimate the full models in both tables. While the estimates for

the lagged value of proportional change in model 5 in both tables switches sign, they are again not

significant. In short, we have failed to find evidence supportive of any of our substantive hypotheses.

Conclusion

By default, our failure to find support for the substantive hypotheses lends support to the null

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[6] We also examined a number of models that, following Baumgartner, Gray, and Lowery (2009), interact each
measure of state-level policy attention with a variable measuring whether the policy area involved considerable
federal involvement with state policy through funding or regulation. These more extended set of results also failed
to generate any evidence in support of our substantive hypotheses.

expectation. But as noted in our discussion of the null hypothesis, there are good substantive reasons to expect that policy attention in the states in the aggregate will have little direct impact on patterns of policy attention at the national level over the short-term. Perhaps most importantly, while federal funding and regulatory activity insure that the national government can exercise influence over the policy making in the states, the obverse is not nearly so clear. The states can rarely compel the national government to pay attention to issues that concern them or to avoid dealing with issues that they wish to keep under the rug. In this sense, the failure to find evidence of either a substitution or stimulation effect running from the states to the national government comparable to the one found by Baumgartner, Gray, and Lowery (2009) running in the other direction is perhaps understandable. At the same time, however, our null results agree with elements of their findings. While they found that the national agenda has numerous and quite complex impacts on the states' attention to issues, they did not find that that Congressional hearings had a contemporaneous positive response on state bill introductions. Our results also indicate that this perhaps most common expectation of democratic polities – that both national and state legislators would respond to common problems at the same time – may not be valid. To a considerable degree, state and national legislatures still have their own policy agendas and their own policy cycles. More generally, we do not think that our null findings result from our policy attention measures or because of our attention to short-term influences. Baumgartner, Gray, and Lowery (2009) certainly demonstrated such linkages, excepting the contemporaneous effect just noted, with similar data when the causal arrow was reversed.

These results matter, we think, because we have an interest in such powerful metaphors as "laboratories of democracy" and such important literatures as that on vertical policy diffusion. Both focus on specific policy solutions that are picked up from one government by another. But attention to such specific policy solutions presumes a prior diffusion of policy attention. Someone must have already perceived a problem for which he or she must find a solution. Our results suggest that, at least over the short term, there is little transfer of policy attention from the states to the national government. This does not mean of course that the national government does not learn from the states. We have too many

examples ranging from the income tax to zero based budgeting to suggest that. And clearly, it would be useful to extend our analysis to a longer-term consideration of linkages between patterns of policy attention. But over the short term, patterns of policy attention in the states have far less impact on policy attention at the national level than the reverse. The laboratories of democracy may be churning out issues and policies, but it is far from clear that anyone in Washington is listening.

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Figure 1: Congressional Hearings by Topic,1997-2000

Health
- 92
- 101
- 98
- 126
- 130

Insurance
- 4
- 3
- 2
- 1
- 1

Bank
- 24
- 26
- 28
- 29
- 24

Government
- 117
- 95
- 55
- 79
- 68

Education
- 39
- 73
- 42
- 76
- 38

Transportation
- 59
- 68
- 56
- 61
- 63

Communications
- 17
- 51
- 55
- 97
- 44

Welfare
- 42
- 29
- 37
- 54
- 41

Utilities
- 8
- 11
- 7
- 14
- 7

Agriculture
- 50
- 40
- 35
- 69
- 43

Law
- 73
- 79
- 52
- 85
- 76

Resources
- 12
- 5
- 6
- 18
- 35

Number Congressional Hearings

■ 2000 ■ 1999 ■ 1998 □ 1997 □ 1996

20
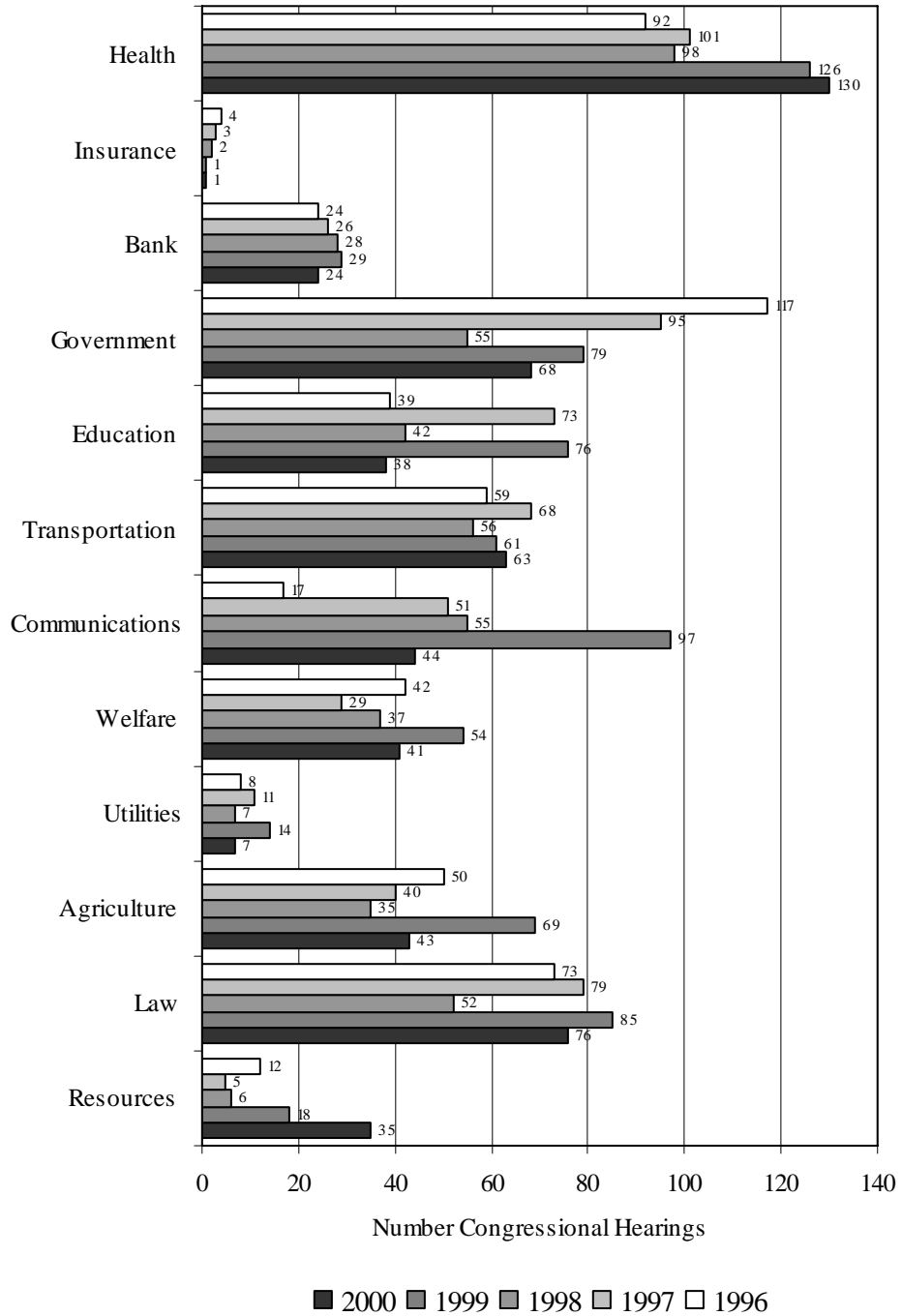
Figure 2: State Bill Count Number by Topic, 1995-1999

Health
6713
15475
14490
13905
10738

Insurance
7195
14216
12847
13461
10645

Bank
6065
10758
11839
11071
9915

Government
3938
8374
5926
7123
6755

Education
2006
5122
5355
3955
3423

Transportation
1473
3660
5497
3431
2784

Communications
1270
3621
296
2400
2305

Welfare
1417
3414
7008
3087
2428

Utilities
1703
3389
3372
2813
2797

Agriculture
826
2101
2336
1683
1549

Law
184
292
258
305
249

Resources
89
209
192
166
159

Bill Count Number

■ 1999 ■ 1998 ■ 1997 □ 1996 □ 1995

21

Figure 3: Weighted State Bill Count by Topic,1995-1999

Health
25547
32841
42669
37658
45297

Insurance
27462
29915
38480
31470
40129

Bank
23876
34491
32031
36065
29418

Government
15204
25690
21238
23493
25860

Education
7888
12120
11915
18048
14709

Transportation
5030
8360
8953
17093
9500

Communications
4605
7783
6472
848
9821

Welfare
4722
7715
8871
23896
9254

Utilities
7515
11297
8621
11276
9763

Agriculture
2648
4587
4777
7099
5788

Law
772
948
579
638
782

Resources
252
529
393
511
635

Bill Count Number

■ 1999 ■ 1998 ■ 1997 □ 1996 □ 1995
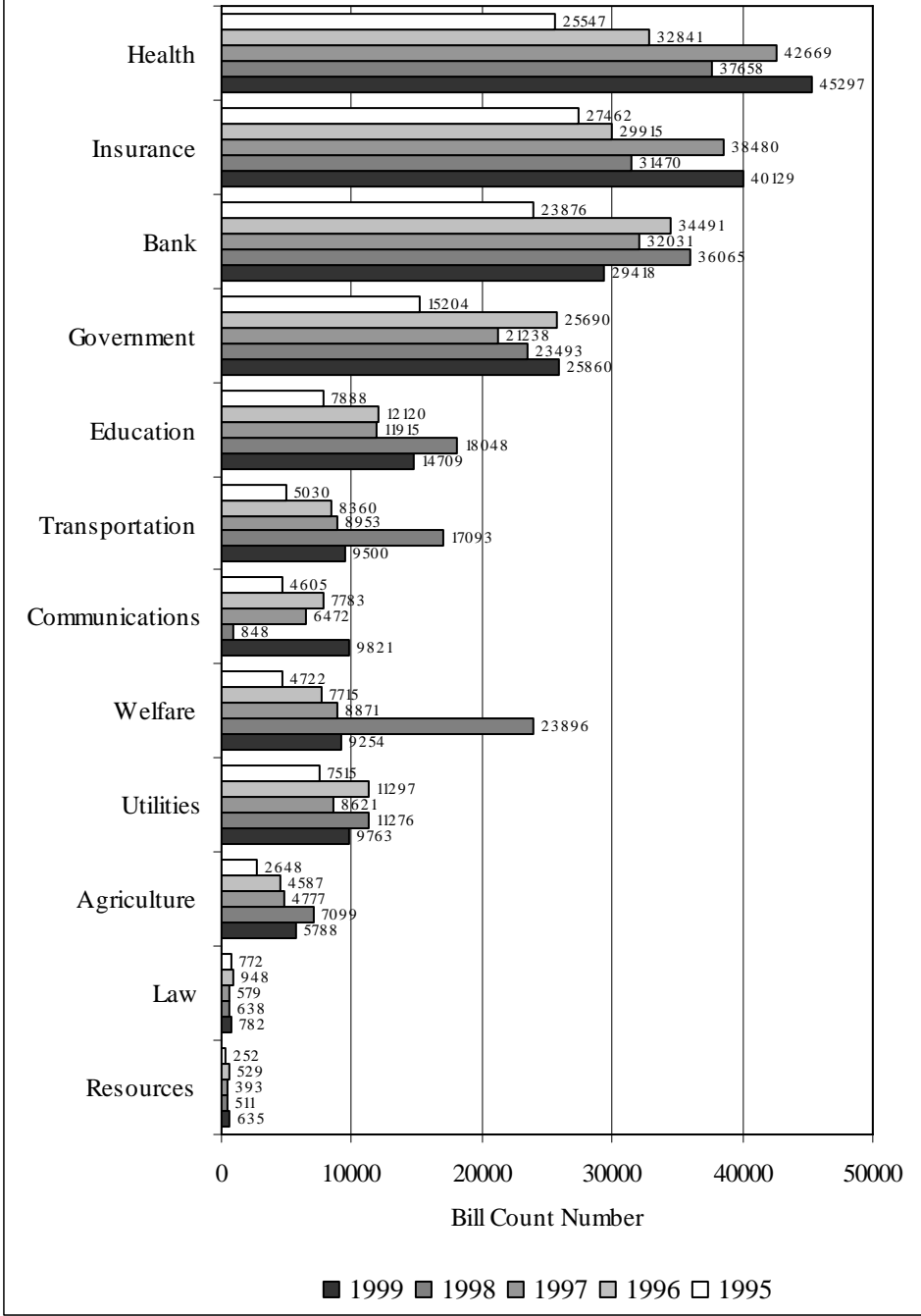
Table 1: Pooled LSDV Regression Analysis of State Determinants of Changes
in Congressional Hearings with Unweighted Measure of State Policy Attention

Independent	Dependent Variable: Pct. Change in Hearings by Subject				
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model3	Model 4	Model 5
Number of	-0.064 #	-0.029	-0.048 #	-0.061 #	-0.058 #
Hearings t-1	-1.530	-1.310	-1.470	-1.530	-1.500
Pct. Change in State	0.154	0.054	--	0.087	--
Bill Introductions t	1.070	0.920		1.000	
Pct. Change in State	0.601	--	0.091	--	-0.142
Bill Introduction t-1	0.730		0.780		-0.180
Constant	1.767	1.513	2.040	2.105	2.349
R-Square	0.621	0.455	0.552	0.616	0.606
N	36	48	48	36	36

*=$p<0.10$, **=$p<0.05$, ***=$p<0.01$, two-tailed tests; '#=$p<0.10$, ##=$p<0.05$, ###=$p<0.01$, one-tailed tests; figures under the coefficients are t-values estimated with robust standard errors clustered on 12 topic areas; the models were estimated with a full set of year and topic area dummies, the estimates of which are not reported.

Table 2: Pooled LSDV Regression Analysis of State Determinants of Changes
in Congressional Hearings with Weighted Measure of State Policy Attention

Independent	Dependent Variable: Pct. Change in Hearings by Subject				
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model3	Model 4	Model 5
Number of	-0.061 #	-0.029	-0.048 #	-0.061 #	-0.059 #
Hearings t-1	-1.490	-1.320	-1.460	-1.530	-1.520
Pct. Change in Weighted	0.079	0.064	--	0.096	--
State Bill Introduction t	0.690	1.010		0.091	
Pct. Change in Weighted	-0.127	--	0.085	--	-0.376
State Bill Introduction t	-0.180		0.073		-0.610
Constant	2.046	0.935	2.017	1.988	2.622
R-Square	0.618	0.456	0.550	0.617	0.613
N	36	48	48	36	36

*=$p<0.10$, **=$p<0.05$, ***=$p<0.01$, two-tailed tests; '#=$p<0.10$, ##=$p<0.05$, ###=$p<0.01$, one-tailed tests; figures under the coefficients are t-values estimated with robust standard errors clustered on 12 topic areas; the models were estimated with a full set of year and topic area dummies, the estimates of which are not reported.