The Local Autonomy Project

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RESEARCH MOTIVATION

Metropolitan regions with sub-state (local) governments

Example: Detroit region,
partial view of metropolitan statistical area
RESEARCH MOTIVATION

Metropolitan regions with sub-state (local) governments

Governance via regional intergovernmental organizations
Research motivation

How do local actors serving in regional intergovernmental organizations reconcile tensions between local and regional interests?
RESEARCH MOTIVATION
RESEARCH MOTIVATION
RESEARCH MOTIVATION
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

more local  

more regional
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INDIVIDUAL

- elected
- low
- conservative

position
- slack / discretion
- ideology

administrative
- high
- liberal
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

**Network**

- local / sub-local
- public
- conservative

- scale
- sector
- ideology

- regional / global
- private
- liberal
**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

- **monocenter / polycenter**
  - strong / weak

- **metro position**
  - strong / weak

- **relative health**
  - strong / weak

- **autonomy**
  - strong / weak

- **non-center**
  - strong / weak
**Theoretical Framework**

Local autonomy concerns the legal relationship between state and sub-state governments.

Local autonomy has been used empirically and theoretically as an objective construct.
Variation in objective local autonomy does not necessarily track variation in the understanding of it by local actors
- term limits
- lack of professionalization
- reliance on attorney and other staff
- ideological filtering

subjective local autonomy
PROPOSITIONS

subjective local autonomy

• variation within the same class of local government in a state

• variation among individuals working in the same local government

• variation among its component dimensions
Legend
- Study areas
- Other metro areas
- States

SOURCE: TIGER/Esi shapefiles for states, counties, places, and county subdivisions; U.S. Census of Governments (2017)
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**RESEARCH DESIGN**

**survey: outcome variables**

- Fiscal discretion (taxation; debt)
- Territorial discretion (annexation; consolidation)
- Functional discretion (land use; econ. dev.; cooperation)
- Basic concepts (home rule; Dillon’s rule)
**Research Design**

**Survey: Outcome Variables**

- Dichotomous measure based on scenario (yes/no)
- Ordinal measure of confidence
- Ordinal measure of relative autonomy (general)
Knowledge deficits

- Average fiscal score: 2.5 / 3
- Average territorial score: 2.1 / 3
- Average functional score: 6.7 / 14
- Basic concepts: 5.3 / 10
- Overall “grade”: 16.6 / 30
Key findings

Knowledge deficits

- Each additional year in office: +1.37
- Large government (>10,000 pop): +3.42
- Education, gender, political affiliation: N/S
- State, region: N/S
**Key findings**

**Confidence**

- Average fiscal score: +1.10
- Average territorial score: +0.67
- Average functional score: -0.21
- Overall: +0.31 (-3 to +3, forced response)
Key findings

General autonomy

- Average (relative to in-state peers): -0.76
- Average (relative to out-state peers): -1.12
Next Steps

• Refining estimation models

• Hot-spot analysis

• Follow-up interviews

• Linking subjective and objective autonomy to regional decision-making
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