

The Mostly Missing Results of the Republican Revolution in the States

Matt Grossmann, Michigan State University

Abstract:

Republicans have made considerable gains in American state governments since the 1990s as a more conservative national party. What do they have to show for it in terms of policy outputs driving social and economic changes in the states they control? I argue that, due to common roadblocks facing conservatives in policymaking, Republican-controlled state governments have not reduced the size or scope of government, reversed prior liberal gains, or advanced their broader socio-economic goals. They have slowed liberal gains and advanced several important conservative policies, some of which have achieved their proximate goals—and they have thus far remained effective at staying in power. But both Republicans' impact on policy as well as their policies' impact on the social and economic life of the states has been limited. Previewing my book in progress here, I sketch several types of studies to assess Republicans' results: 1) reviews of recent large-scale analyses, 2) quantitative analysis of panel data on state policy outputs, 3) a compilation of issue-specific quantitative studies of policymaking, 4) qualitative analysis of state-specific policymaking histories, 5) a review of claims about Red State and Blue State superiority on social or economic outcomes, and 6) a compilation of evaluations of the social impacts of several Republican-led policy changes. With the 30,000-foot view pursued here, I sacrifice depth in favor of integrating the perspectives of several different research strategies to address the same broad question. The results help to reconcile findings of increased partisan effects in state policymaking with the dominant trend of stasis in the scope of state government.

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By the early 1990s, Republicans had been the minority party in the American states for decades. They had controlled a minority of state House and state Senate chambers (and been a minority of legislators nationally) for nearly every year since the early 1930s—usually by large margins. But they have since experienced quite an electoral rise. From 1990 to 2016, Republicans gained 813 state house seats, 360 state senate seats, and 23 governorships—moving from full control of only three states to full control of a majority of states.

The Republican Party arose in the 1990s not by moderating their positions or adapting to local circumstances, but as a full-throated national conservative party with an activist base seeking to roll back decades of liberal advance and remake America into a country of traditionalist values and limited government. Just as Newt Gingrich led a Congressional Republican resurgence with a detailed agenda, promising a new “Contract with America” and its series of policy reforms, 29 state Republican parties in the early 1990s developed and committed themselves to action plans for conservative government.¹ Proposals from conservative think tanks, activists, and state legislators ripened into a menu of policies to address education, crime, welfare, health, housing, family decline, the environment, taxes, government spending, gambling, privatization, torts, and political reform.² What do conservatives have to show for their electoral gains and conservative policy advances?

I argue that the Republican Party’s widespread gains in state legislative and gubernatorial elections over the past quarter-century have been met with only limited success in changing state policy direction or social and economic results. Despite a more conservative and ascendant national party, Republican-controlled state governments have not substantially reduced the size or scope of state governments, counteracted longstanding state tendencies, reversed prior liberal gains, or enacted new policies that succeed in advancing conservative values and goals.

Republicans’ limited success in translating their electoral gains into impactful policy victories is the product of inherent governing challenges facing conservative parties worldwide as well as the

dependence of U.S. states on federal policy. Sustained conservative policymaking is difficult: the scope of government tends to expand over time and programs are rarely dislodged; social changes are more often codified than reversed. Of the policies that do pass, the effects on real-world outcomes like economic growth and societal well-being tend to be small; conservative policies are limited by design and then tend to be diluted or counteracted by other factors. That adds up to two critical limits to Republican policy results: they often have policy goals that they do not achieve and the policies they are able to pass often fail to have broad social and economic impact.

In this paper, I outline several studies of the factors associated with Republican policy achievements and their effects. I first review Republican electoral success and the many potential roadblocks to conservative policymaking. I put the findings of the current literature in this context. I then undertake quantitative and qualitative studies of Republican policy impact: (1) analyses of the effects of recent state partisanship on the net liberal policies passed and the size of state government, (2) a compilation of quantitative analyses of political determinants of policy in policy areas where Republicans have had success, and (3) a review of state political histories on the dynamics of policymaking in states since the 1990s. I then move to the impacts of policy, reviewing two types of studies: (1) broad work on the socio-economic outcomes of Red and Blue states and (2) specific analyses of the impact of major Republican policy achievements. Each miniature study profiled here can only provide a cursory examination, but I wanted to provide a taste of the varied analyses planned for my next book. Overall, the review is designed to illustrate the difficulties that arise in translating Republican electoral victories into lasting social and economic impact.

The Reddening of American State Governments

American state governments have gotten a lot redder over the last quarter century. An illustrative starting point is to look at where Republicans were in 1992 and how far they had come by

2017. Figure 1 compares Republican control of state legislatures (House and Senate) and governorships in 1992 with control in 2017, with each chamber and the governorship counting for one point on a three-point scale. In 1992, they were down to full control in Utah, South Dakota, and New Hampshire, with sporadic control in other areas. By 2017, they were in full control of most of the South, Midwest, and West, losing ground only on the West Coast. Their biggest gains were in the South—broadly defined to include states like Texas, Kentucky, and Florida. But they also had achieved a near monopoly on the Midwest (with Illinois an outlier) and the interior West (with Colorado an exception).

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Across all states from 1990 to 2017, the average state has moved from Republican control of one out of three of the House, Senate, or Governor's office to two out of three. But the gains were not a straight increase over time. After making overwhelming gains in the 1994 elections, they held steady for eight years and then lost some offices to Democrats in the 2006 elections. But Republicans gained back their lost ground and more so in the 2010 elections. They then saw another uptick in 2014, Barack Obama's second midterm election. These patterns are not only the consequence of Republicans winning chambers by close margins. Republican advantages in state houses and state senates have followed similar patterns over the last quarter-century. The average proportion of seats held by Republicans across each state's lower and upper chambers has gone from just over .4 to just over .6 in each chamber. Republican gains were again pronounced in 1994 in both chambers, with losses returning in 2006 (especially in state houses) and then gains moving ever further upward since 2010. State senates shows a steadier upward Republican trend, with the same key elections driving change. Trends in the number of legislative chambers that Republicans control match those for their margins within each chamber.

Republican control of state governments has been rising at the same time the party has been moving rightward. Both parties' legislators have been moving apart ideologically, with fewer defections to the other side. But since Republicans have been gaining share across the country during the period of polarization, that has meant state governments run by more conservative politicians. The cross-state average of the conservatism of the median member of each Republican caucus in each chamber (with indicators from Nolan McCarty and Boris Shor) find steadily increasing conservatism, with Republicans moving to the right in both chambers in nearly every year from 1996 to 2015.³ Trends in both chambers move rightward similarly, from averaging about .6 to nearly .8 on their scale. These trends mean that there are no longer many Republicans more liberal than even the most conservative Democrats in their legislative chambers while there are more on their right wing. But the trends also show narrow variation among Republican state legislators, with most scattered only slightly around the party median. Republican legislators at nearly every point in their caucus's distribution—from the most moderate to the most conservative—are substantially to the right of their predecessors just 20 years before. Democrats have been moving leftward at the same time, while losing control of more chambers and becoming a shrinking minority.

Republicans thus control more state governments with caucuses that are more conservative. For Republican-led governments, a straightforward reading would suggest they had more ability to agree on a conservative platform, put forward conservative policy proposals, and achieve consequential policy gains. But they also faced the substantial barriers to conservative policymaking.

Why Republican Electoral Gains Don't Translate into Conservative Policy Results

Republican and Democratic politicians present different visions of government and citizens expect positions articulated in election campaigns to translate into real results when a party's team is elected and has an opportunity to govern. But the Republican Party has long had trouble translating

its broad campaign messaging into policy results.⁴ Its goals of reducing the size and scope of government and limiting social change are inherently hard to achieve. Conservative policy change is difficult worldwide, but the Republican Party stands out internationally for failing to acquiesce to government's advance. Both critics from the left and conservative activists complain that Republicans have been unable to govern when put in power, failing to carry out their promises—at least at the federal level. The American states, which have been active during a recent massive political shift to the right, offer a better opportunity to assess Republican rule.

Yet research on American state politics tends to treat Democratic and Republican gains as similar in potential policy impact—with recent evidence pointing to an increase in the results attributed to party control.⁵ There is indeed evidence that Republican control can slow the adoption of new liberal policies and adopt a few legislative priorities, but that does not translate into success in reshaping state government or changing state economies or societies. Democratic states continue to liberalize faster through incremental policy advancement, but Republicans have more limited agendas for government and broader aims that are often politically infeasible.

What has the Republican revolution in the states yielded in policy change and real-world results? They may have made progress on some social issues like abortion and gun control, but these policies may have not had broad socio-economic effects or they may be counter-balanced by nationwide liberal gains in other social issue areas like gay rights and drugs. Republicans may have made even less progress in scaling back the size and scope of government, with longstanding state differences remaining while nearly all states continue to increase government's share of economic activity. Limited policy gains, even if apparent, could be no match for broad regional demographic and socio-economic trends in determining the relative standing of the states.

Insights from longstanding theories of government, the international literature on the evolution of welfare states, research on the specific problems of states in the American federal

system, and studies of the unique character of the Republican Party all suggest significant institutional and political roadblocks to conservative policymaking in the states. The strength of existing state policy regimes, the difficulty of rolling back programmatic benefits, and the unpopularity of specific conservative policy proposals means that Republican electoral advances slow the advance of liberal policy, rather than fundamentally re-aligning the role of government or producing a new policy strategy for achieving conservative goals.

As early as the 19th Century, German economist Adolph Wagner proposed that the size and scope of government expand over time in response to economic and social change, political pressure, and path dependent historical development (the phenomenon is sometimes known as Wagner's Law). Libertarian Robert Higgs outlined the many reasons for this built-in pressure for expansion: modernization, economic transformation, and urbanization create new social problems; tax collection and program administration become increasingly feasible; progressive social impulses and democratization lead to new proposals; economic downturns create crises, increasing state power without fully reverting; political and policymaking activity is routinized and available for facilitating action; new agencies and legal precedents enable new claims; past policies create bureaucrats and experts who push for new ones; other social organizations like businesses and interest groups enlarge over time; and popular expectations adjust to broader government roles.⁶ Early state development is thus path dependent, with increasing returns to continuing down the same path due to large fixed costs involved in set-up of programs plus learning, coordination, and adaptive expectations by beneficiaries and implementers.⁷ Because prior government benefits and regulatory regimes create constituencies, programs and roles are thus difficult to reverse. Even in moral and cultural issues, conservatives tend to fight losing battles as protectors of traditional norms facing social change.⁸ As a result, conservatives' policy achievements are less frequent than liberal

victories and are usually paired with expansions of government and accelerations of social change in other domains.⁹

As the federal government expands, it also provides new incentives (even sometimes requirements) for state government expansion. Federal policies have dramatically increased constraints on state actions, while increasing state tasks and reporting requirements.¹⁰ Congress has continually increased the federal role in state budgets, the responsibilities of governors to submit plans for federal approval, and the requirements for cooperative state-federal enforcement.¹¹ Congress anticipates state responses and implements expansionary policies with its own goals in mind, delegating or decentralizing decision-making and authority only where it serves national goals.¹² Nationwide organizing by state officials can provide opportunities for new state action, such as the infusion of resources from the 1998 tobacco settlement, but the results usually extend government's scope.¹³

The largest state policy reform movements of recent decades have all been led by federal policy change. Social welfare spending increased dramatically before the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, a large reform and consolidation that instigated a new round of state welfare roll cuts but was also associated with an increase in state and federal earned income tax credits. Major state education reforms were required under the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and its extensions, increasing testing, funding, and new programs. The largest changes in health policy were precipitated by the Affordable Care Act of 2009, which led to huge expansions of Medicaid in most states alongside a federalization of insurance regulation. The largest components of state budgets—health, education, and social welfare—are not always at the discretion of states.

State institutional trends also contribute to conservative difficulties. By the time Republicans gained power in the 1990s, state legislatures had undergone a “professionalization revolution” between the 1960s and 1981, becoming more like Congress with developed committee systems,

electoral careers, and increased workloads.¹⁴ Nearly every state professionalized dramatically over the 20th Century, increasing legislative time demands and salaries and building centralized legislative institutions.¹⁵ Increasing professionalization led to more complex regulatory policies, more progressive immigration policies, and higher education funding.¹⁶ Professionalization increased government capacity and stability, while courts and federal mandates also increased policymaking requirements.¹⁷ In short, professionalization produced liberal governments of expanding capability.

Other institutional changes also mitigated conservative success. Term limits raised the costs of legislating while increasing the role of other long-term state actors.¹⁸ State lawmaking institutions remain complex and difficult to navigate, with new legislators facing difficult work adjustments and competing time demands for constant fundraising and campaigning. Interest group development also favored status-quo-supporting sectors like business and teacher associations, hospitals, utility companies, lawyers, insurance companies, and local governments.¹⁹ Where majority parties were strong, these interest groups also tended to be strong. As a result, legislatures limit controversial bills and focus on those required by courts, the federal government, or prior expiring policies.²⁰ New rules increasingly earmark existing dollars and stabilize existing programs, just as courts have become increasingly active in requiring more equitable policies and minimum service standards.²¹

The policy regimes Republicans inherited were difficult to challenge. State expenditures concentrated in areas that matter to individual lives like education, health, transportation, and public safety.²² States had become the major providers of public services by 1980, with less direct local or national provision, but states were caught in the middle of their own dependence on federal dollars despite local dependence on them.²³ Education spending had steadily increased, with most states equalizing funding across districts, and had become the largest area of funding. Welfare spending had also grown, with big jumps around 1970 and 1990.²⁴ Major benefits went to veterans, Native Americans, and children with separate funds for health, foster care, nutrition, housing, services, job

training, and energy—all with federal dollars.²⁵ Medicaid, jointly administered with the federal government, was and remains the largest state program.

Republicans also inherited decades of increased regulations and standards in education, the environment, health, safety, civil rights, insurance, and disabilities. Occupational licensing was already high, well-developed, and supported by the involved industries. Even areas of Republican innovation like economic development had already become separate complicated policy areas with numerous tools (and local governments invested in their continuation and expansion).²⁶ Like spending programs, regulations tend to cumulate and complexify over time. Even requests for regulatory relief tend to be met with more fine-grained regulations; often-cited periods of deregulation tend to result in a more active role for government as prior regulations are redefined.²⁷

The most common measure of the size of governments is public spending as a percentage of the size of the economy. On this basis, federal, state, and local direct spending all rose throughout the 20th century, but with an especially steep rise from 1945 to the mid-1970s (after which rises stalled).²⁸ For several reasons, these measures may understate the growth of government: (1) the size of the economy (the denominator) includes capital consumption along with spending and also includes government spending (the numerator), (2) transfers and tax subsidies are not included while both have grown as a share of government activity, (3) uncompensated compliance costs not born by the government have also risen, and (4) it evaluates government spending relative to a broadening economy rather than dampened inflation.²⁹ By 1995, state tax revenues were thirty-six times as large as in 1954 (with inflation only increasing one-sixth as fast) via increasingly diverse tax types; the state share of tax revenues (compared to local and national taxes) had more than doubled.³⁰

The many factors that built liberal state governments were not only Democratic control, but also population size, party competition, and social, religious, and political diversity.³¹ By 1990, state policies had come to broadly match the priorities and ideologies of their citizens.³² But Republican

gains thereafter did not stem from big changes in the relative conservatism of the states' publics or their policies; instead, the most dramatic changes have sorted states into parties based on their ideologies—with Republicans coming to power disproportionately in already conservative states.³³ Republican gains have been strongest in the South, where state governments had already grown much more slowly than the rest of the nation (despite being overwhelmingly controlled by Democrats). Southern conservatives thus inherited governments that were already the nation's least expansive (with no big governments to shrink to other states' levels), but the South was only the most pronounced version of a similar story that also played out in the West and the Midwest.

Even where conservative policy reforms are enacted, they may not be in areas large enough to impact social and economic outcomes. Even directly foreseen outcomes may not follow from policies: abortion restrictions may pass without decreasing the abortion rate, right-to-carry laws may expand without affecting gun ownership, new voting requirements may not decrease registration or turnout, right-to-work laws may not accelerate declining unionization, and energy deregulation may not change prices or usage. And yet these kinds of direct mechanisms are the most likely to link policy outputs to important downstream outcomes.

Because Republicans more often see policymaking as a directional battle over the role of government in society, they tend to treat policymaking less as a catalog of tools to address separable specific social problems (as Democrats do) and more as a long-term struggle to refine and protect society and expand the economy.³⁴ Outcomes like economic growth, job availability and quality, entrepreneurship, and morality are affected by myriad other factors and interacting circumstances, making them hard to even marginally impact with ideal policies. Once conservative policies face inevitable legislative compromises as well as implementation by officials who do not share conservative goals, they are even less likely to have profound effects. Given these theoretical, historical, and institutional roadblocks, how have Republicans in the states fared since the 1990s?

Do Red States Bring Conservative Policy?

What policy outputs have changes in party control of state governments achieved? Has the Republican Party used its newfound power to successfully move public policy to the right? Traditionally, scholars had crude measures to test the liberalism or conservatism of state policy; they showed policy matching state public opinion, with less input from parties. But several recent analyses take advantage of new data to suggest that party control may be producing big policy gains.

First, an impressive data compilation by Devin Caughey and Christopher Warshaw of specific policy adoptions and differences across states led them to create new measures of policy liberalism in each state and year, including separate measures for economic and social issue policies. They show that state policy liberalism is associated with party control and public opinion in the states for both economic and social issues.³⁵ Although they collect data on state policy outputs since 1936, they find that party control has only recently become predictive of state policy differences and changes. Part of today's larger association between state partisanship and policy is due to the increasing ideological sorting of the states by party, especially the move of conservative Southern states to the Republicans, but they show that recent party control has been associated with aggregate change in policy. They also show that public opinion in each state predicts its policy liberalism directly, independent of its smaller effects on party control of state government. Interestingly, public opinion on social issues has been trending leftward over time—and state policy has been following it in that direction—even during periods of increasing Republican control. Caughey and Warshaw also show that party control does not explain most state policy differences—as their remain enormous state-level differences not explained by partisan change. They sought to find as many conservative and liberal policy indicators as possible over their full period, avoiding broad measures like total government spending as well as traditional analyses based on policy diffusion (the fast or slow

adoption of policies that most states eventually adopt). Their measures track the relative liberalism or conservatism of each state in each time period, but (by design) their analyses minimize broader moves across all states in a liberal or conservative direction over time.³⁶

Second, a recent analysis by Jacob Grumbach provides more fine-grained measures of policy output differences in states across 16 issue areas. Grumbach finds that Democratic-controlled states have been moving leftward on the environment, guns, health care, immigration, gay rights, labor, and taxes, while Republican states have been moving rightward on abortion, guns, and labor.³⁷ That means policy polarization has been increasing since 2000 (Republican and Democratic states are increasingly adopting different policies), but not primarily due to rightward movement in Republican states. Republicans are only solely responsible for the parties' moves apart on abortion; they also contribute to differences on guns and labor, where Democratic states are moving leftward in parallel. Grumbach also finds some issue areas with little polarization, including some surprises such as campaign finance, civil rights, criminal justice, and education. Among these unpolarized issue areas, only education has seen a rightward move overall—primarily due to the expansion of charter schools and school choice programs. The other issue areas continue to move in a liberal direction over time. Overall, seven out of sixteen issue areas have seen leftward moves, with two showing rightward moves and the others mixed. Grumbach's analysis is based on scales counting the number of liberal and conservative policies in each state (and placing continuously variable policies like tax rates on the same scale), which enables more change over time shared across states than the Caughey and Warshaw measures. Grumbach's overall scales showed policy liberalism rising until 2001, when it plateaued; but the broad measures hid some important issue-level variation.

Third, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez reviews the effects of Republican elected officials and the conservative movement on state public policy (in a forthcoming book).³⁸ Hertel-Fernandez argues that a right-wing "troika" made up of a network of conservative think tanks (operating

independently but known as the State Policy Network), the Koch brothers' grassroots network Americans for Prosperity, and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC, organization of conservative state legislators) together transformed state policy. The most convincing evidence is for ALEC's effects, where Hertel-Fernandez uses plagiarism software to compare the text of introduced and adopted bills with an archive of ALEC model bills. Copies or derivations of ALEC bills made up an increasing share of introduced and adopted legislation during the 1990s, peaking at over 1% of passed bills. They were most common in Republican-controlled states and more commonly introduced by Republican legislators (though Democrats and Democratic-controlled states also passed ALEC bills). Although several of the most commonly passed bills were token resolutions targeted at the federal government (such as a resolution on Taiwan or against Obama), others were significant policy changes: education reform including charter school expansion, vouchers, and teacher accountability measures; health reform including medical liability limits, high-risk pools, and long-term care insurance deregulation; and 529 college savings accounts. In addition to promoting ALEC model bills, the troika was especially effective in promoting anti-union laws, slowing Medicaid expansion, and pre-empting liberal laws by local governments. The Hertel-Fernandez approach identifies this conservative agenda, reviewing their successes but not those of Democrats.

Predicting the Passage of Liberal and Conservative Policies

A simple way to start assessing the policy impact of state party control is to count the number of liberal and conservative policies passed by state governments. To find policy changes, I use the Correlates of State Policy Project dataset, a compilation of work by myself, Marty Jordan, and several other research assistants to find and link together data on state policy and its potential causes and effects. The dataset relies on substantial work by many other scholars; we simply compiled their work. But together, the dataset covers a large number of state policies. The analyses

of dichotomous policy adoption primarily rely on work by Caughey and Warshaw as well as work by Frederick J. Boehmke, Mark Brockway, Bruce Desmarais, Jeffrey J. Harden, Scott LaCombe, Fridolin Linder, and Hanna Wallach as part of the State Policy Innovation and Diffusion Database.³⁹

Here, I present analyses of net liberal policies defined broadly to include all Democratic-preferred policies minus all Republican-preferred policies. This means that policies are not judged independently on their ideological direction, but are instead assessed based on the political coalition that usually supports them. The cost is that there is some danger of reverse causality, where policies are judged as conservative because Republicans supported them rather than due to their inherent content. I have also analyzed a measure that only counts policies as liberal if they expand government and only counts them as conservative if they contract government; that measure shows much weaker partisan effects. But there are, of course, some conservative policies such as abortion restrictions that involve more government intervention. There are other policies like exchanging business taxes for sales taxes that do not affect the overall size of government but redirect the burden of costs and the distribution of benefits in the direction of conservative constituencies. The net result is that more policies can be coded as liberal or conservative using this measure than an alternative that is based on the size and scope of government alone.

Figure 2 reviews the results of models predicting net liberal laws (liberal minus conservative laws) from 1992-2010. With the help of my research assistant Zuhaib Mahmood, I use several different models, each designed to assess the effect of Republican chamber and governor control; the variable takes a value of 0 if Republicans control neither the state House or Senate or the Governorship of a state, 1 if they control any one of those three, 2 if they control any two of those three, and 3 if they have complete control of the policymaking process.⁴⁰ The top left figure reports the results of a panel model predicting net liberal policies with Republican party control, with state and year fixed effects and a dummy variable for the South.⁴¹ The top right figure illustrates the

results of the same model but adds control variables: the log of Gross State Product (GSP), the log of state population, the percentage of non-white population, and the economic liberalism, social liberalism, and overall liberalism of the state's mass public, along with region. The middle two panels report additional results for the model with control variables: the modeled state fixed effects and year fixed effects. This enables a sense of which states are persistently liberal or conservative and which time periods are more liberal or conservative than others.

[Insert Figure 2]

In both models, there is a clear relationship, with more Republican control leading to fewer net liberal policies. Across the range of Republican control, net liberal policies move from about +14.5 to +12. Yet states are differing in their degree of liberal policymaking rather than switching between active liberal policymaking and active conservative policymaking. The range also leads to large estimated state fixed effects, from almost -30 in North Dakota to more than +40 in California. The year fixed effects show a slowly increasing number of net liberal policies from 1992 to 2010, suggesting that liberalism is advancing across states but more slowly in Republican states.

Since the effects of party control with this outcome are more consistent and sizeable than for a narrow measure based only on policies that expand or contract the size and scope of government, the constraints on conservative policymaking may apply narrowly to attempts to contract government spending or regulation—with Republican governments better able to shift social issue policy or exchange costs and benefits among Republican and Democratic constituencies. But I also analyzed liberal and conservative policy counts separately, which show both fewer liberal policies and a much smaller total of more conservative policies in Republican states. When liberalism is defined to include all policies preferred by Democrats rather than just government-expanding policies, there are more conservative policies but also much broader liberal policymaking; this classification thus incorporates more policy successes on each side. Some of these policy options

may come to be defined as conservative when Republican states are able to pass them, but looking at the list of policies does not suggest many odd fits with conservative or liberal philosophy.

The bottom two panels in Figure 2 represent the results of models of change, rather than levels, of net liberal policies. As a result, change in net liberal policies is predicted with change in the level of Republican control: from losing two out of three chambers and governorships to gaining two out of three chambers and governorships.⁴² The bottom left figure represents the results of the change model with only the South regional dummy control variable. The bottom right includes the same control variables as those used in the panel modes, but I shift all of them to represent changes (change in log GDP, change in log population, change in percent minority, change in public economic, social, or overall liberalism). The estimated effects are dramatically different than in the panel models, with no negative effect of Republican control on liberal policymaking and a (imprecisely estimated) potential for more liberal policymaking after large jumps in Republican control. Republican control does not lead to immediate drops in liberal policymaking or increases in conservative policymaking. The estimated effects are mostly just above the zero line, suggesting little broad immediate change. Combined with the substantial state fixed effects, the change models suggest that the relationships between party control and policy come from long-term differences across states that are associated with typical patterns of partisanship, rather than a party's ability to reshape state governments upon its ascension.

Predicting the Size of State Government

To assess party effects on the size and scope of state government, the most common measures used in comparative political economy studies assess government expenditures as a share of the size of the economy.⁴³ Figure 3 presents our analyses of state government spending as a share of gross state product from 1992-2010. Since nearly all states have balanced budget amendments,

this measure is very highly correlated with total state tax revenue as a share of the size of the economy; I also analyzed the tax measure and found equivalent results. I again present the results for the panel model without controls in the top left, the model with controls in the top right, with the state and year fixed effects (from the model with controls) below. The bottom two line graphs again illustrate the results of a model of changes (now in government expenditures), with independent variables also shifted to measure change from one year to the next rather than levels in each year.

[Insert Figure 3]

With and without controls for population, the economy, and public opinion, the fixed effects panel models for government spending show a different pattern than those for the policy counts. Rather than a continuous effect across levels of Republican control (as in Figure 2), these results demonstrate no strong effect until Republicans control all chambers and the governorship of a state. Note, however, that the range across levels of party control moves from approximately 12.8% of GSP to 12.5% of GSP; we are looking at relatively small differences in the size of state government. Models do not show a significant effect of the level of party control if party control is assessed as a single variable. Instead, the estimated effect of full Republican control is only different from the estimated effect of full Democratic control.

The state fixed effects again show substantial variation across states. With fixed effects ranging from nearly 15 percentage points less spending as a share of the economy in Idaho to more than 10 percentage points more spending as a share of the economy in New York. Although there is some association with the liberalism or conservatism of states, note that many Western states (both liberal and conservative) have much smaller governments and many eastern states (liberal and conservative) have much larger governments. Regardless of party control, states vary considerably in the size of their governments—and these large differences are built up over decades rather than shifted dramatically in response to party control of government. Year fixed effects again show

growth over time, with spending year fixed effects rising seven percentage points from 1992 to 2010. As most state economies grew considerably over this period, state governments are not only keeping up with their economic growth, but also exceeding it. That means they are growing well beyond the rate of inflation, which has been substantially lower than economic growth over this period.

The change models again show a substantially different pattern. Rather than immediately reduce the size of government, changes in Republican control are associated with either no change in the size of government or an (imprecisely estimated and insignificant) increase in state spending. Recall that this measure is nearly perfectly correlated with tax collections, suggesting that Republican promises to substantially lower taxes do not appear to be systematically supported. Instead, the evidence indicates that the share of government of a state's economy is persistently lower in some states, though slightly lower when states have full Republican control over a long period.

Reconciling Models of State Policymaking

What can we say about the effects of Republican control of state government on state policy given the prior literature and these models? First, citizens should not expect immediate changes from shifts in state party control. Models of change do not show Republican control immediately leads to more conservative policies. In line with prior models, party control exerts a long-term rather than short-term influence. Second, Republican-associated policy changes that are enacted often do not affect the size of state government. The role of state government may be harder to shift than other policies associated with Democratic or Republican governance. Third, the effects of party control are generally quite a bit smaller than stable differences over time and across states. Differences between Red and Blue states today may codify long-standing regional or state-specific distinctions rather than illustrate clear partisan effects. Fourth, most new policymaking is liberal and states tend to grow in their liberal policy adoptions over time (even during a conservative era).

The findings thus help to reconcile the new findings from Caughey and Warshaw with those of Grumbach. Like Caughey and Warshaw, I find that party control in the contemporary era is associated with differences in state policy but that the remaining range of policy differences across states is far greater than the part attributable to party control. Like Grumbach, I find that Republican states have had different policy outputs than those of Democratic states but that the patterns are not consistent across different manifestations of liberalism and conservatism. Instead, Democratic states have maintained their leftward trajectories while Republican states have mostly moved slower.

Specific Studies of Policy Areas

To provide a closer study of the particular dynamics at play in Republican successes and to help match the more specific agenda items identified by Hertel-Fernandez, I (along with my research assistant Babs Hough) studied four policy areas where they were able to make change: abortion, charter schools, taxes, and unions. I located 21 studies of the specific determinants of state policy change in these areas to assess how partisanship interacted with other factors to produce policy change, the size of the partisan effects, and the commonly achieved policy ends.⁴⁴ One benefit is that these studies are designed to assess all of the factors that matter to these policy outcomes, rather than only track the effects of partisanship, enabling comparisons of influence.

Abortion politics is an interesting case of continuity and dramatic change. On the one hand, abortion has been legal in every state since 1972; states do not have the power to change its legality and have also faced court scrutiny on their attempts to make abortion more difficult to secure. On the other hand, this is perhaps the clearest case where laws have changed following the Republican partisanship of states, with many proposals by pro-life groups enacted into law. Policies like parental or spousal consent requirements, information and counseling requirements, pregnancy term conditions, clinic access and security, and clinic surgical health requirements have all made progress

in the states. Data on the restrictiveness of abortion laws is easy to come by, with surprising consensus across researchers and even pro-choice and pro-life groups. Four of the six studies I reviewed found an effect of state partisanship, with Democratic states passing less restrictive abortion laws. But the effect of partisanship was weaker than expected in some cases, with factors like public opinion, grassroots activism, constitutional history, initiative and referendum procedures, and Catholic population also mattering. Researchers found less capacity for majority parties to move policy against public opinion in a state; they were mostly matching policy with existing opinion.

Charter school policies provide another useful example of state policy sorting by partisanship. Charters were not originally more encouraged or plentiful in conservative states (and were promoted nationally by Bill Clinton and other Democrats), but the issue became increasingly partisan over the course of the 1990s and 2000s. That leads to conflicting studies on the impact of majority parties. When researchers look for which states were consistent innovators in the area, they find more historical continuity and less partisan influence; but when they look at changes in whether charters are allowed and the number allowed since the 1990s, they find stronger partisan effects. Two of the six studies I reviewed found an effect of state partisanship, but the null findings were partially driven by different measurements. Only one study found that gubernatorial partisanship mattered for the extent or nature of charter school policy. There were also controversies over the extent and nature of regional diffusion in this policy area. Factors like state diversity, urban population, and school quality were also found important in some studies.

Tax policy studies find a more consistent pattern in policy preferences, with Democrats favoring more progressivity in the tax code, but party preferences do not always generate different results. Three of the six studies I reviewed found little direct impact of partisan control of state government, but there was some evidence of the impact of unified Republican control. There was little evidence of diffusion in tax policy, but factors like union membership, population age

distribution, common industries, and economic performance also mattered in some cases. Due to constitutional provisions and path dependence, relative state reliance on property, sales, and income taxes is relatively stable (as is, in some cases, the allowed progressivity of income taxes). In this quintessential Republican-owned policy issue area, there is thus some evidence of success (including high-profile cases of major changes), but the ability to make traditionally liberal states more like traditionally conservative states on tax policy is quite constrained.

Policies designed to reduce unionization (especially in the public sector) and union benefits have been a central aim of state conservative think tanks, the network associated with the Koch brothers, and ALEC. Most of the issue-specific research, however, is focused on the extent to which union strength in the states is associated with these policy outcomes. Three broad studies of state labor legislation that we reviewed did find some partisan effects on right-to-work law adoption, increasing retirement ages for public employees, and collective bargaining restrictions. But other studies find that unions have actually been more influential in Republican states in preventing benefit cuts.⁴⁵ In union-related policies, Republicans have led high-profile moves like Scott Walker's efforts to eliminate collective bargaining for some public-sector workers in Wisconsin and the enactment of right-to-work laws in Michigan and Indiana. But these salient changes have been accompanied by less change in other areas, often driven more by continuing nationwide declines in private sector unionization and rising public sector legacy costs.

Republicans have thus been somewhat successful in changing policies related to abortion, charter schools, taxes, and unions. But, matching the quantitative evidence, they have not been able to turn traditionally liberal states into their conservative counterparts even in these successful areas. Their efforts are sometimes piecemeal, as in abortion and charter schools—important but not able to transform policy. In other areas, like right-to-work legislation and taxes, they have pursued large-scale changes limited to a smaller number of states. In all cases, partisanship is among several

influential factors, including some that are issue-specific and others that confirm prior quantitative analyses, such as dependence on public opinion or the need for full control of government.

Qualitative Evidence on Partisan Agendas and Achievements

Alongside these quantitative analyses of state policy, it can be helpful to review the specific histories of each state since the 1990s. With the help of my research assistant Emily Jenkins, I content analyzed 16 book-length histories of policymaking across 15 states.⁴⁶ We chose non-partisan long-form narrative descriptions of legislatures and governors within particular states that covered as much of the era from the 1990s to today as possible. They were often written by scholars but sometimes by journalists or political practitioners. We sought to identify the most important legislative or gubernatorial policy proposals in each time period and draw from the authors' narrative descriptions of the politics surrounding them. For every proposal, we coded whether it was enacted into law, its primary issue area, whether the issue at stake had important implications for the state (according to the author), whether the debate was primarily along partisan lines, whether it was led by Republicans, and the factors judged important in its passage or failure. We also recorded the authors' primary explanation and their assessment of the role of the parties in each proposal. The procedure matches that used in my book on the history of federal policy change.⁴⁷

The state history books discussed 69 major policy proposals since the 1990s across the 15 states; 48 (70%) were enacted into law. That is a much larger percentage of success than for all bills introduced in any legislature; but the passage rate is similar to those from federal analyses based of presidential proposals or major bills discussed in *Congressional Quarterly*. Table 1 reports the results of our content analysis. The most common proposals concerned education, taxes, and health care (together comprising half of the proposals). These are all large-ticket items related to the state budget; when combined with the next two categories (social welfare and the budget overall), it

suggests that nearly two-thirds of the proposal agenda since the 1990s was related to the overall size and scope of government. Some education or health proposals also incorporated social issue proposals such as those on charter schools or abortion, but they were usually small parts of broader proposals focused on education or health finance. The qualitative literature thus suggests that, although much of the easy-to-count action in the states is in social issue domains, the most important debates each year often concern the overall budget and where to allocate resources.

[Insert Table 1]

Most proposals were considered important to the state (by the books' authors) and important proposals were more likely to be enacted into law. But some (especially social issue) proposals were considered more symbolic than important; only a minority of those proposals passed. Only 39% of the proposals featured debates that broke down along partisan lines (others were multi-dimensional or bipartisan), but the partisan debates were more likely to produce policy changes. Nonpartisanship can sometimes be an indicator that a governor or legislative leader does not even have their own party caucus on their side, rather than an indicator of near-universal political support. Only half of the proposals were led by a Republican governor or legislative leader, somewhat surprising in an era of increased Republican control. The Republican-led proposals were far more likely to pass, often because the Democratic proposals were from Democratic governors in divided government or by minority leaders. But this does suggest that Republican proposals, once they develop into major legislation, did often pass in some form in the states.

According to the state policymaking histories, partisanship was the most important individual factor in driving policy success or failure—though no factor was judged important in a majority of cases. Other key factors included interest group pressure and public opinion, though many authors told multi-causal stories, some with interactions among multiple factors. Federal frameworks or funding threats played a role in one in ten cases, but (despite the focus on policy

diffusion in the state politics literature) no policy histories credited copying other states' policies.

The partisan stories more often concerned cooperation between legislative leaders and the governor (and support from associated interest groups), rather than election campaign victories leading directly to policy change. Compared to my prior analysis of federal policy change, state political history authors see less influence from individual politicians, interest groups, and research but equivalent influence from public opinion, media coverage, and courts.⁴⁸

Qualitative histories also provide a chronology of events that acknowledge compromises politicians made along the way to success or failure. There were several stories of multiple attempts to address revenue shortfalls, education funding inequities, health coverage, sentencing reforms, and energy production. The products of these compromises were not usually characterized as liberal or conservative (by state historians), but often as extensions of previous efforts modified to appease various politicians and interest groups. Although the objectives of each governor and legislative session differed, the policy histories did not portray each set of politicians as having the power to set their own agenda regardless of circumstances. Instead, many issues were pushed onto the agenda by budgetary constraints or by the expiration or unworkability of previous policies. Overwhelming in all of this was the need to balance the state's budget, which was often driven more by economic circumstances and unforeseen policy results, rather than by the plans of party leaders. State political histories thus see more sustained policymaking challenges, with substantial partisan influence but no new Republican agenda to work around traditional budgetary constraints.

Do Red States Create Different Social and Economic Outcomes?

The goal of public policy is to achieve real impact, rather than simply to accumulate political victories. Republican policies are traditionally justified on the grounds that they will create economic growth and prosperity, enable hard work to be rewarded, or sustain social stability and family life.

Democrats, though they also care about those concerns, often emphasize solving immediate hardships like ill health and poverty or rectifying inequalities and spreading economic and social gains throughout society. We should not expect incremental state policy changes to produce immediate gains in any of these areas, but it is fair to ask if the policies have impacts beyond political gains for one side or the other.

In public debate, conflicts over Democratic and Republican successes and failures often take the form of comparing Red States to Blue States. The usual evidence is simple associations: states controlled by Democrats like California are better or worse off (or improving or declining more) than states controlled by Republicans like Texas.⁴⁹ To take some recent examples, a recent CNBC analysis says Red States are better at creating jobs and increasing incomes while a CBS analysis finds employment prospects are better in Blue States.⁵⁰ Sometimes the schadenfreude takes the form of unexpected associations, supposedly proving hypocrisy: one analysis finds that Red States are better at reducing inequality because not-in-my-backyard housing restrictions allow only rich people to afford life in Blue States; another finds that Blue States produce better family life while Red States stimulate divorce, child marriage, and adultery.⁵¹ These arguments are sometimes embarrassingly weak. Economist Tyler Cowen, for example, sought to refute an unsourced Paul Krugman's claim of Democratic superiority with a link to an article from *The Blaze* website claiming Republican states are "better run" (based on the top five and bottom five states in a data compilation by another website called "24/7 Wall St."). Claims of Red or Blue superiority can also be premature. Witness Sam Brownback's claims that Kansas would provide a Red State model for the nation with his tax cuts, only to have them mostly overturned by his own party within five years of adoption.

Political scientists Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson started the latest round of these debates with a *New York Times* op-ed arguing that "The Path to Prosperity is Blue."⁵² They outlined a series of metrics, arguing that Blue States have better life expectancy, higher median income, higher

educational attainment, and higher patent innovation. Their comparisons were based on presidential voting patterns, rather than state policy results, but the implication was that the Red State model is a failure. Nearly all of these broad comparisons fail to look at change over time in response to partisan control of government. The bivariate associations also fail to control for the myriad other factors that distinguish California from Texas or Massachusetts from Mississippi. What is more, they face the problem of cherry picking outcomes to make your side look better: Democrats can pick educational attainment while Republicans pick business confidence.

Some academic research does take a more systematic look at potential outcomes of policy, but it tends to mix measures of actual policies with measures of their effects. It often takes into consideration only a few outcomes at a time with one measure of state partisanship (such as the party of the governor). The results of these analyses have been less clear than their national counterparts. Despite high-profile findings of better economic performance under Democratic presidents, with more widespread and equal gains, the state-level literature does not reach a firm conclusion advantaging either party on economics.⁵³ A systematic review found that state government partisanship has been associated with many different policy outputs and several different more specific outcomes of those policies, such as pollution and working hours.⁵⁴ Compared to 115 tests of party control on policy outputs, the review found 72 different assessed relationships between party control and outcomes (46 of which found a significant relationship). This includes studies using regression discontinuity on close gubernatorial elections that have shown a variety of economic outcomes, though the outcomes measured tend to be highly specific (such as the difference in hours worked between blacks and whites or the employment rate of immigrants). These studies provide better causal inference than a series of one-time op-eds in public debate, but they still run the risk of finding a few significant relationships amplified by publication bias.

In a new paper, John Holbein and Adam Dynes counteract these difficulties by taking a broad look at economic, education, crime, family, social, environmental, and health outcomes that could conceivably be related to policy differences across Democratic and Republican states.⁵⁵ Across 48 of these outcomes, they find that several are associated with current Democratic and Republican partisan control of states: unemployment, energy consumption, and murder rates are higher in states under Democratic control. But when systematically looking at differences over time and place in these outcomes from 1960 to 2010 when a governor, House chamber, or Senate chamber is in different partisan hands, they find no evidence of large or systematic differences for any measure. In fact, they find fewer partisan differences than should be expected just based on chance, given that they are looking across so many different outcomes. They also take advantage of regression discontinuity estimates around close gubernatorial elections and closely split legislative chambers, again finding no evidence of differences due to Democratic or Republican control. Even looking for long-term impacts, they find no evidence of differences driven by sustained Democratic or Republican control—or outcomes over any period from immediate to several years later.

The research by Holbein and Dynes does track party influence on hard-to-move outcomes like population and economic growth, but it does not require Republican or Democratic control to move broader social or economic trends. Even quite-proximate-to-policy outcomes like the abortion rate, school attendance rate, the top 1% share of income, the number of felons ineligible to vote, and energy prices are unaffected by party control of state government. Despite changes in abortion law, education policy, tax rates, and voting rights, therefore, there is little evidence that the underlying outcomes of these policies have seen significant shifts in response to the policy changes made possible by changes in party control of government.

This literature concerns the overall effect of parties on social and economic outcomes and does not foreclose the possibility that particular Republican-adopted policies have not had important

outcomes. The effects of policies could, of course, cancel out one another if they move outcomes in different directions. The policies could fail to be adopted in a widespread enough manner or broad enough in their degree of policy change to produce consistent outcome differences based on party. But this literature should give pause to both triumphant and dystopian views of the potential impact of Republican gains. Even if Red and Blue states are differing more in their policies, it does not imply that their socio-economic trends (good or bad) are a product of those policy differences.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Republican Policy Changes

Despite the null findings of prior research connecting Republican control to social and economic outcomes, Republicans have indeed changed some policies that might be impactful. Two recent studies that demonstrated Republican effects on state policy also attempted to assess Republican policy impacts, one by one.

First, Hertel-Fernandez shows that where ALEC was more successful in promoting their model bills, the state incarceration rate and charter school enrollment rose more quickly while public sector unionization declined more quickly.⁵⁶ These bivariate associations, sometimes responsive to a few highly-policy-active states, are nonetheless suggestive of some important policy implications of at least some Republican-passed policies. His analysis does not show whether Republican gains in the states were required to produce these changes (or even whether the policies were the independent drivers of change), but there are clear mechanisms that should link lenient charter school bills with more enrollment, anti-union bills with reduced unionization, and tough-on-crime laws with incarceration. He also shows that de-unionized states hurt Democratic prospects by reducing union political activity, even where unionization rates did not decline precipitously.⁵⁷ Policies may reinforce political gains, even if they do not bring broader economic or political change.

Second, Grumbach follows up on the social effects in several issue areas where he saw increasing state policy polarization.⁵⁸ He finds that health insurance coverage is now higher in Democratic states, although it began rising to a lesser extent in Republican states as well (following passage of the Affordable Care Act). Grumbach finds very small or no differences in incarceration rates in Republican states (depending on the model used); he notes that Democratic states also passed tough-on-crime policies in the 1980s and 1990s, until criminal justice reform became more popular nationwide. On education, he finds that Republican states formerly had higher high school graduation rates, but Democratic states have matched them; Republican states have more charter enrollment by a slight margin, but it is increasing in Democratic states as well. He also finds limited differences in carbon emissions. Grumbach says the results show that where the parties are polarizing, the outcomes are also moving apart. But all of the effects seem quite modest, with the biggest effect (health insurance rates) likely driven by Democratic states' adoptions of more extensive Medicaid expansions—another example of an impact due to less Republican action.

These analyses were conducted in the course of reviewing overall party impact, but there are much wider literatures on the effects of public policy that are less concerned with the policies' political origins. I reviewed (with the help of research assistant Jonathan Spiegler) 53 studies of recently-passed Republican-supported policies in five categories: right-to-work laws, welfare reform, reduced gun restrictions, increased abortion restrictions, and tax cuts. The goal was to draw from the literature on policy effects, rather than partisan impact. Table 2 summarizes the results of our review. Across issue areas, there were clear links to many, but not all, proximate outcomes. Studies of broader outcomes, however, usually found minimal or conditional effects, with far more studies with conflicting findings. But even studies of proximate outcomes led to some conflicting findings.

[Insert Table 2]

Twelve studies of right-to-work laws mostly found considerable effects, but there was inconsistency in findings.⁵⁹ One found lower manufacturing wages and increased construction deaths, but no economic effects during recessions or effects on employment. Others found increases in private sector employment and faster growth in firms. Still others found no effect on employment, firm growth, or wages. There were no strong effects on overall inequality, but some differences by race and gender. The studies found more consistent effects on unionization (a slight acceleration of decline) and one found a significant and impactful decline in union political activity. The studies are limited by the small number of states' changing laws, the long period with few changes before recent moves, and the decreased unionization preceding recent adoptions.

State welfare reforms were concentrated in the 1990s in response to federal welfare reform. They were not exclusive to Republican states, but there were some differences in punitiveness and in distributional focus that (to some extent) matched state partisanship. I looked at eight studies of state welfare reform differences.⁶⁰ There was more of a consensus in this literature: welfare reform did decrease people on social assistance and employment, but also left the non-working population poorer. Broader effects on labor supply, income, and fertility were tested but not found. Broader national studies found that changes in other policies (like the EITC) amplified both the positive effects for new workers and the negative effects for non-workers.⁶¹ But an overall effect for federal welfare reform does not necessarily mean that individual state differences were impactful.

Our review of fourteen studies on state gun policy found relatively consistent but small effects.⁶² Stricter background checks may reduce suicide and violent crime, while preventing child access reduces injuries. Laws restricting guns from those with restraining orders and criminal records (and effective checks to find restricted population members before gun purchases) may reduce gun homicide and suicide. But no studies found important effects on mass shootings or family violence. The evidence for the impacts of age requirements, waiting periods, assault weapons bans, and

concealed-carry laws is more limited and conflicted. Overall, suicide effects were easier to show than homicide effects. But broader studies of gun restrictiveness do show decreases in injuries and gun deaths with more restrictions. Several studies differentiated among types of concealed-carry laws but found limited or conflicting results. Even where new restrictive gun laws reduced gun violence, it did not necessarily follow that new laws increasing gun access would increase gun violence.

I also reviewed ten studies from the literature on the impact of abortion restrictions.⁶³ There was some evidence that parental notification or mandated counseling, but not enforced delays, can reduce abortion rates. Strict abortion laws can also cause clinics to close, but perhaps not affect the overall abortion rate. They may simply make more people travel to neighboring states. Some studies found small effects on contraception use. Several studies assumed that abortion rates would decline with legal restrictiveness, but this relationship was surprisingly difficult to demonstrate. Abortion rates were already lower in states that adopted new abortion restrictions, so associations might show the social acceptability of abortion more than the effectiveness of more restrictive laws.

We reviewed four studies on the impact of changes in state income taxes.⁶⁴ They agreed that total income taxes paid reduce individual income growth, with some potential effects on the growth of firms and overall economic growth, but the effects were generally small. There were no strong effects on employment. I am continuing to review studies of tax changes, including sales tax increases, corporate tax declines and reforms, and income tax progressivity. I will also collect studies on educational changes, including charter schools, vouchers, and teacher evaluation requirements as well as education finance reforms. There are, of course, also large literatures on minimum wages, sentencing reforms and prison privatization, smoking and drug regulation, and increased early childhood education. Many of these literatures have found that policies change social outcomes.

But the policy-specific review of studies thus far demonstrates that even the most successful Republican policy achievements may not be met with wide social and economic impacts. The

strongest evidence seems to be for new programs (mostly initiated by Democrats) that expand access to government services (such as Medicaid expansion). These cases may reflect outcomes like insurance rates, though that is not quite the same as demonstrating effects on underlying health—where the literature has been far more conflicted.⁶⁵ Regardless, Republican effects in these cases are mostly due to not enacting a policy or enacting policy less extensive than Democratic states. Although significant, this does not demonstrate key conservative outcomes from the Republican revolution in the states. Even straightforward relationships, such as abortion and gun restrictiveness changing the number of abortions and guns, turn out to be more difficult to show (and less extensive) than expected. Where there are clear outcomes, they are often mixed: welfare reforms increased employment among a subset of former recipients while making others less well-off. All of these influences take place within the context of national policy trends: all states enacted welfare reform of some kind, for example, and all states must retain legal abortion and guns. National trends thus make overwhelming impacts of state policy differences less likely.

Policy Effects of the Republican Revolution

Given Republicans overwhelming gains in the states while the party became increasingly conservative, it stands to reason that they would have produced a windfall of policy gains that achieve their broader objectives (or, if skeptical Democrats were correct, led to detrimental outcomes). But Republicans faced constraints at each step: from control of government to policy outputs and then from policy outputs to social and economic effects. Republican leadership led to some considerable changes in policy, but they were unable to reverse the broad build-up of state governments that occurred across all states and set them on different liberal and conservative paths before they arrived. Their policies have had some important direct effects, such as reduced public

sector union involvement in politics on behalf of their opponents. But given all the factors that matter to social outcomes, their policy output did not drive broad real-world results.

The results, though varied, present a relatively clear story. Republicans have been able to slow or stop the increase in policy liberalism in the states, especially in policies unrelated to the broad size and scope of state government. But they were less able to shift the fundamental character of state policy, adjust the role of government in a state's economy, or move formerly liberal states like those in the Midwest to match the longstanding conservatism of other states like those in the South. Partisan control of state government in the contemporary era is impactful, but that does not demonstrate that the Republican revolution in the states has succeeded in achieving conservative policies or their intended (or unintended) outcomes. Instead, it mostly reflects the constraints on the liberal march of policy that develop when Republicans control more state governments.

These results may help explain the unexpected findings of Holbein and Dynes: that there is insufficient evidence to conclude that party control of government has produced any changes in state social and economic outcomes. The path from partisan change to policy outputs remains long and obstructed, as does the path from policy outputs to social and economic change. As Caughey and Warshaw show, partisan control of government has only recently been associated with policy outputs and partisanship still does not overwhelm other state differences. By the time that partisan control mattered, state governments were already well-developed and already started down well-worn paths to their relative liberalism or conservatism. Policy had also nationalized, with periodic efforts to revive state decision-making that still tended to entail more reliance on federal decisions.

As Grumbach and Hertel-Fernandez have shown, it is certainly possible to find areas of policy where Democrats and Republicans diverge—and even some proximate outcomes that may be associated with those divergences. But new policy tends to be more liberal than conservative, both more expansive than contractionary and more accepting of social change over time, meaning that

most policy areas trend to move leftward. Although I confirm several of the issue-specific trends identified by Grumbach and Hertel-Fernandez, as well as the wider association between policy liberalism and state party control found by Caughey and Warshaw, my findings should help put them in context. Conservatives have had successes, without achieving their aspiration to disrupt the wider scope of continuous liberalizing policy trends.

I am hopeful that the triangulating approach pursued here can add to the current literature. Qualitative histories demonstrate that Republican state officials are often consumed with the same budgetary politics as their predecessors. They can be successful quite often, but usually in concert with other factors like interest groups and public opinion and not always on their hand-picked policy agenda. My panel and change models of net state liberal policymaking and the size of government added two important findings: (1) even when Republican control is influential, conservatives are often fighting an uphill battle against rising liberalism and (2) change is usually modest and long-term, rather than immediate and transformative. Issue-specific quantitative studies also show that state partisanship influenced some policy adoptions, but the findings were often conditional—with some issue-specific factors and path dependent histories also important.

My preliminary reviews of social and economic outcomes associated with Republican policy success also flagged important considerations for those who would tout a “Red State” model for social and economic success or failure. Each set of policies has important effects, but the size of the effects on proximate outcomes are usually smaller than anticipated and the effects on broader outcomes often fail to materialize altogether. Simplistic comparisons of one-year differences in Red and Blue states do not tell policymakers or citizens much about the effects of party-preferred policies. Even scholars may fall victim to picking a few outcomes most likely to show effects and failing to learn as much from the lack of evidence for other relationships.

American state governments do bear the marks of a quarter-century of increasing Republican rule, but they still largely take on the same functions and pursue the same goals as they did before. There is considerable variation across the states, though only part is due to partisanship. If the 2018 election brings an end to increasing Republican rule, the period since 1992 may come to be seen as a relative high point in both Republican electoral success and their policy impact. But the Republican revolution has been less transformational than advertised.

¹ Little (1998).

² A nice outline of the agenda appears in Lezar (1994), an edited volume of think tankers addressing state policy issues and forwarded by Ronald Reagan.

³ Schor and McCarty (2011).

⁴ The federal story is covered in my recent book, Grossmann and Hopkins (2016).

⁵ Caughey and Warshaw (2017); Caughey and Warshaw (2018).

⁶ Higgs (2015) updating Higgs (2004).

⁷ Pierson (1994), citing economic studies of path dependence and increasing returns.

⁸ Prothero (2017); Eriksson and Strimling (2015).

⁹ Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson (2002).

¹⁰ Squire and Mocrief (2015).

¹¹ Zimmerman (2010).

¹² McCann (2016).

¹³ Harris and Kinney (2003).

¹⁴ Squire and Hamm (2005).

¹⁵ Squire and Hamm (2005).

¹⁶ Squire and Moncrief (2015).

¹⁷ Van Horn (2006).

¹⁸ Rosenthal (2009); Jenkins (2016).

¹⁹ Morehouse and Jewell (2003).

²⁰ Rosenthal (2009).

²¹ Rosenthal (2009).

²² Morehouse and Jewell (2003).

²³ Morehouse and Jewell (2003).

²⁴ Gray and Hanson (2004).

²⁵ Gray and Hanson (2004).

²⁶ Gray and Hanson (2004).

²⁷ Alleged deregulation in the US and Japan in power, telecommunications, finance, transportation, utilities, and broadcasting mostly resulted in expanded government roles, with re-regulation. See Vogel (1996); Vogel (2018).

²⁸ Gray and Hanson (2004).

²⁹ Higgs (2015).

³⁰ Morehouse and Jewell (2003).

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- ³¹ Barrilleaux (2006).
- ³² Erickson, Wright, and McIver (1993).
- ³³ Erickson, Wright, and McIver (2006).
- ³⁴ Grossmann and Hopkins (2016).
- ³⁵ Caughey and Warshaw (2016); Caughey and Warshaw (2017).
- ³⁶ By using time-variant difficulty parameters, it suppresses average change over time. See Grumbach (2018b).
- ³⁷ Grumbach (2018a).
- ³⁸ Hertel-Fernandez (2019). My analysis is based on a draft produced for a book conference in 2017.
- ³⁹ Boehmke et al. (2018).
- ⁴⁰ Nebraska, as a unicameral non-partisan legislature, is not included. I also experimented with treating the variable as continuous or separately analyzing the effects of legislative and gubernatorial control; there were no consistent differences based on how party control is assessed.
- ⁴¹ This baseline follows Caughey and Warshaw (2016).
- ⁴² There are a few instances of three chambers and governorships lost or gained, but we combine them with the two change cases to avoid assessing a few outliers (models measured from -3 to +3 do now show major differences).
- ⁴³ Potrafke (2011).
- ⁴⁴ The abortion studies were: Kreitzer (2015); Kastellac (2018); Arceneaux (2002); Caldarone, Canes-Wrone, and Clark (2009); Norrander and Wilcox (1999). The charter school studies were: Alberty (2014); Clinton and Richardson (2019); Wong and Langevin (2007); Wong and Shen (2002); Renzulli and Roscigno (2005); and Hartney and Flavin (2011). The tax studies were: Bjørnskov and Potrafke (2013); Leigh (2008); Reed (2006); Dennis, Moore, and Somerville (2007); Jacobs and Helms (2001); and Chernick (2005). The union studies were Thom (2017); Jacobs (2017); and Wade (2015).
- ⁴⁵ DiSalvo (forthcoming).
- ⁴⁶ Lyons, Scheb, and Star (2001); Hardy, Dohm, and Leuthold (1995); Stewart (2016); Thomas and Savatgy (2016); Blair and Barth (2005); Parry and Wang (2009); Masugi and Janiskee (2011); Cronin and Loevy (2012); Weatherby and Stapilus (2011); Nowlan (2010); Miller (1994); Jilson (2015); Conant (2006); Schneier and Murtaugh (2009); Cronin and Loevy (1993); Boyer and Radledge (2009).
- ⁴⁷ Grossmann (2014).
- ⁴⁸ For a comparison with federal policy history, see chapter 5 of Grossmann (2014).
- ⁴⁹ Texas seemed to have the upper hand in this particular comparison until recent years, when California has been making economic gains. See Lydia Phillis. 2017. "In the Texas vs. California rivalry, California is winning." Houston Chronicle. <<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/business/texanomics/article/Gov-Abbott-keeps-bashing-California-but-Texas-11202452.php>>.
- ⁵⁰ See John Schoen. 2015. "Are red or blue states better job creators?" CNBC. <<https://www.cnbc.com/2015/08/13/are-red-or-blue-states-better-job-creators.html>> and Irina Ivanova. 2017. "Inequality between red and blue states persists despite booming economy." CBS MoneyWatch. <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/another-type-of-economic-inequality-the-red-blue-state-divide/>>.
- ⁵¹ See Richard Florida. 2015. "Is Life Better in America's Red States?" *The New York Times*. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/opinion/sunday/is-life-better-in-americas-red-states.html>> and Nicholas Kristof. 2017. "Blue States Practice the Family Values Red States Preach." *The New York Times*. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/18/opinion/sunday/blue-states-red-states-values.html>>.

⁵² Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson. 2016. “The Path to Prosperity is Blue.” The New York Times. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/31/opinion/campaign-stops/the-path-to-prosperity-is-blue.html>>.

⁵³ For the federal literature, see Bartels (2016) and Potrafke (2018).

⁵⁴ Potrafke (2018), citing Beland and Boucher (2015).

⁵⁵ Holbein and Dynes (2018).

⁵⁶ Hertel-Fernandez (2019). My analysis is based on a draft produced for a book conference in 2017.

⁵⁷ Feigenbuam, Hertel-Fernandez, and Williamson (2018).

⁵⁸ Grumbach (2018a).

⁵⁹ Burno et al. (2015); Collins (2012); Eisnach (2015); Eran et al. (2016); Feigenbuam et al. (2017); Hoxie et al. (2017); Jordan et al. (2016); Kalenkoski and Lacombe (2006); Kogan (2017); Minor (2012); Roberts and Habans (2015); Stevans (2009).

⁶⁰ Bitler and Hoynes (2010); DeJong et al. (2006); Grogger (2003); Kaushal and Kaestner (2001); Mazzeo, Rab, and Eachus (2003); McKernan and Ratcliffe (2006); Nathan and Gais (2001); Schoeni and Blank (2000).

⁶¹ Meyer and Wu (2018); O’Brien and Travis (2018).

⁶² Rand Corporation (2018); Andres and Hempstead (2011); Barati (2016); Crandall et al. (2016); Flegler et al. (2013); Gius (2014); Grambsch (2008); Kovandzic, Marvell, and Vieraitis (2005); Lee et al. (2013); Sen and Panjamapirom (2012); Siegel, Ross, and King (2013); Siegel et al. (2017); Smith and Spiegler (forthcoming); Webster, Crifasi, and Vernick (2014).

⁶³ Bitler and Zavodny (2001); Felkey and Lybecker (2018); Felkey and Lybecker (2014); Grossman et al. (2014); Jones and Jerman (2017); Jones and Jerman (2014); Joyce et al. (2009); Medoff (2007); New (2011); Sen (2007).

⁶⁴ Gale, Krupkin, and Rueben (2015); Goff, Lebedinsky, and Lile (2012); Holcombe and Lacombe (2004); Reed and Rogers (2004).

⁶⁵ Randomized lotteries for Medicaid did produce changes in access, but not most health outcomes. The results of the lottery study differ from those of observational research. For a review of the Oregon Health Insurance Experiment and a full list of studies, see <<http://www.nber.org/oregon/1.home.html>>

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Figure 2: Predicting Net Counts of Democratic Preferred – Republican Preferred Policies

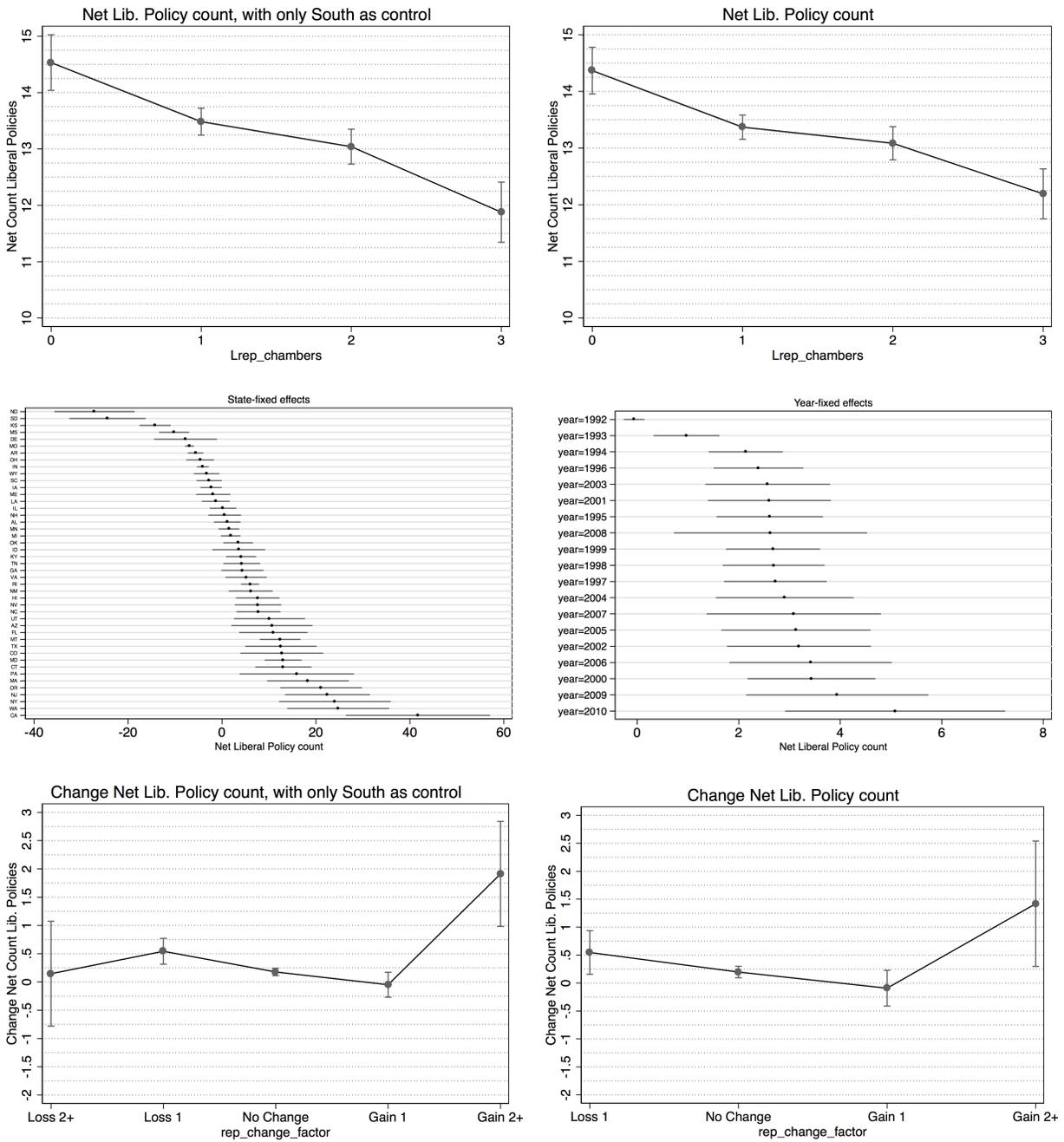


Figure 3: Predicting State Government Expenditures as a Percentage of State Economy

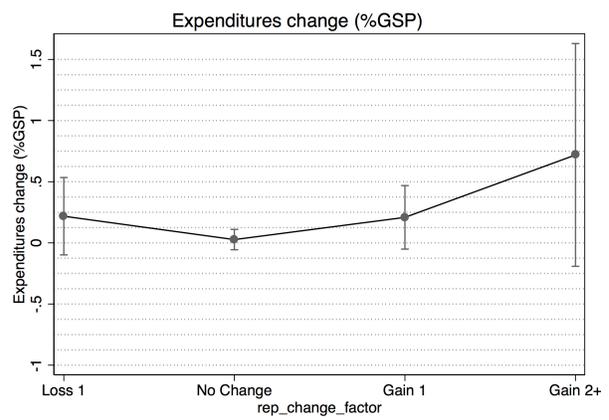
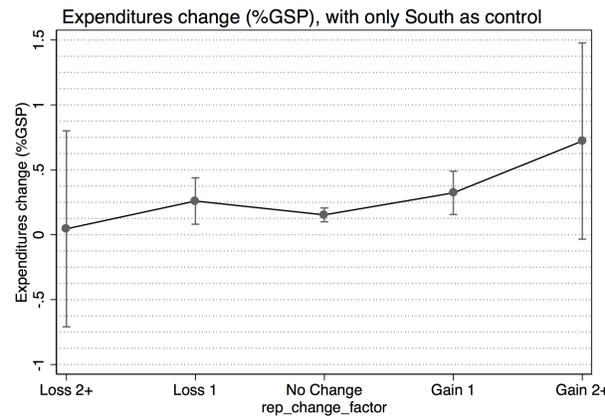
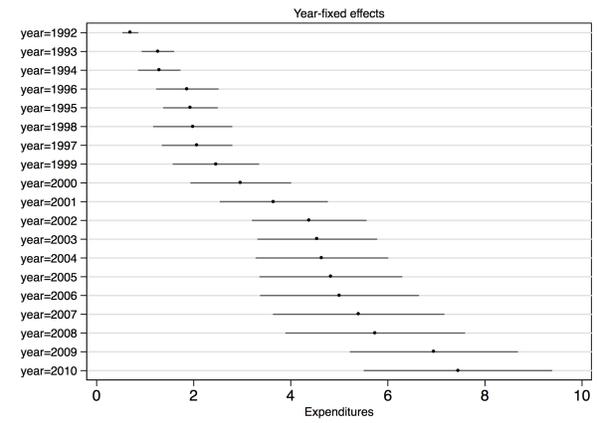
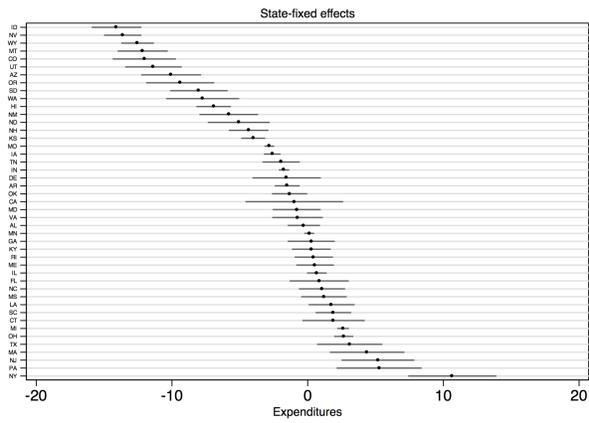
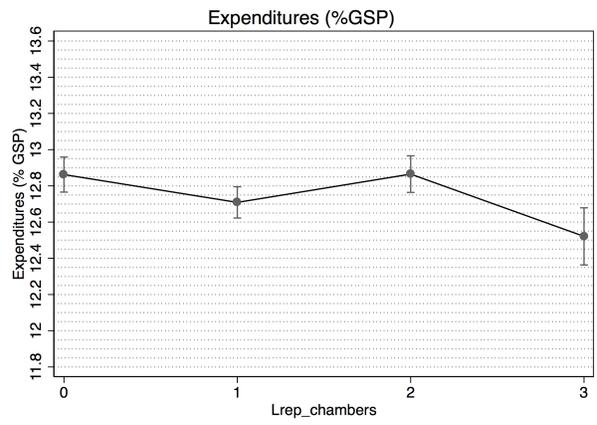
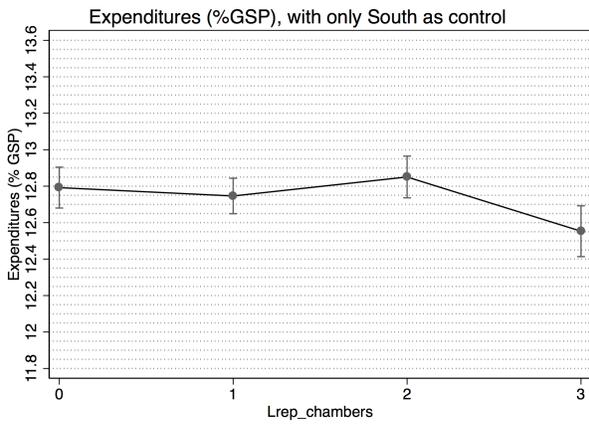


Table 1: Distributions of Major Policy Proposals in Qualitative Histories of State Politics

<u>Primary Issue Areas</u>		<u>Factors Influencing Proposal Success</u>			<u>% of Total</u>	<u>% Adopted</u>
Education	25%	Partisanship	38%	Important	69%	89%
Taxes	13%	Interest groups	28%			
Health care	12%	Public opinion	17%	Unimportant	31%	29%
Social welfare	7%	Research / data	14%			
Budget	7%	Individual politician	13%	Partisan	39%	80%
Environment	6%	Court ruling	12%			
Guns	4%	Federal policy	10%	Non-Partisan	61%	62%
Energy	4%	Media coverage	10%			
Voting	3%	Election campaign	9%	Republican-Led	50%	88%
Redistricting	3%					
Crime	3%			Not Republican-Led	50%	56%

Table 2: Policy Evaluations of Republican-Initiated State Policy Changes

	<u>Right-to-Work</u>	<u>Welfare Reform</u>	<u>Gun Access</u>	<u>Abortion Restriction</u>	<u>Income Tax Cuts</u>
<u>Proximate Outcomes</u>					
Clear Link	unionization	welfare rolls, employment among former recipients, poverty among former recipients	gun suicides	clinic closure, abortion travel	income growth
Mixed, Conflicted, or Minimal	worker injuries	income	child gun injuries, gun homicides, gun hospitalizations	abortion rates, abortion timing, contraception use	
No Link					employment
<u>Broader Outcomes</u>					
Clear Link	Democratic vote share, self-employment				
Mixed, Conflicted, or Minimal	wages, manufacturing, minority wages, employment, firm growth, inequality, business income	poverty rate, university enrollment, labor supply	robbery, assaults, crime	child fatal injuries	firm growth, economic growth
No Link	home ownership	marriage, fertility, food consumption	non-firearm homicides		