3-1-2023

Institutional Design and Policy Responsiveness in US States

Scott J. LaCombe
Smith College, slacombe@smith.edu

Recommended Citation

Article

Institutional Design and Policy Responsiveness in US States

Scott J. LaCombe[1]

Abstract

There is significant disagreement on the moderating role of institutions on policy responsive- ness, yet overwhelmingly research in state politics has focused on single institutions. This project leverages a new aggregate scale of state institutions to evaluate if the collective insti- tutional context moderates the influence of public opinion on policy. I use a recently released latent scale of institutional context and find that high levels of accountability pressure strongly strengthen public opinion's influence on policy for both economic and social policy, while the strength of a state's checks and balance system is largely unrelated to policy responsiveness. These results demonstrate the importance of incorporating aggregate institutional design into our under- standing of the role of institutions in state politics, and that collectively institutions play a large role in determining how public opinion is translated into policy.

Questions of policy responsiveness are central evaluating democratic governance, as few would call a system demo- cratic if policy was completely unrelated to public prefer- ences. In the American context, there is a significant body of research documenting a correlation between public opinion and policy (Erikson et al., 1993; Caughey & Warshaw, 2018; Soroka & Wlezien, 2010; Pacheco, 2013), but a robust debate on whether responsiveness is largely constrained to responding to the preferences of the wealthy (Gilens, 2012), or that any re- sponsiveness is largely an artifact of the voting based on partisan identity, not policy preferences (Achen et al., 2017). This debate has lead to increased research on the conditions when state policy is more (or less) responsive to public preferences.

There has been extensive research on whether institutions can affect the ways in which govern- ments respond to public opinion (Gerber, 1996; Matsusaka, 2010; Lax & Phillips, 2012; Maestas, 2000; Pacheco, 2013), but the evidence is decidedly mixed with some finding that certain institu- tions can moderate this relationship, and others finding no effect. The focus on specific institutional reforms, while important, cannot evaluate how institutions fit together and influence state politics. Individual institutions may have small effects that are difficult to consistently capture empirically, and in- stitutions may have multiple effects that cancel each other out. An indicator or single scale may be unable to identify more complex institutional effects.

I propose scholars also use aggregate institutional mea- sures to understand the role of *insti- tutional context* in state politics. This approach mirrors comparative research that argues single institutions are necessary but insufficient alone in measuring latent concepts such as democracy (Treier & Jackman, 2008). A latent scale of institutions along shared dimensions can incorpo- rate overlapping effects that insti- tutions may share, and a dynamic measure of institutional context reflects the time-varying nature of institutional de- sign. I argue this approach can help scholars understand the largely unknown collective effect of institutions at the state level.

I use a recently published measure of state institutional context along two primary dimensions (LaCombe, 2021). The first dimension, accountability pressure, represents measures the extent to which states have institutions that either incentivize responding to the median voter or provide resources for state actors to learn about public opinion, in- cluding an easy to use initiative process, high levels of legislative professionalism, and relatively strict campaign finance rules. The second dimension, checks and balances, measures the extent to which a state has power separated into different branches of government versus concentrated in a single, powerful branch. While there are clear reasons to

[1]Smith College, Northampton, MA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Scott J. LaCombe, Smith College, 201 Wright Hall, Northampton, MA 01063-0001, USA.
Email: lacombe129@gmail.com

believe that higher levels of accountability pressure will strengthen public opinion's influence on policy, there are less clear expectations of the role of checks and balances. When the checks and balance system is strong, policy is harder to change, meaning it could lock in a representative status quo, or make it harder to change policy to put it back in line with public opinion. By incorporating both dimensions into a single model of policy responsiveness, scholars can more completely account for a state's institutional configuration.

I demonstrate the value of these scores through an application using data from Caughey and Warshaw (2018), and unlike the original analysis I find evidence that institutions have a large moderating effect on public opinion's association with policy on both social and economic policy. Regardless of institutional context, states are at least somewhat responsive to social liberalism, whereas only states with relatively high levels of accountability pressure respond to public preferences on economic policy. When states have chosen a series of institutions designed to increase accountability, public opinion has more than twice the influence on policy compared to states that lack this institutional context. On the other hand, there is no evidence that the checks and balance system plays a role in strengthening or weakening responsiveness. This is the most comprehensive test yet of the theoretical expectations from both institutional dimensions, and the results contribute to a growing body of evidence that there are meaningful effects from a states institutional context that single institution study may be unable to identify.

Scholars should consider incorporating institutional design into our models of state politics. By organizing institutions along their anticipated effects (rather than measuring them by a single indi- cator or scale), one can more clearly distinguish cases by which institutions do and do not influence state policy. A more comprehensive measure of state institutional context groups institutions by their anticipated effects, while also allowing for those with multiple, differing effects, to be orga- nized along multiple dimensions. Lastly, this project evaluates the net effect of state institutions to demonstrate their collective influence on state policies. Researchers should consider at minimum including measures to control for institutional context, and with further efforts to replicate existing institutional modeling approaches, scholars may be able to gain a clearer understanding of the role of institutions in a variety of state political outcomes.

Policy Responsiveness

There is a long tradition of measuring how public opinion is translated into policy at the state, national, and cross-national level (Miller & Stokes, 1963; Burstein, 2003; Lupia et al., 2010; Bartels, 1991; Wlezien, 1996; Soroka & Wlezien, 2010). Research on policy responsiveness in US states has found that there is an association between public opinion and policy, although there are significant disagreements over who the government is responding to and the direction of the

relationship. Some argue that political elites are merely responding to wealthy and organized interests (Gilens, 2012; Page & Gilens, 2017; Bartels, 2018), and that any relationship between public opinion and policy is coincidental. Others contend that the public largely lacks defined opinions, and the direction between public opinion and policy should be reversed. Rather than the public pushing for preferred policies, policy drives attitudes (Hill & Hurley, 1999; Manza & Cook, 2002). Despite these disagreements, research has generally found that states with more liberal populations have more liberal policies on average (Erikson et al., 1993; Lax & Phillips, 2012; Caughey & Warshaw, 2018). Much of this work has turned to institutions to understand the conditions in which policy is more or less responsive to public preferences.

Mediating Role of Institutions

One of the primary reasons institutions are expected to influence responsiveness is that they structure the quantity and quality of information available to policymakers about public prefer- ences. Before the 1960s, policymakers had little polling data which forced them to rely on election results to determine if they were in line with public opinion (Geer, 1996), which are poor indicators of support or opposition towards specific policies (Kingdon, 1967; Broockman & Skovron, 2018).

This poor information environment results in local party elites from both parties overestimating the conservatism of their constituents, which can lead them to be more supporting of ideologically extreme candidates (Broockman et al., 2021). Numerous institutions have been created over the last century to help overcome informational deficiencies to give policymakers more accurate informa- tion about public opinion. For example, the ballot initiative provide information to officeholders if they are out of step with voters (Matsusaka, 2018; Kogan, 2016; Bowler & Donovan, 2004), and highly professionalized legislatures have more resources to learn about public opinion (Squire, 1992; Pacheco, 2013). The higher quality the information, the better governing actors are able to respond to public opinion.

Institutions also can affect the types of candidates that run for office, and in the case of direct democracy, change the policies that a state adopts. Rules governing campaign finance laws struc- ture incentives for candidates to moderate or cater to ideological extremes.[1] Individual campaign donations tend to be driven more by ideology, whereas when parties play a stronger role in the nomination process candidates tend to be less polarized as they converge near the center of the ideological spectrum to maximize election prospects (Barber, 2016; La Raja & Schaffner, 2015). Additionally, both the direct and indirect effect of the ballot initiative can force legislators to adopt policies they otherwise would not because the public can use the "gun behind the door" to force shifts in policy (Gerber, 1996; Matsusaka, 2001).

Institutions structure the ease of moving the status quo. If a system is so rigid that the status quo cannot change, then it will be unable to change policy in response to changing public opinion. In the US context some have argued that negative agenda control is so powerful that they system is defined by stasis, with occasional shocks to the system forcing movement in the status quo (Baumgartner & Jones, 2010). Systems with more institutional veto points respond more slowly to changes in public opinion because they need a higher critical mass of actors to move the status quo (Henisz, 2004).

Despite a rich literature in the politics of American states evaluating specific institutions, far less attention has been paid to the collective effect of institutions on policy responsiveness. Some institutions may have an additive effect on policy responsiveness, while others may counter balance each other. While there are clear reasons to evaluate individual institutions, researchers should also take a collective approach to understand the total effect of institutions on policy responsiveness. If institutional design was measured by including separate measures of ten or twenty institutions, not only would the model lose degrees of freedom, but scholars would be assuming that institu- tions have a independent effects on responsiveness to public opinion. A latent variable approach acknowledges that many of these institutions have overlapping effects on state politics.

Furthermore, this approach can allow for measuring multiple dimensions of institutional design (Lijphart, 1999; Coppedge, Alvarez and Maldonado 2008), meaning that researchers can model multiple, distinct effects that institutions may have. For example, the ballot initiative is expected to push policy closer to the median voter (Matsusaka, 2018), but also changes the gridlock interval for policy change (Boehmke, Osborn and Schilling 2015) leading to changes in the rate at which states adopt policies (LaCombe & Boehmke, 2021). Similarly, professionalized legislatures can learn more about constituent opinion and become more responsive (Maestas, 2003), and also have more resources to check gubernatorial action (Boushey & McGrath, 2017). These two theorized effects may play different roles in moderating public opinion's effect on policy. By measuring institutional context along multiple dimensions, scholars are able to parse out the multiple theorized effects of institutions.

There is a comparative literature that evaluates differences in institutional context, such as the extent to which a democracy is designed to be a majoritarian versus consensus oriented system (Lijphart, 1999). Responsiveness scholars recognize that the institutional context structures incentives for politicians to learn about and respond to public opinion (Kang & Powell, 2010; Amenta, Caren and Olasky 2005), and have identified important differences in how consensus vs majoritar- ian systems respond to the public (Wlezien & Soroka, 2012). Despite smaller levels of variation, there are important differences in how states organize their policy making institutions. Roughly half of the states have ballot

initiatives (and term limits), and legislatures vary considerably in professionalism, ranging from full-time, well staffed legislatures that meet year round, to other legislatures than only have legislative sessions lasting a few weeks every other year (Squire, 1992). Over time, states have seen substantial changes in campaign finance rules, term limits, legislative professionalism, and many other factors. An aggregate measure can better mirror the dynamic nature of institutional design as states change their institutional configurations over time. I use recently published measures from LaCombe (2021) that include two primary dimensions of state institutions. The first, accountability pressure, is a measure of how institutions structure the ability of politicians to receive information about public preferences. The second dimension, checks and balances, measures the extent to which power is divided across multiple branches of government. Both measures were generated from a Mixed Bayesian Factor Analysis (Quinn, 2004) and measure all 50 states from 1975-2015.[2] The measures are normally distributed with a mean of zero and are publicly available. I next overview how each dimension is expected to fit into a model of policy responsiveness.

Accountability Pressure

The first dimension, accountability pressure, incorporates both how institutions structure the types of candidates that run for office and the quantity and quality of information about public preferences available to governing actors. The institutions that load the most on this dimension regulate elections, include campaign finance limits, voter registration laws, and direct democracy.

For example, laws that restrict the ability of organized interests such as parties and political action committees may increase polarization as they reduce the ability for pragmatic interests to support moderate candidates, which in turn increases the relative influence of more ideologically driven activists (La Raja & Schaffner, 2015; Barber, 2016; Hassell, 2018). Although Broockman et al. (2021) find that local party leaders prefer extreme candidates over moderates, they attribute this to the lack of "organizational and informational resources" available to local leaders compared to state and federal party officials. The lack of information about constituent preferences leads to local elites to misperceive constituent ideology and thus misjudge the ideology/electability trade- off. A richer information environment about public preferences, which higher levels of accountability pressure are theorized to generate (LaCombe, 2021), could lead to local leaders operating more strategically with respect to candidate ideology. This dynamic highlights the importance of studying institutions collectively rather than independently. Absent institutions that facilitate learning about constituent preferences, such as the ballot initiative (Kogan, 2016) or legislative pro- fessionalism (Pacheco,

2013), parties may be less likely to act as a moderating force. However, when accountability pressure is high elites have better informational resources to judge public opinion.

Limitations on individual campaign limits may decrease polarization as individuals tend to be more ideologically or issue oriented than access-seeking interests. Donations send important signals to candidates about their bases of support and the incentives for candidates to polarize or moderate on the campaign trail. While there is evidence that campaign finance limits may strengthen the incumbency advantage, states high in accountability pressure also tend to have term limits, which increase legislative turnover and prevent incumbents from remaining in the same office for more than a few terms (Moncrief, Niemi and Powell 2004).

Term limits also shift the incentive structure for state legislators and the types of candidates that run for office (Lewis, 2012), although the expectations are less clear when it comes to term limits and government accountability. There is a robust debate over whether term limits are expected to improve or harm policy representation. Some argue that term limits reduce the value of running for office, make it more difficult for legislators to gain expertise and learn about public opinion, and eliminate the electoral connection for term limited office holders (Kousser, 2005; Clark & Williams, 2014), leading to less responsive policies. Additionally, term limits have been found to increase polarization (Olson & Rogowski, 2020; Masket & Shor, 2015), leading to fears of term limits leading to leapfrog representation (Bafumi & Herron, 2010). However, there has been less attention given to the role of term limits in representation and responsiveness. When scholars incorporate both public opinion and policy in the same model, there is less evidence that term limits hamper representation. Wright (2007) uses roll call votes and finds no evidence that term limits result in legislators becoming less representative of constituent views, and Butcher and Kim (2021) find that the reduction of the incumbency advantage provides an avenue for strengthening the electoral connection by making it easier for challengers to run and win. In perhaps the most comprehensive evaluation to date, Lax and Phillips (2012) find across dozens of policies that states with term limits have higher levels of opinion-policy congruence. These findings highlight that institutions often have multiple, counterbalancing effects, but the research to date suggest that the net effect of increased turnover and reduction of the incumbency advantage is enough to override the polarizing effect of term limits. Further complicating the expectations is that there is evidence that term limits are only found in states with the ballot initiative, meaning that even if the electoral connection is weaker for term limited candidates, they also face the prospect of being overridden by voters if they are out of step.[3] The lack of certainty around the role of term limits highlights the advantage of taking a collective institutional approach, while also incorporating high levels of correlation across institutions.

States high in accountability pressure have an easy to use initiative process and highly profes- sionalized legislatures. While citizen legislators must rely largely on their intuition to understand district preferences legislators with staffers can accommodate more constituent interactions, and staff can aid legislators with determining what the public prefers (Squire, 1992; Maestas, 2000; Pacheco, 2013). Not only do initiatives allow voters to directly pass preferred legislation, but they also provide important information to politicians about public preferences (Gerber, 1996; Matsusaka, 2001; Kogan, 2016). With more accurate information about preferences, elites are predicted to strategically alter their positioning to maximize their chances of reelection. If they fail to match public preferences, voters also have opportunities to override state policy through direct democ-racy.

In sum, states that have institutional configurations rated high in accountability pressure tend to be states that incentivize the election of ideologically moderate candidates through their campaign finance system, and also provide ways for officeholders to receive accurate information about public preferences. Importantly, states high in this dimension tend to have all of these institutions, and states low in this dimension generally lack them. Evaluating a single institution may attribute the collective effect of an institutional configuration to a single institution. LaCombe (2021) finds that accountability pressure predicts policy congruence across nearly 40 policies in a replication of Lax and Phillips (2012), but these models are only from a single year. Extending this analysis to a model of responsiveness can leverage the extensive cross-sectional time-series variation in institutional configuration. Incorporating time varying dynamics will allow for a more thorough investigation of the role of institutional design across states and time, and across different types of policies.

Public opinion should have a greater influence on policy in states high in accountability pres- sure for a number of reasons. Institutions that loads strongly onto this dimension decreases the influence of narrow interests and refocuses incentives to learning about and responding to the aver- age voter. Additionally, states high in accountability pressure have rules that facilitate the election of ideologically moderate candidates, and institutions such as the initiative that can correct the sta- tus quo if it deviates from the median voter's preferences. For states low in accountability pressure, low professionalized legislatures are expected to have less information about public preferences, and rules governing elections incentivize ideologically extreme candidates to run for office, and there is no institution such as the initiative to move the status quo back to the median voter.

Hypothesis 1: High levels of accountability pressure will increase the influence of public opinion on policy.

A potential barrier to accountability and responsiveness at the sub-national level is the typical voter pays so little attention to state politics that they are unable to hold representatives accountable because they are unaware of what their legislator supports/opposes (Rogers, 2017). Despite this barrier, there is significant evidence of a strong correlation between public opinion and policy at the state level.[4] Erikson et al. (1993) suggest that even if voters are unaware of their specific representative's behavior, they do have heuristics of partisanship and perceptions of state party extremity to guide vote choice. If responsiveness is collective rather than dyadic, then the state voting population in the aggregate may be able to hold elites accountable by the group of engaged voters changing their behavior and opinion in response to events (Page & Shapiro, 2010). Taking an aggregate approach to both opinion and policy outputs requires less assumptions about voter sophistication and engagement. Although this project is unable to resolve Tausanovitch's (2019) puzzle of responsiveness, identifying which institutional contexts are related to more responsive policy is a step closer to understanding how institutional resources change elite policy-making behavior.

Checks and Balances

The second dimension, checks and balances, measures the extent to which power is divided among separate branches of government. The largest contributors to this dimension include ballot initiatives (which empower voters), legislative professionalism (which empowers the legislature), as well as gubernatorial power and high veto override requirements (which empower the executive branch). States high in checks and balances have stronger veto actors that can develop their own policy solutions and veto those of other branches. When there are more actors with the ability to stop policy change, the probability of policy change decreases (Tsebelis, 2002). When checks and balances is high, it should be harder to move the status quo because more actors have the power to stop policy change. Changes to the status quo will also likely require a larger critical mass of policymakers to override veto points, meaning that it may be difficult to move policy dramatically without risking a veto actor preventing any movement (Krehbiel, 2010). This measure is negatively correlated with Boehmke and Skinner's (2012) policy innovativeness measure indicating that states with a strong checks and balance system adopt new policies more slowly and are somewhat less likely to innovate.

I therefore expect high levels of checks and balances to somewhat weaken the relationship between public opinion and policy. While LaCombe (2021) finds no relationship between levels of the checks and balance system and policy congruence, the expectations for policy responsiveness are somewhat different because responsiveness is a dynamic process. Systems with strong checks and balances by design are more resistant to shocks to the system, including changes in public opinion. So, systems high in checks and balances will respond more slowly to changes in public opinion because larger coalitions must be assembled to move policy. Policy may move closer to public preferences eventually, but changes may be blocked by veto actors. Public opinion may still influence policy, but changes will be smaller and slower.

> **Hypothesis 2:** High levels of checks and balances will weaken the influence of public opinion on policy.

Data and Methods

To test my hypotheses I use data and the same research design as Caughey and Warshaw (2018) which estimate both social and economic policy responsiveness in US states. Due to data lim- itations on both institutional measures, the time coverage (reduced to 1976–2015) and variables included (such as a measure for pre-1972) differ slightly from Caughey and Warshaw's (2018) original models, but use the same modeling approach (two-way fixed effects regression) and include the same lags for both opinion and policy.[5] These data provide a comprehensive way to measure both public opinion and policy across many policies, and their research design provides a clear, direct way to evaluate how findings change when differing institutions are measured.

The first set of model measures policy responsiveness, and the second set estimate dynamic policy responsiveness by including lagged policy liberalism.[6] The authors find that public opinion does influence policy in models of responsiveness and dynamic responsiveness, but that individ- ual institutions have little to no moderating effect on public opinion's influence on policy. I use the same model specifications, a linear regression with fixed effects for state and year to control for state or year specific shocks that cannot be modeled.[7] Standard errors are also clustered by state. Just as in the original analysis, the only control included is a lagged measure of unified Democratic control, and the institutional measures described above will replace the institutional interactions in the models. Unlike the original analysis, additional specifications are included with controls for state income per capita, state population, and the percent of the population that is black (Grossmann et al., 2021) to test if institutional effects are sensitive to potential confounding factors. I estimate four parallel sets of models, one for responsiveness without controls, dynamic responsiveness without controls, and both models with controls for social and economic policy liberalism.

The dependent variables are measures of policy liberalism on economic and social scales.[8] The measures of policy liberalism are developed by Caughey and Warshaw (2018). These measures include dynamic estimates for economic and social policy liberalism in the states from the 1930s to 2014. High values indicate state-year observations that have relatively liberal policies, and negative values signify states with relatively conservative policies. This over

Table 1. Modeling Social Policy Liberalism in the States.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lagged Policy Liberalism		0.9144*(0.0130)		0.9111* (0.0131)
Public Liberalism	0.6455* (0.1462)	0.0680* (0.0200)	0.5718* (0.1368)	0.0531* (0.0183)
Public Liberalism × Accountability Pressure	0.1018* (0.0588)	0.0125* (0.0064)	0.0778 (0.0527)	0.0134* (0.0062)
Accountability Pressure	−0.0363 (0.0836)	−0.0135 (0.0117)	−0.0534 (0.0833)	−0.0103 (0.0127)
Checks and Balances	−0.0388 (0.0807)	−0.0145 (0.0116)	−0.0595 (0.0852)	−0.0123 (0.0134)
Public Liberalism × Checks and Balances	0.0165 (0.0733)	0.0027 (0.0110)	0.0038 (0.0704)	0.0044 (0.0101)
L.Unified Democratic Control	0.0871*(0.0400)	0.0199* (0.0078)	0.1115* (0.0389)	0.0226* (0.0080)
Income			−0.0103 (0.1230)	0.0033 (0.0142)
Population			0.3154*(0.1808)	0.0130 (0.0214)
Percent Black			0.0389 (0.0305)	0.0094* (0.0045)
Constant	−0.8372* (0.2690)	−0.1294* (0.0492)	−1.8459* (0.7894)	−0.3646* (0.1293)
Observations	1911	1911	1911	1911
R^2	0.914	0.985	0.918	0.985
AIC	696.400	−2642.421	617.869	−2644.365
BIC	940.837	−2392.428	878.972	−2377.707

Model includes Fixed Effects for State and Year and standard errors clustered by state. *indicates $p < .1$.

time measure encapsulates the overall ideological trajectory of a state's policies over both the social and economic dimensions.[9]

The key independent variables are the measures of institutional design, accountability pressure and checks and balances that are publicly available for use.[10] These continuous measures give the relative level of a state's institutional configuration on both dimensions from 1975 to 2015. The base term of both measures do not have a clear theoretical expectation for policy liberalism.

Rather, these dimensions are expected to mediate the role between public opinion and policy, so I interact each institutional measure with public opinion.[11] A positive and significant interaction term would indicate that institutional measures are strengthening the influence of public opinion on policy.

To measure public opinion I use Caughey and Warshaw's (2018) measure of public liberalism on economic and social scales. This measure aggregates hundreds of thousands of survey responses across hundreds of surveys on policy preferences from the last 80 years and aggregates them into large dataset that is then used to generate state-year level estimates for mass liberalism. The scale is relative so very liberal constituencies have high values, and conservative populations negative values. I use the lagged values of mass liberalism to recognize the public opinion is expected to have a delayed effect on policy output because policymakers must learn about public opinion before they are able to respond to it (Erikson et al., 1993). While policy likely has feedback effects on opinion, public opinion in 1990 is not influenced by policy outputs in 1991. These scales will allow me to evaluate the extent to which state policies respond to public preferences on both economic and social policies.

Results

Table 1 shows the results for social policy liberalism. Columns 1 and 3 of Table 1 model policy liberalism, and columns 2 and 4 changes in policy liberalism (dynamic responsiveness). Holding the institutional measures at their mean of 0, as the public becomes more liberal a state's policy also on average becomes more liberal across all specifications. More liberal public opinion is associated with more liberal policy and more liberal changes in policy. Lagged policy liberalism strongly predicts policy liberalism as expected. In three of the four specifications, the base terms for institutional design have no relationship with policy liberalism. In model three both dimensions are associated with somewhat more conservative policy outputs, but the relationship is substantively Figure 1 plots the marginal effect of a one unit change in public liberalism on policy liberalism at different levels of both institutional dimensions using the results from model 1.[12] The two institutional measures have dramatically different moderating effects on public opinion's influence on policy. As accountability pressure increases, public opinion's influence becomes much stronger. At high levels of accountability pressure a one unit increase in public liberalism (roughly a one standard deviation move) results in a half a standard deviation change in policy liberalism. This is substantively a very large effect. In 2010, this is the equivalent of a state moving from having policy liberalism similar to Pennsylvania (.14) to having a similar profile to Illinois (.81). While a one unit shock in public liberalism would be large, the interaction demonstrates that public opinion has a very different relationship with policy depending on the institutional configuration. The interaction between public liberalism and checks and balances shows a completely different relationship. While public opinion
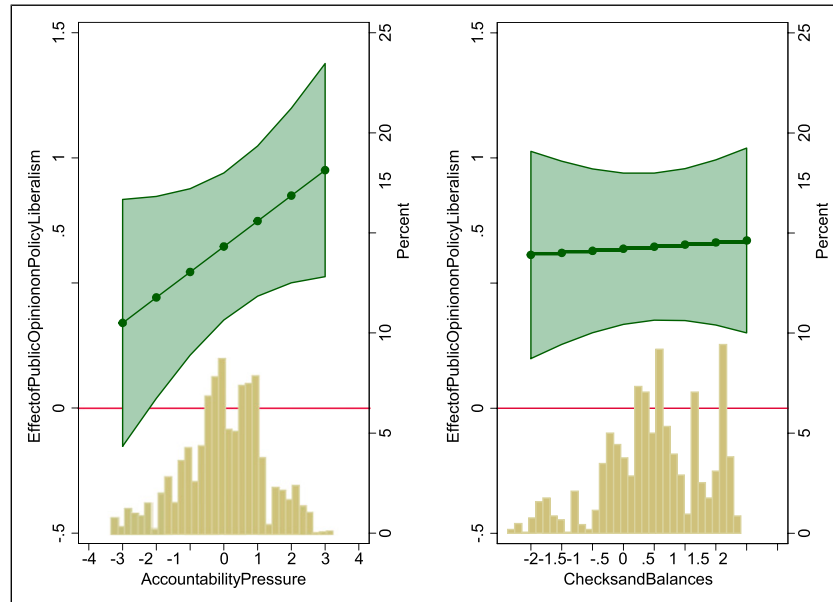
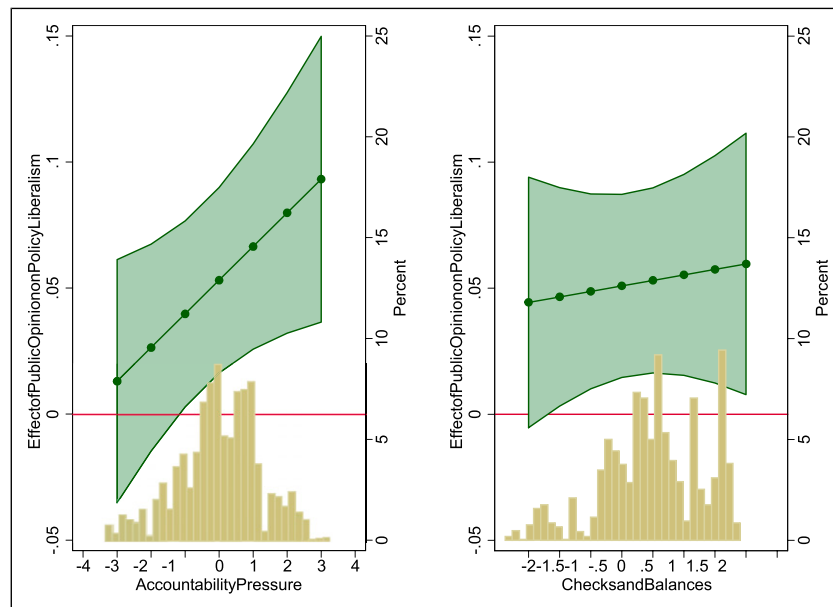**Figure 1.** Marginal effect of public liberalism on social policy liberalism.[15]

Figure 2. Marginal effect of public liberalism on dynamics social policy responsiveness.[16]

consistently has a positive effect on policy liberalism, the effect remains constant regardless of levels of checks and balances. Accountability pressure has a strong moderating influence on public opinion's influence on policy (lending support for the first hypothesis), but checks and balances do not.[13]

The coefficients for both policy liberalism and the interaction between public liberalism and accountability pressure are much smaller in the models of dynamic responsiveness. This reflects that changes in policy are gradual and that public

opinion leads to incremental shifts in policy, not a dramatic change in all policies after a single election. Even after lagged policy absorbs much of the variation in the dependent variable, there is still a significant moderating effect of institutions on public opinion for accountability pressure, but not for the checks and balance system.

Figure 2 plots the marginal effects of the same interactions for dynamic responsiveness using the results from model 4. When accountability pressure is low public opinion is not associated with changes in policy liberalism.

Table 2. Modeling Economic Policy Liberalism in the States.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Lagged Policy Liberalism		0.8502* (0.0179)		0.8373* (0.0478)
Public Liberalism	−0.1022 (0.2324)	−0.0241 (0.0219)	−0.0752 (0.2154)	−0.0211 (0.0449)
Public Liberalism × Accountability Pressure	0.2332* (0.0601)	0.0293* (0.0168)	0.2355* (0.0562)	0.0339* (0.0177)
Accountability Pressure	0.0749 (0.0753)	0.0105 (0.0142)	0.1238* (0.0657)	0.0240* (0.0127)
Checks and Balances	0.0239 (0.0799)	−0.0044 (0.0180)	0.0773 (0.0754)	0.0088 (0.0168)
Public Liberalism × Checks and Balances	−0.1343 (0.0864)	−0.0121 (0.0229)	−0.0719 (0.0818)	−0.0024 (0.0242)
L.Unified Democratic Control	0.0272 (0.0371)	0.0107 (0.0099)	0.0386 (0.0337)	0.0117 (0.0095)
Income			0.2412*(0.1253)	0.0641* (0.0278)
Population			0.1179(0.1076)	0.0029 (0.0253)
Percent Black			0.0524*(0.0226)	0.0064 (0.0047)
Constant	−1.2921* (0.2932)	−0.2181* (0.0645)	−2.1352* (0.6019)	−0.2805* (0.1282)
Observations	1911	1911	1911	1911
R^2	0.929	0.981	0.934	0.981
AIC	653.006	1876.080	514.687	−1891.360
BIC	897.443	−1626.088	775.790	−1624.702

Model includes Fixed Effects for State and Year and standard errors clustered by state. *indicates $p < .1$.

This highlights that despite having smaller effect sizes in a model of dynamic responsiveness, institutional design is even more important because states with low levels of accountability pressure see no relationship between public opinion and changes in policy. If institutional designs do not prioritize accountability, then state policy outputs do not move in accordance with public preferences. However, as accountability pressure increases public opinion is associated with policy moving in the same direction, while levels of checks and balances are not associated with the strength of public opinion's influence on policy. Taken together the two figures support the first hypothesis that accountability pressure increases the effect of public opinion on policy in models of responsiveness and dynamic responsiveness. I do not find support for the the second hypothesis because checks and balances is unrelated to the strength of public opinion's in- fluence on policy across all models. Across all specifications democratic control is associated with more liberal policy as expected. In both models with controls states with larger black populations have more liberal policies and more liberal changes in policy, while larger population is associated with more liberal policy but not with changes in policy.

Economic Policy

Table 2 shows the results for the models on economic policy liberalism. In models 1 and 3, holding the institutional dimensions at zero, public liberalism does not predict economic policy liberalism. However, as can be seen in Figure 3 the effect of public opinion on policy changes dra- matically depending on institutional context. When accountability pressure is low public opinion is negatively associated with economic policy liberalism, and when accountability

pressure is high a one unit change in public opinion results in .5 increase in economic policy liberalism. When one con- siders that economic liberalism runs from −2 to 3, a .5 in- crease in economic liberalism is substantively large. This means that holding public opinion constant, high levels of accountabil- ity pressure is associated with states being 10% more liberal than states with average levels of accountability pressure and identical public preferences, and more than a full standard deviation more liberal than a state with low levels of accountability pressure. The marginal effects plot high- lights the importance of institutional design because under some institutional configurations public opinion and policy are actually moving in opposite direction, which suggests that elites are less responsive to public influence on economic policies unless institutions can incentivize responsive behavior.

The interaction between public liberalism and checks and balances is not significant in any specification, meaning there is no evidence in support of hypothesis 2. A stronger checks and balance system does not significantly alter the relationship between public opinion and policy. The results from Table 2 indicate that without the proper institutional configuration public opinion has little influence on eco- nomic policy.[14] These findings are consistent with previous research indicat- ing that policy responsiveness is stronger for social than economic policy (Caughey & Warshaw, 2018). Whether this dynamic is driven by the public hav- ing less defined economic policy views, or by a greater divergence between the affluent and general public on economic policy (Gilens, 2012; Elkjær, 2020), or some other trend remains to be tested. Nevertheless, higher levels of account- ability pressure are associated with state gov- ernments responding more to public preferences on eco- nomic policy as seen in Figure 4.
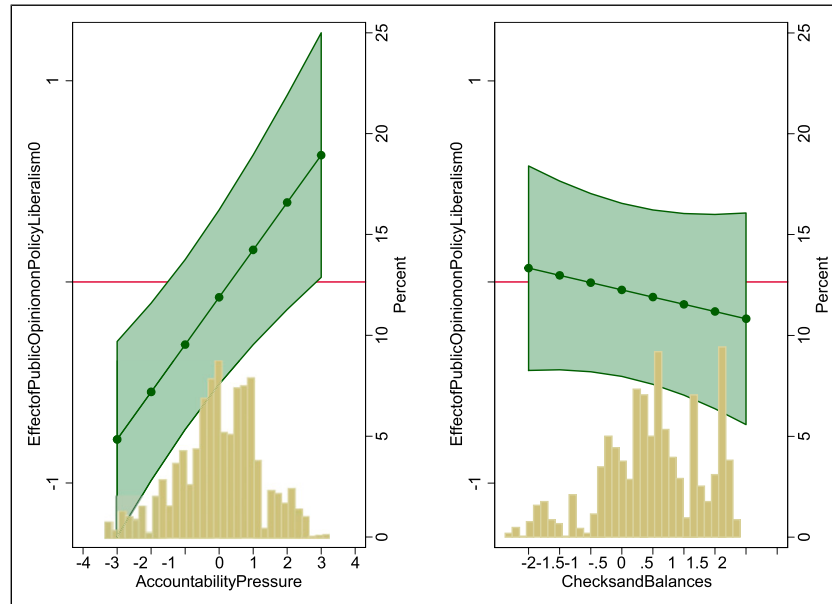
Figure 3. Marginal effect of public liberalism on economic policy liberalism.[17]
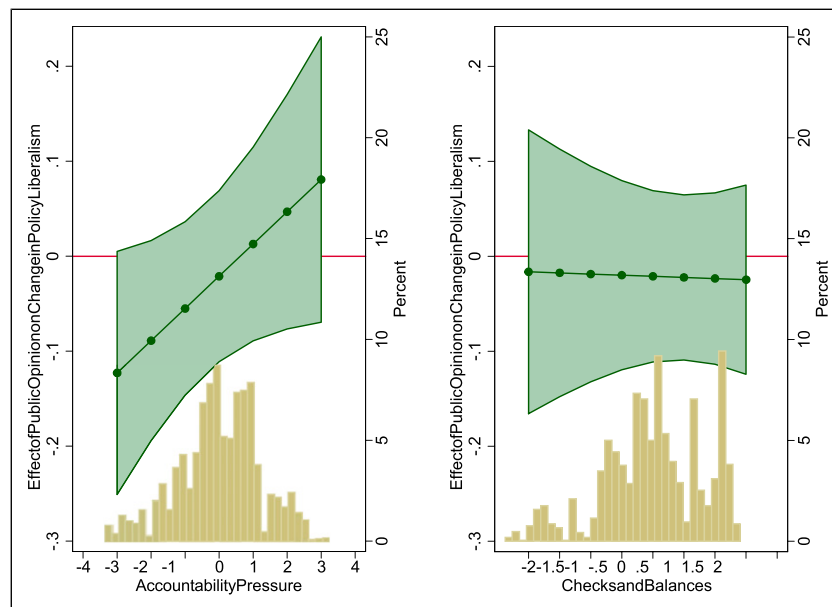

Figure 4. Marginal effect of public liberalism on dynamic economic policy responsiveness.[18]

Models 2 and 4 of Table 2 shows the results for dynamic responsiveness. Lagged policy liber- alism again strongly predicts policy liberalism. This relationship is so strong that very few other variables are significant. Holding the institutional dimensions at zero public liberalism again does not predict policy liberalism. The interaction between account- ability pressure and public liberal- ism is again significant, but substantially smaller than in the model that does not include lagged policy liberalism as can be seen in the marginal effects plot in Figure 3. High levels of account- ability pressure

increase the influence of public opinion on changes in policy. The interaction between checks and balances and public liberalism is again insignificant. The only controls that sig- nificantly predict policy are income and percent black. Wealthier states and states with larger black populations tend to see policy move in a more liberal direction. After ac- counting for lagged policy liberalism, partisan control is not significantly related to a change in economic policy lib- eralism.Only in model 3 does being controlled by Democrats in the previous year result in more liberal economic policy.

The results from both the social and economic models provide strong support that account-ability pressure increases the influence of public opinion on policy. In every specification there is a positive and significant interaction between accountability pressure and public opinion, and the effects are substantively large. These results hold regardless of model specification, including al- ternative ways to account for temporal and state trends such as random effects or splines, and hold with the addition of other potential control variables. Combined with earlier research showing that accountability pressure is also associated with significantly higher levels of policy congruence across dozens of policies (LaCombe, 2021), there is ample evidence to show that accountability pressure strengthens the relationship between public opinion and policy. The results for the checks and balance system show no evidence of moderating the relationship between public opinion and policy across both social and economic policy. This reflects the less clear expectations of this dimension because it measures the ease of moving policy, not the direction that policy should move with respect to public opinion. These results also highlight that the two dimensions are distinct, despite having some overlapping institutions that load strongly onto each. By using both mea- sures researchers can parse out the multiple effects that institutions such as the ballot initiative are expected to have on state politics.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that state institutions *collectively* play a strong role in policy re- sponsiveness. When state institutions are designed to maximize the amount of information sent to policymakers about public preferences and incentivize the nomination of moderate political can- didates, public opinion has a much stronger relationship with policy change. At the same time the strength of the checks an balance system appears unrelated to policy responsiveness. This is consistent other research (LaCombe, 2021) finding that states with high levels of accountability pressure are more likely to have policies congruent with public opinion across a variety of policies, but the checks and balance system is unrelated to policy congruence. I argue that these results show the utility of incorporating institutional context into our understanding of state politics. By applying the measures to Caughey and Warshaw's (2018) data, this paper contributes a clear test of how findings change when evaluating institutions collectively rather than individually.

States with high levels of accountability pressure are not more liberal or conservative on av- erage, but have a stronger association between public preferences and state policies. These rela- tionships hold even when lagging the dependent variable. The moderating effect of accountability pressure is also stronger for social than economic policies. State eco- nomic policy may be less salient for the average voter, and voters may have better defined opinions about topics like abor- tion than preferred tax rates. Institutions that convey

information to policymakers may be more effective when the signal from the public is salient and better defined. If the public has no defined opinion (or more weakly defined opinions) then the importance of having institutions to send that information is less clear. These institutions do not define or strengthen public opinion, but merely are tools for poli- cymakers to learn about the public.

This project proposes a new approach to evaluate the role of state institutions in policy respon- siveness. Despite de- cades of advances in measuring public opinion and policy, there is still consid- erable disagreements on whether insti- tutions such as the initiative play a role in how public opinion is translated into policy. The results highlight the theoretical and methodological advantages to us- ing aggregate insti- tutional measures to understand the role of institutions in policy responsiveness. First, they demonstrate the utility of organizing institutions along multiple dimensions because in- stitutions often have multiple theorized effects. For example, this measurement strategy allows for the initiative to operate as the 'gun behind the door' to push elites to be more re- sponsive to public opinion (Gerber, 1996), but also can act as a veto point to block or overturn legislation (Boehmke, Osborn and Schilling 2015; LaCombe & Boehmke, 2021). The multi-dimensional approach to measuring institutions can help to parse out these effects and identify the institu- tional features that influence policy responsiveness, and those that do not.

Secondly, an aggregate approach allows researchers to evaluate the net effect of state institu- tional context. If the "true" effect of an institution is small, then we may expect that an institutional- specific approach may produce mixed results due to natural variation in sampling procedures. With a small effect size it would be expected that some models would produce significant results, and others insignificant ones. Furthermore, including a single institutional indicator in a model omits the many other institutions that may cancel out a single institution's effects, and decisions on what institutions to omit or include can affect conclusions when taking an institutional-specific approach (LaCombe, 2021). When these institutions are combined, the moderating effects are sub- stantially larger and the effect clearer. This paper directly tests this proposition and finds that aggregate mea- sures of a state's accountability structure produce robust, substantively large results showing the moderating effect of institutions on public opinion's influence on policy.

Aggregate institutional research should operate parallel to institutional-specific work. There are tradeoffs to including a coarsened measure of institutional context over specific measures. First, this research design is unable to attribute increases in responsiveness to a specific institution, meaning that activists cannot attribute blame or credit when proposing new state level reforms. Furthermore, a coarsened measure of state context is unable to distinguish between two states that have very different institutions that aggregate to similar levels of accountability pressure or checks and balances. Therefore,

this project is not suggesting that this analysis replaces individual insti- tutional research, but rather complements existing research on a parallel track to identify both the effects of specific institutions and understand the role of the larger institutional context. Research should also explore how institutional effects vary by policy.

Lastly, these findings show the accountability pressure and checks and balances are distinct concepts with differing expectations. Looking ahead, scholars should think about clear applica- tions for the checks and balances dimension, such as policy innovation or gridlock in the states. A direct test of the expectations for checks and balances would clarify the role each dimension plays in policymaking. Researchers can decide whether to include one or both dimensions in their research (or split the accountability pressure dimension into the two sub-dimensions) depending on the theoretical expectations, and both dimensions can be included in a parsimonious way to control for a state's institutional context.

ORCID iD

Scott J. LaCombe 🄙 https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0653-4006

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Extremity is a relative term, and in this case means candidates who are ideologically distant from the public's preferences. If the population is very conservative, then extremely may be electing a moderate or center-left politicians, or vice versa.
2. See LaCombe (2021) for a more detailed write up of each dimension.
3. Despite there being less clear expectations for the role of term limits in accountability pressure, LaCombe (2021) argues there are clear reasons to expect term limits to play a strong role in the checks and balances dimension, which is why it is included.
4. see Tausanovitch (2019) for a review of this literature
5. In the supplemental material I use the same institutional measures as in the original paper, but for the restricted time period. Like the original paper, I find no evidence for individual institutions having a moderating effect on public opinion for social policy. The evidence for economic policy is more mixed, with campaign contribution limits being associated with more responsive policies, citizen government sometimes being associated with more responsive policies, and suffrage restrictions and legislative days sometimes being associated with less responsive policies.
6. I include just a single lag for public opinion to match the specification from Caughey and Warshaw.
7. As a robustness check models were also estimated with a linear time measure. The conclusion were the same across models. It also should be noted that as the institutional measures are continuous and time variant. Neither measure has repeated values across the time series for each state.
8. In both cases liberalism reflects the left side of the political spectrum of American politics. More liberal social and economic policy would indicate policy is further to the left ideologically.
9. State-level aggregate measures of public opinion offer several advantages. Errors and randomness in individual voter opinion can cancel out to produce reliable aggregate measures of public preferences (Page & Shapiro, 2010). Furthermore, while the average voter is not likely to have a defined opinion on every policy, an general measure such as policy liberalism can average across preferences to estimate an ideological location of a population, and a Bayesian approach can incorporate uncertainty directly into the posterior estimates. See Caughey & Warshaw, 2018 for more details on the measurement of both scales.
10. Because the estimates are a posterior distribution I include parallel analyses for the 2.5% and 97.5% posterior estimates for accountability pressure and checks and balances in the supplemental material.
11. Each dimension was estimated to be orthogonal to the others. As recommended by LaCombe (2021) I combine the first two sub-dimensions into a single accountability pressure dimension. The correlation between accountability pressure and checks and balances is very weak (.008). Models were estimated with accountability pressure and checks and balances included separately an the conclusions were unchanged in both direction and significance small. However, to fully understand the influence of institutional design the interaction terms must be evaluated.
12. The histograms show the distribution of observations by their score along each institutional measure.
13. Because all models include both accountability pressure and checks and balances, there are numerous institu- tions included in both dimensions. Any collinearity could lead to the model understating the size of the coefficients, meaning this may be a conservative test of institutional influences on policy responsiveness. The correlation between dimensions is very low (less than .08) and the results hold in both direction and significance when the dimensions are included separately in the model.
14. The models were also estimated without the interaction terms, and public opinion still did not predict policy.
15. Standard errors for the marginal effects plots have been calculated following the guidance from Brambor et al. (2006) on modeling interaction terms.

16. Standard errors for the marginal effects plots have been calculated following the guidance from Brambor et al. (2006) on modeling interaction terms.
17. Standard errors for the marginal effects plots have been calculated following the guidance from Brambor et al. (2006) on modeling interaction terms.
18. Standard errors for the marginal effects plots have been calculated following the guidance from Brambor et al. (2006) on modeling interaction terms.

References

Achen, C., Bartels, L., Achen, C. H., & Bartels, L. M. (2017). Democracy for realists. In: *Democracy for Realists*. Princeton University Press.

Amenta, E., Neal, C., & Sheera, J. O. 2005. Age for leisure? Political mediation and the impact of the pension movement on US old-age policy. *American Sociological Review* 70(3):516–538. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240507000308

Bafumi, J., & Herron, M. C. (2010). Leapfrog representation and extremism: A study of American voters and their members in congress. *American Political Science Review*, *104*(3), 519-542. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055410000316

Barber, M. J. (2016). Ideological donors, contribution limits, and the polarization of amer- ican legislatures. *The Journal of Politics*, *78*(1), 296-310. https://doi.org/10.1086/683453

Bartels, L. M. (1991). Constituency opinion and congressional policy making: The Reagan defense buildup. *American Political Science Review*, *85*(2), 457-474. https://doi.org/10.2307/1963169

Bartels, L. M. (2018). *Unequal democracy: The political economy of the new gilded age*. Prince- ton University Press.

Baumgartner, F. R., & Jones, B. D. (2010). *Agendas and instability in American politics*. University of Chicago Press.

Boehmke, F., Schilling, T. E. U., & Schilling, E. (2015). Pivotal politics and initiative use in the American states. *Political Research Quarterly*, *68*(4), 665-677. https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912915606234

Boushey, G. T, & McGrath, R. J. (2017). Experts, amateurs, and bureaucratic influence in the American states. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *27*(1), 85-103. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muw038

Bowler, S., & Donovan, T. (2004). Measuring the effect of direct democracy on state policy: Not all initiatives are created equal. *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, *4*(3), 345-363. https://doi.org/10.1177/153244000400400305

Brambor, T., Clark, R. C., & Golder, M. (2006). Understanding interaction models: Improving empirical analyses. *Political Analysis*, *14*(1), 63-82. https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpi014

Broockman, D. E., Carnes, N., Crowder-Meyer, M., & Skovron, C. (2021). Why local party leaders don't support nominating centrists. *British Journal of Political Science*, *51*(2), 724-749. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123419000309

Broockman, D. E, & Skovron, C. (2018). *Bias in perceptions of public opinion among political elites* (pp. 1-22). American Political Science Review.

Burstein, P. (2003). The impact of public opinion on public policy: A review and an agenda. *Political Research Quarterly*, *56*(1), 29-40. https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290305600103

Butcher, J., & Kim, G. (2021). Electing educators: How term limits can increase representation. *Oklahoma Politics*, *31*, 1-32.

Caughey, D., & Warshaw, C. (2018). Policy preferences and policy change: Dy- namic responsiveness in the American states, 1936–2014. *American Political Science Review*, *112*(2), 249-266. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055417000533

Clark, J. H., & Williams, R. L. (2014). Parties, term limits, and representation in the US states. *American Politics Research*, *42*(1), 171-193. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673x13492191

Coppedge, M., Maldonado, A. C., & Maldonado, C. (2008). Two persistent dimensions of democracy: Contestation and inclusiveness. *The Journal of Politics*, *70*(3), 632-647. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381608080663

Elkjær, A. M. (2020). What drives unequal policy responsiveness? Assessing the role of informational asymmetries in economic policy-making. *Comparative Political Studies*, *53*(14), 2213-2245.

Erikson, R. S., Wright, G. C., & McIver, J. P. (1993). *Statehouse democracy: Public opinion and policy in the American states*. Cambridge University Press.

Geer, J. G. (1996). *From tea leaves to opinion polls: A theory of democratic leadership*. Columbia University Press.

Gerber, E. R. (1996). Legislative response to the threat of popular initiatives. *American Journal of Political Science*, *40*(1), 99-128. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111696

Gilens, M. (2012). *Affluence and influence: Economic inequality and political power in Amer- ica*. Princeton University Press.

Grossmann, M., Jordan, M. P., & McCrain, J. (2021). The correlates of state policy and the structure of state panel data. *State Politics Policy Quarterly*, *21*(4), 430-450. https://doi.org/10.1017/spq.2021.17

Hassell, H. J. G. (2018). Principled moderation: Understanding parties support of moderate can- didates. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *43*(2), 343-369. https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12197

Henisz, W. J. (2004). Political institutions and policy volatility. *Economics & Politics*, *16*(1), 1-27. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0343.2004.00129.x

Hill, K. Q., & Hurley, P. A. (1999). Dyadic representation reappraised. *American Journal of Political Science*, *43*(1), 109-137. https://doi.org/10.2307/2991787

Kang, S-G., & Powell, G. B. Jr. (2010). Representation and policy responsiveness: The median voter, election rules, and redistributive welfare spending. *The Journal of Politics*, *72*(4), 1014-1028. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381610000502

Kingdon, J. W. (1967). Politicians' beliefs about voters. *American Political Science Review*, *61*(1), 137-145. https://doi.org/10.2307/1953881

Kogan, V. (2016). When voters pull the trigger: Can direct democracy restrain legisla- tive excesses? *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *41*(2), 297-325. https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12115

Kousser, T. (2005). *Term limits and the dismantling of state legislative professionalism*. Cam-Bridge University Press.

Krehbiel, K. (2010). *Pivotal politics: A theory of US lawmaking*. University of Chicago Press.

LaCombe, S., & Boehmke, F. J. (2021). *The initiative process and policy innovation in US states*. State Politics and Policy Quarterly. Government: Faculty Publications, Smith College.

LaCombe, S. J. (2021). Measuring institutional design in U.S. States. *Social Science Quarterly*, *102*(4), 1511-1533. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12986

La Raja, R. J., & Schaffner, B. F. (2015). *Campaign finance and political polarization: When purists prevail*. University of Michigan Press.

Lax, J., & Phillips, J. (2012). The democratic deficit in the states. *American Journal of Political Science*, *56*(1), 148-166. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00537.x

Lewis, D. C. (2012). Legislative term limits and fiscal policy performance. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *37*(3), 305-328. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-9162.2012.00049.x

Lijphart, A. (1999). *Patterns of democracy: Governance forms and performance in 36 coun- tries*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lupia, A., Krupnikov, Y., LevineLevine, S., Piston, P., & Von Hagen-Jamar, A. (2010). Why state constitutions differ in their treatment of same-sex marriage. *The Journal of Politics*, *72*(4), 1222-1235. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381610000642

Maestas, C. (2000). Professional legislatures and ambitious politicians: Policy responsiveness of state institutions. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *25*(4), 663-690. https://doi.org/10.2307/440439

Maestas, C. (2003). The incentive to listen: Progressive ambition, resources, and opinion monitoring among state legislators. *The Journal of Politics*, *65*(2), 439-456. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2508.t01-3-00008

Manza, J., & Cook, F. L. (2002). A democratic polity? Three views of policy responsive- ness to public opinion in the United States. *American Politics Research*, *30*(6), 630-667. https://doi.org/10.1177/153267302237231

Masket, S., & Shor, B. (2015). Polarization without parties: Term limits and legislative partisanship in Nebraska's unicameral legislature. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, *15*(1), 67-90. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532440014564984

Matsusaka, J. (2001). Problems with a methodology used to evaluate the voter initiative. *The Journal of Politics*, *63*(4), 1250-1256. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-3816.00109

Matsusaka, J. (2010). Popular control of public policy: A quantitative approaches. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, *5*(2), 133-167. https://doi.org/10.1561/100.00009055

Matsusaka, J. (2018). Public policy and the initiative and referendum: A survey with some new evidence. *Public Choice*, *174*(1-2), 107-143. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-017-0486-0

Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1963). Constituency influence in congress. *American Political Science Review*, *57*(1), 45-56. https://doi.org/10.2307/1952717

Moncrief, G. F., Neimi, R. G., & Powell, L. W. (2004). Time, term limits, and turnover: Trends in membership stability in US state legislatures. *Legislative Studies Quar- Terly*, *29*(3), 357-381. https://doi.org/10.3162/036298004x201212

Olson, M. P., & Rogowski, J. C. (2020). Legislative term limits and polarization. *The Journal of Politics*, *82*(2), 572-586. https://doi.org/10.1086/706764

Pacheco, J. (2013). The thermostatic model of responsiveness in the American states. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, *13*(3), 306-332. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532440013487388

Page, B. I., & Gilens, M. (2017). *Democracy in America? What has gone wrong and what we can do about it*. University of Chicago Press.

Page, B. I., & Shapiro, R. Y. (2010). *The rational public: Fifty years of trends in Americans' policy preferences*. University of Chicago Press.

Quinn, K. M. (2004). Bayesian factor analysis for mixed ordinal and continuous responses. *Political Analysis*, *12*(4), 338-353. https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mph022

Rogers, S. (2017). Electoral accountability for state legislative roll calls and ideological rep- resentation. *American Political Science Review*, *111*(3), 555-571. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055417000156

Soroka, S. N, & Wlezien, C. (2010). *Degrees of democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Squire, P. (1992). Legislative professionalization and membership diversity in state legis- latures. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *17*(1), 69-79. https://doi.org/10.2307/440081

Tausanovitch, C. (2019). Why are subnational governments responsive? *The Journal of Politics*, *81*(1), 334-342. https://doi.org/10.1086/700728

Treier, S., & Jackman, Si. (2008). Democracy as a latent variable. *American Journal of Political Science*, *52*(1), 201-217. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00308.x

Tsebelis, G. (2002). *Veto players: How political institutions work*. Princeton University Press.

Wlezien, C. 1996. Dynamics of representation: The case of US spending on defence. *British Journal of Political Science 26*(1): 81–103. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123400007420

Wlezien, C., & Soroka, S. N. (2012). Political institutions and the opinion–policy link. *West European Politics*, *35*(6), 1407-1432. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2012.713752

Wright, G. C. (2007). Do term limits affect legislative roll call voting? Representation, polar- ization, and participation. *State Politics & Policy Quarterly*, *7*(3), 256-280. https://doi.org/10.1177/153244000700700302

Author Biography

Scott LaCombe is an assistant professor of government and statistical and data sciences at Smith College. His research focuses on institutional design and its effect on state politics, including policy responsiveness, attitudes toward government, and representation in US states. He has published articles in The Journal of Politics, Political Research Quarterly, Social Science Quarterly, and Policy Studies Journal.