

Explaining Policy Bandwagons: Organized Interest Mobilization and Cascades of Attention

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Are all issues subject to the same attention from organized interests? If not, why not? This article utilizes data on organized interest mobilization in Scottish public policy to examine the pattern of engagement by policy participants across a large number of policy issues. It finds a heavily skewed pattern of mobilization: Most issues attract little attention, while a few issues account for the majority of attention (they are “bandwagons”). This resembles the findings of Baumgartner and Leech, based on U.S. lobby data. Replication outside the United States supports the claim that this is a general pattern in public policy systems. But what explains such a pattern? After scrutinizing the “size and scope” approach, this article proposes that positive feedback mechanisms are catalyzing cascades of mobilization. Several agents are identified as facilitating cascades in the data: keystone groups, the media, civil servants, and campaign groups.

Introduction: Bandwagons and Policy Activity

Are most policy issues subject to high levels of mobilization by organized interests? Or, are most issues left to a few dedicated specialists? And, if it is a mix of both, then what is the proportion? These types of questions shape the images scholars hold about the dynamics of organized interest mobilization in public policy (see discussion by Jordan 2009). Yet, firm answers to these questions have been somewhat hampered by data availability and research design. Generations of (mostly U.S.) political scientists have been concerned with mapping the engagement by organized interests in public policy (Heinz et al. 1993; Lowery and Gray 1995; Schattschneider 1960; Schlozman and Tierney 1983, 1986; Walker 1983, 1991). In characterizing the legacy of such studies, Baumgartner and Leech (1998, 119, 124) argue that they either focus on single isolated issues (not allowing for any sense of whether findings carry beyond the case) or take a domain wide view (with no sense of variations between issues). The key limitation is that these studies do not explicitly entertain the possibility of issue-level difference. For example, what appear as sizable and diverse group populations from a domain view may, at an issue level, be a collection of discrete issue areas populated by a small number of actors who have effectively created issue niches.¹

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Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions, Vol. 24, No. 2, April 2011 (pp. 205–230).

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A relatively recent contribution from Baumgartner and Leech (2001, 1192) has moved the literature on considerably by mapping “how the involvement of groups is distributed across issues.” Utilizing a congressional lobbying data set (which takes an issue-level approach to mapping engagement), they asked how many organized interests lobby alone—or with few others—versus those who “jump on policy bandwagons and lobby among the crowd” (Baumgartner and Leech, 1193). While their findings are wide ranging and nuanced, perhaps the standout headline is that the vast majority of public policy issues attract very little group activity. They find that a minority of issues soaked up the majority of mobilization activity; most issues attract the attention of a fairly small number of organized interests. The skewed distribution of lobbying over their sample of policy issues leads them to conclude, “This distribution makes generalizations about interest group conflict difficult and perhaps explains why many scholars have disagreed about the abilities of lobbyists to get what they want” (Baumgartner and Leech, 1191). In relation to mobilization, then, there is no “typical” policy issue.

This article addresses whether such a finding holds outside of the U.S. congressional context. It deploys a novel data set that maps the *activity* of organized interests on a broad set of policy issues—publicly consulted upon by the Scottish government—over a 25-year period. The data take an issue-level view and aggregate upward. So, it follows that if skewness is found in the Scottish data, there are some policy bandwagons—and of course some quiet corners. If this pattern can be found—using data from a different policy system—then this would strengthen claims that such a distribution is a common feature of policy systems.

But “why” do bandwagons emerge on some issues but not on others? In their 2001 article, Baumgartner and Leech do not dwell on providing an explanation as to why bandwagons may emerge. In passing, they do contrast what they call “size and scope” explanations with the role of “cue taking and imitation” among actors, but they do not go further than this. This article scrutinizes the validity of size and scope arguments—crudely that levels of mobilization reflect the objective importance or impact of an issue—as a prelude to expanding on “cue-taking” processes by reviewing and then deploying an argument based on information-based “cascades” (Baumgartner and Jones 2009; Jones and Baumgartner 2005).

If bandwagons are found in the Scottish data, this presents unique and potentially important questions that will contribute to the broader literature on policy dynamics. That the Scottish data (in contrast to the U.S. lobby data) include a broader range of policy participants (such as individual citizens and organizations that are policy “amateurs”) means one cannot simply rely on strategic cue taking among professional interest groups as *the* mechanism producing positive feedback. Instead, *additional* mechanisms driving cascades of attention will need to be identified. To this end, this article reports more in-depth examination of particular

issues, alongside insights gleaned from interviews with civil servants and organized interests, and explores mechanisms that may drive (or dampen) cascades of attention.

This article proceeds in two broad sections. The first section addresses the task of replication. Analysis demonstrates that there *are* bandwagons in Scottish public policy and confirms that the Baumgartner and Leech (2001) finding *also* holds outside of the United States. The second section looks for explanations for the distribution: To what processes can we ascribe this distribution? In answering this question, this article contrasts size and scope explanations with the role of “cue taking and imitation.” Analysis supports the importance of cue taking and imitation in explaining bandwagons. It is argued that positive feedback mechanisms encourage organized interest mobilization on some issues—but not on others. Using Scottish data, this article points to the role of keystone groups—the media, civil servants, and campaign groups—in triggering cascades of attention, and thus bandwagons.

What Is the Mix of Bandwagons and Quiet Corners?

The initial focus of this article is in assessing (and reaffirming) the Baumgartner and Leech (2001) finding that mobilization varies across a set of randomly selected policy issues. This is approached by systematically mapping the distribution of actor mobilization, outside of the U.S. congressional context, by analyzing mobilization data across a set of Scottish public policy issues. If a bandwagon effect is to be found, there needs to be a skewed distribution of activity across the sample of consultation issues. A central question is how many actors join a bandwagon and seek to influence issues among a crowd? And how many are engaged in issues with few actors for company? What is the proportion of issues that constitute bandwagons and those that appear as quiet corners?

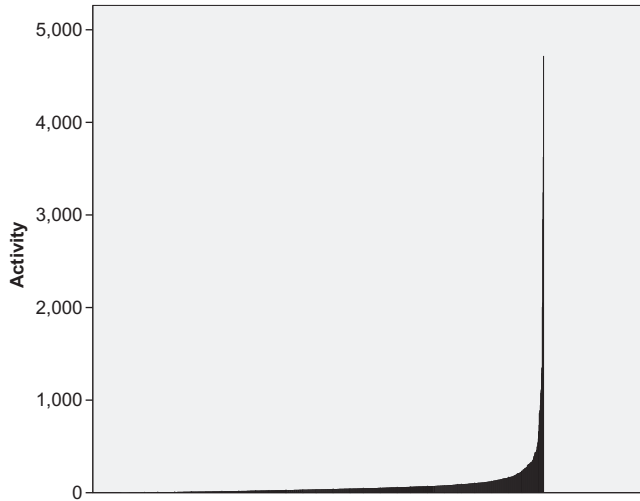
To assess these questions, issue-level data are required. Here, a large data set compiled from records of responses by organized interests to Scottish government policy consultations between 1982 and 2007 is utilized.² Public policy consultations in Scotland are routinely conducted on a broad range of issues, which may include calls for comments on draft bills, initial agendas for discussion, proposals for amendments to regulations, and details of implementation of European Union directives or similar.³ Consultations are launched by a team within a relevant government department, with invitations being sent to stakeholder lists and invitations made on the government Web site (in practice, the access barriers are low for consultations).⁴ No *definitive* list of consultations conducted by the Scottish government exists,⁵ but it is possible to *definitively* say that each consultation where data are available in the public domain have been counted. The consultation process provides an important window into policy mobilization by groups. It is not possible to rule out a different picture of mobilization arising if group activity in the media

or legislative arenas was examined rather than the bureaucratic/administrative arena. However, given the nature of the British—and Scottish—political systems, the bureaucratic arena is likely to be the most frequently deployed, the most open and accessible, and the most productive for organized interests (see discussion by Jordan and Maloney 2001). In total, the data set includes 1,691 consultations, which received over 180,000 responses from more than 18,000 discrete policy organizations (institutions, interest groups, government departments/agencies, and ministers or legislators) and individual citizens.

The issue-based nature of the data set makes it identical in *design* to that used by the Baumgartner and Leech (2001) study. There is a strong family resemblance, yet responses to government consultations are not *precisely* the same data as lobby registration forms. While U.S. data count organizations that are registered to lobby (they must reach a basic threshold of lobbying expenditure to do so), the present data are more inclusive: They count anyone who responds, down to individual firms and citizens. Furthermore, the lobbying counted by Baumgartner and Leech is by and large a private activity, while the consultations we study are by nature public exercises. Such differences are typical in comparative exercises across political systems: With no lobby registration system in the United Kingdom or Scotland, viable substitutes must be found or else comparison is abandoned.⁶ If anything, these differences hold two *advantages* for the analysis that follows. First, if Baumgartner and Leech's skewed pattern of engagement can be replicated in the Scottish data, then this strengthens the generality of the phenomenon. When the same distribution holds using data from a different political system, this increases confidence that we have identified a general feature of public policy. Second, if bandwagons are evident in the Scottish data, this presents unique and potentially important questions that will contribute to the broader literature. Baumgartner and Leech emphasize the cue taking triggered by the strategic monitoring of professional lobbyists. Thus, if Scottish data *also* have many policy "amateurs" (i.e., non-policy-dedicated organizations) and individual citizens, there is an opportunity to identify *additional* processes of cue taking in public policy.

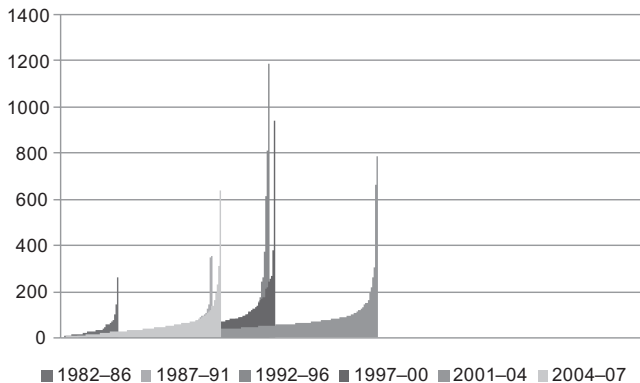
So what pattern is evident? Does it match the Baumgartner and Leech (2001) results? Figure 1 presents the distribution of levels of mobilization across 1,691 issues (they are not graphed in date order). It includes total number of responses, allowing for multiple responses per actor. The figure shows a great deal of skewness in the data, which strongly resembles to the pattern identified by Baumgartner and Leech (1201, Figure 2). This is apparent whether mobilization is measured in terms of numbers of actors—or levels of overall activity—per issue. A large proportion of the raw *activity* in the present sample is composed of individual citizens engaging in public policy.⁷ But, as will be returned to later, the largest proportion of this mobilization tends to be concentrated in a small number (but by no means all) of the "bandwagon" issues.

FIGURE 1
Distribution of Activity Across Issues



Note: The single highest value has been removed in order to allow for a more detailed graphical presentation of the balance of the issues.

FIGURE 2
Distribution of Actors across Issues, by U.K. Parliamentary Terms



As keen observers of Scottish politics may have predicted, the issue with the highest level of responses is the consultation on “Smoking in Public Places.” It received 53,474 responses, with the vast majority (98% in all) coming from individual citizens via an online form.⁸ The smaller number of responses came mostly from local authorities,⁹ interested business associations like the Scottish Licensed Trade Association and Tobacco Manufacturing Association, and citizen groups like the Scottish Consumer Council and Action on Smoking and Health. But the second largest

number of responses in the data arose from a rather mundane-sounding 1,992 consultations on “Water and Sewerage in Scotland: Investing for Our Future.” It included a proposal for franchising water supply (part privatization), which attracted a high degree of attention. Yet it *did not* trigger the overwhelming mobilization of individuals. In passing, it is salient that both these consultations *have* attracted scholarly attention too. The Scottish smoking ban has been heavily researched (see Cairney 2007a, 2007b), and the water and sewerage issue was sufficiently publicized to attract scholarly analysis at the time (see McMaster and Sawkins 1993). This resonates with the broad concern that the way scholars sample issues for research purposes means that there is a risk of constructing theories of public policy based on accounts of “unusually newsworthy” policy issues (Baumgartner and Leech 1998; Jordan 2009). Scholars follow bandwagons too—media attention offers a neat cue that an issue is worthy of research (and that journals will publish the findings!).

Again, as commentators may have predicted, other well-populated consultations related to key legislative initiatives of Scottish devolution,¹⁰ like “Land Reform”—public access and purchase of large tracts of privately held land—and “Gaelic Language,” both (at least in some consultation exercises) engaged thousands of actors. But so did rather obscure and mundane-sounding issues like a consultation on “Proposed Amendments to the Action Programme for Nitrate Vulnerable Zones”—ostensibly an issue about controlling nitrate use and environmental impact in a small number of farming regions of Scotland. One could imagine why the “Artificial Insemination Guidelines for Pigs” received just six responses (and many reasons why it may have sparked debate), but the rather more enticing issue of “Making Sure Crime Doesn’t Pay”—essentially measures to acquire the proceeds of crime from convicted persons—received a low level of mobilization, with less than 20 responses. Determining *in advance* the “interests” an issue will touch upon—to actors who may mobilize—is a complex business. This point will be discussed later.

To further demonstrate that the Scottish distribution is part of the same phenomenon as documented for the United States by Baumgartner and Leech (2001), Table 1 numerically reports the degree of skewness. It records the cumulative percentage that each 169 consultation issues (10% of 1,691 issues) add to the overall mobilization (measured as activity or actors).¹¹ This finding is similar to that reported by Baumgartner and Leech (table 5). It shows that the 10% of issues with the lowest mobilization levels accounts for less than 1% of all activity, exactly the same as the U.S. findings. By contrast, the 10% of issues with the highest mobilization levels accounts for over 30% of all activity. Baumgartner and Leech report that the 10% of issues with the highest mobilization levels accounts for 60% of all activity. While the Scottish data have comparatively more “middling” cases than the United States, they conform to the same skewed distribution.

Unlike Baumgartner and Leech (2001), the Scottish data are pooled, covering several years. Thus, it is a logical possibility that the above

TABLE 1
The Proportion of Mobilization by Issue

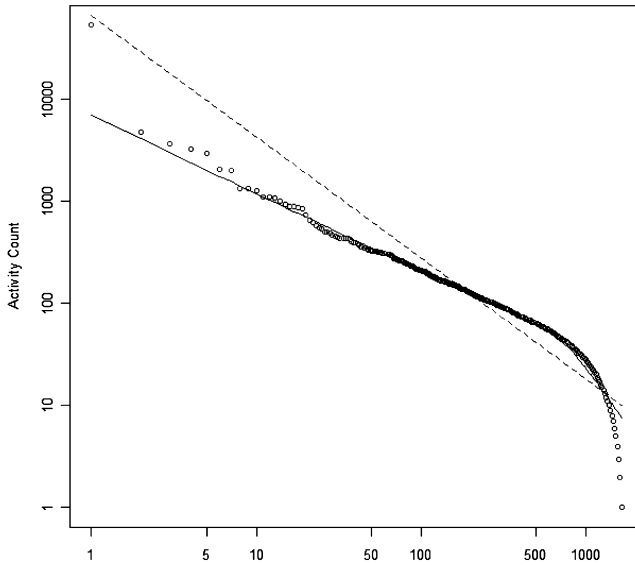
Percent of Issues	Actors			Activity ^a		
	Number	Percent	Cumulative	Number	Percent	Cumulative
Lowest 10% (169 issues)	469	0.57	0.57	492	0.53	0.53
10.1–20 (issues 169 to 338)	1,318	1.63	2.21	1,401	1.51	2.04
20.1–30 (to issue 507)	2,223	2.73	4.94	2,357	2.54	4.58
30.1–40 (to issue 676)	3,408	4.19	9.12	3,670	3.95	8.53
40.1–50 (to issue 852)	4,930	5.85	15.18	5,091	5.48	14.01
50.1–60 (to issue 1021)	6,207	7.62	22.8	6,612	7.12	21.13
60.1–70 (to issue 1190)	7,854	9.65	32.45	8,420	9.06	30.19
70.1–80 (to issue 1359)	9,982	12.26	44.71	10,818	11.65	41.84
80.1–90 (to issue 1528)	13,279	16.31	61.02	14,482	15.59	57.43
90.1–95 (to issue 1613)	9,629	11.83	72.84	10,704	11.52	68.94
95–99.9 (to issue 1690)	20,923	25.7	98.54	27,412	29.51	98.46
Top issue	1,190	1.46	100.00	1,428	1.54	100.00
Totals (1,691 issues)	81,422	100.00	100.00	92,887	100.00	100.00

^aThe count for activity precludes individual citizen responses, as they could not be coded to discrete actors.

figures obscure a “period” effect, whereby all issues in the same time period have low levels of activity, and all issues in latter periods have higher levels of activity. To rule this out, Figure 2 divides the data into segments by time periods, each correlating roughly with U.K. parliamentary terms. The same skewed pattern as above is evident for *each* separate time period. If all issues in earlier periods were equally attracting low levels of mobilization but all issues in latter periods were attracting equally high levels of mobilization, then it would not be a bandwagon style effect.¹² But Figure 2 demonstrates that this is not the case.

To further probe the skewness in the Scottish data, a log–log plot using the same data in Figure 1 was produced (see Figure 3). This plot will help to confirm that the distribution is skewed in a manner consistent with an extreme value distribution, which is associated with cascade phenomenon (see Jones and Baumgartner 2005). When presented as a log–log plot, a perfect “extreme-value” distribution should show an entirely flat line.¹³ As

FIGURE 3
Log-Log Plot of Distribution of Actors across Issues



evident, the line is straight for *almost* the full distribution. It confirms that there is an extreme value distribution in the raw data. As Jones and Baumgartner (2005) outline, this has implications for the way one generates *explanations* for the distribution pattern, a point that will be discussed based on the following analysis.

In sum, the Scottish data show that some issues attract broad attention, while the majority of other issues pass without such attention. The analysis demonstrates that this distribution *is* the same type of phenomenon as found by Baumgartner and Leech (2001) for the United States. On its own, this is a significant finding. It suggests a general result spanning *both* U.S. and U.K. settings.

Toward Explaining Bandwagons?

The findings that *both* Scottish and U.S. data exhibit skewed mobilization patterns across a population of policy issues, strengthens the case that bandwagons are important general phenomenon in public policy. But, how might one account for the heavily skewed distribution of mobilization across policy issues?

Baumgartner and Leech (2001) do not spend much time exploring why bandwagons emerged in their original article, although they do contrast size and scope arguments with the importance of “cue taking and imitation.” This distinction will become important in the next analysis and is worth expanding upon here.

Baumgartner and Leech (2001, 1205) suggest that it is “reasonable to think” that the “size and scope of the issue at hand: issues costing more money, involving a greater departure from the status quo and affecting more people will attract more attention.” The pursuit of size and scope arguments recalls Eckstein’s (1960, 158) view that low levels of attention to particular policy issues owes less to some “antidemocratic collusion among the negotiators” and more to the fact that “few people really care about them.” Without disagreeing with the sentiment, it is quite hard to identify—from the outset—what issues are, and are not, issues that people care about. A key question is how people or institutions *actually* come to “care” about one issue over the other. Seasoned observers of U.K. policy mobilization, for instance, note that trying to pick the “interesting” issues is fraught with danger. Jordan and Richardson (1987, 149) suggest that there is almost an iron law that the politics of detail have the capacity to arouse unexpected controversy. They mean to convey that the level of engagement an issue might generate is often not immediately obvious or predictable. In their perusal of U.K. government consultation exercises, they observe that “[e]ven in less controversial policy areas . . . unexpectedly large numbers of consultees appear” (Jordan and Richardson, 150). Issues of detail spark into action in unpredictable ways, while issues in previously controversial policy territory fail to ignite broad attention. This suggests that the accumulation of attention to a given policy issue is driven by processes endogenous to the prosecution of the *particular* issue itself. The strength of the *same* set of dynamics within each issue context serves to accelerate, or mute, cascades of policy attention.

Indeed, Baumgartner and Leech (2001) do not find the size and scope line of argument convincing. They refer to analysis of lobbying over U.S. Supreme Court nominations (conducted by Caldeira, Hojnacki, and Wright 2000) showing that even where a collection of issues *share* precisely the same size and scope parameters, they can generate a skewed pattern of attention. Proportionate inputs—in terms of size and scope—generate a disproportionate pattern of mobilization. Thus, Baumgartner and Leech suggest the alternative is to see some “conflict-expansion” process at work. Specifically, they suggest that “cue taking and imitation” among actors is important in creating bandwagons: As issues cross a “threshold of visibility,” actors get the message that an issue is either “not going anywhere” or “moving” (Baumgartner and Leech, 1206), but they do not go further than that.

The concept of “cascades” offers a way to unpack the mobilization bandwagon puzzle. This concept is important in the literature on policy attention, of which Baumgartner (along with Bryan D. Jones) has been a leading exponent. This work seeks to map the distribution and intensity of attention various institutions of public policy (e.g., legislatures) give to different policy topics. One of the key puzzles within the literature is the skewed nature of attention: that most policy topics gather little attention but then may rapidly and seemingly inexplicably capture a large degree of

attention. For Jones and Baumgartner, this pattern reflects processes of positive feedback, whereby initial moves in one direction are reinforced and lead to increasingly more attention (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, 140). Communication among actors is critical for the formation of cascades: no communication, then no chance of a cascade. A set of individuals, through mimicry and cue taking, act as though a single entity; the decision by one prompts a similar action from others.

As Jones and Baumgartner (2005, 198) themselves suggest that applying this approach beyond policy attention by law-making institutions to the extent of lobbying activity by organized interests across a set of issues makes eminent sense, given that their engagement rests on issue monitoring. It is a well-established finding that groups engage in high levels of monitoring (see Heinz et al. 1993; Walker 1991), and this monitoring process can logically drive conflict expansion process. Confronted with an information-rich environment, organized interests must decide what signals to pay attention to and which issues to engage in (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, 275). The limits on the volume of information that organized interests—and individuals for that matter—can process, requires the use of shortcuts or “indexes” (formal or informal) from which cues about action can be drawn quickly (Jones 2001, 179).¹⁴ Thus, for Bryan Jones (114), “information cascades” arise because actors rely either on direct evidence from their environment or on the “observations of what others are doing.” He argues that most people take cues from others, with very few actually directly monitoring the world around them. Thus, information cascades form not because all participants become individually and independently convinced of the need to act, but rather the “first in line” become convinced of a need to act, and others follow. He notes, “As a consequence, visible, credible sources have considerable influence in triggering and stopping cascades” (Jones, 114). Actors may not, however, take their cues from the *same* source(s) (Jones and Baumgartner 2005), which means that a multi-agent/mechanism explanation is likely to be most relevant. As discussed, that the Scottish data incorporate groups *plus* individuals and policy amateurs (non-policy-dedicated organizations) provides a valuable opportunity to look for additional processes that drive conflict expansion.

So, the cascade process seems to be a fruitful line of inquiry in explaining skewed patterns of policy mobilization. Transplanting the above perspective from a policy attention context to discussions of mobilization provides organized interest scholars with a basic theory of information-processing that underpins expectations on how bandwagons, *aka* cascades, of mobilization may be generated. However, there is a well-identified need to flesh out this generic account in particular cases (see Walgrave and Vliegthart 2008). Can this particular *genre* of mechanism be identified in the Scottish public policy context? A key part of any explanation is the trigger for a cascade. As explained in the next discussions, several candidates suggest themselves based on perusal of the Scottish data.

Addressing the “Size and Scope” Thesis

The initial (and understandable) reflex for scholars trying to explain skewed patterns of mobilization across policy issues is to look for the “factors,” intrinsic to particular *types* of issues, that render bandwagons predictable. This is what Baumgartner and Leech (2001) call the size and scope thesis. Like Baumgartner and Leech, this article finds problems with resting on size and scope arguments alone. Instead, information cascades and similar mimic-based mechanisms are viewed as key to explaining engagement patterns. However, it is prudent to explore some of the propositions this thesis presents.

Invitation + Time = Responses?

It is tempting to assume that the mobilization levels mapped simply reflect the time and effort taken in inviting responses. It has been noted that invitation lists are often very long, and that getting on a list is incredibly easy to achieve (Cavanagh, Marsh, and Smith 1995). This access is especially easy now that anyone can join Web-based consultation mailing lists. However, analysis of the overlap between invitation and response lists unearths no such relationship. Invitations to respond to consultations do *not* seem to explain actual responses. On a representative sample of 173 consultations examined, 76% of those who *did* respond to a consultation were invited to do so. But that means that the 24% of those responding *were not* invited to do so.¹⁵ The analysis also establishes that the overwhelming majority—just under 70%—of those invited to engage in a given consultation in fact *do not respond*. The size of lists does not seem to be particularly crucial, with several invitation lists of around the 200 mark, for instance, eliciting a range of 37 to 491 respondents. A similar finding exists with respect to the time given to respond. There are guidelines that suggest a uniform period of 12 weeks for responses (post 1999), and indications are that this is almost always adhered to. Such a norm precludes almost all substantial variation on this dimension.

Agenda Setting Attracts More Attention?

One likely argument to be anticipated is that responses mirror the degree to which the issue being discussed is at an early agenda-setting phase where influence may be most effective. Rational leaders of organized interests may be expected to invest resources *only* when and where they see some likely progress or benefit arise. By contrast, a consultation on a draft bill or a minor adjustment to a regulation could be expected to attract less attention. Yet, analysis of the Scottish data suggests that there is no clear relationship between a dimension (like “issue stage”) and mobilization levels. Leaving to one side the problem of consistently coding issue stage, there *are* instances where the equivalent of white papers (essentially

draft bills) are subject to heavy mobilization, and, vice versa, there are cases where very loose agenda-setting papers go out to consultation and pass by relatively unnoticed. For instance, in an unusual case in which there *was* a clear series of four *related* consultations—on Scottish “Land Reform”—the initial issues paper received relatively little attention, but a final consultation on the “Draft Bill” was the issue with the third highest level of response in our entire data set. In sum, there seems little clear evidence of a reliable relationship between the stage of the policy process at which consultation occurs and mobilization levels.

Broad Issue Scope Attracts More Attention?

Perhaps the most intuitively attractive argument is with respect to what is called issue scope. The presumption is that issues that are likely to affect more people—or entail high levels of government expenditure—will attract more attention from policy actors who will likely seek to engage directly. Responses in terms of mobilization will be *proportionate* to what is at stake and for how many interests. This is essentially the inverse statement of Eckstein’s observation that a lack of mobilization reflects simple disinterest. At an interview, civil servants often *do* refer to a “continuum from high- to low-profile issues” but these are *post hoc* reflections.

For instance, the smoking in public places consultation is an issue that does conform to the prediction. As one civil servant noted, it “has a direct impact on everyone’s life.”¹⁶ But the consultation, they observed, was made “intellectually accessible” to people—a “straight yes/no thing” that did not require in-depth judgments on proposals or options. He said, “the one on smoking was very basic. . . .” Here, the aim was to get broad community buy-in to the issue, not to check out problems or pitfalls, or correct faults in proposals. In fact, the civil servant identified a “snowball effect” as important, whereby “individuals responded, and their friends thought they should too.” This is an implicit reference to cascade mechanisms at play. The low threshold of an online form enabled this momentum to build. But, other issues that had similar scope attracted fewer responses. The same civil servant noted his “surprise” when *only* 200 responded to a consultation relating to vetting systems for adults working with children, an issue that he estimated would affect almost one-fifth of the adult Scottish population.¹⁷ It would be wrong to deny that idiosyncratic “administrative processes” applied to individual consultations—such as accessibility and technical complexity of the consultation instrument—are irrelevant to shaping response levels. The vetting consultation had more questions, and the form was less user friendly than the online form in the smoking consultation.¹⁸ However, the point is that where a set of issues *shares* the same broad issue scope overall mobilization patterns still vary.

The above hints at the broader difficulty in defining, *from the outset*, which issues have a more or less scope. Viewed in isolation and with

TABLE 2
Issue Scope and Mobilization Levels

Quintile of Issues (Mobilization Level)	Scope (%)		
	Low	Medium	High
Lowest 1–20	33	44	22
21–40	42	38	21
41–60	27	55	18
61–80	24	52	24
Highest 81–100	14	62	24
No. issues (<i>n</i>)	30	53	23

hindsight, it is perhaps entirely obvious that smoking in public places consultation would attract so much attention. It was an issue of high politics and on the policy agenda of the government. It invested a lot in attracting good responses. But these contributory factors are part of a contingent “conflict expansion process,” not prior to it and not intrinsic to the issue. A crude attempt to code the scope of all issues consulted upon in 2006 demonstrates no clear relationship with mobilization levels. Table 2 shows little variation in the percentage of issues in each scope category (high, medium, low) regardless of the quintile of responses each issue lies in the distribution.¹⁹

As Baumgartner and Leech (2001) make clear with their reporting of data on lobbying across Supreme Court nominations, the *more* convincing way to establish the assertion that scope is not crucial is to identify what are objectively *identical* issues and examine whether similar response rates are evident, that is, to look for a natural experiment. Between 2001 and 2006, no fewer than five consultations were engaged in with reference to the “structure plan” for the Fife region of Scotland.²⁰ Across these consultations, all on *precisely* the same issue, responses varied from 79 to 1,104. Issues that are—from a distance—uniform in every general respect generate substantial differences in mobilization.

Available “Energy”?

It may be that there are “natural” limits on the overall volume of attention and mobilization that could be evident in a given policy area. For instance, 20 responses to a consultation on “poultry welfare” may, relatively speaking, constitute a “crowd” given the low number of actors engaged in farm animal welfare, whereas a similar level of response to an issue like “old-age pensions” would be a quiet corner (although crowds *can* build; see the next discussion). One way to gain purchase on this is to suggest that the available “energy” in a given policy area clearly bounds the overall volume of mobilization that *could* occur (this resonates with Gray

and Lowery's 1995/2000 "energy" concept). At one level, if it is assumed that "interest" in a policy area is bounded; this makes sense. But, of course, "energy" *can* be introduced into an issue area where interests beyond the usual suspects are drawn in. After all, it is just this phenomenon that is captured by "conflict expansion processes" (see Schattschneider 1960). Often, "interests" are discovered as an issue evolves.

In sum, these size and scope factors seem not to shape response rates in any consistent direction, which confirms the general approach outlined earlier to focus on the endogenous processes that hold the *potential for cascades*. There are sufficient cases where *similar* conditions conspired to deliver *varied* levels of mobilization. Apparently, equivalent issues can catalyze diverse levels of attention.

Cascades, Mimicry, and Cue Giving

This article pursues the route of information cascades (processes endogenous to the evolution of an issue) as crucial to explaining levels of organized interest mobilization and engagement. Confidence in this approach does not only arise from the difficulties in deploying the size and scope thesis. In addition, as Figure 3 established, the Scottish distribution has a strong "family resemblance" to a power law distribution. This is salient for the discussion that follows in two ways. First, this type of distribution suggests that the "input" signals about mobilization are acted upon (or processed) disproportionately—some explode while others smolder innocuously. Jones and Baumgartner (2005) suggest several mechanisms that may underpin such skewed distributions (in their case of policy attention). This article explores the role of one of these mechanisms and information cascades. Second, it implies "scale invariance" (see broader discussion in Bak 1997; Gribbin 2004).²¹ This means that patterns of mobilization, regardless of size, are governed by the *same* basic rules. This has important implications for explaining bandwagons: the driving forces of bandwagons—and quiet corners—*must be the same*. All issues start off with the potential to cascade; it is not something intrinsic to the issue, it is something that emerges endogenously as the issue plays out (see Jones 2001, 167).

Here, the focus is on the agents that trigger positive feedback mechanisms or otherwise serve as "indexes" for those organized interests that are *not* directly monitoring policy issues as they move onto the agenda and then start to take shape. As discussed already, compared to the Baumgartner and Leech study, the Scottish data count the mobilization of a broader range of policy participants, including individual citizens and institutions. These differences have a bearing on the types of mechanisms that might be relevant to explaining the positive feedback mechanisms that underpin bandwagons.²² The U.S. literature emphasizes the cue taking triggered by the strategic monitoring of professional lobbyists. This is no doubt important among similar professionalized interest groups in Scotland, but one

might also expect to see additional triggers for cascades given the more diverse participant base. Here, several mechanisms are identified as being particularly salient in providing cues to policy professionals *and* to citizens/policy amateurs.

The Media as “Cue Giver”?

The media is generally considered to be crucial as a shaper of policy attention. In the context of group mobilization, it may be a signal that an issue is “on the move.” The media may be less important where policy actors (like interest groups) have a policy or parliamentary officer, retained third-party lobbyists, or otherwise be “connected” to established policy networks (such as member of preconsultative working group). Conversely, it is likely to constitute an *especially* important cue giver for policy participants that do not monitor policy life *directly*. And, the majority of actors in the Scottish data are infrequent actors—the “occasionally involved.” If one examines the number of times organized interests in the data set engaged in consultations over a 25-year period, it reveals that 57% responded just a single time. They are like the Clydebank Youth Forum or the Annbank Primary School Board that engage in policy *only* as it comes to them—they are not ostensibly “policy-dedicated” actors. It is therefore even more salient that many of the bandwagons in the Scottish data are composed of actors that seldom engage (or even just once) in public policy issues. It is likely that they would mostly avail themselves of cues readily available to policy amateurs. They follow the lead of others as they rarely monitor the policy context *directly*.

But, is it possible to say more about how the media actually works in mobilizing policy amateurs and citizens? The case of the Forestry Provisions in the Scottish Climate Change Bill consultation provides a clear example. The government had consulted on a Climate Change Bill in early 2008, which received over 20,000 responses (see below). However, it engaged in a subsequent consultation to get specific commentary on possible provisions, *within* this broader bill, that related to using forestry resources to meet ambitious targets for cuts in carbon emissions. The Scottish government, through the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), owns and manages (on the taxpayers’ behalf) a large proportion of Scottish forestry land, makes this an important issue for the government. The consultation document outlined several areas, four in all, where it sought feedback and ideas. These included allowing the FCS to engage in joint ventures with forestry companies and to lease out land to be managed by private operators. The issue ended up producing 514 responses, making it a clear crowded bandwagon issue in our data set. But how did this bandwagon emerge, and what role did the media play?

As one can imagine, the issue was immediately salient to the FCS, their workforce (and related unions) and environment campaigners concerned with climate change. And, most of the initial comment focused on the

potential for job losses within the FCS. Trade unions and forestry contract companies were among the key actors engaged in debate. This perhaps reflects the way in which unofficial soundings were pursued. As the (civil-service-produced) written analysis of the consultation exercise explains, the issue was discussed at the Scottish Forestry Forum (an industry networking venue) in mid-December 2008, and with staff at FCS offices throughout Scotland (Scottish Government 2009, 2). However, analysis of the media debate showed it focused almost singularly on the issue of leasing land to private forestry and the potential “access” issues for recreational users. These were facets that would have broad public salience, but it was only one dimension to the issue of granting private leases on forestry land, which itself was one among the four elements of the broader consultation. The media attention had the effect of promoting a “branching” of mobilization in the direction of citizen and recreational groups that represented the interests of current and potential forestry land users. This is reflected in the government’s analysis of written responses. The report observed that “loss of social and environmental benefits” was a core concern over the proposal to lease FCS land to private companies. The report noted concerns about impacts on “walking; mountain-biking; tourism; orienteering; car-rallying; archery; dog-sledging” among others (Scottish Government 2009, 6). A large number—29 in all could be readily identified—of rather obscure recreational groupings emerged as “interested” parties.

It is noteworthy that “recreational user” interests were not part of any forestry industry forum or even on the list of consultees. Civil servants did not see their “interest” from the outset (mostly because objectively it will have no impact). For instance, the consultation response from the major rallying organization in the United Kingdom complained in its response to the question “May I ask the question why neither myself or any of my colleagues in the Rally Industry or the Scottish Rally Championship have not been contacted or consulted about the plans in the Climate Change Bill?” the answer was that no one—not even the civil servant in charge—saw them as a stakeholder and that media “misinformation” led them to (falsely) detect a “stake.” But media attention drew enough of these users in to catalyze a cascade of attention along a specific concern with forest access and use.

A close inspection of *all* written responses made to this consultation revealed some of the cues that actors claimed prompted their response. For most organized interests—companies, unions, community councils, local authorities, NDPBs—the responses referred to their clear financial, professional or statutory stake in the issues at hand, and they were invited to respond as such. But for many recreational user-groups and individuals, the impetus was the realization that private forestry *may* impact on their access to forestry lands. And in passing, several individuals *specifically mentioned* articles in newspapers as triggers for their concern. For instance, one individual referred to coverage in *The Galloway News*, and another to the *Southern Reporter* (both regional newspapers). Indeed, scru-

TABLE 3
Count of Media Coverage by Mobilization Levels

Quintile of Issues (Mobilization Level)	No. of Articles
Lowest 1–20	87
21–40	114
41–60	73
61–80	226
81–100	275
Total	775

tiny of the timing of responses to the consultation from those concerned with forestry “access” issues seems to coincide with the burst of attention in the national and local print media.²³

To be clear, the argument here *is not* that media attention can explain mobilization levels entirely, but it does contribute to cascades. To establish (rather crudely) the point, analysis of media coverage of 75 issues (15 each from each quintile of the mobilization distribution) consulted on in 2006 was conducted. As Table 3 demonstrates, there is somewhat more overall media coverage of those issues that attract more mobilization. However, across all categories, there are issues that attract very little or no media coverage. It also revealed that some issues do not gain any media coverage *but do seem to tap a rather large response among a thin slice of the interest community*. The consultation “A Policy on Architecture for Scotland” gathered 47 responses, but *all* were directly concerned with building codes, standards, architecture, or construction. But it had almost no discernible media coverage in Scotland.²⁴ This suggests a mix of different mechanisms contribute to cascades forming.

One ought to be leery of an overreliance on the media as the mechanism for drawing in the attention of political actors. The problem is that many, and in this particular study, most policy issues will not attract any significant media coverage.²⁵ If the aspiration is to develop accounts of policy mobilization that account for the full “distribution,” then other mechanisms are surely needed. But, if not the media, then what?

Keystone Groups

The role of umbrella or coordinating groups is crucial in transmitting signals about mobilization to related groups in their network. This may be a federation relating to members, an informal coalition or simply a “lead” group for a sector. The term “keystone groups” seems to capture the role well.²⁶ In the Scottish context, groups such as the Scottish Council for Voluntary Sector Organisations (SCVO), the Scottish Trade Unions Congress or the Scottish Environment Link, seek to organize and speak for

broad sectors of the group universe. Professional bodies, such as the Scottish Law Society or Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, may not be umbrella bodies, but they seek to speak for a set of individual professionals—many of whom own and run their own businesses and could easily respond to policy issues directly. It is self-evident that such groups play a role in giving cues to member bodies about issues that arise for which they might reasonably be expected to have a stake. Some groups have an explicit function as keystones in this chain of political attention and mobilization.

But, keystone groups are not simply a force for multiplication of engagement. They may act *both* as “sponges” or “multipliers” of attention. In that sense, activity by keystone groups can increase or neutralize overall engagement level. Cascades can, when heavily shaped by keystone groups, generate attention within a rather narrow slither of the interest community. The implication in the Baumgartner and Leech work—and in the work of Schattschneider—is that cascades are driven by a *broadening* of the conflict, competition and controversy. It is about actors reinterpreting an issue as “theirs” but this need not be the case. It may be a hallmark of a media-driven cascade, yet there are alternative scenarios. The case of the consultation “A policy on Architecture for Scotland” discussed earlier shows that “within-sector” cascades can occur without any media involvement. This issue is a controversy for architects, but it does not attract a bandwagon *beyond this policy niche*. Much more work is required before one is in a position to systematically identify “types” of cascades, but it seems clear from the existing vantage point that the types of agents acting as positive feedback mechanisms have an impact on the breadth and diversity of engagement.

In summary, peak groups can be used (1) to submit a single response for the sector (act as an “aggregator” or “absorb” policy responses from smaller bodies) or, conversely, (2) to stimulate a multiple of specialist groups to engage (act as a “amplifier” of a cascade of attention).

Mass-Member Campaign Groups

In the data, many of the issues with rather large mobilization levels seem to also have uncharacteristically large numbers of responses from individual citizens. Could it be that mobilizing the general public is one way some—very broad—bandwagons emerge?

The recent Climate Change Bill consultation shows how the type of actor involved has a part to play in cascade phenomenon. It was launched in 2008 (running for four months). Its 21,046 responses make it an issue with one of the largest overall response levels ever in Scotland. So what explains the cascade? The consultation analysis generated by the Scottish Government mentions that of the total, 20,728 were “generated by campaigns” with only “318 noncampaign responses.” So, the campaign groups were instrumental in causing a cascade of engagement. The consultation

analysis report, generated by the civil service, provides further details. They identified eight campaigns in all. The smallest, by a union (UNISON), elicited 10 responses, but the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) (both international and Scotland) contributed 19,821 in total. It is evident that this approach caused some consternation within the government, with the analysis report providing a specific annex to detail how these campaign responses were analyzed, emphasizing in part that they were taken seriously (but treated as individual responses by concerned citizens) but that the head count of responses did not sway outcomes (preparing the ground for dissuading such large-scale campaigns in the future). It is also salient that the analysis identified what they called “campaign plus” responses, whereby individuals *amended* “standard” letters to reflect a more individualized response (they estimated that 420 of the total did this). The noncampaign responses were still dominated by individuals (45% in all), with the public sector (mostly local authorities) the next most significant respondents at 16%. So, campaign groups are not the sole answer to why this cascade developed; any answer is likely to be multidimensional. Yet, they are a key variant of bandwagon generation.

Government Actors

Civil servant activism may also play a part in cascades of attention. It is most often presumed that the civil servant would seek to keep the invitations of participation closed in order to shield policy discussions from “outsiders.” Broad attention could be a sign of failure to keep an issue “in-house.” This is certainly one logic, but it rubs up against others. As mentioned, invitation lists are almost universally broad, and there is little incentive to overly narrow the scope of consultees; in most cases the rule is to err on the side of inclusion (Jordan and Richardson 1987). The imperative is to ensure that the “key” actors are engaged and that no obvious set of interests is excluded (as they will no doubt emerge at some later point). As one civil servant explained, “The sign of a good one [consultation] is that you get an improved product and take people with you.”²⁷ Part and parcel of this is ensuring that no key players are left behind. Of course, important insights can—and do (according to civil servants themselves)—arise from unusual quarters. So, casting a broad net means that, as one civil servant puts it, “You can flesh out all potential problems, and perhaps introduce third or fourth options you hadn’t thought of!”²⁸

Anecdotally, one hears evidence of civil servants actively promoting responses from sections of the community where they are concerned that the “signal” to engage has not been picked up. In respect to civil servant activism, it is the *promotion of responding* that is salient. Peak groups can be used to expand responses from particular constituencies, especially where civil servants fear the dominance of powerful lobbies. One interviewee cited the example of the Health Care Bill, which included a controversial proposal for directly elected (rather than appointed) health boards.²⁹ Civil

servants funded—modestly—Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) efforts to get “user groups” to respond to “balance out” health professions and local health boards. Again, the consultation on the Review of Scottish Charity Law (in 2004) included a workshop “jointly hosted” by the Scottish government and SCVO. The purpose was to promote the engagement of the *members* of the SCVO in the consultation process—it was a civil-servant-induced attempt to generate a cascade of attention *within a specific segment of the broader population of organized interests*.

Summary: Bandwagon Dynamics

The “distributional approach” adopted in examining patterns of interest mobilization does not attempt “point predictions” of specific cases (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, 282). Rather, it points to underlying processes that are at work in promoting cascades of attention and mobilization. It is possible, after the fact, to point to some of the particularly crucial mechanisms that underpin the emergence of cascades. These might serve well as hypotheses for future (even comparative) work on cascades of organized interest attention. Table 4 summarizes the various agents that were important, from the Scottish data, as cue givers.

Consistent with the policy attention literature, it is argued that all issues have the *potential* to become crowded bandwagons. And, the actions of the agents identified here will be crucial in shaping levels of engagement (small and large).

Conclusions and Future Directions

The pattern of mobilization across policy issues has started to be mapped for the U.S. legislative arena, with the work of Baumgartner and Leech

TABLE 4
Summary of Agents Shaping Cascades

Agents	Explanation
Mass media	Attracts the “amateur” actors who rely on media reports to gauge relevance. Mobilizes individual members of the general public.
Keystone groups	Division of representative labor can <i>both</i> lead to keystone groups absorbing or multiplying the activity of “affiliates.” Typically mobilizes <i>within</i> constituency niche.
Civil service	Civil servants may seek to promote mobilization where they anticipate that a set of actors would be interested but risk missing the signal to engage.
Campaign groups	Campaign groups are able to mobilize individual citizens who are activists and sometimes the broader public. They can deploy them as necessary, which also implies they can decide <i>not</i> to deploy them (or at least dissuade such mobilization).

(2001) pivotal.³⁰ This article offers a contribution to the debate over political mobilization that has hitherto been dominated by U.S. contributions. It has explored the pattern of mobilization by policy participants across as full as possible a range of Scottish public policy issues, over time. Two broad questions were posed at the outset. First, what is the distribution of mobilization across issue niches? Do we find a mix of bandwagons and quiet corners? Second, to what processes and mechanism can such a pattern be ascribed?

With respect to the first set of questions, the Scottish results broadly uphold the Baumgartner and Leech (2001) findings from the U.S. Congress. The extent of mobilization across policy issues varies considerably. Most issues attract few actors, while the majority of attention is lavished on relatively few issues. This holds within smaller time periods and within issue areas. There are “tartan” bandwagons too. This is not an unremarkable finding, particularly given that the data are drawn from a different political system (U.K. vs. U.S.) at a different level (subnational versus national) and within a different institutional venue (bureaucratic versus legislative). This suggests our data—as with that of Baumgartner and Leech—capture a fundamental dynamic of organized interest engagement in political systems.

As is to be expected, initial answers to questions about “how many”—as important as they are in their own right—beget further questions around “why”? In respect of the emergence of bandwagon issues, the article asked what processes and mechanisms may be at work. As with Baumgartner and Leech (2001), an *exclusive* focus on size and scope arguments about engagement levels was found to be unconvincing. The analysis suggests that there are obvious variations among response levels within sets of issues that share key size or scope dimensions. There are good reasons to view some issues as intrinsically more “important” or “far reaching” in their implications and thus assuming they deliver more engagement. However, the “iron law” that details surprise is evident (Jordan and Richardson 1987). It is also tempting to accept that some issue areas have a natural “ceiling” on response levels (only so much energy can be absorbed by issues as they arise), but this ignores the potential for significant conflict expansion into new “communities of interest”; the boundaries can break open. Thus, this article pursues an explanatory approach that emphasizes the development of information-based cascades.

Jones and Baumgartner (2005, 140) say that “a major cause of cascades is monitoring and mimicking.” This suggests a focus explanation on how participants become enrolled in policy life—from where and how they take their cues. The lobbying literature rightly focuses upon the extensive monitoring of professionalized Washington groups that underpin cascade behavior. No doubt, this is evident among Scottish groups. But, the data presented here are derived from a somewhat more open facet of policy engagement and capture the mobilization of a broader cross-section of policy participants. Thus, it was possible to *add* further agents that are

important in the process of cascade development—in different ways they act as relays for information about policy issues. The media, keystone groups, citizen campaign groups, and civil servants are all identified as such agents. Different data sets derived from different policy venues will undoubtedly identify more. For now, this is intended as a contribution to efforts at drawing interest group scholarship—and the long-standing tradition of group mapping studies—into the growing literature on policy attention.

Following Jones and Baumgartner (2005) and Jones (2001), this article argues that cascades in some issues emerge because of the inability of *most* actors to *directly* monitor and thus “proportionally” act upon signals from the policy environment.

Future work may want to consider the differences among the “cue taking” of types of actors. For instance, Baumgartner and Leech (2001) note that resource limitations are also a factor in mobilization decisions. “With limited resources, inevitably this means that other issues will have to be ignored” (1204). This seems most relevant for *dedicated* political actors. Their “identities” as general or niche actors surely inform issue selection, along with juggling resource limitations. And it seems reasonable to expect their cue-taking behavior to be somewhat different from amateurs. They may, for example, take their cue directly and endogenously from a “self-assessment” of interest. In the case of government actors (e.g., local government or agencies), they take their cue from an endogenous statement of responsibility, jurisdiction or statutory remit. However, most actors in the Scottish data are “sporadic interventionists” (Dowse and Hughes 1977)—organized policy amateurs that engage seldom in policy life. In fact, as it so happens, recent work by Kay Schlozman (2010) shows that the intermittent engagement of organized policy amateurs in policy life is *also* a Washington phenomenon. If these amateur interest organizations constitute the bulk of bandwagon members, this suggests scholars might be wise to pay *more* attention to how the *nondedicated* political actors become enrolled in public policy activity. It is more likely that they are taking their cue to participate second hand, from the media or campaign groups for instance. Volatility in “civil society” attention to public policy most likely reflects the infrequent engagement of the organized policy amateur.

Acknowledgments

This article is based on research funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, “The Mobilisation of Organised Interests in Policy Making: Access, Activity and Bias in the ‘Group System’ ” (RES-000-22-1932). These data could not have been collected without the incredible dedication of Graeme Baxter (The Robert Gordon University, Scotland). I acknowledge the help and assistance of Herschel Thomas III, who has been collaborating on other outputs from the same data set. An earlier version of this article was delivered at the 2008 annual meeting of the

American Political Science Association, August 28–31, 2008. Thanks to the participants and the discussant for their comments. I am grateful to the journal reviewers for their constructive criticism.

Notes

1. See the divergent characterization of the policy dynamic in U.S. agricultural policy offered by Browne (1990) and Heinz et al. (1993) as an example of the impact that data sources can have on conclusions.
2. Criticism has been made in the past over using consultation *invitation lists* as data—mostly on the basis that access to lists is very open (see Cavanagh, Marsh, and Smith 1995). In these data, I only map actors who *actually responded* to policy consultations.
3. Given that Scotland does not have responsibility for all policy matters (so-called reserved matters) our data *do not* cover policy issues in areas like defense, national security, international trade, or foreign affairs.
4. This data set was compiled largely using paper-based records held in the Scottish Government Library and its document storage facility in Edinburgh, but with the addition of some more recent documentation only available electronically on the *Publications* pages of the Scottish Government Web site.
5. The Scottish Government's internal *Consultation Good Practice Guidance* (2008) recommends that departments, on completing a consultation exercise, should deposit copies of responses with the Scottish Government Library and also post them on the Scottish Government Web site. However, this guidance has not always been followed, and therefore not all consultation documentation has made its way into the public domain.
6. And, like others, I see comparison as both possible and desirable (see Baumgartner and Leech 1998).
7. Individuals account for 49.9% ($n = 92,467$) of all responses. However, in every instance it is not possible to be sure that they are "representing" themselves. They may be business persons or somehow affiliated with other organizations.
8. This mode of responding is the exception rather than the rule. Most consultations allow for written responses—accepting either responses on forms or as e-mails or letters.
9. The term used for local government in the United Kingdom.
10. In 1999, Scotland was granted its own parliament with powers to legislate on a limited number of so-called "devolved" issues. The process in the United Kingdom, including powers granted to legislatures in Wales and Northern Ireland is referred to as devolution. Prior to 1999, the U.K. Parliament passed legislation relating to Scotland, but there was a Scotland Office that functioned as a Scottish civil service. The Scottish Office launched and managed the consultation processes we mapped from 1982 until 1999.
11. Activity is a count of submissions made including multiple submissions from the same actor and individual citizens. Actor counts do not include multiple submissions from the same organizational actor and also preclude individual citizens (as they were sometimes anonymized in the reporting of consultations and were impossible to track in our coding regime).
12. In such a scenario, institutional factors in the Scottish policy system may have been a better explanation of mobilization patterns.
13. The distribution in Figures 1 and 2 are "fat-tailed" and are sometimes linked to so-called "power laws" (see, e.g., Bak 1997).

14. As Bryan Jones argues, attention is selective and cannot be allocated proportionally—attention to one issue requires less attention to other issues (Jones 2003, 407). According to Jones, “disproportionate information-processing” provides an explanatory basis for attention that leads to these skewed distributions, where outcomes are not the direct corollary of input streams (Jones, 408). This is a crucial point for our purposes. We could try to explain mobilization by taking one single case and assuming that everyone acted rationally to all information and factored in costs of responding. A model may provide some answers. But, when viewed in aggregate, such explanations cannot hold, because these actors are confronted with myriad choices over allocation of attention, and they cannot process all relevant information. Across a hundred odd policy issues consulted on per year (never mind the many others that did not make it onto the consultation agenda), actors simply cannot apply this fully informed and calculated mobilization decision strategy—skewed attention is inevitable, and thus the “size and significance” factors cannot explain this skewed pattern.
15. This analysis was undertaken by comparing lists of the *organizations* that were invited and those *organizations* that responded.
16. Interview with Scottish Civil Servant, May 2009, Edinburgh, undertaken by author.
17. One reviewer suggested I conduct an experiment asking civil servants to predict responses based on their calculation as to scope. I have not conducted such work but interviews with several civil servants revealed surprise at outcomes (in both directions), and this reinforces a longstanding assumption in the U.K. literature (Richardson and Jordan 1979).
18. The perusal of hundreds of consultation documents shows that the overwhelming majority facilitate responses by way of letter (and more recently e-mail) in a more or less unstructured form. There are very few “tick-a-box” forms.
19. The coding for issue scope was made on an assessment of the breadth of impact of the issue and the cost to government or stakeholders of measures being discussed (a judgment based on scrutiny of consultation documents and or analysis reports). This is by no means a perfect approach, not least because some consultations are framed quite openly, and it is only upon subsequent framing and (reframing) that the scope of an issue becomes clear. A statistical test of the relationship between scope and response levels showed no statistically significant relationship (Tau C: value -0.12, significance 0.16).
20. A structure plan is drawn up from time to time by Scottish local government and submitted for approval to central government. It sets out broad plans for a given area in relation to allowable development.
21. This has a basis in the complexity literature that highlights that explanations for such phenomenon are “scale invariant.” The case of earthquakes is a good illustrative example. If one wishes to understand the reasons of earthquakes, then there is no point looking only at the infrequent—but attention-grabbing—large ones. Any explanations of earthquakes should be able to account for both the large and the small earthquakes even if the proportion of large ones is small compared to the total number of earthquakes over time. The explanation for earthquakes are “scale invariant” if they explain *both* small and large ones.
22. Thanks to the detailed comments of one *Governance* reviewer for helping me rethink and expand this point.
23. One reviewer suggested that logging responses for each consultation could reveal the underlying pattern of the cascade. To construct such a data set is vastly time consuming and for many reasons not possible for much of my

data (letters not dated, etc.). I did try this on this single forestry issue where I could find dated responses. It *did* show a pattern of slow engagement and then rapid last minute attention. However, interviews with those engaged in such consultations suggested that it was common for a late rush of responses. Many big players wait until the last minute to see who else is engaged and what the nature of the debate is (much as Baumgartner and Leech suggest). Thus, the actual date on a form or letter is probably not indicative of the actual “attention point.” The content of the responses are more revealing, as they often indicate why they *became* interested in an issue (and whether they were initially invited) and through what mechanism (“I saw article in paper,” colleagues told me, etc.).

24. A search was undertaken of the *Glasgow Herald* and *The Scotsman*, the two Scottish broadsheet newspapers. A range of keywords that could reasonably be expected to yield coverage of the consultation issues in our sample across multiple years preceding and following the actual consultation period were utilized. A count of net number of articles per issue was made.
25. The average count in our sample was 10 items, but only 19 issues exceeded this figure. In addition, 10 issues had no media coverage whatsoever.
26. I subsequently learned that Bosso (2005) uses the term “keystone players.” Gray and Lowery (1995/2000, 49) refer to “keystone predators” who, in an ecological sense, are key to sustaining species—if they die out, it has a profound impact on related species in the food chain.
27. Interview with U.K. civil servant, March 2009, telephone, undertaken by author.
28. Interview with Scottish civil servant, May 2009, Edinburgh, undertaken by author.
29. Interview with Scottish interest group, March 2009, Edinburgh, undertaken by author.
30. See also work by Boehmke et al. (2009).

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