Multilevel Governance and City Sustainability Policies:

Does It Exist? Does it Matter?

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Abstract

Building on the literature that posits the importance of multilevel governance for environmental, climate change, and sustainability policies, this paper examines the relationships between measures of multilevel governance and the pursuit of sustainability by large U.S. cities. With specific reference to the extent to which there seems to be high frequency of interaction and contacting among multiple levels of government, and the extent to which other governments are included in city policy deliberations, this analysis shows that there is significant variation across cities. Using data from a survey of city administrators in 50 of the largest cities in the U.S. to measure aspects of multilevel governance and independent measures of how aggressively cities seem to be pursuing sustainability, the relationship is investigated. The evidence is very strong that multilevel governance has very little to do with cities' decisions to adopt and implement sustainability policies and programs. There is even evidence that when cities engage in multilevel governance they are less likely to take the pursuit of sustainability seriously, suggesting the other levels of government might actually impede rather than stimulate pro-environmental policies.

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Introduction

Over the past several decades, globalization has coexisted with decentralization and localization (Levi 2010). These processes, seemingly oppositional but actually complementary, have resulted in the recalibration of governmental powers at different territorial levels, a phenomenon often called "multilevel governance." Multilevel governance emphasizes the connections across these governmental levels as well as the development of substantive relationships with nongovernmental actors from the non-profit and private sectors. The interactions of these actors and institutions have produced new types of collaborative relationships and networks aimed at addressing contemporary public problems. Environmental challenges have been the subject of much of the multilevel governance literature, particularly the issue of climate change (e.g., Betsill and Bulkeley 2006; Betsill and Rabe 2009).

In this paper, we explore multilevel governance at the substate level in the United States. Using original data from surveys of officials in 50 of the 54 largest cities in the U.S., we focus on the extent to which multilevel governance is occurring in these cities. Several questions drive the research, such as "How much do city leaders interact, coordinate, and collaborate with officials at other levels of government?" We also seek to determine whether cities with the most aggressive sustainability policies take part in more multilevel governance activities. We find varied patterns of interaction taking place among jurisdictions, both horizontally and vertically. Moreover, the findings with regard to the linkage between sustainability policy and multilevel governance do not comport with expectations.

In the next section of the paper, the concept of multilevel governance is discussed with particular emphasis on the U.S. case, local governments, and environmental protection. Research questions are presented. Following that, the methodology of the study is explained, with particular attention given to the survey questions and the construction of a sustainability policy index. The findings are presented in the penultimate section of the paper, followed by a discussion of implications in the concluding section.

Multilevel Governance

Cities are essential components within a multilevel framework. Among scholars who have studied the distribution of authority in nation-states, many have concluded that, in the absence of compelling reasons for centralization, "local decisions are best made by locals" (Hooghe and Marks 2009, 232). Across the globe, decentralization has become a desirable option for dispersing decision making and allocating responsibility. The European Union has made subsidiarity a foundational principle: matters ought to be handled by the smallest or lowest competent authority. In an operational sense, the ostensible advantages of decentralization include service delivery efficiencies, alignment of program costs with services provided, fostering of policy innovation, enhanced citizen responsiveness, greater government transparency and accountability, and relieving higher-level legislative bodies of the burden of hearing and deciding on local bills (Oates 1972; Kincaid 1998; Krane, Rigos, and Hill 2001).

Some advocates want to see local officials playing a larger role in multilevel governance, one that extends beyond the local setting. For example, in the book, *If Mayors Ruled the World*, Barber (2013) profiles a set of big-city mayors who have successfully tackled tough public problems. He contends that the inherent pragmatism of mayors—elected officials who are expected to "get it done" and who face limits in their legal authority and geographic scope—prepares them to become the global leaders of the future. In Barber's view, big cities, led by smart and clever mayors are the best hope for our democratic future and for governance. Through cooperative and collaborative actions, big cities can

form an interdependent network –a mayors' parliament, in Barber's terminology-- to address global problems.

Broadly, the concept of multilevel governance refers to the idea that policymaking in cities is not pursued in a political or administrative vacuum. Rather, cities adopt and implement policies within their respective governance contexts. In the U.S., cities exist as governmental jurisdictions embedded in geographically larger jurisdictions, including counties and states, all within the framework of the U.S. federal government. Additionally, many cities also make decisions in the context of metropolitan planning agencies or councils of government, or regional development organizations. Multilevel governance, as reflected in much of the urban policymaking research, is thought to be important because of the ability of these "higher-levels" of government to exert influence over city policymaking. Thus, scholars suggest that when cities make policy decisions in the context of other levels of government, these other levels affect those decisions. As we argue below, this has evolved into an expectation that cities engaged in collaborative governance with other government agencies are more likely to adopt pro-sustainability policies than cities not engaged in multilevel governance. Moreover, these is an implication that the pro-sustainability policies are more likely to be effective in achieving desired environmental outcomes than when multilevel governance is not involved.

Homsy and Warner (2015) argue, for example, that cities whose state governments are very friendly toward environmental sustainability are much more likely to adopt sustainability policies than cities whose states are less environmentally friendly. While this may be true, it is not clear what this might imply for multilevel governance, per se. Without knowing more about the character of the decisions made at different scales, it is difficult to draw conclusions about whether this finding represents anything more than coincidence. As we discuss below, it is certainly clear that state governments can, and often do, exert influences and constraints on the policies and programs their respective cities pursue. In the case of climate protection and sustainability policies, many states have enacted explicit prohibitions on municipal actions (Portney 2013a). If there is a "state effect" on local environmental policymaking, it is more likely that this effect inhibits, rather than enables or promotes, the local pursuit of sustainability. The question remains whether this is the result of some form of multilevel governance, or simply an example of city and state governments responding to different demands placed on them by different constituencies.

Multilevel Governance in the U.S.: Federalism and Localism

Governance and policymaking in the U.S. take place within a dynamic context of federalism. In recent years, the nature of this federalism – the relationships between and among different levels of government – has been to subject of much discussion. In 2013, when Katz and Bradley wrote that "…the U.S. is on the brink of a historic re-sorting, in which responsibilities once reserved for higher levels of government are being fully shared with, even shifted to cities, metro areas and the networks of leaders who govern them," (11-12) they were suggesting that multilevel governance has taken on a new set of meanings.

As a federal system, the United States has pioneered multilevel governance. In the U.S., sovereignty is divided between a national government and state governments. Chronological treatments of U.S. federalism track the gradual evolution of intergovernmental relations from an initial period of "dual federalism" in which the assignment of functions and responsibilities to the national government and the states was somewhat precise to a period in which functional responsibilities became more

interwoven, often referred to as "cooperative federalism" (Walker 1999). As a consequence, domestic public policy has become highly intergovernmentalized. Although areas of self-rule continue to exist, the domain of shared rule has expanded. The American federal system has become a partnership between orders of government, a highly complex system bound by the U.S. Constitution, statutes, regulations, and finances…and importantly, politics.

Local governments, not mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, are legal creatures of their respective states, although with the advent of home rule, localities have gained some measure of policymaking authority and discretion (Krane, Rigos, and Hill 2001). As a result, city governments have emerged as key players in numerous policy domains, acting not only as service deliverers but as policymakers and innovators. In fact, in some instances, it is precisely the innovative policymaking that riles state governments seeking to exert control and insure uniformity across the state. To be sure, drawing the line between state authority and local action remains a source of contention. And at the local level, debate continues about how to most effectively allocate policymaking authority across multiple empowered jurisdictions (Howell-Moroney 2008; Berry 2008).

Empirical evidence shows strong public support for active local governments that take responsibility for the problems facing U.S. communities (Schneider, Jacoby, and Lewis 2011). In the absence of state law, local governments often engage in policy innovation. Recent examples of cities taking action in the absence of state law include Austin, Texas banning single-use plastic bags, Kansas City, Missouri increasing the city's minimum wage, Milwaukee, Wisconsin requiring local businesses to provide sick leave to employees, Lincoln, Nebraska prohibiting police drones, and Miami-Dade County, Florida banning pit bulls. Local innovations may spread not only horizontally across cities and throughout metropolitan areas but also scale up to the state level (Katz and Bradley 2013). Shipan and Volden (2008), in their analysis of local anti-smoking policies between 1975 and 2000, find evidence of a pattern of local-to-state diffusion, although it is contingent on the political environment of a state, particularly the presence of a professional legislature.

Local governments also occasionally take actions that are clearly at odds with state law. For example, Philadelphia adopted gun control ordinances in 2008 in defiance of a 1996 ruling by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court affirming that the state had sole authority to regulate firearms (Riverstone-Newell 2012).[1] In some instances, local governments push back by implementing state law such a way that it more closely conforms to local preferences and practices. A study of language instruction in public schools in the wake of the passage of state "English-only" laws found this to be case (Marschall, Rigby, and Jenkins 2011). Krueger and Bernick (2009) argue that local governments are adept at adapting to state policy; they have learned to utilize the powers they do have in creative ways. For example, when states constrain various options for funding local services, cities opt for cooperation with other local governments. In other words, "state limits …create incentives for cities to cooperate with other local governments to achieve economies of scale" (p. 698).

U.S. metropolitan areas as a whole contain two-thirds of the nation's population and generate three-quarters of the country's gross domestic product, effectively becoming the engines of the national economy (Katz and Bradley 2013). The cities at the center of these metro areas operate in a web of government relationships, both vertical and horizontal. Local jurisdictions, be they general-purpose or special- purpose, have discrete geographic boundaries, but nesting and overlapping among these

[1] The Pennsylvania General Assembly defeated related gun control measures. Philadelphia's ordinances were later thrown out by state courts.

jurisdictions occur. That is, with some exceptions (e.g., consolidated city-county governments, independent cities in Virginia), cities are part of a county (or in the case of sprawling cities, parts of two or more counties). Special districts may have borders that are conterminous with city or county geographic limits or they may comprise a small portion of these territories, or instead reach beyond them to encompass other jurisdictions as well. Counties are aggregated into regions for many functions such as economic development, transportation planning, and homeland security, although in most states, these geographic regions are functionally-determined and the boundaries may not match across functions. Indeed, one of the advantages of special district government is the ability to design their boundaries to fit specific conditions and circumstances. Mullin (2014, 397) summarizes the metropolitan setting it this way, "Local government boundaries overlap and intersect, and they move with some regularity as governments form, disintegrate, and expand or contract their geographic territories." The geographic closeness has numerous consequences, one of which is the opportunity for these jurisdictions to develop connections with one another. These connections could result in shared production of various public services, joint management of public facilities, and perhaps, similarities in the adoption of public policies. Bickers, Post, and Stein (2010, 163) note that "…proximity among jurisdictions and the sharing of common borders increases the likelihood of greater interaction and intergovernmental cooperation…"

The analysis of multilevel governance would be remiss if it did not recognize that in the U.S. context, cities exhibit considerable organizational variation relative to other levels or types of governments. Multilevel governance suggests that cities taking sustainability most seriously should be cities that are more successful at coordinating their policymaking activities with other governments, particularly higher levels of government. Presumably, one of the rationales for this expectation is that in order to confront sustainability, cities need to address the negative environmental externalities that nearly all major cities face. Addressing such externalities is thought to be outside of the governmental purview of individual cities, and thus requires involvement with other "higher-level" governments at a larger scale. In this analysis below, we focus on a number of different kinds of inter-governmental interactions and characteristics.

Multilevel Environmental Governance

As Andonova and Mitchell (2016, 256) state, "Studies of globalization have highlighted that global governance has been rescaled away from the nation-state in multiple directions: vertically down toward provincial and municipal governments, vertically up toward supranational regimes, and horizontally across regional and sectoral organizations and networks." This is particularly the case for environmental governance. Andonova and Mitchell (2016, 264) continue, "The proliferation of transnational networks has helped localize global issues, globalize local issues, and organize collective action across levels of politics. This tendency is visible with respect to issues such as fresh water, forestry, biodiversity, and climate change." Approaching many environmental protection and natural resource conservation issues from a multilevel governance perspective is apt – they are often transboundary in their reach, rife with externalities, and inadequately addressed by sometimes misaligned institutions (McKinney and Johnson 2009; Steelman 2010).

Climate change is perhaps the environmental issue most commonly associated with multilevel governance (Betsill and Bulkeley 2006; Schreurs 2008; Betsill and Rabe 2009; Bulkeley 2010; Rabe 2011). With efforts as global as the United Nations' Kyoto Protocol and as local as Frankfurt's renewable energy guidelines, the issue is inherently multilevel. The mobilization of an array of non-state actors at all levels has created a seedbed for policy experimentation, with both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Much

of programmatic activity has occurred at the local level. Bulkeley (2010) traces the development of municipal responses to climate change from the small-scale efforts of a few pioneering cities to the development of transnational municipal networks such as the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) and, in the U.S., the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. Over time, not only have more local governments become engaged in climate change action, the types of jurisdictions thus engaged have diversified.

By far, the vast majority of research on multilevel governance related to the environment focuses on climate change policy and climate protection, particularly climate mitigation. Our focus here is somewhat broader, examining the potential role of multilevel governance in city sustainability policies and programs *writ large*. In this conception, climate change policies are part of a broader array of local initiatives pursued by city governments in an effort to move toward becoming more sustainable with special reference to environmental sustainability. Thus, our key dependent variable, described more fully below, consists of a measure of how extensive city policies are in pursuit of sustainability.

This leads to the following research questions: (1) how much interaction occurs among these local governments, (2) how much collaboration occurs, and (3) how does the interaction and inclusion influence a city's sustainability policies?

Data and Methods

The statistical analysis below draws upon an original mixed-level database that includes information from two sources. The first is a 2009–2010 survey of local city administrators involved in management of departments and programs with environmental, land use, and economic development decisions in 50 of the largest 54 cities in the United States. The administrators we targeted were all leading officials at the heads of departments or bureaus with some relevance to environmental affairs or economic development. Titles of such offices and the organization of responsibilities differed from city to city. Generally, though, we identified those working in areas such as environmental protection, sustainability, public works, parks and recreation, public utilities, water and wastewater management, office of the city manager, economic development, and planning.

The four largest cities, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston, were excluded from the survey because of the challenges presented by their scale particularly with respect to the number of active non-governmental organizations, an issue unrelated to this current study of multilevel governance.[2] The 50 surveyed cities had 2008 population sizes ranging from 1.5 million in Phoenix to 336,000 in Tampa. A multi-modal survey approach was used, offering subjects the choice of filling out a paper questionnaire they received in the mail or going to a web site and answering the same questions online. Follow-up prompts to initial non-respondents took the form of personalized emails and specified the

[2] After a preliminary creation of the list of interest groups in the largest forty cities including New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston, it became clear that by dropping these four largest cities, the fourteen next-smaller cities could be added. As a result the survey focused on fifty of the largest fifty-four cities. Analysis by Fisher *et al*. (2012) of environmental steward groups in New York City alone identified nearly 2,800 groups, demonstrating the magnitude of the challenge just in this one city.

URL links for the survey web site.[3] The initial mailing of questionnaires to city administrators took place between June 2009 and January 2010. Questionnaires were mailed to this entire population of 885 identified city administrators (an average of about 17.7 per city), and 413 responded. Thirty-seven of these questionnaires were returned as "undeliverable," and we were not able to locate appropriate replacement administrators. The adjusted response rate was thus 48.7%. The average number of administrator responses across all included cities was 8.3. The descriptive tables below present information from all administrators responding to each of several questions.

The key independent variables: The survey of city administrators contained questions eliciting information about experiences with multilevel governance operationalized in two ways. First, we asked administrators how frequently they were in contact with other government agencies and officials, including other cities, counties, metropolitan planning councils or councils of government, and regional planning organizations. Second, we asked administrators how likely it is that these other agencies or officials would be included in policy deliberations on issues involving both economic development, environmental, or sustainability issues. Unlike other city surveys, we rely on multiple responses in each city because of the expectation that no single administrator is likely to be in a position to serve as an informant for the entire city government.

The dependent variable: The data used to measure the dependent variable, the extent to which cities pursue adoption and implementation of local sustainability policies and programs, comes from an aggregate city database containing information about what cities actually do in terms of promoting sustainability through various programs and policies. This database was used to construct the dependent variable which is a citywide Sustainability Policy Index measuring how extensively each city seems to be pursuing sustainability goals as a matter of public policy (Portney 2013b: 37-87; Lubell *et al*., 2009). Such data make it possible to link the attitudinal and policymaking variables from the survey to each city's commitment to environmental protection. The data gathering was quite comprehensive and information has been collected across 38 separate variables in all of the cities. These 38 programs and policies include industrial recycling, brownfield redevelopment, tax incentives for environmentally friendly development, alternatively fueled city vehicles, car pool lanes, eco-industrial projects, a citywide comprehensive plan, and a sustainability indicators program. Operationally the index represents a summary (additive) score (one point for each program) for each city. The guiding assumption here is that cities with higher scores have a stronger policy commitment to sustainability than cities with lower scores by virtue of having enacted and implemented more programs. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that cities with higher scores have produced more sustainable outcomes; it simply suggests these cities are trying harder as a matter of public policy. Although this approach takes a relatively large number of specific policies and programs into consideration, it has the drawback that it does not attempt to weight any one program or policy as being more important than another. Weighting might seem intuitively appropriate, but realistically requires knowledge of how the operation of specific programs is systematically linked to the production of sustainability outcomes (such as cleaner air or lower levels of human exposure to toxics), and this type of knowledge does not yet broadly exist.

[3] To incentivize respondents to fill out the questionnaire, recipients of the questionnaire were offered the opportunity to win one of three $100 gift cards from Amazon.com. The mailings included a pre-paid (stamped) postcard allowing the respondent to provide his/her name and to be entered into the gift card raffle. This mailing also included a new $1 bill, which exerts significant influence on the response rate; See: Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009: 238–242).

External validation for this scoring of individual cities comes from comparison with the sustainability assessments produced by other researchers (Siemens 2011; Karlenzig 2007). A simple comparison between the scores used here and the SustainLane sustainable city rankings shows substantial similarity. Both assessments place Portland, Seattle, and San Francisco at the top; Virginia Beach, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City are near the bottom. As another indication of the internal validity of the index developed here, the correlation between these scores and the Siemens environmental performance index for the 21 U.S. cities included in the Siemens' analysis (2011) is .772 (significant at the 0.000 level), suggesting that both indexes are likely measuring the same underlying policy commitment to sustainability and the environment.

Findings and Discussion

The first question we address is the extent to which large U.S. cities seem to practice some sort of multilevel governance in the context of environmental policymaking. As noted earlier, we measure this with reference to two questions that were asked of city government administrators. We asked administrators to report how frequently they interact with people or agencies at other levels of government, where more frequent ("weekly" or "monthly") contact represents more multilevel governance and less frequent ("annually" or "never") contact represents less multilevel governance. We also asked administrators a question perhaps more directly related to governance, *per se*, when we queried them about actual collaboration in policymaking. Specifically, we asked them how likely they think it is for other government agencies to be included in policy deliberations on issues of the environment and development. Administrators reporting that inclusion is "very likely" represents more multilevel governance, and reporting "not very likely" represents less multilevel governance.

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses for city administrators' contact with different types and levels of government, from horizontal coordination with other city governments, to county government, Council of Governments or metropolitan planning organizations, and regional development organizations. This contacting information suggests that there is only modest amount of multilevel governance taking place, with the vast majority of administrators reporting that contacts occur on a monthly basis or less frequently. The one level of government that differs is county government, where about a third of the administrators reporting weekly contact. Even so, the vast majority of administrators, over two-thirds, report contact with county government agencies or officials only monthly or less. From the perspective of this one piece of information, multilevel governance does not appear to happen with much frequency.

Table 2 examines the issue of multilevel collaborative governance, showing the distribution of responses for city administrators' reports of the likelihood that other government agencies or officials would be involved in city policy deliberations on issues of environmental and economic development policies. Regardless of the level of government, about a third of city administrators reported that other governments would "very likely" be included in deliberations, and nearly half suggested that other governments would "maybe, maybe not" be included. Taken together, these results certainly suggest that there is not all that much multilevel governance taking place in these large U.S. cities.

To what extent do cities engage in more than one type of multilevel governance? In other words, are different types of multilevel governance correlated across cities? Table 3 presents the bivariate correlations showing the extent to which each type of multilevel governance is associated with

others. These correlations suggest that city administrators reporting the most frequent contact with other city governments tend to also be administrators reporting contact with their respective county governments, metropolitan planning organizations or councils of government, and to a lesser extent with regional planning organizations. A very similar pattern exists with respect to inclusion in policy deliberations. Administrators reporting that other city governments are likely to be included in policy deliberations also report that county governments, councils or government or metropolitan planning agencies, and regional planning organizations are very likely to be included in policy deliberations. Table 3 also provides correlations between the measures of contacting and measures of inclusion, and these correlations make clear that contacting as a form of multilevel governance is different from inclusion. Administrators who report high levels of contacting with other levels of government do not necessarily report that these other levels of government would be included in deliberations. The correlations are strongest between contacting councils of government or regional planning organizations and inclusion of these organizations. Overall, according to reports from city administrators, there is a strong tendency for one type of multilevel governance to be associated with others – the frequency of contacting with one level of government is associated with contacting other levels of government, and inclusion of one level of government is associated with inclusion of others.

The third, and arguably more important, research question investigated here examines the relationship between multilevel governance and the pursuit of sustainability policies and programs. Specifically, we address the questions of whether the cities that seem to have the greatest contacts with other levels of government, and that are very likely to include other levels of government in their policy deliberations, are the cities that are more aggressively pursuing sustainability policies. Our expectations are that greater multilevel governance will present conditions most conducive to such pursuits.

Table 4 presents bivariate correlations between the measures of multilevel governance and the pursuit of sustainability policies measured by the Sustainability Policy Index. The pattern is fairly consistent across all measures of multilevel governance. The correlations are very weak. Among all of the contacting and inclusion measures, only inclusion of other city governments and inclusion of councils of government or metropolitan planning organizations are correlated with the pursuit of sustainability policies. Perhaps even more important, these correlations are negative. In other words, administrators who report greater inclusion of other city governments and councils of government come from cities that tend to have lower propensity to pursue sustainability. Overall, it is difficult to argue that multilevel governance is associated with greater pursuit of sustainability policies. Essentially, multilevel governance is largely irrelevant in terms of how seriously cities take the pursuit of sustainability.

To support this conclusion even more strongly, Table 5 shows the results of three OLS regression models using the Sustainability Policy Index as the dependent variable. Model 1 includes the four multilevel governance frequency of contact variables as predictors, and also includes two variables measuring key aspects related to the internal politics of city policymaking. The first internal politics variable is a composite measure of city administrators' assessments of the political ideology of the mayor, most city councilors, and most city administrators where each is code from 1 (very liberal) to 7 (very conservative). The second is city administrators' assessments of the likelihood that local environmental groups would be included in policy deliberations. Model 2 substitutes the "likelihood of inclusion" of other levels of governments in deliberations for the frequency of contact variables. Model 3 includes both the contact and inclusion measures of multilevel governance. All three models exclude

the "regional development" frequency of contact and inclusion in deliberations measures because the number of administrators responding to these questions was substantially lower.

All three models show that the multilevel governance variables pale in comparison to the internal politics variables as predictors of city sustainability policies. Both the measure of ideology and the measure of environmental group inclusion are strongly and significantly related to how aggressively cities pursue sustainability policies, with cities reported to be more conservative are considerably less likely to adopt and implement sustainability policies, while cities reported to be "very likely" to include local environmental groups in policy deliberations are far more likely to aggressively pursue sustainability. The only multilevel governance variables whose coefficients approach statistical significance are those measuring inclusion of other city governments and inclusion of county governments in policy deliberations. Inclusion of other city governments is slightly associated with **fewer** sustainability policies, suggesting that when there is collaboration or coordination among cities there is less, not more, commitment to sustainability. Inclusion of county governments is associated with more sustainability policies.

Implications and Conclusion

The notion that there might be a connection between the multilevel nature of governance and pro-environmental policies is enticing. Although there are ambiguities embedded in this notion, much of the literature on multilevel governance and environmental policy posits that when cities are actively engaged and collaborate with other levels of government they are better able to pursue climate protection and sustainability policies. The analysis presented here calls into serious question whether there is empirical support for this notion. It may well be true that cities, however well meaning, cannot adopt and implement effective climate protection and sustainability policies that fully account for their respective externalities. It may also be true that when cities happen to exist in a context of other governments – other city governments, county government, regional planning organizations, and state governments, and with the benefit of councils of government or metropolitan planning organizations -- that share the goals of become more sustainable, they may be able to more aggressively pursue sustainability policies. But the results here suggest that multilevel governance, *per se*, is not likely to facilitate such policies in cities. It seems just as likely that other levels of government exert negative influences on city environmental policymaking, preventing cities from trying to engage in climate mitigation or sustainability policies rather than promoting them. Overall, when cities are engaged in multilevel governance they are not more likely to try to become more sustainable in their policies.

As a prescription for pro-environmental policies, efforts to promote multilevel governance seem greatly misplaced. There is simply no evidence that increased contact with other levels of government or inclusion other levels of government on city policymaking will make it easier or more likely for cities to be able to adopt and implement sustainability policies. Placed in the broader context of research on the factors that influence more aggressive city sustainability policies, multilevel governance characteristics seem relatively unimportant. Polycentric explanations, which focus more on the internal politics of city policymaking, seem compelling. Stated another way, when cities develop the political will to be aggressive in their pursuit of climate protection, sustainability, and other pro-environment policies, they generally are able to do so. When cities are engaged with other levels of government that are not supportive, this represents an impediment to such aggressive policies.

The conclusions in this paper are, of course, the result of the particular empirical analysis that relies on specific operationalizations of the concept of multilevel governance. Here the focus is on the actual relationships between cities and other levels of government and types of governmental

organizations. We offer measurements of the extent to which city administrators engage in contacting behaviors with, or report inclusion in policy deliberations of, other governmental organizations. These measurements are predicated on the idea that multilevel governance has something to do with collaboration and coordination between cities, other cities, counties, and metropolitan and regional governance organizations. An alternative argument can be made that multilevel governance happens regardless of whether there is any type of collaboration or coordination. Yet, it is difficult to avoid the idea that multilevel governance must involve such interactions.

Future analysis of the effects of multilevel governance will necessarily need to sort out the roles played by policymakers at different levels of government in the pursuit of climate protection and sustainability policies. Our own efforts will turn to examining the relationships between cities and other levels of government with a special focus on large cities in two states, California and Texas. Among the 50 large cities studied here, a substantial number – 13 -- are in these two states. Our analysis included the Texas cities of Arlington, Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, and San Antonio, and the California cities of Fresno, Long Beach, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, and Santa Ana. Each of these cities faces its own intergovernmental and multilevel governance context, and comparison across states will make it possible to document the role of relations with other governments as potential influences on city environmental policymaking.

Table 1: Frequency of City Contact with Other Government Agencies in 50 Large US Cities

	Contact with:			
Frequency	Other city governments	County government	Council of Governments or Metropolitan Planning Organization	Regional Planning or Development Organization
Never	4.0%	7.3%	11.7%	20.9%
Annually	26.2	17.4	29.7	34.3
Monthly	51.9	42.9	41.4	33.5
Weekly	18.0	32.2	17.2	11.3
Total Percent	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of cases	401	396	401	397

Table 2: Likelihood of Inclusion of Other Governments in City Policy Deliberations

	Inclusion of:			
Likelihood of Inclusion in City Policy Deliberations	Other city governments	County government	Council of Governments or Metropolitan Planning Organization	Regional Planning or Development Organization
Not very likely	16.7%	19.0%	17.9%	16.7%
Maybe, maybe not	44.9	43.5	45.9	48.4
Very Likely	38.4	37.5	36.2	34.9
Total Percent	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of cases	372	379	351	126

Table 3: Correlations Among Measures of Multilevel Governance

	Contact with:			Inclusion of:			
	County government	CoG/metro planning organization	Regional development organization	Other city governments	County government	CoG/Metro planning organization	Regional development organization
Contact with other city governments	.439*** (393)	.404*** (399)	.345*** (395)	.196*** (366)	.175** (373)	.105* (346)	.022 (126)
Contact with county government	------	.329*** (393)	.227*** (389)	.231*** (362)	.292*** (370)	.159** (340)	.139 (125)
Contact with CoG/metro planning organization	------	------	.524*** (396)	.113* (367)	.087 (374)	.124* (346)	.025 (126)
Contact with regional development organization	------	------	------	.060 (365)	.072 (372)	.264*** (345)	.320*** (126)
Inclusion of other city governments	------	------	------	------	.535*** (365)	.573*** (344)	.374*** (125)
Inclusion of county government	------	------	------	------	------	.464*** (346)	.390*** (124)
Inclusion of CoG/Metro planning organization	------	------	------	------	------	------	.708*** (122)

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Table 4: Correlations Between Measures of Multilevel Governance and the Pursuit of Sustainability Policies

Measure of Multilevel Governance	Sustainability Policy Index, 2011
Contact with other city governments	.034 (401)
Contact with county government	.064 (396)
Contact with CoG/metro planning organization	-.013 (401)
Contact with regional development organization	-.045 (397)
Inclusion of other city governments	-.127* (372)
Inclusion of county government	-.041 (379)
Inclusion of CoG/Metro planning organization	-.135* (351)
Inclusion of regional development organization	-.108 (126)

*$p < .05$

Table 5: OLS Regression Results Showing the Effects of Multilevel Governance and Internal Politics Measures on the Sustainability Policy Index

Independent Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B (S.E.)	Beta (Significance)	B (S.E.)	Beta (Significance)	B (S.E.)	Beta (Significance)
Multilevel Governance Measures						
Contact with other city governments	.140 (.421)	.018 (.739)	------	------	.144 (.454)	.018 (.751)
Contact with county government	.165 (.349)	.025 (.638)	------	------	.271 (.385)	.039 (.481)
Contact with CoG/ metro planning organization	-.002 (.340)	.000 (.994)	------	------	.442 (.368)	.064 (.231)
Inclusion of other city governments	------	------	-.892 (.518)	-.107 (.086)	-1.022 (.528)	-.123 (.054)
Inclusion of county government	------	------	.942 (.468)	.115 (.045)	.855 (.478)	.105 (.075)
Inclusion of CoG/ metro planning organization	------	------	-.828 (.502)	-.098 (.100)	-.862 (.513)	-.103 (.094)
Internal Politics Measures						
Conservative political ideology	-.730 (.081)	-.430 (.000)	-.767 (.081)	-.455 (.000)	-.764 (.084)	-.447 (.000)
Inclusion of local environmental groups	1.142 (.446)	.122 (.011)	1.204 (.458)	.128 (.009)	1.194 (.467)	.127 (.011)
Constant	29.38 (1.88)	------	32.28 (1.73)	------	30.36 (2.03)	------
Adjusted R^2	.207		.255		.247	

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