

The Conditioning Effects of Policy Salience and Complexity on American Political Institutions

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Years ago, Bill Gormley introduced public policy scholars to a new and innovative salience-complexity typology for regulatory policies. This typology not only helps scholars catalog numerous policies into distinct categories, but also helps explain variation in political processes. Specifically, different policies provide different incentives for political actors to be involved in policymaking. Salience encourages activity on the part of elected officials; complexity often requires policymaking outside of the public sphere. In this article, I extend Gormley's salience-complexity typology to more than just regulatory policies and confirm that levels of institutional activity vary across this range of public policies. I also expand on Gormley's contribution by differentiating the distinct impacts that policy type has on the policy activities of Congress and the presidency, and propose that institutional activity differs according to the dynamics of a policy's salience.

KEY WORDS: Gormley, policy, salience, complexity, civil rights, clean air, agriculture, presidency, Congress, media, bureaucracy

Political scientists and policy scholars have a love-hate relationship with policy typologies. On the one hand, typologies help condense a vast amount of information into discernible and distinct categories. If compiled correctly, these typologies might spawn research into a range of political and policy-related topics, such as presidential success in Congress (Shull, 1983), agenda-setting (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2005), or regulatory policy (Gormley, 1986; Wilson, 1989). A strong, theoretically driven typology may even generate predictions about politics (see Gerber & Teske, 2000; Gormley, 1986), making it more than a crude way to classify policies or political action. On the other hand, typologies have typically been insufficiently motivated or have proven unhelpful in categorizing vast amounts of data. Scholars seem resigned to use typologies to describe politics, not explain it. Often, typologies are either too static or inaccurate to bear fruit (see Heckathorn & Maser, 1990).

Despite criticisms of its own (see Gerber & Teske, 2000, p. 868), (Gormley, 1986) has offered a policy typology designed specifically for regulatory policies. He categorizes regulatory policy by salience and complexity dimensions, and offers a theoretical argument for variation in political participation by these policy types. In brief, levels of salience and complexity provide different incentives for political actors to be involved in the policymaking process. Policies that are highly salient,

for example, are likely to encourage public involvement. Because politicians should respond to their constituents, elected officials are also likely to be actively involved in salient policies. This argument makes Gormley's typology more than just a classification of policies, but a theory of political influence with predictive qualities (see Gerber & Teske, 2000).¹

That policy conditions action by political actors is a widely supported idea in political science. Members of Congress tend to represent their constituents differently on distinct issues (Erikson, 1978; Hill & Hurley, 1999; see MacRae, 1970; Miller & Stokes, 1963). Presidential leadership of the public, media, and Congress also vary by policy type. Presidents lead public opinion in the short term on civil rights issues, just as they have affected the public's attitude on foreign affairs (Cohen, 1997; Hill, 1998). Presidential agenda setting and its impact on congressional and media agendas also vary by policy issue (Edwards & Wood, 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2004). At the very least, Gormley (1986) reminds us of the sizeable conditioning impact of public policy on political processes (see Lowi, 1972) through his salience-complexity policy typology.

In the interest of using typologies to explain political phenomena, I propose that Gormley's salience-complexity typology is too limited in one important respect: it need not only apply to regulatory policies, but to all policies. Scholars have already done this to a limited extent (Eshbaugh-Soha & Meier, 2003).² In this paper, I examine three policies—civil rights, clean air, and domestic farm policies—that vary by salience and complexity and ask: Can Gormley's typology be applied to other than regulatory policies and how well does it explain them? Using congressional, presidential, bureaucratic, and media policy activity levels, I argue not only that these policies vary according to Gormley's typology, but also that his framework gives us a foundation for separating and comparing these and other policies.³ I also provide empirical support for some hypotheses suggested by Gormley's (1986) research, including that policy activity varies by policy type and institution, and that the dynamics of policy salience create fluctuations in incentives for policy involvement across institutions. Finally, I use Vector Autoregression (VAR) analysis to test Gormley's (1986) hypothesis that bureaucrats are most responsive to elected officials on policies with salient characteristics. I conclude with some suggestions for future research in applying Gormley's typology to other areas of political science and policy research.⁴

Policy Typologies

One way to condense vast amounts of information, such as numerous policies, into discernible and generalizable categories is through the policy typology. Lowi (1972) first argued that policy affects politics: for political scientists to truly explain variation in political processes, they had to consider the policy itself and its impact on the decisions of political actors. To explain this variation, Lowi (1972) created a typology of distributive, redistributive, regulatory, and constituent policies, a cross-section of coercion. With it, he demonstrated that the dominance of different policy types explains institutional preeminence of the presidency or Congress. When dis-

tributive policies were prominent in the late nineteenth century, Congress controlled public policy. When regulatory and distributive policies gained in prominence, so too did the president's role in policymaking. A few scholars have adopted and applied Lowi's typology to presidential-congressional relations. Whereas Shull (1983) concludes that presidents are most influential over distributive policies, Spitzer (1983) notes that presidents propose more redistributive policies, and are least successful with regulatory policies.

Several scholars have applied policy typologies specifically to presidential requests for and in support of legislation. Both Light (1999) and Peterson (1990), for example, group presidential policy initiatives according to size, either large or small, or age, whether new or old. Peterson (1990) uses these policy types as independent variables to explain the level of conflict between the presidency and Congress. Light (1999) uses these categories as dependent variables and shows how policy type varies across presidents' yearly domestic agendas. Light also speculates about another aspect of presidential policies—the long-term dimension—from which Eshbaugh-Soha (2005) builds an explanation of contextual impacts on the president's yearly domestic policy agenda. In short, he crossed time with importance dimensions of presidential policy priorities to explain the propensity for presidents to propose or support them in the face of environmental constraints (e.g., budget deficits) or political opportunities (e.g., unified government).

Gormley (1986) argues that political processes surrounding regulatory policies differ according to the salience and technical complexity of a policy issue. Salience, according to Gormley, involves a sizeable segment of a population, particularly if it concerns a necessity (air, water, energy) or "an affront to community values." (601) In other words, an issue that is highly salient "affects a large number of people in a significant way" (598). Complexity, which is important to understanding administrative behavior (Gormley, 1986, p. 598; Thompson, 1967), on the other hand, concerns an issue that is technically complex and one that requires substantial expertise to understand and address (p. 598).

The salience and complexity dimensions of public policy present different incentives for political actors to participate in the policymaking process. Because different policies comport differently with these dimensions, different policies will present a distinct set of opportunities for involvement in the policy process, influencing who will play a prominent role in its adoption or implementation and who will not. Figure 1 illustrates Gormley's salience-complexity policy typology.

Gormley (1986) describes his first category, which consists of high salient, low complexity policies, as involving "hearing room" politics. The public is likely to be concerned about these issues but also be able to understand it. In other words, citizens have strong incentives to participate in these policies (Gormley, 1986, p. 608). Because of this, politicians who desire reelection are drawn to these types of policies and should devote countless resources to their adoption. Bureaucrats and interest groups, on the other hand, play a lesser role in these policies.

Gormley's second category, which he terms "operating room" politics, centers on policies that are high in salience and complexity. These conditions present conflicting incentives for political leadership, as the need for both accountability and

		Salience	
		High	Low
Complexity	High	Operating room politics Clean air	Board room politics Agriculture
	Low	Hearing room politics Civil rights	Street level politics

Figure 1. Gormley's Saliency-Complexity Policy Typology.

expertise are present. Politicians, Gormley (p. 612) notes, respond by offering procedural, not substantive solutions to issues that fall within this policy category, even though he also mentions that much legislative activity occurs within it.

Third, "board room" politics are low in salience, but high in technical complexity. Although the public and media are unlikely to be involved in the processes of this policy area, "power elites" (Gormley, 1986, p. 606) should dominate policy-making. Only a handful of experts, whether business groups, bureaucrats or, as I argue, key members of Congress are likely to participate in the adoption and implementation of policies listed under this heading.

Finally, "street level" politics concerns policy types that are neither salient nor complex. Here, *ad hoc* decision making by lower-level bureaucrats drives the implementation of regulatory policy, providing little if any opportunity for political leadership or influence over these policies. Routines develop out of these decisions to guide the processes of this policy area (Gormley, 1986, p. 610). Because there are few incentives for politicians to be actively involved in this policy area (see Eshbaugh-Soha & Meier, 2003) and Gormley specifically lists only state and local regulatory, not federal policies in this policy type, I exclude it for the purposes of this analysis.

In their review of the regulatory policy literature, Gerber and Teske (2000, 868), despite being strongly supportive of Gormley's (1986) contribution, suggest some limitations to his framework. Among other criticisms, they mention that political actors may be able to alter an issue's salience, suggesting that salience is not as static as Gormley's typology implies; complexity and salience can vary within the same broad issue areas; and Gormley's (1986) framework cannot, as he lays it out, separate different incentives for action by chief executives and legislators. Although this article does not address each of these concerns, one of its purposes is to address their final criticism, by separating the incentives for presidential or congressional leadership on distinct policy types. It also explores variation in and the impact of a policy type's measurable salience and whether bureaucrats respond to politicians on salient policies.

The Effects of Policy on Politics

Gormley's (1986) theoretical framework for using a policy typology to explain political processes is elegant in its simplicity. At base, the salience and complexity dimensions of public policy affect the dynamics of political processes, and who will participate based on a set of incentives for doing so. This theoretical framework and policy typology suggest a number of testable hypotheses, including expectations for which institutions will be actively involved in which policy areas; that the presidency and Congress differ in how they react to distinct policy areas despite similar electoral incentives; and the impact of variation in measurable policy salience levels on policymaking. Although Gormley limits his typology to regulatory policy, I select a range of policies—civil rights, clean air, and domestic farm policies—that are not necessarily regulatory in nature, but vary by salience and complexity dimensions, nonetheless.

Different levels of complexity and salience affect the dynamics of the policy process and offer incentives for different actors to participate in policy debates. Salience pushes elected leaders to deal with an issue. A salient policy affects a sizeable portion of the general population (Gormley, 1986, p. 598), and salience demands that elected representatives respond to the public or face electoral consequences or a decline in public support. When a policy is salient, moreover, bureaucrats are particularly wise to listen to elected politicians, as oversight and budget increases or decreases may be most likely. Journalists or news organizations also gravitate toward salient issues. Salience might change over time (Gormley, 1986, p. 599), even though Gormley does not explicitly consider this in his article.

Complexity encourages policy adoption and implementation outside of the public eye. If a policy is technically complex, politicians are unlikely to look to the public for guidance because they are not motivated by electoral or other democratic concerns to adopt complex policies. Instead, politicians will look for expert opinion to inform their decisions on complex policies, or defer to experts to make policy decisions. Because they are experts, bureaucrats are likely to dominate the implementation of complex policies without much political oversight. Complexity refers to technical issues that cannot be addressed or answered by the average person. Technically complex policy requires "specialized knowledge and training" (Gormley, 1986, p. 598), and so the media are unlikely to cover complex issues as much as other issues that are easy for their audience to comprehend. Complexity is less malleable than salience and remains constant for the policies examined in this article.

Gormley argues convincingly that complexity and salience present different opportunities and incentives for political actors to participate in the policymaking process. Because the policy process is not limited to regulatory policies alone, salience and complexity policy characteristics may also help explain policies other than regulatory policy. Indeed, if we witness variation in institutional activity to a range of other policies, we can infer that salience and complexity characteristics also affect the incentives for political participation in other policies as well.

The examination of four political entities should reveal whether this is the case.⁵ First, policy type should condition the attention that presidents devote to public policies in their public speeches. Presidents, some classical scholars of presidential politics argue, have no constituency, *per se*, but are leaders of the entire nation, of the people. In part because of the vagueness of Article II of the U.S. Constitution, presidents cannot rely solely on their enumerated powers to govern. Instead, they derive much of their legitimacy—their “prerogative” in the words of John Locke—from the American people. As such, presidents have a strong incentive to address those issues that are not only pressing issues for the American public (see Price, 1978, p. 50), but are also fairly easy to explain and understand (Corrigan, 2000). Therefore, presidents should attend to policies that are salient, yet not complex.⁶

Second, members of Congress have similar incentives as the presidents to be involved with salient policies (see Price, 1978). Just as salience increases presidential activity, it also encourages legislative responsiveness to constituency cues. A legislator’s constituency is his primary motivation. If a policy is salient, then constituents should be active in expressing their preferences, encouraging legislators to respond to constituent preferences (Kingdon, 1977, p. 578). At the same time, not all issues that Congress must address are salient. There are numerous policies that in spite of their complexity, legislators do address. Legislators also wish to achieve good public policy (Fenno, 1978), suggesting that they may have a strong incentive beyond their personal goals of being reelected, to pursue a policy that is complex. So even though legislators will attend to salient policies for the obvious electoral benefit, they will also take action on policies that are complex to achieve their goal of good public policy. Therefore, legislators will be involved in salient issues, just as they have reason (expanded below) to attend to issues that are also complex.

Unfortunately, Gormley cannot or does not separate incentives for why legislators or presidents might diverge in their attention to different policies. Clearly, both have electoral and democratic incentives to be involved in salient policies. To understand how presidents and legislators may differ on policies that are similarly salient, Gormley’s typology suggests that we turn to the other dimension, complexity, to settle whether Congress or the presidency is more likely to be involved on policies that are also complex. Institutional flexibility and the diversity of individual preferences help sort this out.

Presidents undoubtedly have issues to which they must attend, like the budget, etc. But presidents have more flexibility in raising issues. Moreover, modern presidential leadership is public leadership (Kernell, 1997). Presidents will choose policies that are easy to explain to the public (Corrigan, 2000) and will choose not to get bogged down in having to explain the technical details of a policy. When they do, they are less likely to be successful, which is one reason why I argue that they will not in the first place.⁷

The congressional forum is much different. Although fewer people watch the president’s nationally televised addresses than they used to (Baum & Kernell, 1999), it is reasonable to infer that even fewer people watch congressional hearings on C-SPAN or C-SPAN2. Because legislators are not communicating with a large, public

audience, they may be more likely to hold committee hearings on policies that are relatively complex, whether or not they are also salient. Legislators also have shared goals of achieving good public policy (Fenno, 1978), meaning that an individual legislator may have a strong incentive beyond the personal goals of being reelected to pursue a policy that is complex. In part because of this, several members of Congress might easily be considered policymaking elites or experts in a specific area, like Senators Mitchell and Muskie who championed the Clean Air Acts of 1990 and 1970, respectively (Cohen, 1995).

Additionally, whereas there is only one president who can prioritize a handful of policies at any given time, there are numerous committee chairs who can hold hearings on many issues at any given time, whether they are salient or not. Even if clean air is not salient to the nation, for example, a member of Congress can hold several hearings on the subject, whether for position taking, to further his or her own expertise on the policy, or to achieve a policy goal. Other policies may be salient to a committee chair's district or region, even if it is not salient to the nation (and are thus not measured as salient in this study). Congress also has many inertial issues to which they must respond, many of which may not be salient, but are certainly complex. The farm bill, for instance, must be addressed every six years or policy will revert to permanent provisions of the Agricultural Adjustment Acts of 1938 and 1949.

In short, both presidents and legislators will attend to highly salient issues but diverge when an issue is also complex. Presidents are less likely than legislators to discuss complex policies, even if they are also salient. But the policy goals of legislators and the institutional dynamics of Congress encourage legislators to address complex issues, whether or not they are also salient. In other words, whereas both presidents and legislators should be actively involved in policies that are salient and not complex, legislators should be more actively involved than presidents in policies that are complex, even if they are also salient.

Third, salience and complexity present conflicting incentives to bureaucrats in the American policymaking system. On the one hand, bureaucrats should be responsive to elected officials, according to the theory of overhead democracy (Redford, 1969). Bureaucrats have explicit incentives, after all, to "look over their shoulders" at political figures when the policy is salient to the public and, therefore, to them (Gormley, 1986). On the other hand, bureaucrats are experts in their policy areas, and often implement policy according to their expertise and discretion, not a politician's desire to appease public opinion. Although Gormley (1986) does not provide a precise prediction here, one may infer that bureaucrats will be most active on those policies about which they have considerable knowledge, an internal source of bureaucratic power (Meier, 1993, p. 68). Yet, bureaucrats cannot ignore congressional oversight or presidential leadership on salient policies; suggesting, therefore, that bureaucrats will be most active on policies that are both salient and complex. At the same time, bureaucrats should be involved more than other institutions in policy areas that are not salient but complex given the stronger incentives for bureaucrats—not presidents or legislators—to consistently tackle complex policies.

Fourth, media or journalists, relevant actors to the policymaking process (Gormley, 1986), should operate similarly to the presidency. The media seek profits and ratings (Bennett, 2003) and will want to appeal to their audience. Because their audience is most likely to be interested in policies that they understand, the media will concentrate on policies that are not complicated. By focusing on them, by definition, these policies are also salient.

Equating media attention to a range of policy areas with salience presents an opportunity to overcome some of the limits of Gormley's (1986) earlier work. Simply, Gormley does not assess the dynamics of salience, that a policy in a high-salience box may move to a low-salience box and back, given the dynamics of public policy. It is reasonable to categorize policies as salient "at a given point in time" as Gormley (p. 599) has done. But we should understand more about a policy and levels of institutional activity if we can look at policies, and their levels of salience, at numerous points in time. Media attention, as an indicator of salience, assesses the dynamics of institutional attention to policy areas.

Three distinct policy types, based on Gormley's (1986) salience-complexity dimensions, and the expectations therein, provide an opportunity to test variation in the institutional activity surrounding each policy type. First, civil rights policy is salient and not complex (hearing room politics). It is not complex, being easy to understand, and citizens usually have an opinion about it, whether voting rights, busing, or affirmative action (Page & Shapiro, 1992, p. 70). Even a civil rights policy that is complicated from a tactical standpoint, such as busing, does not require technical understanding. Civil rights policy is also salient because it concerns a sizeable portion of the population (Gormley, 1986).

Second, clean air regulation is salient, yet complex (operating room politics).⁸ Air pollution is not only a health issue, whereby most prefer to breathe clean air, but an environmental and economic one. For these reasons, clean air policy meets Gormley's (1986) definition of a salient policy in that it affects a "sizeable portion of the population." Yet clean air and environmental policies follow episodic cycles of salience (Downs, 1972), allowing its salience to fluctuate over time (see below). The regulation of air pollution is a complex policy area, which requires expertise and technical understanding. It is the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) bureaucrats, those monitors of industrial power plants, who are charged with the task of interpreting data. They must use their technical understanding of air pollution to ensure compliance with federal clean air statutes.

Third, farm policy is not salient, yet complex (board room politics). Except in rare instances, such as during increased public awareness of farm debt in the mid-1980s, farm policy typically does not capture the nation's attention. Agriculture is a technically complex policy as well (Meier, 1985, p. 134). It is a complex industry, in which farmers not only have to make decisions about fertilizers and crop production, but also about if and how much payment to accept from the government for their commodities. Farm policy requires experts to set government payment levels, calculate future target prices, and assess the policy's potential impact on the economy.

This range of policies assures variance across dependent variables and leads to different expectations for institutional attention to public policy. Specifically, presidents and the media should pay the most attention to (and have the most influence over) civil rights policy and Congress should pay the most attention to (and have the most influence over) clean air policy. Although the bureaucracy will also be active in clean air policy, it should pay more attention to (and have the most influence over) domestic farm policy, relative to the other institutions. As a basic point, if we witness variation across these policy areas, even though they are not regulatory policy, we have some suggestive evidence that it is reasonable to apply Gormley's salience and complexity typology to a range of policy areas that include more than just regulatory policies.

Data and Methods

Presidential Activity

I measure presidential activity according to the core aspect of modern presidential leadership: his public speeches.⁹ Activity is coded as the number of pages devoted per year to civil rights, clean air, or agriculture policy from successive issues of the Public Papers of the Presidents (1948–2004). Each volume of the *Public Papers* has a subject index from which I compiled a list of key words related to each policy area, which I list in the Appendix. I then scanned each entry to ensure that the statement related to either civil rights, clean air, or agriculture policy. Although the number of speeches or remarks is only marginally different from the number of pages devoted to a subject, which are barely different from the number of paragraphs (Barrett, 2004), counting pages allows differentiation between a brief mention of a policy and a concerted effort by presidents to make a policy his priority. Coding pages, therefore, is appropriate given the importance my argument places on presidential attention to specific policies. I also include press conferences in my data set because they are a useful forum over which presidents have substantial control to express unfettered their policy preferences (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2003; Grossman & Kumar, 1981, p. 248).¹⁰

Congressional Activity

The Congressional Information Service (CIS) provides a measure of congressional attentiveness to policies. These are the number of days Congress spends in committee hearings on a particular policy. I use an index of key words per policy area, listed in the Appendix, and then scan each entry to determine that each committee-hearing day addressed the policy area I am examining. Committee activity is particularly important to assess because policymaking and oversight occurs predominantly in the committee, not on the floor.

Bureaucratic Activity

Measures of bureaucratic activity vary by agency and policy area. For civil rights policy, I count the yearly number of civil cases filed in the U.S. District Court by the U.S. government. These are fiscal year data: July through June, up until 1993; October through September, thereafter.¹¹ Clean air policy activity includes counts of clean air enforcement and compliance. Because the EPA altered its cataloguing scheme in the late 1980s, I have two sets of enforcement counts. Wood (1988) supplies the first, which runs from 1977 through 1986. The second runs from 1986 through 1998. The EPA supplied these data directly to the author. Measures of domestic farm policy activity are sparse. Although imperfect, government price support payments to farmers, over which the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Farm Service Agency have a modest level of discretion (see Eshbaugh-Soha, 2006), provide an adequate count of bureaucratic policy activity.¹²

Media Attention

The media are important for two reasons. First, as a linkage institution in American politics, media affect the policy process. As Gormley's typology predicts, media should be driven by salient policies. Second, media attention simultaneously indicates the measurable level of salience of a policy issue at any given time. Therefore, while Gormley's typology provides a general sense of which policies are salient or complex, a measure of salience helps us assess the dynamics of salience. I measure media attention as the number of articles listed in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* by policy area. A list of key words is provided in the Appendix. These measures are advantageous in that they allow for coding a lengthy time series (something that the Vanderbilt news archives do not) and provide for more count variation than a random sample of front-page stories on *the New York Times* may.

Methods

For much of this article, I rely on simple interpretation and comparison of policy activity counts. This requires no additional elaboration. For the final portion of the analysis section, I use VAR analysis (Freeman, Williams, & Lin, 1989; Simms, 1980), which is a multivariate extension of the Granger (1969) approach to causal inference. Each dependent variable is regressed on lagged values of itself and other dependent variables in the system. VAR provides an excellent control for history by taking into account lags of all of the system's endogenous variables. It conducts joint hypothesis tests for the blocks of lags associated with each variable to determine causal relationships between presidential, congressional, and bureaucratic activity levels surrounding clean air and civil rights policies.

Findings

The tables demonstrate much support for variation across policy types, which is consistent with Gormley's hypotheses and expectations. The findings also reveal

Table 1. Average Policy Activity by Presidential Administration

		Clean Air	Civil Rights	Agriculture
Eisenhower	P	0.9	15.5	21.5
	C	3.4	15.3	31.1
	B	11.6	13.0	592.8
	M		161.1	69.8
Kennedy	P	2.0	41.0	20.0
	C	2.7	31.0	30.0
	B	14.3	38.7	1,645.3
	M		156.0	52.7
Johnson	P	7.6	66.8	13.6
	C	20.6	23.3	10.0
	B	35.0	82.2	2,892.4
	M		175.2	18.4
Nixon	P	13.3	24.5	6.7
	C	31.8	47.3	13.5
	B	74.0	203.8	2,959
	M		119.0	14.0
Ford	P	8.0	14.0	5.5
	C	27.5	30.5	12.0
	B	49.5	407.5	770.5
	M		77.5	17.0
Carter	P	13.8	12.0	10.8
	C	39.5	27.0	14.5
	B	1,364	297.3	1,877.3
	M	66.0	66.0	25.8
Reagan	P	6.1	11.3	8.4
	C	26.5	22.6	17.0
	B	1,871	486.4	9,237.3
	M	79.9	90.6	40.6
Bush	P	29.8	16.0	7.5
	C	33.3	16.8	21.5
	B	7,170	737.3	9,386.3
	M	97.3	76.8	23.0
Clinton	P	8.5	24.0	6.1
	C	22.3	16.6	7.1
	B	10,737	634.9	12,526
	M	65.8	121.8	17.1

P, presidency; C, Congress; B, bureaucracy; M, media counts.

substantial variation in institutional activity by policy area, and that activity fluctuates according to a policy's measurable salience, at least for those institutions that should be motivated to engage in making those policies.

At first glance, we notice variation by policy type within institutions. Table 1 shows that presidents do indeed alter their activity across three policy areas that vary by salience and complexity. Of the policy areas that Gormley (1986) would characterize as salient, yet not complex, presidents devote the most attention to civil rights policy. Presidential activity surrounding clean air policy, which is salient and complex, varies considerably. Finally, presidents had devoted attention to domestic farm policy in the 1950s and 1960s, but this interest has declined considerably since the Johnson administration. Indeed, many recent presidential comments on domestic farm policy generally lack substance or tend to be given in response to congress-

sional action (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2004). So, even though presidents devoted more attention to farm policy over the course of this data set, recently, as the national policy agenda has jettisoned agriculture policy and captured environmental policy, presidents exhibit higher levels of activity on clean air policy than agriculture policy. Since the Nixon Administration, the administration averages for clean air and domestic farm policies are 13.3 and 7.5, respectively. Salience, therefore, seems to be the driving force behind presidential involvement in the policy process.

Congressional committee activity also varies by policy area (Table 1). As Gormley theorizes, Congress will be involved in policy areas that are salient, just as some legislators may have an incentive to debate complex policies. As such, we should see high levels of congressional attention to civil rights and clean air policies. Congress devotes fairly consistent attention to both civil rights and clean air policies. Congress, therefore, is as equally likely to engage in operating room politics as hearing room politics. Salience is important, yes, but Congress also has many members who may hold hearings on policies that are complex. Indeed, this may explain the relatively high level of activity in domestic farm policy—key members of committee, such as those who represent farming constituencies or experts in a policy, will call for hearings in policy areas, even if they are complex and not salient to the general public. Although it devotes less attention to domestic farm policy than to the other policy areas, Congress still pays a modest amount of attention to it.

Bureaucratic activity, because the measures across agency are not consistent like committee hearings of pages in the Public Papers of the Presidents (1948–2004), is more difficult to assess variation across policy type. We may infer, nonetheless, that any variation in policy activity by agency appears to be a function of the inner workings of an agency itself, not any broad characteristics of public policy, as Table 1 reveals strong inertial responses to the policy activity levels across three policy areas.¹³

Finally, the media play a vital role in the policy process. According to Gormley, we should witness more involvement by the media in policies that are primarily salient, and less involvement in areas that are complex. Indeed, Table 1 reveals that the media are most attentive to civil rights policy and least attentive to domestic farm policy. Clean air policy, predictably, falls in between these two camps, with the media being less likely to cover the complex aspects of clean air regulations, despite them otherwise being salient to the public and political institutions. The media counts also verify placement of policies along a salience dimension: civil rights policy, partly because it is also not complicated, displays the highest level of salience, followed by clean air policy and domestic farm policy, which is not salient, but complex. This provides additional support for the expectation that policies other than regulatory policies will vary by salience-complexity dimensions of policy.

The levels of policy activity by the media also present an opportunity to examine the dynamics of policy salience. Recall that Gormley places policies in a static box, despite recognizing that salience can ebb and flow over time. That he did not explore this possibility in great detail provides an opportunity to do so now. On average, these policies are consistent with where Gormley places them (or would place them) in his policy typology: Civil rights policy is most salient, followed by clean air, and

Table 2. Average Activity on Civil Rights Policy by Presidential Administration

	Presidency	Congress	Bureaucracy	Media
Eisenhower	15.5 (-7.0)	15.3 (-6.9)	13.0 (-393.4)	161.1 (43.1)
Kennedy	41.0 (18.5)	31.0 (8.8)	38.7 (-367.7)	156.0 (38.0)
Johnson	66.8 (44.3)	23.3 (1.1)	82.2 (-324.2)	175.2 (57.2)
Nixon	24.5 (2)	47.3 (25.1)	203.8 (-202.6)	119.0 (1.0)
Ford	14.0 (-8.5)	30.5 (8.3)	407.5 (1.1)	77.5 (-40.5)
Carter	12.0 (-10.5)	27.0 (4.8)	297.3 (-109.1)	66.0 (-52.0)
Reagan	11.3 (-11.2)	22.6 (0.4)	486.4 (80)	90.6 (-27.4)
Bush	16.0 (-6.5)	16.8 (-5.4)	737.3 (330.9)	76.8 (-41.2)
Clinton	24.0 (1.5)	16.6 (-5.6)	634.9 (228.5)	121.8 (3.8)
G. W. Bush	4.5 (-18.0)	7.0 (-15.2)	624.0 (217.6)	76.5 (-41.5)
Mean	22.5	22.75	406.4	118.0
Standard deviation	22.5	15.30	263.7	58.3

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the difference from the mean. The G. W. Bush counts are through 2004, except for bureaucracy, which is through 2002. Eisenhower-bureaucracy is 1960, only.

domestic farm policy. Clearly, each policy varies in its level of salience, with one policy area being more salient than another at any given time. Throughout the Eisenhower administration, for example, agriculture policy was quite salient, being much more salient than clean air policy, which had not yet reached the level of federal agenda status. Today, domestic farm policy is consistently not salient, especially when compared with clean air and civil rights policies. With that in mind, does the level of salience further help us explain variation in institutional activity?

Table 2 displays the level of institutional activity by civil rights policy. Again, the presidency should be most involved in this policy area, given the presidential discretion to decide which policies to pursue, and the most benefit provided to the president by salient policies. When we look at the president's level of activity relative to its salience, we see that this holds up. In all the administrations except Eisenhower's, the president's level of activity is tied with its level of salience. That is, when an administration's level of civil rights activity is higher than average, the level of media attention is also higher than average. Similarly, when an administration's level of activity is lower than its average, so is media attention. Presidential attention, therefore, fluctuates with salience. Congressional activity and bureaucratic activity are more impervious to salience. Although there are instances where congressional activity fluctuates in tandem with the changes in salience, it does not always do so. Bureaucratic activity is more inertial, reflecting internal or institutional mechanisms rather than fluctuations in salience. In short, Table 2

Table 3. Average Activity on Clean Air Policy by Presidential Administration

	Presidency	Congress	Bureaucracy	Media
Eisenhower	0.9 (-8.86)	3.4 (-18.77)		11.6 (-43.64)
Kennedy	2.0 (-7.76)	2.7 (-19.47)		14.3 (-40.94)
Johnson	7.6 (-2.16)	20.6 (-1.57)		35.0 (-20.24)
Nixon	13.3 (3.54)	31.8 (9.63)		74.0 (18.76)
Ford	8.0 (-1.76)	27.5 (5.33)		49.5 (-5.74)
Carter	13.8 (4.04)	39.5 (17.33)	1,364.0 (-3,705)	66.0 (10.76)
Reagan	6.1 (-3.66)	26.5 (4.33)	1,871 (-3,198)	79.9 (24.66)
Bush	29.8 (20.04)	33.3 (11.13)	7,170 (2,101)	97.3 (42.06)
Clinton	8.5 (-1.26)	22.3 (0.13)	10,737 (5,668)	65.8 (10.56)
Mean	9.76	22.17	5,069.0	55.24
Standard deviation	10.6	15.80	4,261.0	31.53

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the difference from the mean. The bureaucracy counts are through 1998.

reveals that presidential activity is more strongly tied to fluctuations in the measurable levels of salience in policies that are salient, yet uncomplicated than are other levels of institutional activity. For these reasons, furthermore, we may infer that there is institutional variation, particularly between the presidency and Congress on this policy area: Presidents are more involved with salient policies, and tied to the dynamics of salience than are congressional committees.

Table 3 reveals that Congress is more consistently involved in clean air policy than the presidency. Whereas presidential attention tends to hover around the average from year to year, congressional committee hearings are consistently much higher than average. Salience—or media attention—also plays less of a role. When media attention increases in the years in which significant clean air legislation is on the table (during the Nixon, Carter, and Bush administrations), presidents do pay more attention to it. Yet without a measurable increase in salience, arguably, clean air's complexities preclude presidential public statements on a regular basis. At the same time, legislators are just as willing to hold hearings on clean air policy as they are on civil rights policy. In other words, legislators are more likely to be involved consistently in hearing room politics because they have the institutional or individual expertise to do so.

In general, both presidents and legislators should not spend too much time on a policy that is not salient or complex. But Table 4 reveals something a bit more nuanced, once we consider that the level of agriculture policy's salience has fluctuated over time. Clearly, presidential involvement was greater when domestic farm policy issues were more salient. Like the other policy areas, presidential involvement is tied, unlike other institutions, to the level of salience.¹⁴ Congress, which has

Table 4. Average Activity on Farm Policy by Presidential Administration

	Presidency	Congress	Bureaucracy	Media
Eisenhower	21.5 (10.39)	31.1 (14.64)	592.8 (-5,632.35)	69.8 (38.6)
Kennedy	20.0 (8.89)	30.0 (13.54)	1,645.3 (-4,579.85)	52.7 (21.5)
Johnson	13.6 (2.49)	10.0 (-6.46)	2,892.4 (-3,332.75)	18.4 (-12.8)
Nixon	6.7 (-4.41)	13.5 (-2.96)	2,959.0 (-3,266.15)	14.0 (-17.2)
Ford	5.5 (-5.61)	12.0 (-4.46)	770.5 (-5,454.65)	17.0 (-14.2)
Carter	10.8 (-0.31)	14.5 (-1.96)	1,877.3 (-4,347.85)	25.8 (-5.4)
Reagan	8.4 (-2.71)	17.0 (0.54)	9,237.3 (3,012.15)	40.6 (9.4)
Bush	7.5 (-3.61)	21.5 (5.04)	9,386.3 (3,161.15)	23.0 (-8.2)
Clinton	6.1 (-5.01)	7.1 (-9.36)	12,526.0 (6,300.85)	17.1 (-14.1)
G. W. Bush	9.5 (-1.61)	6.3 (-10.16)	15,279.0 (9,053.85)	9.8 (-21.4)
Mean	11.12	16.46	6,225.15	31.2
Standard deviation	9.64	13.24	6,067.7	23.8

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the difference from the mean. The G. W. Bush counts are through 2004.

numerous experts across policy types, is also likely to attend to domestic farm policies, even though they are complex, but relatively low in salience. As expected, moreover, bureaucratic actions regarding distributive price support programs, being complex yet salient, are rather impervious to salience. There is no real relationship between the level of media attention to domestic farm policy and the level of bureaucratic activity. Not only are the two variables not strongly correlated, they also correlate negatively, at $r = -0.23$.

This foregoing analysis provides some support for Gormley's typology and related hypotheses as extended to a range of policies other than just regulatory policies. Clearly, salience-complexity policy characteristics influence the incentive structure of political actors on a diverse range of public policies. It also answers a question raised by this and previous studies. Particularly, Congress pays roughly equal attention to civil rights and clean air policies, despite occupying separate policy categories, and modest attention to domestic farm policy because its committees are peopled with experts whose institutional and electoral credibility depend on their attention to complex policy areas. These results contrast with presidential policy actions, despite an electoral incentive similar to legislators'.

At the same time, the analysis does not adequately explain why all three policy activity levels of the bureaucracy are inertial. It follows from Gormley's (1986) work that bureaucrats will not respond to political pressure on two of the three policy areas because they are complex. But should not we have seen greater variation in bureaucratic activity on salient policies, just as with other political institutions? It

seems that although Gormley’s typology as applied to other-than-regulatory policies helps us explain and understand presidential and congressional activity levels, it does less well in explaining bureaucratic activity. Perhaps one limitation to applying Gormley’s typology to nonregulatory policies is the lack of variation by bureaucratic activity to these policy areas. At the same time, the similarities across these policies suggest that bureaucrats may indeed be fairly impervious to the policy preferences of politicians and media, despite expectations to the contrary.

Bureaucracy Revisited

Bureaucratic activity levels, as presented in the previous tables, are difficult to compare, given distinct metrics. Moreover, they tend to be impervious to changes in salience, despite expectations otherwise. Although this is consistent with bureaucratic inertia, in general, the findings are rather unfulfilling in explaining bureaucratic activity in the context of a salience-complexity typology. To gain a better handle on bureaucratic activity, I turn to a hypothesis that Gormley suggests in his article: Bureaucrats should “look over their shoulders” and be responsive to elected officials on salient policies. To test whether this is the case, I build a VAR model of two policy areas that have salient characteristics—civil rights and clean air.

The VARs in Table 5 confirm a lack of responsiveness of the bureaucracy to either institution, regardless of a salient policy’s level of salience.¹⁵ Although the VARs exhibit some inertial effects across the institutions, there exist no causal relationships between the institutions. More precisely, bureaucrats do not respond to either the presidency or Congress on clean air or civil rights policies. This null finding seems to run counter to Gormley’s expectations that we should witness bureaucratic responsiveness to elected officials on policies that follow hearing room and, to a lesser extent, operating room politics. At the same time, congressional

Table 5. Block Exogeneity Tests for Presidential, Congressional, and Bureaucratic Attention to Clean Air or Civil Rights Policy

Independent Variable			Dependent Variable
	CR	CA	
President	→	→	President
Congress			
Bureaucracy			
President			Congress
Congress	→		
Bureaucracy		→	
President			Bureaucracy
Congress			
Bureaucracy	→	→	
N	54	51	

Note: The arrows indicate that the independent variable Granger causes the dependent variable at a significance level of 0.05, at a lag of one quarter for clean air policy (CA) and one year for civil rights policy (CR). The clean air policy time series runs from the first quarter of 1986 through the last quarter in 1998. The civil rights policy time series runs from 1948 through 2002.

leaders take cues from the bureaucracy on clean air policy, whereby bureaucratic activity (levels of EPA enforcements) Granger causes an increase in congressional attention to clean air policy. This could be one reason why Congress is fairly attentive to clean air policy: They are consistently taking cues from experts in the bureaucracy, whether or not clean air policy is actually salient.

Conclusion

Professor Gormley (1986) proposed a policy typology to explain regulatory policy in the language of political science and issue networks, not economics. Although that was his intent, his intellectual motivation has laid the foundation for an exploration much more expansive than that. This article shows that Gormley's salience-complexity policy typology can and should be applied to numerous policies, including those that are not regulatory by nature, to explain many questions in political science. By focusing on the incentives that policies provide to political actors, I have demonstrated that policy activities vary by a range of policy types and there is considerable institutional variation along these lines. Observations about the dynamics of policy salience further enrich these basic observations.

In sum, the findings comport nicely with Gormley's (1986) initial observations. Three policy areas—civil rights, clean air, and domestic farm policies—vary predictably according to both expected salience levels (where I initially placed the policies) and actual salience levels (based on media attention to each policy). Presidents consistently attend to policies that are primarily salient, just as their level of activity increases or decreases in conjunction with a policy's actual salience. Congress tends to be attentive to policies with primarily salient characteristics as well, but is also quite active in complex policies, given a diverse body of policy experts in committee. Ironically, my results suggest that a central focus of Gormley's (1986) typology, the bureaucracy, does not vary as extensively in its activity as it might in its incentives to respond to politicians, media, or interest groups. Perhaps the typology is best suited to explain the process of policymaking within the bureaucracy, rather than any demonstrable policy outputs by federal agencies. Or it may best explain "irregular" participants in the policymaking process, not "regulars" like bureaucrats (Gormley, p. 603).

Although promising, these findings need to be furthered by more elaborate and systematic hypothesis tests to determine if Gormley's typology offers as much insight as this article suggests it does. Only with confirmatory evidence, across an alternative range of public policies, can we extend Gormley's contribution, develop its predictive qualities, and further it as a theory of politics and public policy. Indeed, this article suggests additional avenues for future research. First, because we can categorize the body of public policies into broad categories (and this article provides support for that assertion), for example, we may be able to predict on which issues legislators are most likely to be responsive to their constituents, and on which policies they will not be responsive. Second, scholars of the courts and interest groups should examine those institutions more specifically in the context of Gormley's theory. Third, future research should determine whether complexity is truly the

driving force behind congressional attention to policies that are high in complexity. Perhaps congressional committees act on these complex issues because they are highly salient to specialized groups—whether interest or constituent—who might react negatively to a handful of legislators who do not act on those policies. Ultimately, it is paramount that scholars consider the findings put forth in this and other research so that they do not ignore the fundamental relevance of public policy type to fully explaining politics and policymaking.

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Notes

I thank three anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. RATS 5.01 was used for statistical analysis.

1. I thank an anonymous reviewer for reminding me of this central contribution of Gormley's (1986) typology.
2. As Gormley (1986, p. 598) references, Price (1978, p. 26) looks at variation in congressional policy activity by policy type as well, noting that the level of salience in a policy affects the "incentives and constraints facing congressional policymakers."
3. An astute reader might question why I examine only these institutions when Gormley also makes predictions about the courts and interest groups. The rationale is a function of data limitations (particularly with interest groups), but also a desire to keep this study—a first step in extending Gormley's framework—to a manageable set of institutions and policies. Future research should incorporate these institutions, nonetheless.
4. The reader should be aware at the outset that this article, and its application of Gormley's typology to other-than regulatory policies and institutional dynamics, means that it avoids many of the other debates that Gormley raises, such as the value of an iron-triangle versus issue networks approach, the extent to which capture plays a role in which regulatory policies, and whether or not policymakers focus on the substance or procedure of policy.
5. Again, I limit my analysis to four institutions, even though Gormley (1986) maintains that his framework should apply to other institutions and actors, too.
6. This claim clearly points to the president as an individual policymaker, not to the presidency as an office. The presidency, with its array of policy experts in the Office of Management and Budget, the Council of Economic Advisers, or National Security Council, will likely engage complex policy areas. Yet, the president as an individual, who relies on speeches to communicate his policy preferences, I argue, will be less likely to advertise these complex policy positions given the difficulty in explaining them to a public audience. I thank two reviewers for noting these differences between presidents and their individual tools of policy influence, and the presidency, which engages tirelessly in complex policy areas.
7. George W. Bush recently prioritized social security reform—private savings account—without a clear media, public, or congressional demand to do so. Although he was able to place the issue on the national policy agenda, he has had little impact on public opinion. One possible explanation, and one that is policy driven, is that social security is very complex, making it difficult for Bush to explain and build support.
8. Price (1978, p. 31) also characterizes clean air policy as salient but does not reference potential dynamic changes to its level of salience. To his credit, Price also examines the content of congressional initiatives as a function of salience and conflict, something that neither Gormley nor I really do.

9. Light (1999) and others note that the president's speeches are clear indicators of the president's policy preferences.
10. The number of presidential requests by policy area is another indicator of presidential policy activity. Because presidents discuss their requests in their public speeches anyway and attention through speeches also indicates whether a policy area is a presidential priority, presidential attention is a more comprehensive measure of presidential policy activity than are presidential requests.
11. This measure is similar to what Whitford and Yates (2003) examine when they find that presidential speeches affect bureaucratic policy agenda.
12. These measures of bureaucratic policy activity differ slightly from presidential and congressional activity measures, as they are enforcement-oriented measures. Because of this, I had considered using administrative rules to measure bureaucratic policy activity. Although a viable alternate measure and one that future research should explore, these measures of bureaucratic policy activity bring a sense of consistency to the measures in that each captures the dominant means of policy activity for each institution: Congress deliberates in committees, presidents speak, and bureaucrats enforce. Besides, West (1985) argues that rule making may itself be an output, or at least examines rule making as "a [primary] means of carrying out statutes" (p. 8, see chap. 3). Whitford and Yates (2003) also use policy output or enforcement measures to assess bureaucratic agenda setting on illicit drug policy.
13. One may argue that rule making is more comparable to presidential and congressional measures of policy activity. Yet West (1985, p. 17) shows that rule making has increased incrementally, suggesting that my conclusion about bureaucratic activity—that it is primarily inertial—may not change even if I changed the measure.
14. One concern for scholars may be the lack of causal inferences that can be made using these descriptive data. Hypothetically, one might argue that the reason why presidential attention fluctuates in toe with media attention is that presidents can influence the media's agenda; and so media attention is not a valid or independent indicator of salience. Yet, much research shows that presidents cannot consistently influence media attention to issues (see Edwards & Wood, 1999, among others). Presidents do not Granger cause media attention to domestic farm policy issues (Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2004), despite a strong correlation between them. Furthermore, these tables reveal administration averages, hardly worthy of making or refuting any causal claims.
15. Because they only confirm the VARs null findings, I do not include Moving Average Response graphs, which are typically associated with interpretation of VAR models. These graphs are available from the author.

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Appendix: Keywords Index

<i>Reader's Guide</i>	<i>Public Papers of the Presidents</i>	CIS Index
CIVIL RIGHTS		
Desegregation; racial discrimination; blacks (negroes); discrimination; segregation; civil rights; busing; integration	Civil rights; desegregation; discrimination; integration; voting rights; segregation; racism; affirmative action; busing	Civil rights; discrimination; desegregation; segregation; voting rights; affirmative action; integration; busing
CLEAN AIR		
Acid rain; air pollution; clean air; Clean Air Act; emissions credits; smog	Air pollution; clean air; Clean Air Act; conservation; environment; Environmental Protection Agency; pollution; pollution prevention; regulation	Air pollution; clean air
AGRICULTURE		
Agriculture; agricultural administration; farm legislation; price supports	Agriculture; Agricultural Adjustment Act; butter; corn; cotton; wheat; farms; farming; price supports	Agriculture; Agricultural Act; Farm payments; price supports