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## ARTICLES OF GENERAL INTEREST

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### POLICY ISSUE NETWORKS: THEIR INFLUENCE ON STATE POLICYMAKING

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#### INTRODUCTION

This study analyzes an overlooked influence on state policymaking, particularly the early phases of "agenda setting," and interstate diffusion of policy innovations. We designate this influence as "policy issue networks." A recent review of the early stages of decisionmaking concludes that relatively little research on issue network has been conducted (Cobb and Elder, 1983). Though an extensive literature on policy communication, diffusion of innovations, and networks theory exists, there are scant empirical data concerning the role played by state policy issue networks (Gray, 1973; Kirst and Meister, 1983). Little is known about the characteristics of these networks or their impact on specific types of policy issues. Nor does any study focus on the interaction of different state political cultures and these issue networks.

The initial phases of public policy are directed toward stimulating government to consider a problem. It is difficult, however, to isolate the sub-parts or stages of the agenda-setting process as "identifiable, one-time, discrete events" (Jones, 1984). We define agenda setting as active and serious consideration of a concrete and specific issue by state policymakers. How state policymakers are stimulated actively and seriously to consider a set of policy issues across a set of American states constitutes our evidence for enlarging existing concepts of the process. While we do not analyze whether these agenda items became law, we do focus on the rapid interstate diffusion of the same new policy issue.

The sweep of numerous major state educational reforms during the 1970s was not caused by the traditional role of the "iron triangle." Such rapid diffusion of an issue could also not be credited to alternative perspectives on how and why issues appear on a given state's policy agenda. The state policy issue network has many attributes of an interest group, but does not fit into any of the conventional definitions (Salisbury, 1984). Salisbury mentions as interest groups: political movements, voluntary organizations of members recruited through the selective use of incentives, and institutions like universities. This paper examines the nature of these policy issue networks, and concludes with their interaction with specific state political cultures.

#### INFLUENCES ON THE EARLY PHASES OF PUBLIC POLICYMAKING Public Opinion and the Media

Public opinion and the news media are often conceptualized as play-

ing important roles in political agenda setting. Schon (1971) states that new ideas can gain salience rapidly if initial events and important influences "surface in the mainstream" and thereby become issues of public debate or conflict. Social movements and ground swells of public opinion create a broader context within government for decisionmaking and allow for greater discretion in the creation and design of new programs (Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 1981).

In his review of American theories of power, MacFarland (1979) focuses on the impact of media and public opinion on traditional special interests or "factions" in agenda setting. He maintains that the notions of pluralism or elite pluralism do not adequately explain broad social movements such as environmentalism and women's rights. He finds instead that in the cases of large-scale political or social movements, coalitions form with established interest groups and elements of political parties. Elected officials are then quick to follow the trend and so create the bandwagon phenomenon. From this initial coalition, "generations of lobbies" have grown in response to these social movements (Berry, 1977). Television news, in particular, hastens their development or demise.

Conlan and Abrams (1981) point out that the news media directly influence members of Congress. At one time, party discipline, legislative apprenticeship, and deference to seniority were the most important factors in determining a congressperson's role in political agenda setting. Now, the passage of legislation is increasingly dependent on "symbolic politics." Mitchell (1981) notes that policymakers rely heavily on printed and electronic sources "to gain insight into relevant social science findings."

### **State Political Environment**

A second strand of concepts emphasizes policy environment (Dye, 1966). Of particular importance to our agenda setting concern is the finding by Gray (1973) that many social and economic factors create a political milieu which purportedly affects a state's receptivity to new ideas. She concludes that "innovative states are both wealthier and more competitive between political parties than their sister states at the time of adoption of a particular law." The notion that wealthier states have more innovative policy agendas has been assessed in some detail by Mitchell (1981), who found variation linked to: the amount of their federal expenditure; personal and corporate income; degree of urbanization; industrialization; and level of education of their citizens. However, Mitchell stresses these variables clearly differ in their significance depending on the policy issues being decided. Ziegler (1983) has demonstrated linkages between interest groups and state socio-economic complexity; for example, states with a few strong interest groups do not have complex economies. These dominant interest groups (e.g., timber in Oregon) have a very influential role in determining a state's agenda.

### **Intra-Government Factions**

Factions within state government can determine the policy agenda. Beer (1977) cites the "professional-bureaucratic complex" and the "inter-governmental lobby" as the centers of influence in policymaking. The professional-bureaucratic complex is a "core of officials with scientific training working in close cooperation with legislators and interest groups."

The formal organizational structures of bureaucracies allow members to communicate with relative ease. Elling (1983) analyzes the influential role of state bureaucrats as "policy shapers." He points out that "career bureaucrats often 'know best' — in a technical sense how to deal with problems . . . or even to determine whether a particular situation requires a state response."

### Policy Issue Networks

Heclo (1978) defines the key concept in this paper — a policy issue network — at the federal level and distinguishes it from the "iron triangle":

Issue networks . . . comprise a large number of participants with quite variable degrees of mutual commitment or of dependence on others in their environment; in fact it is almost impossible to say where a network leaves off and its environment begins. Iron triangles and subgovernments suggest a stable set of participants coalesced to control fairly narrow programs which are in the direct economic interest of each party to the alliance. Issue networks are almost the reverse image in each respect. Participants move in and out of the networks constantly. Rather than groups united in dominance over a program, no one, as far as one can tell, is in control of the policies and issues. Any direct or material interest is often secondary to intellectual or emotional commitment. Network members reinforce each other's sense of issues as their interests, rather than (as standard political or economic models would have it) interests defining positions on issues.

A policy issue network is different from a political movement because movements are characterized by great uncertainty as to who authentically speaks for those identifying themselves with the cause. Typically, political movements create considerable competition among several would-be spokespersons (Salisbury, 1984).

A policy network is a part of the large policy system and is comprised of both those from the larger community outside government and those within it who have official decisionmaking power (Walker, 1982). Policy networks have vertical components — cutting through various layers of government — and horizontal components — tapping into the traditional iron triangle but also extending outside of government (Jones and Matthes, 1982). The definition we employ views policy issue networks as linked to specific issues, rather than attached to general policy areas (e.g., the environment), or to broad interests like teachers (Milward and Francisco, 1982). The policy goals of an issue network are more specific than a political movement. Heclo asserts that issue networks will not replace the more familiar politics of iron triangles (in Washington), but will overlay the once stable political reference points with new forces that complicate calculations and decrease predictability. The policy issue network research to date has focused on the federal level.

Nelson (1982) finds that state issue networks are led by policy brokers who play a critical role in translating technical and academic data into "plain English" for other bureaucrats and politicians. The heroes of these subcultures are "policy politicians — experts in using experts, victuallers of knowledge in a world hungry for the right decisions" (Heclo, 1978).

However, empirical research on issue networks within the confines of state policymaking is scarce, though there is a diverse and rich networks literature that taps into various branches of sociology, psychology, and communications (Burt and Minor, 1983). Existing research does not address rapid (within a year or two) diffusion of agenda issues across twenty or more states (Morehouse, 1982).

## METHODOLOGY

As a participant in state policymaking, the senior author suspected that the existing literature did not explain completely state agenda setting.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, four policy issues were selected for study in six states: school finance reform, collective bargaining, minimum competency tests, and creation science. The policy issues represent several of the most important education reforms during the 1970s. We selected issues that could **not** be attributed to any existing theory of socio-economic prediction (Gray, 1973). Our issues spread rapidly and widely, regardless of state wealth, history, or regional leadership. None of our four issues had been stimulated by federal legislation, so we could eliminate the idea that states are merely following the federal lead. Indeed, a limited federal technical assistance role evolved **after** some of the issues had spread to many states. In short, our research reveals a concept of state agenda setting that is derived from earlier work at the federal level on issue networks, but also draws heavily on public opinion/media dynamics.

States were classified by such characteristics as fiscal capacity, state education policy centralization, and legislative capacity (Ziegler and Johnson, 1972). The presence of some, all, or none of the four educational policy issues on a state's policy agenda helped mark seventeen states as potential field study sites. These seventeen states represent the full range of socio-economic and political culture characteristics (Dye, 1966; Ziegler and Johnson, 1972). Of all the states tagged, the six states selected for case studies also represent the spectrum in state political cultures (Elazar, 1972).

In order to be defined as "on the agenda," an issue must pass through four agenda setting states: (1) issue recognition, where an issue is noticed by legislators, and is felt to be a topic for potential action; (2) issue adoption, whereby the legitimacy of government responsibility and the possibility that an appropriate response could be found are acknowledged by state legislators; (3) issue prioritizing, so that the existing agenda is reordered to include the new issue; and (4) issue maintenance, so that the new issue remains on the agenda after initial consideration (Nelson, 1978). None of these issues was a reaction to large-scale crises as Downs (1972) highlights in his "issue-attention cycle." The case study variation among state economic, social, and political characteristics generated a pattern of different contexts in which to explore why the same issues did or did not reach state agendas. If an issue sweeps across very different state political cultures and socio-economic contexts, the idea that issue networks help determine agenda setting regardless of state socio-economic context emerges as a possibility. Using four policy issues in six states, we provided a total of twenty-four cases to test the proposition. The six states were: California, Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, Texas, and Washington.

We collected data by conducting two stages of interviews, and by gathering background documents suggested by those interviewed. Interviews elicited the names of key actors, dates, and themes of influential conferences, titles of influential research papers and articles in the news media. Interviews were useful for discovering sources and resources that fueled network activities, the motivation of key policy actors, and the impact of symbols in policy issue diffusion. We first interviewed policy actors within traditional state iron triangles, or those whose formal positions could conceivably determine agendas. These included legislators, legislative aides, employees of state agencies, or lobby directors. Using a snowball technique we next interviewed representatives of groups operating primarily in an interstate or national setting. They were either issue leaders, or were able to identify others who belonged to national or interstate networks. These individuals included university professors, lobbyists, and interstate agency heads, such as the Education Commission of the States (ECS) or the Council for Exceptional Children. About one half of the interviews were conducted by telephone. The others were conducted on site within the states, and at the ECS conferences.<sup>2</sup> We cross-checked the information. For example, intrastate political actors were asked to verify the claims of interstate leaders about external influences on state agendas.

#### **POLICY ISSUE NETWORKS: FOUR CASES**

The four issues cases are presented below. We will describe the first case, school finance reform, in somewhat greater detail than the others in order to illustrate all network dimensions contained in Table 1. Table 1 provides a summary comparison of the four issue networks.

##### **School Finance Reform**

The school finance reform movement can claim impact in twenty to twenty-five states that contain about 60% of the nation's pupils. Its predominant approach has been to "level up" the low spending districts without decreasing spending in the wealthy districts. Landmark progress toward this goal came in 1969, in large part because of such successful court suits as Serrano vs. Priest in California and Robinson vs. Cahill in New Jersey. These suits declared that the property tax based system of financing education was unconstitutional because school districts with low assessed value of property per pupil could not raise as much money with the same tax rate as their wealthy neighbors. For example, in Oregon, the Brothers School District had a 1975 assessed value of \$537,761 per pupil while Knox Butte District is restricted to \$16,119. While the U.S. Supreme Court in the Rodriguez vs. Texas case ruled this problem was not a federal issue, a nationwide network thereupon operated behind the scenes, orchestrating and spreading the effort to bring finance reform to state agendas.

The entrepreneur with the resources to launch such a network was the Ford Foundation, working in close collaboration with HEW's National Institute of Education (NIE) (Fuhrman, 1980). The Ford Foundation is a multi-purpose issue organization. One grant officer at Ford was at the network center, transmitting and directing information flows. The Ford Foundation provided publicity, grants, travel, and recognition as a way to motivate and

Table 1

## Policy Issue Network Typology

	<b>Scientific Creationism</b>	<b>School Finance</b>	<b>Teacher Collective Bargaining</b>	<b>Minimum Competency Testing</b>
<b>Membership</b>	Organized body of true believers. Religious & Moral Majority types. Dissenters face charges of heresy.	Coalitions of interest groups through bargaining and side-payments. Coalitions vary among states.	Stereotypical participants: Labor vs. Management. Strong & formal state and local subunits.	Cadre of expert advisors plus independent politicians and promoters.
<b>Guidance and Promotion</b>	Highly centralized and controlled by single institute.	Centralized and promoted through single foundation plus key academic experts.	Nationally orchestrated by union and teacher organization. Also, strong local initiative.	Highly decentralized. Leadership spontaneous in many instances.
<b>Conceptual Agreement</b>	Absolute agreement.	Core concept agreement.	Core concept agreement.	Vague concept agreement.
<b>Basis for Advocacy</b>	Value-based arguments (religious, moral).	Legal and constitutional arguments, articulated through court decisions.	Standard organized labor arguments plus ones based on professional interests at local level.	Simple agreement on means of improving student performance.
<b>Legislative Focus</b>	Identical statutes proposed in all states with no compromise considered.	Specific legal arguments tailored to individual states.	Model statute available for imitation but high variability among states as to endorsement.	No uniform statutes proposed. High variability among states as to components and objectives.
<b>Information Flow</b>	Steady informational flow from single-issue institute. Newsletters and position papers most common. Indirect reliance on religious communities and organizations.	Network meets annually. Academic papers, formal organizational lobbying, and informal contacts.	Organized network meetings, training. National conventions. Trouble-shooting projects at local level by official representatives.	Continuous flow of information sharing. News media instrumental. Advocacy through speeches and papers at national conferences.

organize the network participants. Indeed, it funded, directly or indirectly, all of the network's major elements, which may be enumerated as:

(1) Lawyers to sue the states. Ford grants were made to the Western Center on Law and Poverty (California) and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (Washington, DC), which then coordinated interstate legal activities. These lawyers devised and litigated Serrano and Robinson, and the Lawyers Committee assisted in more than twenty subsequent state suits.

(2) Private agencies to spread the concepts of finance reform around the state. These were state branches of the League of Women Voters and the National Urban Coalition which publicized general principles the network supported.

(3) Scholars to testify as expert court witnesses favoring reform and then advising the state on how to meet the court order. These scholars from prestigious universities such as Columbia, Stanford, and Syracuse adapted the network's principles to specific state contexts.

(4) Interstate technical assistance groups, such as ECS and the National Conference of State Legislators. These groups worked with the scholars and provided computer simulations of various solutions to state legislators, reform commissions, or courts. They were hired by state politicians whom the network discovered or after court suits made "reform" seem likely.

(5) State politicians and political institutions. Typical of these were the Governor's Citizens Committee on Education (Florida) and the Oregon Legislature's Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity. These temporary government units employed network scholars and groups like ECS as their chief advisors.

(6) Research and action centers oriented to minority groups, including the International Development Research Association (Hispanic, San Antonio) and the New Jersey Urban Coalition (Black, Newark). These Ford-funded organizations insured that minority concerns were brought to the attention of the other groups mentioned above.

(7) Graduate students, from Columbia to Stanford, who received full scholarships to prepare themselves as the next generation of school finance advocates or technicians.

Ford and NIE provided operating expenses, travel, consultants, research papers, and any other appropriate incentive to make the network effective. Periodic meetings of key network participants were used to select target states for intervention. States that network meetings decided were "ripe" found all seven elements above descending on them. In all affected states, network political advocacy and symbolism emphasized the legal concepts of equity, fundamental rights, and discrimination against the poor and ethnic minorities.

Table 1 presents six characteristics that distinguish our four different issue networks. Listed below are the characteristics for school finance reform.

Membership. At the national level, Ford organized and coordinated the activities of independent scholars, state politicians, state-level organizations, and lawyers. Other groups interested in the issues of equity, discrimination, and rights for the disadvantaged were drawn into the base coalition of interests represented in the network. But within any state, the



school finance reform coalition varied. For example, teacher organizations were sometimes included or excluded depending on how the majority of their members fared in state finance redistribution formulas.

Guidance and promotion. Guidance of the network was highly centralized at the national level primarily by Ford, with assistance by NIE. The efforts of lawyers, state officials, and numerous private or nonprofit organizations were coordinated.

Conceptual agreement. The school finance reform network contains a "core concept agreement," meaning that the general principle of greater equity of funding of local school districts was the key point on which all participants agreed. However, within various states and court cases, network participants varied, depending on the previous funding schemes, state political and economic contexts, and particular local needs. In urban states big city problems were stressed through special formula adjustments, while in rural states the isolated school districts were featured.

Basis for advocacy. School finance reform was argued from a philosophic, constitutional, and moral basis. The constitutional aspects were articulated through statewide law suits. Moral arguments arose from the general principles of equal treatment for minorities, disadvantaged, and taxpayers.

Legislative focus. Legislation was tailored to individual states, but usually included a mix of unrestricted state aid, special adjustments for core cities, and increases for special needs populations such as handicapped children.

Information flow. The network met periodically at conferences both at the state and national level. Academic papers, court decisions, organizational lobbying, and informal contacts were all coordinated by the Ford Foundation. Ford was very aggressive in translating research findings into state policy implications.

### **Scientific Creationism**

The scientific creationism movement became a major policy issue in 1980-81. In that two year period alone, bills were introduced in twenty-three states requiring equal treatment of "creation science" and "evolution science" in public school curriculums (Pipho, 1981). Equal treatment meant equivalent time for teacher presentation of "scientific concepts," as well as equivalent numbers of texts, library materials, and films. Scientific creationism not only resurrected some of the basic arguments associated with the Scopes "monkey trial" in the 1920s, but also rekindled religious fervor to regain control over the public schools.

The Institute for Creation Science in San Diego, California, was chiefly responsible for creating issue salience, and maintained momentum through alliance with religious organizations like the Moral Majority. The Institute provided three vital services. First, it sponsored conferences, journals, newsletters, and "research." It distributed information directly or channeled it through organizations of several fundamentalist churches such as the Christian Legal Society or the Religious Roundtable. Second, it provided model legislation to local religious groups and interested state legislators. Third, the Institute provided "expert witnesses" for court suits or legislative testimony through a law firm in Cleveland, Ohio.



Since most bills introduced in the twenty-three state legislatures were identical, there was "absolute concept agreement" in this network. Arguments were based on the Bible and dissenters were branded as religious heretics. Listed below is a summary of network characteristics:

Membership. Members of the network can be characterized as a body of "true believers." There is substantial crossover between creationism network members and those who belong to other fundamentalist religious groups such as the Moral Majority. Since the creation science idea is based on the Bible, network members were urged not to compromise or seek political bargains with opponents over scriptural interpretations.

Guidance and promotion. The network is centralized and controlled predominantly by the Institute for Creation Science. There are religious organizations at the state level that coordinate local activities. Organizations at all levels are single-issue oriented and do not concern themselves with issues other than creation.

Conceptual agreement. Agreement on the fundamental principles and details of curriculum is specific and absolute.

Basis for advocacy. Arguments in support of creation science are value-based, i.e., moral and religious. Supporters also claim that the exclusion of religious concepts in school curriculum is not required by law and, consequently, is a distortion of constitutional separation of church and state.

Legislative focus. Legislation proposed in all states is identical, with negotiation and compromise discouraged. Supporters advocate equal treatment of creation and evolution in science courses rather than relegating creation to social studies curriculum.

Information flow. Newsletters and position papers are the most prevalent form of spreading information in this network. The Institute for Creation Science provided lawyers from a single firm to any state requesting assistance.

### **Collective Bargaining for Teachers**

In the late 1960s, a majority of public school teachers believed that collective bargaining was unprofessional (Hess and Kirst, 1971). Female elementary teachers were the most opposed to collective bargaining. But by 1977, twenty-nine states had adopted some form of collective bargaining laws that required employers to bargain with teacher unions. The popularity and spread of collective bargaining statutes in the states resulted from advocacy by the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

Each group had a distinct strategy for organizing teachers. AFT concentrated on urban areas, particularly in the Midwest and East. AFT was able to establish collective bargaining in strong labor states. As recently as 1969, NEA was not a union but a "professional organization," that focused its efforts outside the AFT's big city strongholds. Moreover, state and local NEA chapters could reject national policies and maintained separate organizations with separate member dues.

In 1970 NEA pushed hard for a national unified dues structure and sponsored national conventions advocating collective bargaining. But NEA also formed "Uni-serv," a coordinated group of collective bargaining advocates whose members were selected from the ranks of local teachers.

Uni-serv members were trained by the national NEA in all aspects of organizing, striking, and negotiating. Then Uni-serv staff were subsidized by national NEA to work as the representatives for groups of local school districts. A corps of "young Turks" in the national NEA played a coordinating role similar to school finance reformers in Ford. One of these young Turk leaders, Terry Herndon, became the head of NEA. The national NEA imbued the local Uni-serv members with the principles of collective bargaining, and tried to tailor local NEA activities to the unique needs of states and localities.

The collective bargaining movement rose to national attention through numerous teacher strikes during the 1970s. Teacher grievances came to the fore through national publicity, and collective bargaining was accepted by many teachers who were previously opposed. The initiative of AFT and NEA organizers forced local school district administrators to react with state lobby positions opposing a broad scope for collective bargaining that went beyond wages. Teacher organizers were able to build solidarity among teachers quickly when school boards resisted demands for better pay and working conditions. Electoral pressure from NEA and AFT, including money and precinct workers, caused many state legislators to support collective bargaining. State legislation varied from state to state, but by the late 1970s, collective bargaining for teachers was widely accepted in most areas of the country except the Southeast.

The NEA collective bargaining network was galvanized and coordinated nationally. NEA's network for state collective bargaining statutes contained these characteristics:

Membership. Members were comprised of national and local staff organizers, as well as classroom teachers. Occasionally, labor leaders from other unions would lend nominal support. The Uni-serv representatives were an effective field staff and converted many reluctant teachers.

Guidance and promotion. Initially, collective bargaining was conceived and organized nationally. By the later stages, most of the work was accomplished by elected heads of state level affiliates or local Uni-serv members. National leaders continued to promote the issue through annual conventions and helping with state legislative strategies.

Conceptual agreement. Collective bargaining for teachers embodied a fundamental principle — the right to bargain collectively for wages and a wide array of working conditions. The precise form of a state collective bargaining statute varied considerably depending on state political culture and the desires of state and local NEA units.

Basis for advocacy. Arguments for and against the issue were standard labor/management positions with the exception of opponents' claims that collective bargaining undermined "professionalism."

Legislative focus. The national organizations provided local organizers and representatives with model statutes adopted in other states. However, state and local NEA leaders were able to adapt the standard statute to widely varied conditions.

Information flow. At the national level, numerous conventions were held and local organizers trained in Washington, DC, at NEA headquarters. News of strikes and bargaining difficulties spread through the national press. Most information was disseminated by elected state NEA leaders or Uni-serv representatives.

### **Minimum Competency Testing for High School Graduation**

Public dissatisfaction with declining student achievement in the 1970s resulted in thirty-eight state statutes requiring a minimum competency test for students before high school graduation. The minimum competency testing network (MCT) differs most strikingly from the other three in the matter of central guidance. As one researcher put it (Pipho, 1980):

It is probably fair to say that the minimum competency testing movement, supported for the most part by non-educators, has moved through thirty-eight states without any centralized support, and with no single agency or group of people playing an advocate role.

Expert advisers from organizations like ECS and UCLA did participate in technical information sharing, but only after the idea had reached state legislative agendas. For example, university consultants provided technical assistance to legislators and their assistants in response to legislative requests for help in designing the details of an MCT statute.

MCT gained its salience rapidly, due in large part to the role played by the mass media. Legislative sponsors heard about MCT from newspapers, national news magazines, and educational journals written for non-specialized audiences. The MCT "network" is bounded conceptually by a general belief that school performance could be improved through more testing. Network members did not necessarily agree on specific goals, test questions, or standards. Because there were no clearly recognized spokespersons for MCT, this issue network is most similar to a political movement like the nuclear freeze. Often a lone figure (such as California Assemblyman Gary Hart or former Massachusetts Commissioner of Education Gregory Anrig) sculpted the public's awareness and concern by introducing the issue on to the state's policy agenda. The pattern of interstate MCT agenda-setting was non-hierarchical, loosely coordinated, and spontaneous. Typical of the pattern described by Downs (1971) as the "issue-attention cycle," MCT experienced a rapid flare of mass media attention, but quickly faded into technical journals. Because of its popularity and adoption in so many states, MCT has already demonstrated an impact on secondary schools. Listed below is a summary of MCT characteristics.

Membership. MCT is typified by a very loosely coupled group of legislators, legislative aides, education promoters, and a cadre of test design experts.

Guidance and promotion. Guidance was highly decentralized and promotion was spontaneous and diffuse. MCT caught on quickly with no interest group sponsorship in the early stages of its development. It was an idea whose time had come.

Conceptual agreement. The concept of MCT is vague. Members concurred on a general notion concerning improved student performance through testing, but the specific form of the test or its academic goals were never universally shared.

Basis for advocacy. MCT supporters argued that the school system take greater accountability for poor student performance. Since students were graduating from high school without certain basic skills, MCT became an equity issue for students who had slipped through the system.

Legislative focus. No uniform statutes were proposed. Legislation varied considerably from state to state in every dimension except that a test must be passed as a condition for a high school diploma.

Information flow. For several years, there was a continuous flow of information through the news media and educational journals. MCT was actively promoted through speeches at major conferences like ECS and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) by politicians who wanted to be identified as education policy innovators.

## **STATE POLITICAL CULTURE AND ITS IMPACT ON AGENDA SETTING**

State political culture plays an important role in mediating the success of policy issue networks in agenda-setting and policy diffusion. State political culture represents a variety of factors (social, economic, historical, political) which help determine whether a policy will be promoted to a state's agenda. Political culture includes popular attitudes toward local control of education and acceptance of higher levels of government, the role of political parties, and the legitimacy of other political institutions (McDonnell and McLaughlin, 1982). We selected six dimensions of political culture that were most relevant for assessing and comparing issue networks: (1) historical receptivity to new policy ideas that circulate among the states; (2) impact of state political culture in changing national concept; (3) sophistication of state administration and legislative staff; (4) cohesiveness of interest groups leading to coalition or conflict; (5) linkage of state or local officials to interstate policy issue networks; and (6) linkage of relevant intrastate interest groups to interstate networks.

Some examples of how the six dimensions of political culture influence the success or non-success of issues reaching the state agenda are discussed below, illustrating that there is an interaction effect between the policy issue, the network spreading it, and the political culture of the state. School finance is included in each to demonstrate these interactions on a single policy area. Other policy areas are added to display the distinctiveness of each state's political system. Research reported in this section is intended to illustrate the potential role of political culture rather than reach quantitative conclusions.

### **California**

California is a perennial national agenda leader. It is consistently among the first states to initiate or respond to policy reforms. California has influenced other states regionally and nationally by enacting model legislation, and by promoting policy issues through its news media and well organized interest groups. The state's political leaders, state and national policy brokers, and legislative and agency staff members are well linked to national information sources.

The Ford school finance network was active in numerous ways in California. Ford funded the lawyers' Western Center for Law and Poverty there and it was Professor John Coons at the University of California at Berkeley who sued the state. Ford provided school finance reform information and advocacy capacity to such varied groups as the League of Women Voters and a Hispanic research organization at San Diego State University. Ford money helped ECS complete several technical studies of California

property taxation for the State Education Department. Ford graduate fellowships to Berkeley and Stanford spawned a new generation of school finance reformers.

In the case of collective bargaining, California reacted quickly to the AFT and NEA pressure for legislation allowing collective bargaining for teachers. Gubernatorial candidate Jerry Brown won the endorsement of the California Teachers Association (NEA) for his advocacy of this policy. Also, the state's history of collective bargaining in other industries and services (including public employees) helped political receptivity to the issue. In 1965, the Winton Act allowed teachers to "meet and confer" over salaries and working conditions. It was not clear in many cases, however, who had the legal right to represent teachers, and what rights were still retained by school boards. Pressure from local teacher groups and from the national AFT and NEA thus led to a number of strikes and political initiatives for reform within state government. AFT relied on its national strategy to capture as many of the urban districts as possible. NEA trained local teachers and teacher representatives to participate in Uni-serv. These young Turks from NEA were able to create a ground swell within the ranks of California teachers while using the technical and legal expertise gained in their training to overwhelm local school officials. The power of California teachers to present their case to legislators culminated with the 1976 passage of collective bargaining legislation, with little opposition. Only at the last moment did conservative legislators manage to enact a no-strike clause.

### **Florida**

Florida is an anomaly in the South. Unlike many other southern states that are known for their conservatism and resistance to change, Florida has been among the national leaders in the area of school reform. The election of Governor Reuben Askew in 1968 signaled the ascent of education to the top of the state's political agenda. Askew's efforts were strongly reinforced by a new group of legislators who took an assertive role in reconstructing the state's method of school finance, and its system of accountability of local school districts to the state. In 1971 the Governor and the Legislature initiated cooperation with the national school finance network, coordinated and led by the Ford Foundation. There was little partisan opposition to the proposals of Democrat Askew. The local and national news media coverage of Florida's school finance equalization law of 1972 helped focus national attention on Florida. The backing by the Ford Foundation was key to the concept of school finance reform within the state and also linked Florida with school finance reforms taking place in other states. Ford and NIE sponsored a network of academics and technical experts in the field who spread the Florida concept.

### **Indiana**

Indiana is a conservative mid-western state known for its belief in local control and resistance to change initiated from the outside. Surrounded by more aggressive states like Illinois and Michigan, Indiana has been reluctant to follow the trends of its neighbors. Its school finance system remained unreformed and no laws were passed requiring an MCT for graduation. The school finance reform network never attempted to influ-

ence Indiana. Its political culture was viewed as inhospitable to substantial reform, so other states were targeted for the limited Ford funds.

The role of the national news media in carrying new ideas and creating salience for particular policy issues has been minor. Additionally, the links among state interest groups and state officials and interstate policy issue networks have been weak. The sophistication of state administration and the expertise of legislative and agency staffs have also been comparatively low. For example, nearly one-third of all jobs in state government are based on patronage. For this reason political factions within the state are quite active. Indiana did succumb to the pressure from NEA Uni-serv in 1973 to pass a weak collective bargaining bill for salary and fringe benefits only. Attempts to expand the scope of bargaining to other areas of education policy failed.

The strong link between the national Moral Majority and other national church-related groups and state politics is an exception to the usual insulation of Indiana from interstate influence. Religion plays an important role in Indiana political culture. In the case of scientific creationism, support for religious ideals helped account for the receptivity of proposed scientific creationism legislation. In 1978, legislation was initiated by a fundamentalist minister who was also a state representative from Indianapolis. This bill passed the House but died in the Senate. In 1981, a first term senator from central Indiana again tried to pass a similar bill. He had substantial backing from the San Diego based Institute for Creation Research as well as from the Moral Majority. The senator's unwillingness to allow the Moral Majority to stage mass demonstrations in favor of scientific creationism in the schools was regarded as one reason for the bill's ultimate failure.

## **Texas**

Texas has long been regarded as one of the most conservative states in the union (Pettus, 1976). The ethic of local autonomy and state's rights dominate state politics. Local communities are fiercely resistant to state intervention and bureaucracy. Similarly, the state rhetorically opposes federal regulations and involvement in its affairs. While other states have initiated or followed reform trends in the past (such as in mass transportation, civil rights, welfare, and collective bargaining), Texas has appeared relatively immune to new ideas and to various national networks promoting policy reforms. Predictably, state control of education has been weak, and the level of legislative staff and technical expertise is not high.

The school finance reform network made numerous attempts to place school finance reform as a top priority agenda item in Texas. None of these attempts led to much legislative action, but reform was discussed by state political leaders. Ford's major funding went to a San Antonio based Hispanic policy research and lobbying organization (Intercultural Development Research Association). Ford-funded projects of the Washington based National Conference of State Legislatures provided consultants to the Texas Legislature. Ford helped fund lawyers who sued the state. All of this activity resulted in some incremental finance formula change, but major conceptual reform never reached the state's legislative agenda.

The tradition of right-to-work and strong statewide anti-union sentiment accounts directly for the failure of teacher collective bargaining



to reach the state agenda. Texas is one of two states where collective bargaining is still illegal. In sum, all four interstate networks targeted Texas and failed to gain legislative passage of their ideas.

## CONCLUSIONS

Our study of four policy issue networks in six states points to these conclusions:

(1) Policy issue networks are an underutilized concept for understanding the early phases of state policymaking. These networks may be characterized along such internal organization dimensions as membership, central guidance and promotion, conceptual agreement, and information flow. Variability in these dimensions can generate differences in state agenda-setting processes.

(2) Networks may also be characterized by the kind of policy solution they advocate. Along this policy dimension networks vary from a complete, inflexible statute (e.g., scientific creationism) to similarly motivated but highly variable programs and legislation (e.g., minimum competency testing).

(3) The content or subject matter of a policy issue network and the grounds on which the arguments are advanced may contribute to the ways the networks develop, the kinds of policy solutions they advocate, and distinctions among them as to types. Ranging from arguments primarily based on philosophy (e.g., creation science) to legal, constitution-based arguments (e.g., school finance) to conventional political bargaining arguments (e.g., collective bargaining for teachers), the network message will help determine variation in both the operation and success of policy issue networks. Moreover, centrally driven networks create similar state statutes, as evidenced by the difference between centrally led creation science and minimum competency testing.

Further research on issue networks is needed to test the dimensions, classifications, and assertions that have emerged from our four cases, and to illuminate more fully how issue networks influence state policymaking and agenda-setting. The very rapid diffusion of education policy agenda items across states continues. For example, since 1980 over one half of the states have increased their course requirements for high school graduation, and twenty-three states have made course requirements for admission to public universities more stringent. For these reasons policy issue networks need to be better understood and merit further study.

## NOTES

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1. Michael Kirst was a member of the California State Board of Education from 1975 to 1981, and President for three years. At the same time he was on the Executive Committee of the Education Commission of the States.
2. ECS is an interstate compact that includes governors, state legislators, and educators to devise interstate policy analysis and coordination. This



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