Balancing Regionalism and Localism: How Institutions and Incentives Shape American Transportation Policy

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Public policy decisions are increasingly made by regional governance efforts *that involve diverse decision makers from multiple government units within a geographic region. These decision-making bodies face competing pressures to represent regional and local interests. We study how decision makers balance preferences for regionalism and localism within* metropolitan planning organizations *(MPOs), the policymaking entities that are responsible for implementing U.S. federal surface transportation policy at the regional level. Our model of regional governance relates variation in regional policy outcomes to the incentives of MPO decision makers and the institutional environments in which they interact. Analyzing data from a sample of the nation's largest metropolitan areas, we find that MPOs dominated by elected officials produce more locally focused policies, holding other factors constant, while MPOs dominated by nonelected public managers produce more regionally oriented policies. Contextual factors, as well as the regional governance institutions themselves, further shape the balance between regionalism and localism.*

Policymaking and Regional Governance

What types of decision-making arrangements are best suited to handle complex public policy problems? In recent years, attention has turned to the role of policymaking institutions that operate outside—or at least alongside—traditional legislative processes. In particular, political scientists are increasingly interested in the concept of "governance," involving "governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred" (Stoker 1998, 17). Governance arrangements typically incorporate nonlegislative and nongovernmental actors in public decision making. These nontraditional actors are thought to hold different perspectives, resources, values, and interests than their legislative counterparts (Campbell and Lindberg 1991; Kooiman 1993; Ostrom 1990; Pierre and Peters 2000; Rhodes 1996). Further, unlike many formal governmental arrangements that are characterized by a sharp separation of powers between legislative, executive, and private actors, governance institutions may incorporate structures that require shared policymaking responsibility.

Regional governance institutions are one important class of governance arrangements. Created to coordinate the efforts of two or more governments in the planning and/or provision of public policies, regional governance institutions hold significant policymaking responsibilities in a wide range of policy areas in the United States, including economic development, land use, resource management, transportation, housing, information, emergency preparedness, public safety, and human services. They currently distribute hundreds of billions of federal, state,

and local public dollars annually (NARC 2007).[1] Advocates of regional governance argue that relative to local government policymaking, such regional arrangements bring together a wider range of stakeholders and allow for a closer alignment between the level of decision-making authority and the scope of a policy outcome's impact (Foster 2001). Expanding the scope of conflict to a regional level may be desirable for groups that were previously excluded under local decision-making institutions, as it provides additional venues to express and advance their interests (Schattschneider 1961).

Despite their prevalence and potential importance, however, we know little about how regional governance institutions actually operate and how they shape public policy outcomes.[2] In particular, few studies have considered how decision makers in regional governance arrangements balance the interests of the region as a whole relative to the interests of the local government jurisdictions they are charged to represent. In some cases, regional and local interests closely align and regional decision makers face little conflict. In other cases, however, regional and local interests may diverge dramatically, making compromise far more difficult. Understanding what factors drive policy outcomes, given possible combinations of local and regional interests within regional governance institutions, is this study's primary goal.

We explore decision making in regional governance arrangements by focusing on the incentives of regional decision makers and the processes by which these individuals' preferences are aggregated into policy. Comparing across regional governance arrangements, there is a great deal of variation in the membership of their decision-making bodies. Some rely heavily on elected officials such as county or local council members/commissioners/mayors to make, deliver, and implement policy decisions. These elected officials are appointed to the regional governance body to represent their jurisdiction's interests in regional decision making. Other regional governance arrangements have decision-making bodies dominated by policy professionals—state and local bureaucrats, technocrats, and government staff (whom we refer to collectively as "public managers")—who are likewise appointed to the regional governance body. Still others exhibit some combination of elected officials and public managers on their decision-making bodies, in addition to private actors such as businesses, universities,

interest group representatives, and citizens. We exploit such variation to explore and test how various combinations of decision makers and processes translate into different patterns of regional and local considerations in policy outcomes.

We present our study of regional governance as follows. We first discuss regional governance in the American context, focusing on the kinds of problems regional institutions typically address and the tensions and trade-offs inherent in regional policymaking. We then present our theory of regional governance, focusing on actors' preferences and the decisions they make within regional governance efforts. Our theory produces a number of hypotheses. We test these with data from a sample of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), which are the regional governance arrangements responsible for planning and implementing federal transportation policy at the regional level. Consistent with our hypotheses, we find that MPOs with decision-making structures that favor public managers produce more regionally focused policies. Alternatively, when elected officials' preferences are favored, MPOs tend to produce more locally targeted policies. We end by discussing the implications of our study.

The Promise and Problem of Regional Governance

Regional governance exists in various forms throughout the United States (Katz 2000). Some states such as Tennessee, Washington, Oregon, and Florida have adopted statewide policies that mandate extensive regional coordination over land use and conservation policies (Bollens 1992; Gale 1992; Rohse 1996). Most other states rely primarily on voluntary approaches to regional governance, enabling but not requiring intergovernmental cooperation (Rohse 1996). As a result, we now observe a wide and diverse range of regional governance efforts across the American policy landscape. These efforts range from small-scale attempts by neighboring local governments to coordinate their planning to large-scale multipurpose regional governments responsible for a wide range of planning, policymaking, and service delivery activities.

Many regional governance arrangements are organized with the explicit goal of enhancing economic efficiency in public policy and service delivery across a region.[3] For some, this means mitigating negative

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[1]For the purposes of this study, we focus on regional governance efforts that operate in U.S. metropolitan areas and involve two or more local governments.

[2]Some notable exceptions include Carr and Feiock (1999) and McDowell (2003).

[3]Discussions of regionalism parallel scholarship on globalization, which points to the collective benefits of authority migration away from the nation-state and toward supranational institutions (for a review of these approaches, see Kahler and Lake 2003).

externalities created when the actions of one local government impose costs on another jurisdiction (see, e.g., DiMento and Graymer 1991; Kresl and Gappert 1995; Peirce, Johnson, and Hall 1993). Regional governance may also be instituted to promote activities with positive externalities (e.g., Jacob 1984) or to encourage coordinated efforts in service provision to capture economies of scale (e.g., Schechter 1996). Calls for greater regional governance (or regionalism) have grown louder in recent years as scholars, practitioners, and observers have become more attuned to the interconnectedness of local governments and the potential efficiency-enhancing benefits of coordinated region-wide policies (Downs 1996, 2004; Foster 2000, 2001; Sandler 1992).[4]

Despite its promise of enhancing economic efficiency, however, advocates of regionalism often fail to acknowledge the underlying political dilemma associated with regional governance: local actors must give up public authority to achieve regional coordination. Indeed, this is the whole point of regionalism—local governments, acting independently, produce policies that are different from (and presumably inferior to) outcomes that would be produced by a regional body. The rub, however, is that local political actors may then be held accountable for regional policies that are contrary to the preferences of their local constituents. This tension lies at the heart of regional governance: when contemplating a regional approach to policy, decision makers must consider the expected regional benefits and costs of the policy, the expected local benefits and costs, and how those net benefits compare to the likely political costs associated with delegating power to the region. Ceding power to a regional governance institution means giving up control over some policy outputs. Thus, while the benefits to a locality may be large if they agree to regional governance, such benefits may come at the cost of less control and greater uncertainty over policy outcomes.

We argue that to understand how regional governance efforts balance this tension between regional and local costs and benefits, scholars must consider not only the regional economic interests to which these efforts respond (i.e., the nature of the externalities they seek to internalize and the economies of scale they hope to capture), but also the interests of their individual members, and how institutions aggregate these interests. We hypothesize that this balance is a function of the prefer-

ences of actors involved in regional decision making and the regional entity's institutions. When regional institutions allocate decision-making authority to actors who are more aligned with regional interests, we expect the regional entities to undertake activities that focus more on regional benefits, since the key decision makers are less tied to local interests. When regional decision making empowers actors who are aligned with local interests, we expect to see the balance of policy outcomes shifting in the direction of those local interests.

We study these political dynamics of regionalism by focusing on the metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) found throughout the United States. MPOs are intergovernmental organizations that are responsible for regional surface transportation planning, policymaking, and implementation. The recent federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU; and previously the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act [ISTEA] and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century [TEA-21] programs), requires each metropolitan area in the United States with a population over 50,000 to designate or establish an MPO.[5] In some areas, an existing regional governance arrangement (typically a regional council or council of governments) is designated; in others, the MPO is newly created specifically for this purpose and remains free-standing.[6] SAFETEA-LU charges MPOs with both long-range planning (through a 20- to 30-year Regional Transportation Plan) and short-term allocation of resources to specific projects (through a three-year Transportation Improvement Program, or TIP). MPO members may include county or local government elected officials; state, county, or local government staff (especially bureaucrats and transportation policy professionals); business and labor representatives; representatives from local educational institutions; and citizens. Membership composition varies greatly across the nation's 384 MPOs (U.S. DOT 2007).

We focus our empirical analysis on MPOs for a number of reasons. First, in terms of substantive importance, MPOs are a common and important form of regional governance that has received little scholarly attention. MPOs

[4]Empirical tests of these purported efficiency-enhancing effects, however, are limited and inconclusive. For example, Foster (2001) describes several cases of regionalism that failed to achieve their full economic promise, while Carr and Feiock (1999) find that city-council consolidation has no effect on economic growth in a multivariate analysis.

[5]Governors are authorized to designate the MPOs within their states, and practices vary in terms of the role of other actors in this process.

[6]In practice, however, the distinction between regional council and free-standing MPOs is less clear: MPOs that operate within regional councils have quite a bit of organizational and political autonomy from their parent organizations (and often even different memberships), while free-standing MPOs often develop formal and informal relationships with the regional councils operating in the same metropolitan area, including staff sharing and coordinated programming.

allocate hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funds each year and are key players in the planning and implementation of the U.S. national transportation system. MPO decisions result in real and significant consequences for individuals and communities. Second, MPOs have a good deal of discretion over exactly how to allocate the funds they receive.[7] While the federal government places certain restrictions on funding categories, MPOs spend their monies on a wide variety of projects, both within and between these categories. Third, MPOs provide unique analytical advantages. MPOs exist in all 50 states, allowing a multistate analysis that captures significant variation in the composition of decision-making bodies, the institutional structures that define the organizations, and the social, political, economic, and legal contexts in which MPOs operate. At the same time, however, MPOs are sufficiently similar to one another in terms of their structures, resources, mandates, and activities so as to limit the number of variables necessary to explain and understand variation in their activities and policy outputs. MPOs differ in several ways from many other common forms of regional governance, but we believe that studying them allows us to explore some of the most important examples of regionalism while allowing enough variety to produce generalizable results.[8]

Theory, Hypotheses, and Measurement

Institutional theory tells us that the policies of regional governance arrangements in general, and of MPOs in particular, will be shaped by two main factors: the preferences of their members and the rules that aggregate those preferences into outcomes. The preferences of members are, in turn, affected by their formal positions—whether they are elected officials or public managers—and the contextual factors of their environments. In this section we discuss the origins and aggregation of member preferences and derive hypotheses from our theory. We also describe our data and measurement of key concepts.

Formal Positions and Preferences

We argue that the incentives that derive from individual decision makers' positions shape their choices regarding

[7] Several of the major federal funds explicitly allow MPOs to shift dollars between spending categories (such as highways and transit). Others are earmarked for specific expenditure categories but still allow MPOs to select the location and scope of individual projects.

[8] Compared to most other forms of American regional governance, MPOs tend to be larger, better funded, more institutionalized, longer lasting, and engaged in a wider range of activities.

MPO policy. Four types of actors participate in MPO decision making: (1) county and local elected officials appointed by their local governments (typically a county board or city council) to represent their jurisdiction on the MPO; (2) state, county, and local government staff (such as city managers or planning directors) and transportation professionals (typically transportation department staff) who bring land use, engineering, or transportation policy expertise (we use the term "public managers" to refer to this group); (3) nonpolitical appointees, such as residents or representatives of business, labor, or educational organizations; and (4) MPO staff, responsible for the day-to-day operations of the MPO, including much of the technical work involved in producing long-range and short-term regional transportation plans. Individuals from the first two categories—elected officials and appointed public managers—typically comprise an MPO's governing council (hereafter MPO board).

We expect that whether an MPO board member is an elected official or a public manager has a pivotal influence on his or her policy preferences. In the case of elected officials, assuming that these actors care about reelection, then they should prefer MPO projects that help them to win votes. Such projects would have characteristics that promote credit claiming, e.g., visibility, short-term results, and targeted benefits to their electoral unit. Scholars of the U.S. federal government have long noted these political incentives (Fiorina 1974, 1977; Mayhew 1974), and scholars of urban politics have a similarly long history of noting local officials' preferences for projects that facilitate credit claiming in the short term (Feiock and Clingermayer 1986; Feiock, Jeong, and Kim 2003; Feiock and Kim 2000; Frant 1993, 1996; Lineberry and Fowler 1967). A project to repair a specific road within a single jurisdiction, for example, satisfies all three credit-claiming criteria: the official can point to the road on a map and residents can witness the repairs; the benefits come as soon as the construction equipment is removed; and the project targets a specific constituency. Such projects provide greater credit-claiming opportunities for a local official compared to the creation of a region-wide emergency services communication system, for example, which would extend beyond the elected official's jurisdiction and have more diffuse, longer-term benefits. This does not mean that elected officials who are members of an MPO are being rewarded for their positions on an MPO per se, but rather for the resources they can bring home from MPO projects. Assuming that county and local elected officials represent constituencies who generally want more and/or better public services for their own areas, we therefore hypothesize that the elected officials who sit on MPO boards will favor expenditures

on projects that have a strong targeted dimension that promotes credit claiming.

The preferences of public managers who serve on an MPO board are likely to be quite different. Unlike those of elected officials, public managers' choices derive from sources such as their professional training, norms, and career incentives (Erie 2006; Frant 1993, 1996; Kammerer 1964; Wilson 1980, 1989; see Carpenter 2001 for a review). These influences make a public manager less responsive to narrow political demands and more apt to advocate for comprehensive, region-wide planning efforts and projects (Feiock and Kim 2000; Miller 2000). Unlike elected officials, public managers are thought to be better able to think outside the electoral box and towards meeting long-term environmental and economic goals (Nalbandian 1989). Scholars also argue that professional concerns would drive bureaucrats (including public managers) to maximize budgets and build their organizations (Niskanen 1971; Miller and Moe 1983). By being able to command more resources, public managers can create a profile that may lead to a better job in the future. While public managers are not immune to politics, their professional careers are not solely determined by elections (Schneider, Teske, and Mintrom 1995). Public managers can pursue more efficiency-enhancing, region-wide MPO policies with less negative—and in some circumstances quite positive—consequences for their professional careers. Following from these incentives, we expect public managers who sit on MPO boards to choose policies that are more likely to satisfy multijurisdictional, region-wide interests.

There are, of course, likely to be exceptions to how we characterize the motivations and preferences of elected officials and public managers. Some elected officials do gain political rewards from funding regional projects. The creation of a multijurisdictional road system that unsnarls a long-clogged highway could be one example. Such a project may provide benefits to commuters throughout the region and long outlive an official's time in office, but it could still provide large electoral payoffs through credit claiming in the short term. There are also narrowly focused projects that a public manager might favor over large, multijurisdictional efforts, such as a critical highway interchange improvement that occurs only in the area in which the manager is employed. Some elected officials may be willing to fund projects with beneficial spillover effects if they have ambitions of running for higher office in the future (Bickers and Stein 2004). And they may feel pressure from constituents to support regional projects if their neighboring jurisdictions are all doing so. We argue, however, that *on average* elected officials and public managers do have different enough incentives to choose

different types of projects. It is this average effect that we will test in our empirical analyses.

The fact that both elected officials and public managers can be appointed to the MPO board may dilute the effect of their diverging preferences. If a mayor chooses to appoint a transportation professional to the board, it is possible that this public manager would mirror the mayor's preferences, i.e., for narrowly targeted, highly visible projects in his city. There are two reasons why, on average, the transportation professional (or other public manager) may not vote exactly like his elected counterpart on the MPO board. First, the public manager still retains his preferences that go beyond the mayor's electoral imperative. Second, the mayor and manager find themselves in a principal-agent relationship (Miller 1992). As agents, public managers can exploit information advantages and monitoring costs to make choices that may not always perfectly reflect their elected boss's policy agenda.

There is another, specific type of professional to consider in this discussion: the city manager. It is possible that city managers would have very similar preferences to those of their political bosses: managers may want MPO projects that target their local jurisdictions in an effort to please a city council that has the power to renew or terminate their own employment contracts. But numerous scholars still find that public managers' incentives differ from those of elected mayors and city councils. Even if politically popular, city managers could damage their career options by pursuing policies that might undermine their city's fiscal position (Frant 1993; Nalbandian 1989; Schneider, Teske, and Mintrom 1995). Analyses of city managers in the context of service contracting (Stein 1990) and administrative reforms (Ruhil et al. 1999) demonstrate that managerial efficiency can increase employment opportunities for professional local government managers, providing potential rewards for city managers to withstand political pressures.

Although public managers and elected officials have different interests and constituencies, MPO boards give them equal voting power. This leads to this study's central hypothesis:

H1 (Representation): As the ratio of elected officials to public managers on an MPO's board increases, local interests will be more heavily represented in MPO outcomes.

To operationalize this hypothesis, we determined the formal position of each board member from current U.S. Department of Transportation documents for each of the 100 largest MPOs. We code each member as "Elected" if he or she is a current local or county government elected officeholder (e.g., city council member, mayor, county

supervisor, or commissioner, etc.) and as "Manager" otherwise. We compute the total number of board members and the percent of elected board members.

Local and Regional Influences on Member Preferences

The second source of MPO board members' preferences are the political, social, and economic circumstances that characterize their local and regional contexts.[9] We expect one such factor to be the degree of similarity between jurisdictions. In extremely homogenous regions, citizens in neighboring communities are likely to share common policy preferences and priorities. As the heterogeneity of residents across member jurisdictions increases, local governments may face greater resistance from constituents reluctant to share power or cooperate on projects with dissimilar communities (Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999; Foster 2000, 2001; Wacks and Dill 1989). These political costs will be highest in policy areas that involve significant redistribution between members.[10]

H2 (Local Politics/Heterogeneity): As the political, social, and economic circumstances of a region's constituent units diversify, MPOs will adopt relatively less regionally focused policies and relatively more locally focused projects.

We collected political, social, and economic data for each local government contained within each MPO from the U.S. Census of Population and the U.S. Census of Governments. To measure political heterogeneity, we compute the standard deviation across each member government's expenditures per capita within each MPO.[11] To measure social heterogeneity, we compute for each local government the percent white, percent black, percent His-

panic, and percent other nonwhite (including Asian). We combine these race/ethnicity variables into a Herfindahl concentration index and compute the standard deviation of this index across member governments within each MPO.[12] To measure economic heterogeneity, we compute the standard deviation of median household income across each MPO's member governments.

We also hypothesize that several important regional factors influence the preferences of MPO board members. American metropolitan areas vary widely in terms of their geography, population, economy, and existing transportation infrastructure. Of the 100 largest metropolitan regions in the United States, some are compact and densely populated, while others are widely dispersed and sprawling. Some are experiencing dramatic population and economic growth, while others have stagnant economies and are experiencing net population losses. Some metropolitan areas have extensive public transit systems in place, while others have minimal public transportation. In terms of our model, these regional geographic, population, economic, and infrastructure characteristics create demand for spending on different kinds of transportation projects, independent of the local political dynamics that are the primary focus of our theory. We include these regional factors in Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5 below.

H3 (Regional Infrastructure): Regions with extensive public transit systems will demand continuing investment in those systems. Regions that lack extensive public transit systems will demand relatively more investment in local infrastructure projects.

H4 (Regional Population): Regions with larger and faster-growing populations will demand greater investment in regional projects. Regions with smaller and slower-growing populations will demand greater investment in maintaining and improving existing local infrastructure.

H5 (Regional Economy): Regions with greater wealth will demand more investment in costly regional transportation systems. Regions with less wealth will focus their more limited resources on local projects.

We measure regional transportation infrastructure using data from the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics that reports the number of fixed (i.e., rail) and flexible (i.e., bus) transit miles traveled per year (we use 2004

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[9]Member preferences are also likely to be shaped by each individual's personal experiences, especially as they relate to his or her relationship to and identity with the broader region. Thus, members who have previously worked in a regional organization or in a capacity that necessitated a regional orientation may view the net benefits of regionalism more favorably. However, these personal factors are beyond the scope of the current analysis.

[10]Various literatures present conflicting hypotheses on the impact of heterogeneity. Olson's (1965) privileged groups may successfully provide public goods when some members have distinct preferences for collective action. Others question the Olson effect (Baland and Platteau 1996, 1997, 1999; Dayton-Johnson and Bardhan 2002; Marwell and Oliver 1993). Much of the discussion depends on what exact characteristic is measured and in what context: race and ethnicity (e.g., Alesina and La Ferrara 2005), economic endowment, culture, etc.

[11]Examination of the raw Census of Governments data revealed four outliers whose reported values exceeded $60,000/capita. We eliminated these four observations to construct our political heterogeneity measure.

[12]In our application, the Herfindahl index is computed as the sum of the squared percentage of each of the four racial/ethnic groups: white, black, Hispanic, and other. Higher values indicate greater concentrations of one or a few groups; lower values indicate greater heterogeneity across multiple racial/ethnic categories.

statistics, which are the most recent available). We measure total population and change in population between 1990 and 2000 with data from the U.S. Census of Population (to operationalize our regional population hypothesis), as well as median household income (to operationalize our regional economy hypothesis). Since MPO boundaries typically contain whole counties and so preserve county boundaries, these and other census characteristics are easily constructed by aggregating county information.

Aggregating Member Preferences

How MPO members act on the preferences generated by their formal positions and their local and regional circumstances is conditioned by the rules and procedures embodied in an MPO's institutional structure. MPO members interact and bargain within the context of formal institutions characterized by explicit powers and constraints, formal rules and procedures, and informal norms and practices. These institutions shape how decision makers interact, the aggregation of their preferences, and the translation of those preferences into outcomes.[13]

In terms of their basic powers, MPOs resemble voluntary associations in which members enter into agreements in order to achieve goals that cannot be reached individually and thus may be subject to the difficulties explored by studies of collective action (Olson 1965), such as group size and uncertainty. Regarding size, the total costs of negotiation generally increase with the number of actors involved and thus reduce any individual actor's expected payoff from the collective good. Negotiations involve determining and seeking to compromise over a range of policy preferences. With each additional actor, the number and range of preferences can increase the number of interactions necessary to reach a collective decision (Mueller 1989; Sandler 1992). Regarding uncertainty, variation over policy preferences coupled with uncertainty about future outcomes may lead individuals to prefer universalism (logrolling) over the provision of collective goods. When an elected official is uncertain about whether she will be in the majority in the future, when she desires reelection, and when she must distribute

benefits to her constituents to do so, then she may opt for a norm of universalism over any other collective outcome, since she would rather have a certain set of benefits to distribute rather than a less certain although potentially greater set (Fiorina 1974; Weingast 1979). Cox and Tutt's (1984) model of legislative choice predicts similar outcomes with assumptions that closely resemble the institutional features of MPOs (e.g., weak parties, zero-sum budgetary rules, majority rule, and geographic representation). Under these conditions, actors are likely to choose a rule of universalism rather than provide collective goods. Together, these considerations lead us to hypothesize that increasing the size of MPOs will reduce their ability to cooperate over the provision of regional policies.

H6 (Collective Action): As the size of board membership increases, MPOs will produce less regionally focused policies.

We operationalize our collective action hypothesis with U.S. Department of Transportation data on board composition, described above.

To identify the effects of more detailed institutional rules on the relative importance of regional versus local interests within MPOs, we posit two stylized models of MPO decision making. In one extreme case, local officials retain virtually all of their local decision-making authority, and MPO institutions allow each member a veto over policy proposals. In other words, members can base their decision to support a policy strictly on their evaluation of local benefits and costs. If the benefits outweigh the costs for all members, the regional entity adopts the policy; if a single member finds the costs to be greater than the benefits, that member would veto the policy. The MPO may provide selective incentives to facilitate collective action, but only if all members agree to provide these payoffs. In this extreme case, members hold equal power, local interests prevail, and the MPO merely facilitates those collective activities that make all members at least as well off as uncoordinated action. Such MPOs may find it especially difficult to undertake regional projects that require delegation of authority from individual members to the collective body and that may redistribute benefits and costs between members.

In institutional terms, features of MPOs that empower local interests include unanimous consent and supermajority decision rules that enhance members' veto authority, complex decision-making processes that prevent easy adoption of regionally oriented policies (including multistate MPOs), extensive opportunities for local officials to shape agendas and hence inhibit regional proposals, and limited powers and resources for regionally oriented staff.

[13]We posit a simple preference aggregation process whereby both preferences and institutions are fixed and exogenous. Much of the recent literature on legislative institutions emphasizes institutional choice (i.e., endogeneity). In some ways, the assumption of exogenous institutions is more plausible in the current application since federal and state mandates establish MPOs and some (but not all) of their internal rules and procedures. However, these institutions are not strictly exogenous in the sense that MPO members may be able to change some of their provisions. We consider the question of institutional choice in later sections.

Now consider the case in which regional interests enjoy significant power vis-à-vis local governments. Such regional entities would want to pursue policies that shift resources away from local projects and towards policies that might redistribute benefits and costs among members. The institutional features of such MPOs include decision rules that entail lower thresholds of agreement (e.g., majority rule rather than supermajority), more opportunities for regional and state interests to participate in agenda setting and policymaking, and staffs with the power to set agendas and the resources to facilitate trade-offs and cooperative solutions between members. We list the hypotheses derived from these stylized MPOs below.

H7 (Capacity): As MPOs increase their organizational capacity, in terms of staff, expertise, resources, or technology, they will adopt more regionally focused policies.

H8 (Leadership): When executive directors or committee chairs hold significant power within MPOs, regional interests will be more heavily represented in MPO policies.

H9 (Agenda Setting): When local government members have substantial agenda-setting powers, local interests will be more heavily represented in MPO policies. When regional or state actors set the agenda, MPO activities will include a more regional focus.

H10 (Complexity): When MPO decision-making processes are more complex, collective action will be more difficult and policies will more heavily reflect local interests.

H11 (Voting Rule): When MPOs require high levels of member support to approve their project plans (e.g., when they utilize supermajority or unanimity rules), MPO policies will more heavily reflect local, as opposed to regional, interests.

In the spring and summer of 2006, we conducted a web-based survey of executive directors in the nation's 100 largest MPOs. An email was sent directly to each executive director, inviting him or her to participate in the survey, with a link to the online instrument. After three follow-up solicitations, we received 57 completed surveys, reflecting a reasonably representative sample in terms of size, population, economic, political, and institutional characteristics.[14] The surveys include questions about membership composition, rules and procedures,

resources, and leadership powers.[15] We operationalize our institutional hypotheses using the responses from these surveys. Specifically, we measure the number of staff full-time equivalent (FTE; to test our Capacity Hypothesis), how much power the executive director believes the MPO's institutions afford to him or her (Leadership Hypothesis), whether local officials can submit projects directly and how many of 10 listed powers the state holds within the MPO (Agenda-Setting Hypothesis), whether the MPO comprises multiple states and how complex the executive director rates the MPO's decision-making processes (Complexity Hypothesis), and whether the MPO uses simple majority rule (i.e., one jurisdiction, one vote) for approving projects (Voting Rule Hypothesis).

Controls

Finally, to capture other potentially important determinants of an MPO's policy outcomes that are outside of our theory of representation, we add control variables for the percent of the region's population that is African American (either alone or in combination with another racial group, to account for broader racial dynamics not captured in the Herfindahl index variation measure) from the 2000 Census, the region's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) air quality nonattainment status (an index of the number of pollutants for which the region is in nonattainment, to capture additional federal constraints on local transportation and environmental investments) from U.S. EPA reports, and the total number of local governments within the MPO region (to capture regional fragmentation) from U.S. DOT documents.[16]

Policy Outcomes

MPOs allocate federal transportation funds to projects throughout their metropolitan area.[17] Individual projects are limited to one or a few specific activities; several projects may be underway in a given location at any given time. For example, a single location may be host to separate projects to repair a bridge, widen and resurface the roadways leading to and from the bridge, and mitigate environmental impacts. Prior to construction, another separate project may have conducted a feasibility study. Other projects may involve widening a stretch of highway,

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[14]Average size of MPOs in the survey sample is 1,887,360 people, compared with 1,755,190 in the total sample. Other characteristics are roughly similar (see Table 1 below).

[15]The survey instrument is available upon request from the authors.

[16]Note that the total number of local governments (*Places*) differs from *Board Members* because most MPOs include only a subset of their region's local governments on their board.

[17]This description applies to regions with populations over 200,000. In smaller regions, state transportation departments allocate funds to individual projects.

reconfiguring an intersection, conducting a transit engineering study, adding enhanced metering systems to a regional road network, building a new transit facility, constructing a pedestrian/bicycle path, purchasing buses or light rail cars, etc.

While several studies have considered how regions arrive at different mixes of projects allocated into various substantive categories, we seek to explain why MPOs choose to fund regional versus local projects.[18] Local projects are those whose geographic scope is contained within one or two jurisdictions, such as a single bridge repair, intersection improvement, or road construction or repair (of a short distance). We can think of these local projects as direct allocations to individual local governments that require little or no cooperation between MPO members to plan, develop, manage, or implement. By contrast, regional projects are those whose geographic scope traverses multiple local government boundaries. These include, for example, multi-jurisdiction road construction or road repair, area-wide congestion management programs, construction or improvement of transit systems, and purchase of transit equipment.

The distinction between local and regional projects is a matter of degree: all projects within a metropolitan transportation system may increase the effectiveness of the larger system and so have region-wide impacts. Even the most locally concentrated project may have important regional impacts if it involves, for example, opening a bottleneck that then allows improved traffic flow through the wider area. And regional projects may trump local ones in terms of actual dollars allocated to any single jurisdiction. Still, in terms of the political calculus relevant to decision makers within an MPO, geographic scope matters. Locally focused projects require less coordinated governance and concentrate benefits within one or a few jurisdictions. Projects with more dispersed activities distribute benefits more widely and demand greater levels of coordination. The difference in scope thus affects opportunities to engage in credit claiming, as discussed in the previous section.

Our outcome variable is the share of all federal funds allocated to regional projects by an MPO within their most recent three-year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).[19] SAFETEA-LU federal legislation requires

MPOs to adopt, by a vote of their board, a three-year TIP that lists each project that will receive funding from the several funds that make up the federal bridges, highways, and air quality programs. The MPO must designate the federal and state/local funding sources for each project, subject to forecasted federal allocations, and so the TIP is effectively budget constrained (rather than simply containing a project wish list). All TIPs must be approved by their MPO board. The number of projects included in a TIP ranges from several thousand in the largest MPOs to several dozen in the smallest.

Employing a team of eight graduate students, we coded each project in each of our sample MPOs' most recent TIP according to its geographic scope. The students were extensively trained in our coding methodology and each TIP was coded by at least two coders; discrepancies were considered by the full coding team and resolved collectively. We coded projects as "regional" when designated in the TIP as multijurisdictional, region-wide, or statewide. We coded projects as "local" if their geographic scope is limited to one or two local government jurisdictions. Because TIP format varies widely, such coding was relatively straightforward for some MPOs and more subjective for others. In addition to specifying each project's geographic scope, all TIPs also identify the sponsoring agency (typically a local or county government, state department of transportation, MPO, or transit authority). This sponsorship information was used to supplement the coding process as necessary. Our outcome variable is the percent of all federal funds in the three-year TIP allocated to regional projects.[20]

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for all of our variables.

Results

Table 2 reports the results of a series of OLS regression estimates. The dependent variable in each regression is the percent of federal funds allocated by each TIP to regional projects during the most recent three-year time period. The dependent variable ranges from 0 for the Association

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[18]Lewis and Sprague (1997) consider how California MPOs allocate funds across seven expenditure categories. Nelson et al. (2004) consider the balance between highway and transit spending in 20 large MPOs.

[19]For some MPOs, this will be projects approved for 2004–06; for others, it will be for 2005–07. We can think of no reason to believe that the allocation process or outcomes for these two time periods would be different (i.e., there were no major changes in the amounts or types of funds available during this period). Some TIPs

list projects slated for funding in years beyond the standard three-year project allocation window. These projects (and their funding sources) are frequently amended and so are not sufficiently reliable for inclusion in our analysis.

[20]We consider dollars allocated in each category to account for differences in magnitude and importance of individual projects. Most of the federal funds and programs that comprise the current federal transportation policy require state or local matching. We also code the amount of nonfederal funds for each project. However, the purposes, requirements, and availability of such funds vary widely across states, so modeling them explicitly is beyond the scope of this analysis.

TABLE 1   Sample of MPOs and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean (Full Sample)
% Regional (DV)	.29	.22	0	.82	.28
% Board Elected	.74	.24	0	1	.76
σ (Expenditures/cap)	1413.047	2140.045	297.68	12978.63	1194.42
σ (Median HH Income)	16234.22	8509.12	4312.34	40573.01	15028.97
σ (Herfindahl Index)	.13	.037	.050	.21	.14
Transit Miles	5.66e + 08	2.00e + 09	0	1.42e + 10	4.42e + 08
ln(Tot Pop 2000)	14.019	.82	12.39	16.31	13.91
% Change Pop 90–00	.047	.071	-.19	.30	.054
Median HH Income 00	44413.39	5540.85	34038.15	63236.85	44075.54
Board Members	38.95	44.50	8	234	33.92
Staff FTE	3.24	3.38	.5	20	–
ED Influence	3.00	1.29	1	5	–
State Influence	4.49	1.24	3	8	–
Complex Process	3.61	1.048	1	5	–
Multistate	.12	.33	0	1	.11
Simple Majority Rule	.81	.40	0	1	–
Percent Black 2000	.14	.099	.012	.55	.13
EPA Non-attainment	1.070	.84	0	3	1.10
Places	80.72	75.45	4	360	73.09

of Central Oklahoma Governments to .82 for the Denver Regional Council of Governments.

Column 1 of Table 2 reports the results of a bivariate regression that includes as a regressor only the share of the board that is comprised of elected officials. This variable allows us to test our key Representation Hypothesis. We see that the coefficient on % *Board Elected* is negative and significant, as hypothesized: a higher concentration of elected officials on MPO boards is associated with a lower share of federal dollars allocated to regional projects. This effect is substantial in magnitude as well: going from the lowest to the highest possible value of percent elected board (that is, from 0% to 100%) results in a 23% decrease in the share of total federal dollars going to regional projects in a given MPO. For the MPO with the average amount of spending on regional projects, that amounts to reducing regional investments by about $80 million.

Subsequent columns of Table 2 add additional independent variables to test our other hypotheses and to assess the robustness of our Representation Hypothesis. Column 2 adds three variables intended to operationalize our Local Politics/Heterogeneity Hypothesis. We see that MPOs with greater variation across local government members in terms of political outcomes (σ[*Expenditures/capita*]), economic characteristics (σ [*Median Household Income*]), and population het-

erogeneity (σ [*Herfindahl Index*]) allocate larger shares of federal dollars to regional projects (though in this specification, only our measure of economic diversity is significant). In other words, regions with greater overall diversity invest relatively more in regional transportation infrastructure. This is contrary to our hypothesis, which predicts that greater diversity will create political pressures to reduce regional spending. In this model, the coefficient on % *Board Elected* remains negative and significant.

Column 3 adds several regional variables intended to operationalize our Regional Infrastructure, Population, and Economy Hypotheses. The effect of *Median Household Income* is significantly related to regionalism, with wealthier regions spending a larger share of their federal dollars on regional projects. This result is consistent with Peterson's (1981) finding that wealthier local governments are more likely to engage in redistribution (in this case, spending on regional projects). The effect of *Transit Miles* is positive and significant at p < .10. The other regional factors are insignificant.[21]

[21]The effect of economic heterogeneity (σ [*Median Household Income*]) also becomes insignificant with the inclusion of regional household income, indicating that the region's overall wealth, rather than its distribution across local governments, drives policy outcomes within the MPO. In turn, political heterogeneity (σ [*Expenditures/capita*]) is significant in this model.

TABLE 2 Determinants of Regionalism

Independent Variable	Political Incentives	+Local Interests	+Regional Interests	+Institutions +Controls	Final Model
% Board Elected	−.2287*	−.2973**	−.1991*	−.2022*	−.2522**
	(.1176)	(.1078)	(.1056)	(.1067)	(.0843)
σ (Expenditures/capita)		.000011	.000020*	.000021*	.000025**
		(.000013)	(.000012)	(.000011)	(9.47e-06)
σ (Median HH Income)		9.06e-06**	2.98e-06		
		(3.37e-06)	(3.89e-06)		
σ (Herfindahl Index)		.9116	.4840		
		(.7999)	(.7827)		
Transit Miles			2.51e-11*	3.40e-11**	2.01e-11*
			(1.49e-11)	(1.35e-11)	(1.07e-11)
ln(Total Pop 2000)			−.02825		
			(.04804)		
% Change Pop 90–00			.1950		
			(.3707)		
Median HH Income			.000018**	.000020***	.000017***
			(5.47e-06)	(4.31e-06)	(3.70e-06)
Board Members				−.00013	
				(.00060)	
Staff FTE				.01852**	.02082**
				(.0072)	(.0060)
ED Influence				.02579	
				(.01976)	
State Influence				.06030**	.05123**
				(.01820)	(.01611)
Complex Process				−.01209	
				(.02385)	
Multistate				−.05283	−.1188**
				(.07745)	(.0594)
Simple Majority Rule				.03931	
				(.05541)	
% Black				−.09557	
				(.2190)	
EPA Non-attainment				−.03048	
				(.02772)	
Places				−.00029	
				(.00041)	
Constant	.4598***	.2260*	−.1078	−.8077**	−.6172**
	(.0918)	(.1132)	(.5619)	(.2349)	(.1885)
Adjusted R^2	.0476	.2419	.3907	.5648	.5794
N	57	57	57	55	57

DV = Percent of Regional Projects; Model = OLS Regression.
*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

Column 4 adds the institutional variables, as well as controls for regional racial composition, EPA nonattainment status, and the total number of local governments. We see that the coefficient intended to test our Agenda-Setting Hypothesis (*State Influence*) is positive and significant, with more state involvement associated with greater shares of resources going towards regional projects. The coefficient on *Staff FTE* (to test our Capacity Hypothesis)

is positive and significant as hypothesized, with larger staffs associated with greater regional spending. *Multistate* (one of the variables intended to test our Complexity Hypothesis) is negative as hypothesized but not significant, with multistate MPOs allocating smaller shares of federal dollars to regional projects. The variables intended to capture our Collective Action Hypothesis (*Board Members*), our Voting Rule Hypothesis (*Simple Majority Rule*), and our Leadership Hypothesis (*Executive Director Influence)* are all signed as expected but are insignificant, as is our additional complexity variable (*Complex Process*). % *Board Elected* remains significant at p < .10 in this model, despite limited degrees of freedom.

Finally, column 5 reports a more parsimonious version of the full model that drops most of the insignificant variables. Several of the institutional characteristics become significant and the effect of % *Board Elected* becomes stronger.

Endogeneity

One potential concern with our analysis is the possibility that some of our key independent variables are appropriately modeled as endogenous, that is, the causal relationships may be more complex than implied in our simple linear specification. Specifically, we are sensitive to the possibility that the composition of an MPO's governing board may reflect characteristics of the region and decision makers' preferences that also affect resource allocation decisions. To test for this possibility, we report in Table 3 the results of an instrumental variables regression in which we model the determinants of board composition (% *Board Elected*) as a function of several instruments, including the number of MPO board members (*Board Size*), year established (*Year Established*), percent of the region's population categorized as African American in the 2000 Census (% *Black 2000*), regional residential growth as measured by new housing starts (*New Homes 2000*), total size of the region as measured by land area (*Area Sq. Miles*), and a series of regional dummy variables, with New England serving as the comparison category. None of these instruments are hypothesized to directly affect the share of federal funds allocated to regional projects, and none are significant in a simple multivariate regression.

Column 1 of Table 3 reports the OLS estimates of a first-stage equation of the relationship between % *Board Elected* and the 12 instruments. The purpose of this estimation is to demonstrate the relationships between the instruments and % *Board Elected*. All of the estimated

relationships are significant except two of the regional dummies, and the overall R^2 is .53.

Column 2 reports the results of the reduced form estimation that begins with the model in column 1 and adds the independent variables from our full model of the determinants of regionalism. The predicted values from the reduced form estimation are then substituted for % *Board Elected* in the second-stage structural equation reported in column 3. In addition to the instrumented measure of board composition from the reduced form estimation, this model includes the independent variables from the full structural model. We find that the effect of % *Board Elected* remains negative and significant. All of the other hypothesized effects that were significant in the full model remain so once we account for their indirect effects on board composition. Together, these results provide substantial support for our theory of regional governance by demonstrating that MPO decisions about how to allocate federal transportation funds between regional versus local projects vary systematically in response to the institutional environments and incentives facing MPO decision makers.

Sample Selection

Another possible concern with the preceding analysis is that the sample of MPOs for which we have complete data (i.e., which completed the web-based survey of executive directors) may be unrepresentative of the population of large MPOs. In other words, if some MPOs are more likely to participate in the survey, and if those characteristics are associated with different patterns of behavior in the relationships estimated in our empirical model, then the sample estimates will be biased estimates of the underlying relationships. To explore this possibility, we first note that the mean values of our dependent and independent variables for which we have complete information (i.e., that are not derived from the survey) are very similar between the full sample and the survey sample, as reported in Table 1.

Second, we employ a Heckman selection model to test explicitly for the possibility of selection bias. The Heckman model uses maximum likelihood to jointly estimate the parameters of a regression equation and a selection equation. In columns 2 and 3 of Table 4, we report the results of the regression equation and the selection equation, respectively. For comparison purposes, we replicate the results from the final OLS regression in column 1. We find that the Heckman regression equation estimates are virtually identical to the OLS estimates. In the selection

TABLE 3 Instrumental Variables Regression

Independent Variable	First-Stage Structural Equation DV = % Board Elected	Reduced Form Equation DV = % Board Elected	Second-Stage Structural Equation DV = % Regional
% Board Elected	–	–	−.2507**
			(.1262)
Board Size	.0040**	.0037**	
	(.0011)	(.0012)	
Year Established	.0075*	.0079*	
	(.0039)	(.0042)	
% Black 2000	−.7804**	−.6764*	
	(.3602)	(.3897)	
New Homes 2000	−6.25e-06**	−5.93e-06*	
	(2.44e-06)	(3.26e-06)	
Area Sq. Miles	.000053**	.000049*	
	(.000022)	(.000026)	
Mid-Atlantic	.2918**	.2460*	
	(.1202)	(.1421)	
Southeast	.5752***	.5161**	
	(.1239)	(.1545)	
Midwest	.2868**	.2436*	
	(.1219)	(.1368)	
Central	.4939***	.4398**	
	(.1293)	(.1606)	
Northwest	−.3202	−.2898	
	(.2879)	(.3041)	
West	.5209***	.4868**	
	(.1364)	(.1532)	
Southwest	.1607	.1238	
	(.2141)	(.2746)	
σ(Expenditures/capita)		6.31e-06	.000030**
		(.000015)	(9.94e-06)
Median HH Income		−2.03e-06	.000020***
		(7.71e-06)	(3.88e-06)
Staff FTE		.0012	.0209**
		(.0099)	(.0065)
State Influence		.0277	.0512**
		(.0235)	(.0183)
Multistate		.0145	−.1191*
		(.0928)	(.0651)
Constant	−14.4512*	−15.2999*	−.7192**
	(7.7460)	(8.3060)	(.2098)
R^2	.5348	.5564	.5488
N	57	57	57

*$p < .10$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$.

equation, the two identifying variables (the number of board members and whether the MPO is also a regional council) are both significant, but none of the variables that serve as regressors in the regression equation are significant. Also, based on a Likelihood Ratio test of independent equations, we cannot reject the hypothesis that the two equations are independent (i.e., Prob > $\chi^2 = .60$). This further increases our confidence that the

TABLE 4   Heckman Selection Model

Independent Variable	OLS Regression	Heckman Regression	Selection Equation
% Elected Board	−.2878**	−.2925***	−.5512
	(.0842)	(.0813)	(.5676)
σ (Expenditures/capita)	.000030**	.000032**	.000135
	(9.28e-06)	(.000011)	(.000111)
Median HH Income	.000019***	.000020***	7.97e-06
	(3.61e-06)	(3.52e-06)	(.000021)
Staff FTE	.0222**	.02218***	
	(.0061)	(.0057)	
State Influence	.0532**	.0533**	
	(.0165)	(.01542)	
Multistate	−.1194**	−.1201**	.3021
	(.0609)	(.0573)	(.4108)
Regional Council			−.5815**
			(.2970)
Board Size			.0110**
			(.0051)
Constant	−.6948**	−.7187***	.0496
	(.1885)	(.2033)	(.9937)
ρ			.1733
			(.7160)
σ			.1370
			(.0156)
λ			.0237
			(.0996)

DV = Percent Regional Projects.
*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

Implications and Conclusions

In this study we focus on issues of representation that arise from the membership and structure of regional governance arrangements. We find that the extent of regionalism—measured as the share of federal surface transportation dollars allocated to regionally focused projects within an MPO—varies significantly and substantially across MPOs and is associated with differences in MPOs' membership composition and decision-making structures. We take this as strong and compelling evidence that the design of regional governance institutions has an important impact on the representational consequences of these governance arrangements, above and beyond the surrounding economic, political, and social contexts in which they operate.

sample estimates are reflective of the larger population of MPOs.

We believe this research offers several important contributions. First, scholars generally model policymaking by examining some form of interaction between legislators, interest groups, bureaucrats, and citizens. The preferences of all of these groups may have consequences for policy outcomes. The interactions between legislators and bureaucrats have also been extensively researched. In some cases, legislators construct narrow policies to ensure certain outcomes. In other cases, they issue broad mandates that bureaucrats must "fill in" with more explicit and narrowly tailored policies which legislators may then monitor, whether by "police patrols" or "fire alarms." In far fewer situations do we see bureaucrats, executives, and legislators with identical policymaking powers within the same institution. The existence of such institutions provides an excellent opportunity to explore issues of governance. In the case of MPOs, elected officials and public managers sit on the same policy body and enjoy the same voting rights regarding the types and funding levels of regional transportation projects. Because the ratio of elected

officials to public managers varies, we are able to test our central hypothesis that each group prefers different policy outcomes as they represent different constituencies and have different goals. We find strong evidence for our hypothesis: elected officials opt for funding local projects; public managers favor funding more regional projects.

We also test several institutional theories of policymaking. We explore the effects of MPO capacity, state agenda setting, leadership, complexity, and voting rules, finding that greater levels of capacity and external agenda control are significantly associated with the adoption of regionally oriented policies. Of the structural conditions that are considered to promote demand for regional projects, wealthier areas and those with more extensive transit systems spend more federal funds on regional projects.

Our study also offers insights to the study of regionalism more broadly. Thousands of regional governance efforts exist around the world, ranging from pairings of towns in rural Iowa to international entities like the European Union. But extant studies are limited by very small sample sizes, dissimilar cases, or both. MPOs, in contrast, have identical mandates and funding sources, but vary in their membership, institutions, and structural conditions. MPOs boast similarities and differences that allow us to test more precisely theories of governance within regional governing bodies. We hope this line of research can be extended to other forms of regionalism with different policy scopes and resources so as to better understand the mechanisms driving the policy outcomes of different regional governance institutions.

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