"The Role of Policy Subsystems at the State Level:
The Case of the Nevada House"

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to test the theory of subsystem politics, developed at the national government level, in three policy areas: agriculture, education, and transportation in the state of Nevada's House for the 1979 legislative session. The study contained three phases of analysis: (1) determination of the relevant actors in the subsystems; (2) participants in agenda setting in committees; and (3) effects of cooperation/conflict on committee decisions. In so doing, the research reveals several characteristics of subsystems in all three policy areas.

For my parents, Mr. and Mrs. C.A. Swan, for instilling in me a desire to learn and for believing in me even when I lost faith in myself.

And to my friend, Janet, for always being near when she was needed.

Acknowledgment

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Introduction

Political scientists often study public policy and policymaking and how different variables effect the process. On the national government level, many researchers find that political subsystems represent a significant factor in policymaking (e.g., Bond, 1979; Davidson, 1977; Freeman, 1965; Kovenock, 1973; Rundquist and Griffith, 1976). The key actors in subsystem politics are the bureaucratic agencies, interest groups, and legislative committees. The agency, interest group, and committee of a particular policy area form the policy subsystem and have the greatest input on any resulting legislation. Studies have been done which display the growth and development of these subgovernments (Dodd and Schott, 1979). Also, many scholastic inquiries have concentrated on one of the many aspects of a subgovernment. For example, many researchers have analyzed the committee assignment process (i.e., Fenno, 1973; Clark and Lipsit, 1978; Moncrief, 1981). Many research efforts have also attempted to determine which policy areas have developed subgovernments and which ones have not (Ripley and Franklin, 1980). Thus, several single-policy studies have been undertaken including areas such as Indian affairs (Freeman, 1965) and the tobacco industry (Fritschler, 1975).

Until recently, very little research has been done on the role subsystems play in policymaking at the state level. Elling (1983), using data from over 700 administrators in eight states, concluded that only about one-third of the units displayed a pattern similar to that of an "iron triangle" (p. 50). Browne (1985) examined aging policy in four states. He concluded that although specific, "restricted relationships"

determined most policymaking in the state, there was not any of the "unrestrained influence" that represents a basic element in policy subsystems (p. 32). Both these studies, however, did agree on the importance of committees in policymaking in state legislatures. This study intends to analyze the role subsystems play at a state level for three different policy areas: Agriculture, Education, and Transportation in the 1979 Nevada House. These three policy areas were chosen due to the differences in the design, organization, and objectives of the interest groups, bureaucratic agencies, and legislative committees in these areas (Ripley and Franklin, 1980). In order to determine the existence of subsystems, three major questions must be addressed: Who are the relevant actors in the subsystems? Who are the participants in agenda setting in the committees? And what are the effects of cooperation/conflict on committee decisions? Thus, this study is divided into three phases of analysis in order to determine what characteristics of subsystems exist in the policy areas.

Research Design and Methods

This project involves a study of three major policy areas: Agriculture, Education, and Transportation in the Nevada House during the 1979 legislative session.

Subsystems emerge in areas in which committees play a very important role in the policymaking process. This is true for the state of Nevada as can be seen by Francis and Riddlesperger's study in 1982. Therefore, the environment exists which is necessary for subsystems to develop.

Information on the composition and activities of these committees was obtained from several sources. Information on the legislators' education, occupations, government experience, and associations was obtained through legislative biographies. Committee hearing minutes were studied in order to determine the number, type, and rate of interest group and agency appearances. Also, the position of support or opposition for the legislation by the interest groups and agencies was ascertained through analysis of the minutes. Finally, bill histories were examined to discover the sponsors of each piece of legislation. All bills which were heard in regular committee hearings were studied. Thus, there were 125 bills considered in all.

Analysis

Relevant Actors for each Policy Subsystem

Primarily, the relevant actors of each subsystem are determined. First, the amount of overrepresentation of "interested" legislators were ascertained for each of the three committees. An overrepresentation of "interesteds" means that more legislators with an interest in an area have a place on that respective committee than would normally be expected through viewing the legislature as a whole. Several previous studies have found this type of overrepresentation of certain interests on committees (e.g., Caroll and English, 1981; Shepsle, 1978). An "interested" legislator is one who has a background in a particular policy area (i.e., occupation, education, associations or government experience). Also, he would be considered an "interested" if he

represented an "interested" district (i.e., for the case of Education, a district with a major university would be considered an "interested" district). As seen in Table 1, there is an overrepresentation of interesteds on the Agriculture and Education committee but not in Transportation. One explanation for this "underrepresentation" in Transportation could be that political action committees (PAC's) were not considered in determining an "interested" legislator. A legislator may have been an "interested" if he were supported by an interested PAC group. Thus, although many factors are taken into account when determining "interested" legislators, all may have not been considered.

Second, the "internal complexity" of the various subsystems is determined (Hamm, 1986a). In order to determine the internal complexity of the subsystem, the number, type, and rate of appearances of the interest groups and state agencies were studied. Several questions were addressed. First, do committee members tend to interact with the same interest groups and agencies regularly, or is the involvement more on a one-time basis? Second, do the interest groups and state agencies vary with the nature of the issue, or do some participants become involved on many varied issues? Third, are the participants the interest groups and agencies one would expect to be involved, or are some other groups interacting within the subsystem? In order to answer these questions, all the interest groups and state agencies which participated in regular committee hearings were considered whether or not they took a formal position of support or opposition to the bill. As seen in Table 2, there appears to be a high degree of internal complexity for Agriculture and

Transportation. Between 68 and 89 percent of the participants appear only one time, and only 2 of the 92 interested groups and agencies appear for 25 percent of the bills that either committee hears. Education has a slightly lower internal complexity in that 52 percent of the participants in this area appear more than one time, but, still, only 2 groups appear on more than 25 percent of the bills. This broad analysis, however, does not consider the various issue areas with which the committees must deal. Thus, the next step in the analysis is to consider participants' involvement by particular issue area. For the Agriculture committee, two issue areas were determined: (1) straight agricultural bills and (2) miscellaneous bills which the agriculture committee hears (see Table 3). The miscellaneous category includes bills which could be considered "one-shot" issues for a session (e.g., a bill concerning the liability of dog owners for injury to livestock) or "housekeeping" bills (e.g., a bill concerning adding a board member to the State Board of Agriculture). For the Education committee three categories were developed: (1) bills dealing with K-12, (2) bills dealing with higher education, and (3) bills concerning both levels of education or education in general (e.g., "housekeeping" bills for the Department of Education). By analyzing participation in terms of issues, the involvement of groups in particular "interest" areas becomes clearer (see Tables 3, 4, and 5).

Each issue area still contains a reasonably large number of one-time-only appearances by participants. The issue area with the least internal complexity or "tightest" policy areas are the K-12 and "Both"

Education areas. As seen in Table 5, both the K-12 and "Both" areas have one of the three major participants appearing on more than 50 percent of the bills. (A major participant is one who appears on 25 percent of the bills.) These areas have a small group of participants which appear on a large percentage of the bills. This finding is consistent with policy subsystem theory in that a small group of participants appear regularly before the committee. In the Agriculture "miscellaneous" category, the State Department of Agriculture represents the only major participant (see Table 5). This is reasonable when one remembers that a large portion of the miscellaneous bills were "housekeeping" bills for that department. Otherwise, as expected, the other participants in this area appeared only one time. In summary, there seems to be a regular involvement of certain participants in the K-12 and "Both" Education areas, but a more "internally complex" or "open" system in the other areas.

Agenda Setting in Committees

Given the extent of overrepresentation of "interesteds" on committees and interest group and state agency participation, the next logical question to ask would be: what are their impacts on policymaking? In other words, in what way, if any, does overrepresentation and group participation effect policymaking? Several questions must be considered. First, do committee members author more of the bills which come before their committee than would normally be expected? Second, do "tighter" subgovernments exhibit more or less conflict than more "open" systems? And, third, what effect does interest group and agency conflict and

cooperation have on the committee's decision regarding passage or failure of the legislation?

Previous studies show that if legislators seek committee assignments, at least due in part to their knowledge and experience, then they would probably have more incentive for introducing legislation within their committee's jurisdiction than would other legislators (Francis, 1982). A committee's agenda represents all the bills referred to it. Thus, one must study the extent to which "interesteds" in a particular policy area set the agenda for that respective committee.

It was expected that, for all three committees, committee members would sponsor a larger percent of bills referred to their committee with respect to their relative proportion of legislative membership. As seen in Table 6, this expectation was confirmed for all three committees. Given the committees' membership, it would be expected that 17.5 percent of the bills coming before them would have been introduced by them. When considering the prime sponsor of the bill, committees or their members introduced 4.7 times more of the legislation in Agricultural policy than would normally be expected; 3.7 times more of the legislation in Educational policy; and 3.8 times more of the legislation in Transportation. Recalling from Table 1, however, the same percentage of "interesteds" do not exist on all three committees. Overrepresentation of "interesteds" is fairly high for the Agriculture and Education committees and nonexistent for the Transportation committee.

The next conjecture was that a direct relationship should exist between the percent of "interesteds" on a committee and the percent of legislation introduced by committee members. This expectation, however,

was not confirmed. Transportation had the second highest amount of committee members as prime sponsors of the bills and an underrepresentation of "interesteds" on the committee. This direct relationship, however, does exist on the bills with only a committee member or the committee itself as sponsor.

Moreover, analysis was completed to determine whether committee members set the agenda more often in more "closely knit" issue areas (i.e., K-12 and "Both" Education areas). As seen in Table 8, almost all of the bills in the "Both" issue area had only a committee member or the committee itself as a sponsor. Interestingly, however, there is a larger percentage of bills with a prime sponsor as a committee member or the committee itself for the "Higher" Education area than K-12. In Agriculture, both issue areas have agendas which are by a large margin set by the committee. Thus, this expectation was not very soundly confirmed. For all three committees, however, the committee members are overrepresented on introductions by substantial factors.

Cooperation/Conflict and Committee Decisions

The final phase of the study considers the amount of cooperation and conflict which exists among the participants relative to committee decisions. As seen in Table 9, the majority of the bills for each committee were supported by the participants. A recent study of interest group lobbying in three state legislatures found that on about 20 to 25 percent of the bills no position was taken and 23 to 32 percent conflict occurred (Hamm, Wiggins, and Bell, 1986). The "conflict" involvement

pattern of interest groups and agencies in this study is close to these findings, although Transportation appears to be a bit higher. For all three committees, however, there are fewer bills on which participants took no position. Thus, for all three committees there is a majority of support and lower percent of conflict over legislation between participants.

The next research issue entails studying the extent to which committees screen and shape legislation referred to them. From Table 10, several conclusions may be drawn. First, in the Agriculture committee, only 25 percent of the bills which were referred to the committee passed the committee with no amendments. Second, in Education, the committee decision is spread fairly evenly between pass, pass with amendments, and no action. Third, in Transportation, the highest percentage of the bills passed with amendments. Thus, in all three policies the committee is instrumental in screening and shaping legislation.

Finally, if the committee screens and shapes the majority of the legislation in a particular policy area, how does the cooperation/conflict of participants effect their decisions? In Agriculture (see Table 11) all the bills on which no position was taken by interest groups or agencies were indefinitely postponed. None of the bills on which participants were in conflict simply "passed" the committee without amendments or without being indefinitely postponed. Moreover, a majority of the bills which were supported with no opposition passed the committee without amendments. In Education, similar to Agriculture, bills on which conflict existed either passed with amendments or were very often indefinitely postponed. Also, almost all

the bills which were supported with no opposition passed the committee (half of them without amendments). Interestingly, a large portion of the bills on which no position was taken by interest groups or agencies passed the committee. This could partially be explained by the fact that many of the bills on which participants took no position were simple "housekeeping" bills. In Transportation, the same relationship between the committee decision and bills which are "supported" or "conflictual" appear. Thus, participants' patterns of cooperation and conflict appear to significantly effect the way a committee screens and shapes legislation.

Conclusion

In terms of the three phases of the study, several statements can be made about the existence of subgovernments in the three policy areas. An overrepresentation of "interesteds" exists on two of the three committees (i.e., Agriculture and Education). Education appears to have the most "tight" or "close knit" subsystem with agriculture having a more "open" system and transportation having the most complex internal make-up of them all. Thus, in terms of the relevant actors in a subsystem, Education appears to be the policy area which most closely fits the model of a subgovernment. Agriculture, however, represents the policy area with the highest percent of its agenda set by the committee. Furthermore, the cooperation/conflict patterns of participants are similar for all three policy areas. Moreover, the effects of these patterns on committee decisions are very similar on bills with support or conflict. The only major difference can be seen in bills on which no one

takes a position. The variations of decisions by the committees on these type of bills may be explained by the unique character of a bill which is introduced and referred to a committee with no participants taking a position on it. As seen in education, these bills are often simple "housekeeping" bills.

In conclusion, although there are differences in the make-up of the relevant actors in the three policy areas, they seem to participate in the legislative process in ways similar to those in a subsystem. The committee, interest groups, and agencies of all three areas seem to have the greatest input on the resulting legislation. The next reasonable step would be to consider how the legislation holds up when sent to the floor. This study does display the "restricted relationships" which determine policymaking in Nevada without documenting the existence of strict "iron triangles." In so doing, this work remains consistent with Browne's study in 1985. Due to the limitations of this type of research, many other research questions about subgovernments in different policy areas and states remain to be studied.

Table 1

Overrepresentation of "Interesteds"*
on Three Committees in the Nevada House

	% of "I" in legislature	% of "I" on Committee
AGRICULTURE:	22.5%	44.4%
EDUCATION:	20.0%	44.4%
TRANSPORTATION:	15.0%	11.1%

* "I" or "Interested" is defined as any individual legislator who
has a background in a particular policy area (i.e. Occupation/
Education, Associations, Government) or representative of an
"interested" district (i.e. education -- a district with a major
university).

Table 2

Interest Groups (IGs) and Agency Appearances
Before Three Nevada Committees (1979)

Appearances		Agriculture	House Education	Transportation
Number of Bills*		17**	43**	65**
Total IG and Agency Appearances***		30	108	176
No. of Different IGs and Agencies Appearing		19	29	73
Distribution of Number of Appearances	1	17	14	50
	2	1	3	8
	3	2	2	3
	4	–	2	2
	5	1	1	2
	6	–	2	2
	7	–	1	1
	8	–	2	1
	9	–	–	–
	10	–	–	1
	12	–	1	–
	13	–	–	1
	14	–	–	1
	15	–	–	1
	22	–	1	–
Percent of IGs and Agencies Appearing Only One Time		89	48	68
Percent of Total Appearances by One-Time Only IGs and Agencies		57	13	28
IG or Agencies Appearing on More Than 25 Percent of the Bills		Dept. of Ag. Dairy Comm.	Dept. of Ed. Clark Co. Sch. Dist.	-- --

* Includes all House and Senate bills heard in regular committee hearings.
  ** If a committee hearing was not held, the bill is excluded.
   *** An interest group or agency is counted as having appeared at a
      hearing if it participated in the proceedings. They did not have to
      take a formal position of support or opposition.

Table 3

Interest Groups and Agencies' Appearances
Before the Nevada House Agriculture Committee
(by Issue Area)

| | | Committee and Type of Issue | |
| | | House Agriculture | |
Appearances		Ag.	Misc.
Number of Bills*		10	7
Total IG and Agency Appearances***		19	14
No. of Different IGs and Agencies Appearing		16	11
Distribution of Number of Appearances:	1	14	10
	2	1	–
	3	1	–
	4	–	1
	5	–	–
Percent of IGs and Agencies Appearing Only One Time		87.5	90.9
Percent of Total Appearances by One-Time Only IGs and Agencies		73.7	71.4

   * Includes all House and Senate bills which were heard in regular committee hearings.

  ** If a committee hearing was not held, the bill is excluded.

 *** An interest group or agency is counted as having appeared at a hearing if it participated in the proceedings. It did not have to take a formal position of support or opposition.

Table 4

Interest Groups and Agencies' Appearances
Before the Nevada House and Senate Education Committees
(by Issue Area)

| | | Committee and Type of Issue | | |
| | | House Education | | |
Appearances		K-12	Higher	Both
Number of Bills*		23**	10**	10**
Total IG and Agency Appearances***		71	12	22
No. of Different IGs and Agencies Appearing		26	7	5
Distribution of Number of Appearances:	1	13	6	2
	2	5	–	–
	3	2	–	–
	4	1	–	–
	6	1	1	1
	7	–	–	2
	8	1	–	–
	9	–	–	–
	11	1	–	–
	13	1	–	–
Percent of IGs and Agencies Appearing Only One Time		50	86	40
Percent of Total Appearances by One-Time Only IGs and Agencies		18	50	9

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* Includes all House and Senate bills which were heard in regular committee hearings.

** If a committee hearing was not held, the bill is excluded.

*** An interest group or agency is counted as having appeared at a hearing if it participated in the proceedings. It did not have to take a formal position of support or opposition.

Table 5

Major Participants in the Different Issue Areas of Two Nevada Committees

Committee and Issue Area	Agency or Interest Group
House Agriculture Committee:	
Agriculture (10)**	St. Dairy Commission (3)***
Miscellaneous (7)	St. Dept. of Ag. (4)
House Education Committee:	
K-12 (23)	St. Dept. of Ed. (13) Clarke Co. Sch. District (11) Nev. St. Ed. Association (8)
Higher (10)	Comm. on Post-Secondary Ed. (6)
Both (10)	St. Dept. of Ed. (7) Legislative Council Bureau (7) St. Attorney General's Office (6)

* A major participant is defined as any interest group or agency which appears on at least 25 percent of the bills in a particular issue area for each committee.
** Number of bills per issue area.
*** Number of bills on which agency or interest group appeared.

Table 6

Controlling the Committee Agenda:
Sponsorship of Legislation in Three Nevada Committees

| Variable | Groups* | House Committees | | |
		AG.	ED.	TRAN.
% Bills	CM	82.4	65.1	67.7
Prime Sponsors**	EXP	11.7	18.6	9.2
	NI	5.9	16.3	23.1
% Bills With at Least One CM as Sponsor		94.1	79.1	75.4
% Bills With Only CM as Sponsor		70.6	65.1	44.6

   * For each committee, all legislators were assigned to one of three
     categories: CM or 1979 committee member, EXP or those "interesteds"
     or legislators with committee experience not on the committee, and NI
     or noninteresteds or committees other than CM.
  ** Prime Sponsor = first author of the bill.

Table 7

Controlling the Committee Agenda
Sponsorship of Legislation in the Nevada Agriculture Committee

| Variable | Group* | Committee and Type of Issue | |
| | | House Agriculture | |
		Agric.	Misc.
% Bills	CM	80.0	85.7
Prime Sponsor**	EXP	20.0	0.0
	NI	0.0	14.3
% Bills With at Least One CM As Sponsor		90.0	100
% Bills With Only CM as Sponsor		70.0	85.7

   * For each committee, all legislators were assigned to one of three
     categories: CM or 1979 committee member, EX or those "interesteds"
     or legislators with committee experience not on the committee, and NI
     or noninteresteds or committees other than CM.
  ** Prime Sponsor = first author of the bill.

Table 8

Controlling the Committee Agenda
Sponsorship of Legislation in the Nevada Education Committee

| Variable | Group* | Committee and Type of Issue | | |
| | | House Education Committee | | |
		K-12	Higher	Both
% Bills	CM	52.2	70.0	90.0
Prime Sponsor**	EXP	30.4	10.0	0.0
	NI	17.4	20.0	10.0
% Bills With at Least One CM As Sponsor		78.3	70.0	90.0
% Bills With Only CM as Sponsor		52.2	70.0	90.0

* For each committee, all legislators were assigned to one of three
categories: CM or 1979 committee member, EX or those "interesteds"
or legislators with committee experience not on the committee, and NI
or noninteresteds or committees other than CM.
** Prime Sponsor = first author of the bill.

Table 9

Patterns of Interest Group/State Agency Involvement
in Three Nevada Committees

Committee	Interest Group/State Agency Involvement Pattern*		
	No Position**	Support***	Conflict****
House			
Agriculture (N=17)	11.8%	52.9%	35.3%
Education (N=43)	16.3%	51.2%	32.5%
Transportation (N=65)	1.5%	58.5%	40.0%
Total (N=125)*****	8.0%	55.2%	36.8%

    * The Pattern is associated only once for each bill in the committee in
the first chamber.
  ** Includes bills on which interest groups or state agencies may have
testified for information, but did not take a formal position
supporting or opposing it.
 *** Includes all bills on which at least one group or agency supported
the bill, no group opposed it, although there may have been requests
for amendments.
**** Includes bills on which there was both support and opposition for the
bill, including where the sponsor was the long supporter and the
interest groups and/or state agencies opposed it.
***** Includes only bills on which there was a public hearing.

Table 10

Screening and Shaping Decisions by Three Nevada Committees

		Committee Decision				
Committee	Pass	Pass & Refer to Second Committee	Amend & Pass	Amend/Pass & Refer to Second Committee	Refer to Comm.*	In Post., No action or Defeated
			House			
Agriculture						
SB**	100****	0	0	0	0	0
HB***	25.0	0	37.5	0	0	37.5
Education						
SB	50.0	0	50.0	0	0	0
HB	22.0	12.2	26.8	4.9	4.9	29.2
Transportation						
SB	50.0	0	28.6	0	7.9	14.3
HB	33.3	0	41.2	0	0	25.5

   * Refer to another committee
  ** Senate Bill
 *** House Bill
**** Entries are percents

Table 11

Overall Relationship Between Patterns of Interest Group/State Agency
Involvement and Committee Decisions in Agriculture Committee

Committee Decision	Interest Group/State Agency Involvement Patterns*		
	No Position**	Support***	Conflict****
Do Pass	0.0%	55.6%	0.0%
Do Pass With Amendments	0.0%	33.3%	50.0%
Indefinitely Postpone	100.0%	1.1%	50.0%
N=*****	2	9	6

   ** Includes bills on which interest groups or state agencies may have
      testified for information, but did not take a formal position
      supporting or opposing it.
  *** Includes all bills on which at least one group or agency supported
      the bill, no group opposed it, although there may have been requests
      for amendments.
 **** Includes bills on which there was both support and opposition for the
      bill, including the case where the sponsor was the lone supporter and
      the agencies or interest groups opposed it.
***** Includes only bills on which there was a public hearing.

Table 12

Overall Relationship Between Patterns of Interest Group/State Agency
Involvement and Committee Decisions in Education Committee

Committee Decision	Interest Group/State Agency Involvement Patterns*		
	No Position**	Support***	Conflict****
Do Pass	42.8%	50.0%	7.1%
Do Pass With Amendments	14.3%	40.9%	28.6%
Refer to other Committee with No Action	14.3%	0.0%	7.1%
Indef. Post., or No Action, or Defeated	28.6%	9.1%	57.2%
N=*****	7	22	14

  ** Includes bills on which interest groups or state agencies may have
testified for information but did not take a formal position
supporting or opposing it.

 *** Includes all bills on which at least one group or agency supported
the bill and no group opposed it, although there may have been
requests for amendments.

 **** Includes bills on which there was both support and opposition for the
bill, including the case where the sponsor was the lone supporter and
the agencies or interest groups opposed it.

***** Includes only bills on which there was a public hearing.

Table 13

Overall Relationship Between Patterns of Interest Group/State Agency
Involvement and Committee Decisions in Transportation Committee

Committee Decision	Interest Group/State Agency Involvement Patterns*		
	No Position**	Support***	Conflict****
Do Pass	100.0%	52.6%	11.5%
Do Pass With Amendments	0.0%	34.3%	46.2%
Refer to other Committee with No Action	0.0%	2.6%	0.0%
Indef. Post., or No Action, or Defeated	0.0%	10.5%	42.3%
N=*****	1	38	26

 ** Includes bills on which interest groups or state agencies may have
    testified for information but did not take a formal position
    supporting or opposing it.
 *** Includes all bills on which at least one group or agency supported
    the bill and no group opposed it, although there may have been
    requests for amendments.
 **** Includes bills on which there was both support and opposition for the
    bill, including the case where the sponsor was the lone supporter and
    the agencies or interest groups opposed it.
***** Includes only bills on which there was a public hearing.

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