The Effects of Misalignment and the Pursuit of a Counter-Partisan Agenda:
How National Politics Conditions State Policymaking[♦]

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Does the partisan control of national government influence the behavior of state governments? With little power at the national level, one alternative for the minority party is to focus their policy efforts on the state capitals where they do maintain majorities, and thus, can find legislative success. We argue that the misalignment in partisan control between national and state government influences the behavior of state legislatures, leading them to pass more ideological policies. We examine the systematic variation of policies passed in the states from 1980 to 2014, a period during which the national government began shifting between unified and divided government. Our results show that while Republican-controlled states have consistently pushed policy in a more conservative direction, Democratic-controlled states have been more reactive to national politics, pushing liberal policies more aggressively when Republicans have unified control in Washington. This is particularly the case in the Northeast and Western regions of the country where the Democratic Party enjoys its deepest bases of support. These findings demonstrate that states do not create policy in a vacuum; they often respond to the national political climate by taking advantage of regional and local (state) environments.

Introduction

In an increasingly partisan and polarized environment, when one party gains control of the national government—controlling the presidency and both chambers of congress—it pushes to enact its agenda, with little incentive to consider the policy goals of the minority party. This leaves the minority party with few options to pursue its agenda at the national level. A similar scenario exists when the two parties share power in a divided government arrangement, as neither party will be able to easily implement its policy agenda. It is often assumed that the minority party or parties in divided government are left with no alternative but to bide their time and play an opposition role until the next election cycle. However, American federalism—through the constitutionally derived independent powers of both national and state governments—offers another option. With no national majority, parties may focus their policy efforts in the state capitals where they do have majorities and a political mandate to pass their preferred policies, either through direct opposition to federal actions or by pushing the state in the opposite direction of the platform being pursued at the national level.

There are numerous examples of the tension between the policies enacted at the national level by one party and the response or actions of states controlled by the opposite party. In 2017, when the Republican Party held unified control at the national level, California, a Democratic-controlled state, initiated 24 different lawsuits against the federal government. These suits targeted federal policies such as the border wall, the travel ban, the loosening of student loan protections, efforts to dismantle the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare"), and the decision to end DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) (Hart 2017). California was not the only state to sue the Trump administration; other states, such as Washington, Maryland,

New York, Massachusetts, and Minnesota either joined existing suits or initiated their own legal action. What all these states have in common is that they tend to be liberal in their policy preferences, and viewed the policies of the Republican-controlled federal government as impeding or outright abusing the rights of their residents. Similar actions occurred when Democrats controlled both the presidency and Congress at the outset of the Obama administration, when Republican-controlled states filed numerous lawsuits against the federal government, most notably to stop the implementation of the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate. In fact, during President Obama's tenure, Texas sued the federal government over 48 times; "a point of pride for the state's Republican leaders" (Satija 2017). The tangible tension between the federal government and the states can be readily observed with the following quote taken from a joint statement by California legislative leaders, Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles) and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon (D-Paramount), issued shortly after the 2016 elections (de León and Rendon 2016):

> "…California has long set an example for other states to follow. And California will defend its people and our progress. We are not going to allow one election to reverse generations of progress at the height of our historic diversity, scientific advancement, economic output, and sense of global responsibility… While Donald Trump may have won the presidency, he hasn't changed our values. America is greater than any one man or party. We will not be dragged back into the past. We will lead the resistance to any effort that would shred our social fabric or our Constitution…"

The push-and-pull nature of American federalism naturally creates conflict among the national government and the states. Actions and reactions of states to federal policies have been amplified due to increased partisan polarization and party competition at both the national and state level (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2008; Conlan and Posner 2016). Another exacerbating factor to this conflict may be the increasingly nationalized nature of American politics. Daniel Hopkins (2018) argues that voters have become more attentive to what is

occurring in Washington than in their own state and local communities, with their preferences now anchored more heavily on national party platforms than those at subnational levels. Because of this orientation, members of Congress have much less incentive to focus on constituent benefits and have instead ceded policymaking authority to party leadership in their respective chambers (Drutman and Kosar 2018). Moreover, increased polarization and party competition have made these choices bimodal (support or opposition for a particular policy) and much more distinct (Mason 2018). However, whether these changing political factors have led to greater federal-state conflict and reactive state policies remains an open question.

In this paper, we test the assumptions that states have become more reactive to federal policies due to increased partisanship, party competition, and the overall nationalization of American politics by asking whether and when partisan control of national government influences state policymaking. Previous work has generally shown inconsistent results for the effects of state partisan control on state policies (Hanson 1984; Lax and Phillips 2011; Caughey, Warshaw, and Xu 2017). While much of this inconsistency may be due to the lack of a dynamic measure for policy liberalism, we argue that it is also attributable to the conditional effect of partisan control at the national level. Thus, we posit that the misalignment in partisan control between national and state government influences the behavior of state legislatures, leading to a bottom-up response to enact more ideologically distinct policies during these periods of tension. Specifically, we expect state legislatures will produce more ideological policies during these periods of partisan misalignment and less ideological policies during periods of partisan alignment, when the national government bears some of the burden of the party agenda. To test these expectations, we utilize Caughey and Warshaw's (2016) dynamic measure of policy liberalism to examine the systematic variation of policies passed in the states

from 1980 to 2014, a period during which the national government began shifting between unified and divided control. Our findings show that while Republican-controlled states have consistently pushed state policy in a more conservative direction during the time period examined, Democratic-controlled states have been more reactive to national politics, pushing liberal policies much more aggressively when Republicans have unified control in Washington. These results are particularly strong in the Northeast and Western regions of the country, where the Democratic Party enjoys its deepest bases of political support. These findings have implications for how we study the relationship between the federal and state governments and provide a better understanding of how party competition, polarization, and the changing context of American politics influence the motivation and ability of states to pass their preferred policies.

Previous Work on Federal-State Relations

Research has examined different aspects of U.S. federal-state relations, including the distribution of power between the federal government and the states (Tarlton 1965; Knight 2002), the boundaries of federal and state power (Mettler 2000; Byrne et al. 2007), and policy innovation, development, and adoption across levels of government (Boehmke and Witmer 2004; Daley and Garand 2005; Boushey and Luedtke 2011). Particular to our area of interest is scholarship that has looked at how states (or citizens of states) respond to federal policies. In other words, how does American federalism allow for a bottom-up response (e.g., states) to top-down government actions (e.g., national government) and what factors influence this reaction? Soss et al. (2001) analyzed how states responded to the passage of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which created a system of block grants and gave states more options for implementation, but also imposed certain conditions (e.g., promote work and

reduce welfare reliance). The authors found that a number of factors shape state welfare policies, but in particular, the racial composition of families who receive these benefits had a differentiating effect. Barrilleaux and Rainey (2014) examined governors' decisions to support or oppose Medicaid expansion under the 2010 Affordable Care Act. They found that political considerations (governors' partisanship and composition of the legislature) were more important than state citizen needs and economic conditions in determining whether governors accepted or declined the Medicaid funding. Nicholson-Crotty (2012) looked at the refusal of states to accept federal grant aid money. He demonstrates that partisanship and electoral considerations have influenced state acceptance of federal monies, but that this refusal is not novel to more recent times; an era of increased polarization. Brown (2010) shows that partisanship is an important explanatory factor in determining which policy results are attributed to the president and which are credited to the governor. He finds that voters ascribe blame for poor economic conditions on the opposing party executive and overestimate policy success of whichever executive—president or governor—is of their preferred party.

As American politics has become more nationalized, homogenized, and polarized, there is an incentive for states governed by the opposite party to that of the national government to respond to federal action. This response is possible because a state-level majority offers a counterbalance to the federal majority, where the national minority party can evoke actionable change in response to constituent demands. Given the increased focus on national politics, state lawmakers are incentivized to offer a clear alternative (Hopkins 2018).

The ability to govern and implement policies at the national level, either under unified party control or under divided government, has been the focus of much scholarly attention (e.g., Fiorina 1992; Krehbiel 1996; Coleman 1999; Mayhew 2005). Moreover, as noted above,

research on states' responses to federal action has focused on specific policy areas or particular decisions. Largely missing from the federalism literature is work that more broadly captures the behavior of state governments in response to party control of the national government. Certainly, states have used discretion on federally mandated policies. This discretion is explicitly manifested when states refuse to recognize or enforce federal law (as in the case of assisting federal officers with deportations in sanctuary cities), or file lawsuits in an effort to stop the implementation of federal policies (as in the case of President Trump's travel ban). While state legal or non-enforcement action against federal policy is immediate, dramatic, and newsworthy, state legislative action may be a more effective and durable response.

Partisan Misalignment and State Legislative Response

Drawing upon previous work on federalism and state responses to federal action, we explore how state legislatures react to federal policies. We argue that state legislative action is conditioned by the increased nationalization of politics that has resulted in more homogenous and distinct political choices, which are influenced by an environment of greater polarization. We are particularly interested in testing whether state legislatures will produce more ideological policies during periods of partisan misalignment between the national and state government and less ideological policies during periods of partisan alignment. As such, we build upon the theoretical framework of the increased nationalization of politics, the dynamics of divided federalism, and the effects of partisanship on federal-state power arrangements.

Brown (2010, p. 606) argues that, "…partisan considerations will influence allocations of blame in the many policy areas where the president and the governor share responsibility…" He notes that opportunity for partisan voters to cast blame is contingent upon whether "divided government" is at play—when the president and the governor belong to different parties. We

extend the application of the concept of divided government and posit that it can also refer to the misalignment in control of the national and state government, wherein one party controls the national government and the other party controls the state government. Thus, partisanship in the context of a more nationalized and polarized political environment plays an important and agitating role in the relationship between the federal government and state governments. As Barrilleaux and Rainey (2014) show in their work on whether states opposed Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, a governor's partisanship and composition of the legislature strongly influenced the decision. Similarly, we argue that more broadly, states are motivated to respond to federal policies and are guided by which party controls the levers of state government, in particular, the executive and legislative branches. Based upon these theoretical propositions of divided federalism and partisanship, we present our working hypotheses below.

The scenario where one party holds unified control of the national government and the opposite party has unified control of state government creates the ripest environment for states to respond to national policies, since the policymaking levers of state governments are more likely to be willing and able to respond to federal policy action. This scenario produces the pure misalignment hypothesis.

H1a: *Pure misalignment hypothesis-* States will produce more ideological policies when one party has unified control of the national government and the other party has unified control of the state government.

An important qualifier in examining states' responses to federal policies is the fact that party competition at the national level is a relatively recent phenomenon. Between 1936 and 1980, the Democratic Party held unified control of the national government for 26 years. This arrangement relegated Republicans to seemingly permanent minority status at the national

level. As a result, the Republican Party has long utilized state governments to pass preferred policies because their ability to control the national government was so infrequent. Preferred policies in states controlled by Republicans are likely to have been in place longer and may not require a different, more ideological response when the Democratic Party has control of the national government. As a result, misalignment, during the period under review, should have a lesser effect in Republican controlled states. This scenario offers the Republican misalignment hypothesis.

> H1b: *Republican misalignment hypothesis*- While pure misalignment creates more ideological policies in the states, the effect may be mitigated by which party is in control of the state government. Partisan misalignment is likely to have a weaker policy effect in Republican-controlled states than in Democratic-controlled states.

The Democratic Party and Republican Party, each, have enjoyed deeper and more enduring support in varying regions of the country. This distinctive support is in large part due to a number of factors that are captured by the presence of different political cultures (Elazar 1970, 1984; Johnson 1976; Fitzpatrick and Hero 1988) that align better with one of the two political parties. We expect to see the strongest effects of misalignment (i.e., greater policy ideology) in the regions where each party holds its deepest base of support. Therefore, we propose two additional hypotheses: the Democratic regional misalignment hypothesis and the Republican regional misalignment hypothesis.

> H2a: *Democratic regional misalignment hypothesis*- States in Democratic regions will produce more liberal policies than states in non-Democratic regions when Republicans have unified control of the national government and Democrats have unified control of the state government.

> H2b: *Republican regional misalignment hypothesis*- States in Republican regions will produce more conservative policies than states in non-Republican regions when Democrats have unified control of the national government and Republicans have unified control of the state government.

Data and Methods

The dependent variable in our analysis is Caughey and Warshaw's (2016) measure of state policy liberalism. Caughey and Warshaw (2016) developed this measure by collecting data on 148 policies between 1936 and 2014, covering topics such as abortion, criminal justice, education, the environment, taxation, and gun control (among many others). From this dataset of state policies, Caughey and Warshaw (2016) used dynamic latent-variable estimation to create annual ideal point estimates of state policy liberalism, with higher values indicating more liberal policy and lower values signifying more conservative policy.

Our analysis focuses on the years from 1980 to 2014. We examine this date range primarily for practical reasons. Prior to 1980, national politics was largely uncompetitive, with the Democratic Party enjoying an extended period of national dominance. For instance, from 1936 to 1979, Democrats enjoyed 26 years of unified national government across 13 Congresses, while Republicans only saw unified control for two brief years during the 83rd Congress (1953-1955), at the onset of the Eisenhower administration.[1] By comparison, 1980 to 2014 has been a period of intense party competition at the national level, with frequent stretches of divided government and occasional but brief instances of unified control (see Table 1). For instance, from 1980 to 2014, there were 26 years of divided government, five years of unified Democratic control (1980, 1993-1994, 2009-2011), and four years of unified Republican control (2003-2006). Hence, the pre-1980 period simply provides too little national-level variation to offer any leverage for testing our hypotheses.

The main independent variables in our analysis capture the alignment and misalignment of partisan control between state and federal government. We include two dichotomous

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[1] For a complete breakdown of national partisan control during this earlier period, see Appendix 1.

variables to capture unified Democratic and Republican control at the state level (controlling

the governorship and both chambers of the legislature), respectively, each coded as 1 or 0.

These are also commonly known as "trifectas" among observers of state politics. Data from

1980 to 2011 for each of these variables were collected from Klarner (2013), while data from

2012 to 2014 were gathered from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)

(2018). Similarly, we also include two dichotomous indicators to capture unified partisan

control at the national level (controlling the presidency and both chambers of Congress). As

shown in Table 2, though unified partisan control is relatively rare at the national level, it is far

more common in the states. From 1980 to 2014, there were 814 instances of unified partisan

control out of 1,715 state-years (excluding Nebraska), which means that roughly 47 percent of

all state governments over this 35-year period were unified, compared to only 26 percent at the

national level. Of these instances, 467 were unified Democratic and 347 were unified

Republican.

Finally, we also included four dichotomous variables to capture partisan alignment and

misalignment between state and national government. Democratic and Republican alignment

occur when state and national government are each fully controlled by Democrats and

Republicans, respectively. Likewise, Democratic and Republican misalignment occur when

Democrats and Republicans, respectively, have unified control at the state level, while the

other party has unified control at the national level. As we hypothesize, these are the periods

when unified partisan control should be most consequential for state policymaking.

Short of having full unified control, parties might also be able to enact their agenda at

the state level if they enjoy veto-proof majorities in the state legislature. Thus, we also include

two dichotomous variables to control for the existence of partisan veto-proof majorities. The

first, coded as 1 or 0, indicates whether Democrats maintain veto-proof majorities in both chambers of the state legislature, while the second, also coded as 1 or 0, captures whether Republicans have veto-proof majorities in both chambers. To account for collinearity, in which the parties may have both unified government and veto-proof majorities, we have coded these variables to capture only those instances where parties have veto-proof majorities in the absence of full party unification.

In addition to measures of partisan control, we also consider a number of other political factors that may influence state policy ideology. Legislative professionalism is an important factor to account for, as states with legislatures that are more professionalized—those with more staff and resources—may have a greater institutional capacity to act on a wider range of policy proposals. To control for these differences, we include the first dimension of Bowen and Greene's (2014) measure of legislative professionalism.[2] State policy should also generally reflect the ideology of a state's citizens (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993). In other words, states that are more liberal should generally enact policies that are more liberal. Previous work has indeed found evidence that state policy liberalism is influenced by citizen ideology (Barrilleaux 1997, 1999; Witko and Newmark 2005).[3] Thus, we include Berry, Ringquist, Fording, and Hanson's (1998) measure of state citizen ideology, which ranges from 0 to 100, with higher values indicating more liberal citizen ideology.[4]

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[2] This measure is highly correlated with other common measures of legislative professionalism, such as the Squire Index (see Bowen and Greene 2014). We use this measure, as opposed to the Squire Index, due to the availability of data across more state-years.

[3] While many of these studies also find that government ideology influences policy liberalism, we do not include a measure of government ideology in this analysis, as it is already captured (to a large extent) by state partisan control.

[4] Though the original paper was published in 1998, updated measures are available through Richard Fording's website: https://rcfording.wordpress.com/state-ideology-data/.

Socioeconomic factors may also influence state policy liberalism. One such factor is a

state's level of union activity. As previous scholars have discussed, unions can organize for

greater state spending, particularly on welfare programs (Radcliff and Saiz 1998), as well as

push back against business interests lobbying for more conservative state economic policy

(Witko and Newmark 2005). To account for this, we rely on Hirsch, Macpherson, and

Vroman's (2011) estimates of state union density.[5] We also include Frank's (2016) estimates

of state Gini Index to control for level of income inequality in each state-year. High levels of

income inequality may lead some states to enact more liberal policies aimed at addressing

these inequities, such as greater public spending on social programs or increases in the state

minimum wage, while other states may react by passing some conservative policies, such as

tax cuts.[6] Finally, since states with populations that are more diverse should be more inclined

to implement liberal policies, we control for demographic heterogeneity using Kelly and

Witko's (2014) estimates of each state's nonwhite population.[7]

Utilizing these predictors, we estimate a dynamic panel model with state fixed effects

to test our hypotheses about how national partisan control influences ideological policymaking

in the states. While many panel models of this nature may also include year fixed effects, we

do not include these here because it presents problems of perfect collinearity between the year

effects and our variables for partisan national control. Instead, we include panel corrected

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[5] Hirsch, Macpherson, and Vroman's (2011) original paper was published in 2001, but updated union density figures are available via their website: http://unionstats.gsu.edu/MonthlyLaborReviewArticle.htm.

[6] One example of this has been New York under Democratic Governor Andrew Cuomo. See, for instance, Vielkind (2016).

[7] This measure represents the proportion of each state's population identifying as non-white. Because Kelly and Witko (2014) only have estimates through 2011, we imputed values for 2012 through 2014 using a three-year moving average. Though other imputation methods would also suffice, we opted to use a three-year average because we have three years of missing data.

standard errors to account for both heteroscedasticity and contemporaneous correlation (Beck and Katz 1995).

We employ this type of model for a number of methodological reasons. First, we use a dynamic specification because we cannot assume that the effect of these variables on state policy liberalism is static. That is, the effect of these variables on policy decisions made in one year should strongly influence policy liberalism in subsequent years. If a state legislature, for example, moves to make abortion rights less restrictive or legalizes same-sex marriage, these policy decisions—unless reversed—will shift the state's overall policy orientation in a liberal direction well into the future. In addition, the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable also accounts for the existence of serial correlation.

This model specification does present some methodological hurdles. First, the inclusion of state fixed effects with the lagged dependent variable leads to biased coefficients (Nickell 1981). This bias, however, is not problematic for our analysis given the sufficiently large number of time periods being captured (Beck and Katz 2011).[8] A second concern is that state policy liberalism is nonstationary, which makes capturing dynamics through a lagged dependent variable problematic for various methodological reasons (see Keele and Kelly 2006). In this regard, we follow an approach similar to that of Caughey, Warshaw, and Xu (2017), who did not find the issue of nonstationarity problematic for their dynamic specifications of state policy liberalism.[9]

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[8] As Beck and Katz (2011, 342) note, this bias is less serious when the number of time periods is larger than 20.

[9] Mirroring the findings of Caughey, Warshaw, and Xu (2017), we show that the coefficients on our lagged dependent variables are high, but less than 1, which suggests that there is no unit root. Nonetheless, we follow their approach and provide supplementary analyses in the Appendix, which demonstrate that our results are robust even when using first differences of state policy liberalism with a *within* estimator, as well the inclusion of higher-order time lags.

Results

Table 3 displays the results of our baseline models. These models include only our dichotomous predictors for partisan control at the state and national levels, along with our four dichotomous variables capturing partisan alignment and misalignment between state and national control. Each model is estimated with a different grouping of states. The first iteration includes all 49 states in the dataset between 1980 and 2014, excluding Nebraska due to its unicameral legislature. Given that the South was undergoing a political realignment during this period, moving away from solid Democratic control and towards Republican control, the second specification includes only non-Southern states (N = 35) to account for the region's unique political dynamics. The third through sixth models are further disaggregated to highlight any regional differences in the effect of partisan misalignment on state policy liberalism. These groupings are based on the regional codes assigned by the U.S. Census.[10]

The baseline results in Table 3 provide initial support for our hypotheses. As we expect, unified partisan control in the states does have an effect on the ideological direction of state policy. Beginning with Republicans, unified Republican control of state government leads to less policy liberalism, on average, than under divided government. These effects, however, differ by region. While unified Republican control consistently leads to less state policy liberalism, it is particularly strong in the South and Midwest, while failing to reach statistical significance in the Northeast. National partisan control, however, does not appear to have any effect on ideological policymaking by state Republicans, as the coefficients for Republican alignment and misalignment fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance across

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[10] Under the original Census groupings, Delaware and Maryland were categorized as part of the South. We have regrouped these states to the Northeast region. This change does not produce any substantive changes in our results. For a full table of the states included in each grouping, see the Appendix.

all model specifications. Thus, unified Republican control at the state level leads to more conservative policy, on average, regardless of whether Democrats or Republicans have unified control in Washington.

The effect of unified Democratic control, however, does appear to be strongly influenced by the national partisan context. Across all states, unified Democratic control, on average, leads to more liberal state policy than under divided government. Even more so than Republicans, these results are subject to regional differences. Despite strong effects of unified Democratic control in the South and Midwest, the coefficients for the Non-South, Northeast, and West fail to reach statistical significance. This changes dramatically, however, when Republicans gain unified control at the national level. Periods of Democratic misalignment have led to remarkable accelerations in policy liberalism in states that have unified Democratic control, particularly in the non-South, Northeast, and Western states. For instance, while the effects of unified Democratic control in these three regions range from .005 to .015 and all lack statistical significance, the effects of Democratic misalignment range from .097 to .194 (each statistically significant at $p < 0.01$).

These findings are robust when accounting for our set of control variables. Table 4 contains the effect of our predictors on state policy liberalism after controlling for these other factors, which allows us to further isolate the influence of partisan misalignment on policy liberalism. As these results indicate, the effects of partisan control and partisan misalignment found in our baseline specification above are robust even when controlling for other factors predicted to affect policy liberalism, such as the existence of Democratic veto-proof majorities, income inequality, union density, and the size of a state's nonwhite population. In line with the baseline model, unified Republican control, on average, leads to less policy liberalism. This

effect is consistently negative (in the conservative direction) across all model specifications and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in all but the Southern model. The coefficients for Republican alignment and misalignment, however, still fail to reach statistical significance. These results further suggest that unified Republican control in the states leads to more conservative policy regardless of whether the state government is misaligned with the national government, rather than because of it. This null effect of Republican misalignment thus provides strong support for hypothesis 1b (*Republican misalignment hypothesis*).

The effects of Democratic partisan control and misalignment are also consistent with the baseline models above. Across all states, the effect of unified Democratic control, on average, leads to more policy liberalism. Though this effect is positive for all model specifications, it fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance in the non-South, Northeast, and West. The Democratic misalignment coefficients, however, indicate that unified Democratic control amid unified Republican control at the national level leads to significant increases in state policy liberalism. While in non-Southern states, unified Democratic control on policy liberalism is relatively small and fails to reach statistical significance, Democratic misalignment in non-Southern states leads to a statistically significant increase in policy liberalism of 0.117 ($p < 0.001$). From a regional perspective, the effects of Democratic misalignment are particularly strong in the Northeast and West, where Democratic misalignment, on average, leads to a 0.095 ($p < 0.05$) and 0.205 ($p < 0.01$) increase in policy liberalism, respectively. Meanwhile, in the South, where local political environments may temper attempts to push liberal policies too aggressively, Democratic misalignment actually leads to less policy liberalism, on average ($p < 0.05$). This makes sense when one accounts for regional context. In an area of the country that has trended in a more conservative direction,

Democrats may be more cognizant of local (regional) dynamics and thus be reluctant to deviate too far from a national agenda that may be popular in that state. These findings further support the *Democratic regional misalignment hypothesis* (H2a).

The effects of Democratic misalignment are also substantively significant, particularly in the non-South. Figure 1 displays the predicted policy effects of partisan control, alignment, and misalignment across all states and in just non-Southern states (the first and second models in Table 4), along with their 95 percent confidence intervals (using the panel-corrected errors). Relative to the independent effects of unified Democratic control, which are of roughly equal magnitude to that of unified Republican control, the effect of Democratic misalignment in the non-South is considerably large. For instance, the partial coefficient of Democratic misalignment in the non-South is roughly 6.5 times larger than the coefficient of unified Democratic control in the non-South, 3 times larger than the coefficient of unified Democratic control in all states, and more than 2.5 times larger than the effect of unified Republican control across all states and the non-South.

The regional effects, however, are even more pronounced. As shown in Figure 2, which plots the coefficients of the regional models in Table 4, the effects of Democratic misalignment on policy liberalism is particularly strong in Northeastern and Western states. In the Northeast, the effect of Democratic misalignment on policy liberalism is nearly 8 times larger than the independent effect of unified Democratic control in the region. Even yet, this pales in comparison to the West. In Western states, the coefficient for Democratic misalignment is over 25 times larger than the independent effect of unified Democratic control in the region. Relative to other model specifications, the influence of Democratic misalignment in the West is more than twice as large as it is in the Northeast, and roughly 75 percent stronger than its

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effect in the non-South. This suggests that during periods of unified Republican control in Washington, Western states with unified Democratic control (such as California and Oregon), have been the fiercest activists for liberal policymaking.

Our results generally support the hypotheses we have laid out about how partisan misalignment—control of the national government by one party and control of state government by the opposite party—affects the policies passed by state governments. We find Democratic-controlled states in the non-South pass more ideological policies when the Republican Party has unified control of the national government (Democratic misalignment). However, we also find regional qualifiers to these results. Though the effect of Democratic misalignment is quite strong in the Northeast, Western states have pushed liberal policy most aggressively when Republicans hold unified national control.

The strength of our results should be considered in light of two additional factors. First, our findings are based on conservative estimates. Our model specification biases the coefficients downward with the lagged dependent variable (Achen 2000), which makes it more difficult to find statistical significance. Second, our regional groupings do not perfectly align with where each party maintains its strongest bases of political support in the contemporary political environment. Clean regional Democratic/Republican demarcations are difficult to ascertain, especially with a changing electoral map. For example, some solidly Republican states, such as Utah, fall in predominantly Democratic regions, such as the American West. Our measures capture general trends, with outliers serving to temper the regional effects in our models.

Conclusion

The U.S. federal system of government not only permits, but also promotes the actions of states, either as a direct response to national level policies or as part of a broader agenda that can be in contrast to the federal government platform. State actions can take a number of forms, including the filing of lawsuits against policies enacted by the federal government, or a state's outright refusal to help enforce federal laws. A less visible, but perhaps more durable action is the ability of state governments to enact legislation in response to the balance of power in Washington. To date, though, there has been little systematic analysis about how states have responded to changing partisan control of the national government—particularly in more contemporary times when national politics has taken center stage and party competition and polarization have become important mediating factors in state government decisions.

Our findings show that while Republican-controlled states have consistently pushed state policy in a more conservative direction, Democratic-controlled states have been more reactive to national politics, pushing liberal policies much more aggressively when Republicans have unified control in Washington. These effects are particularly strong in the Northeast and Western regions of the country, where the party enjoys its deepest bases of political support. These findings demonstrate that states do not create policy in a vacuum; they respond to the national political climate by taking advantage of regional and local (state) environments. Thus, the party not in power at the national level is not simply relegated to minority status with little recourse but to voice its opposition. Rather, the minority party can pursue policies in an arena that provides circumstances that are more favorable—states where they possess majority power.

Certainly, the relationship between the federal government and the states is a complex one. States are reliant upon the federal government for both monetary and logistical support (to varying degrees), and as a result, they cannot simply counter federal policies just because they have the ability to do so. As a result, states must consider a multitude of factors beyond just partisan misalignment before deciding to enact more ideological policies. Future work should expand upon these findings by more closely examining other factors that may influence a state's willingness to pursue a counter-partisan agenda. In light of increasing partisan polarization and party competition, future work should also consider different types of policies where states may have a clearer boundary from federal policies and where they can pursue an ideological agenda in a less consequential manner.

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Table 1: National Partisan Control, 1980-2014

Year	House	Senate	Presidency	GOP Unified	Dem. Unified
1980	D	D	D		✓
1981	D	R	R		
1982	D	R	R		
1983	D	R	R		
1984	D	R	R		
1985	D	R	R		
1986	D	R	R		
1987	D	D	R		
1988	D	D	R		
1989	D	D	R		
1990	D	D	R		
1991	D	D	R		
1992	D	D	R		
1993	D	D	D		✓
1994	D	D	D		✓
1995	R	R	D		
1996	R	R	D		
1997	R	R	D		
1998	R	R	D		
1999	R	R	D		
2000	R	R	D		
2001	R	D	R		
2002	R	D	R		
2003	R	R	R	✓	
2004	R	R	R	✓	
2005	R	R	R	✓	
2006	R	R	R	✓	
2007	D	D	R		
2008	D	D	R		
2009	D	D	D		✓
2010	D	D	D		✓
2011	R	D	D		
2012	R	D	D		
2013	R	D	D		
2014	R	D	D		

Table 2: Frequency of State Partisan Control, 1980-2014

State	Dem. Unified Government	GOP Unified Government
Alabama	13	4
Alaska	0	8
Arizona	0	15
Arkansas	20	0
California	12	0
Colorado	6	4
Connecticut	13	0
Delaware	6	0
Florida	9	16
Georgia	23	10
Hawaii	27	0
Idaho	0	20
Illinois	12	2
Indiana	0	15
Iowa	4	5
Kansas	0	16
Kentucky	20	0
Louisiana	15	3
Maine	12	2
Maryland	31	0
Massachusetts	19	0
Michigan	1	10
Minnesota	8	0
Mississippi	16	3
Missouri	9	4
Montana	0	10
Nevada	4	0
New Hampshire	4	16
New Jersey	10	8
New Mexico	17	0
New York	4	0
North Carolina	17	2
North Dakota	0	22
Ohio	2	16
Oklahoma	13	4
Oregon	10	0
Pennsylvania	1	14
Rhode Island	10	0
South Carolina	7	12
South Dakota	0	33
Tennessee	10	4
Texas	8	12
Utah	0	30
Vermont	12	5
Virginia	12	2
Washington	17	2
West Virginia	27	0
Wisconsin	6	6
Wyoming	0	12
Total	**467**	**347**

Table 3: The Conditional Effects of Partisan Control on State Policy Liberalism (Baseline Model), 1980-2014

	State Policy Liberalism$_t$					
	All States	**Non-South**	**South**	**Northeast**	**Midwest**	**West**
State Policy Liberalism$_{t-1}$	0.914***	0.923***	0.858***	0.939***	0.887***	0.919***
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.021)
State Unified Dem.	0.027***	0.015	0.041***	0.005	0.049***	0.006
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.016)
State Unified GOP	-0.036***	-0.035***	-0.044***	-0.024	-0.042***	-0.035**
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.017)
National Unified Dem.	-0.001	0.0005	-0.010	-0.012	0.020	-0.016
	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.026)	(0.028)	(0.027)
National Unified GOP	-0.003	-0.006	-0.001	0.019	-0.027**	-0.027
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.017)
Democratic Alignment	0.017	0.043*	-0.011	0.028	0.031	0.088**
	(0.020)	(0.026)	(0.022)	(0.040)	(0.048)	(0.044)
Democratic Misalignment	0.045**	0.119***	-0.047**	0.097***	0.034	0.194***
	(0.019)	(0.023)	(0.021)	(0.031)	(0.036)	(0.044)
Republican Alignment	-0.010	-0.008	0.002	-0.047	0.017	0.009
	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.024)	(0.057)	(0.019)	(0.031)
Republican Misalignment	-0.021	-0.020	-0.013	0.023	-0.039	-0.020
	(0.026)	(0.036)	(0.027)	(0.084)	(0.060)	(0.050)
N	1666	1190	476	374	374	442
R-squared	0.850	0.868	0.788	0.886	0.830	0.872
Adj. R-squared	0.845	0.863	0.778	0.880	0.821	0.866
F Statistic	1014.732***	836.957***	187.595***	306.658***	192.224***	319.025***

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .1$
Note: All models include state fixed effects; panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4: The Conditional Effects of Partisan Control on State Policy Liberalism, 1980-2014

	State Policy Liberalism$_t$					
	All States	Non-South	South	Northeast	Midwest	West
State Policy Liberalism$_{t-1}$	0.885***	0.881***	0.833***	0.830***	0.862***	0.870***
	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.027)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.024)
State Unified Dem.	0.039***	0.018*	0.051***	0.012	0.045**	0.008
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.017)
State Unified GOP	-0.044***	-0.045***	-0.032*	-0.038**	-0.030**	-0.060***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.014)	(0.017)
National Unified Dem.	-0.004	-0.006	-0.001	-0.025	0.036	-0.028
	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.027)
National Unified GOP	-0.010	-0.015	0.005	0.012	-0.013	-0.049**
	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.021)
Dem. Veto Proof Majority	0.046***	0.049**	0.034*	0.012	0.038	0.075**
	(0.013)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.045)	(0.030)
GOP Veto Proof Majority	-0.027	-0.035*	0.005	0.091	-0.039	-0.059**
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.040)	(0.060)	(0.039)	(0.024)
Legislative Professionalism	0.011*	0.008	0.025	-0.019	0.005	0.024**
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.019)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.011)
Citizen Ideology	0.0002	-0.00001	0.001**	-0.0001	0.002*	-0.001
	(0.0004)	(0.0005)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Gini Index	0.002**	0.004***	-0.0001	0.005**	0.00002	0.004*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Nonwhite Population	0.004***	0.004***	-0.001	0.008***	0.004	0.004*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Union Density	0.004***	0.006***	0.002	0.004	0.007***	0.004
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Democratic Alignment	0.018	0.048*	-0.015	0.037	0.028	0.094**
	(0.019)	(0.026)	(0.022)	(0.041)	(0.048)	(0.042)
Democratic Misalignment	0.041**	0.117***	-0.051**	0.095**	0.017	0.203***
	(0.019)	(0.024)	(0.021)	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.044)
Republican Alignment	-0.005	-0.002	-0.009	-0.002	0.006	0.027
	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.023)	(0.059)	(0.021)	(0.030)
Republican Misalignment	-0.023	-0.017	-0.033	0.067	-0.041	-0.016
	(0.026)	(0.035)	(0.026)	(0.084)	(0.061)	(0.049)
N	1666	1190	476	374	374	442
R-squared	0.855	0.874	0.795	0.896	0.840	0.881
Adj. R-squared	0.849	0.868	0.781	0.889	0.828	0.873
F Statistic	591.014***	493.520***	107.808***	187.419***	113.700***	190.806***

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .1$
Note: All models include state fixed effects; panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses.

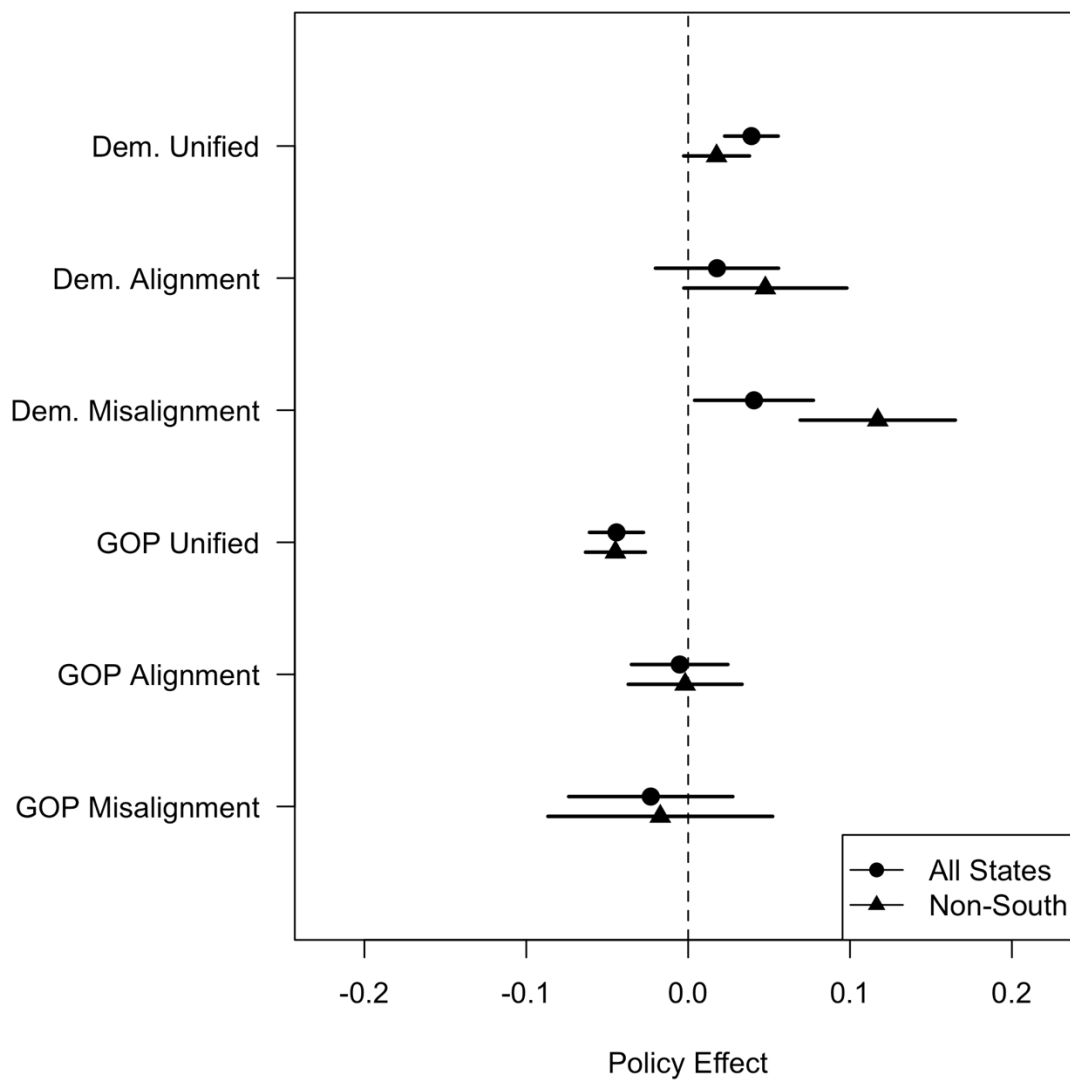Figure 1: Policy Effects of Partisan Misalignment, 1980-2014

Figure 2: Policy Effects of Partisan Misalignment, By Region, 1980-2014