Evolutionary Paths and Confining Cages: The Genealogy of American State Constitutions

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Evolutionary Paths and Confining Cages: The Genealogy of American State Constitutions*

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**Purpose:**

1) Identify how provisions and concepts in state constitutions are related to one another and evolved over time

2) Understand how the provisions in these documents impact the work of state officials in the policymaking process

Once a sentence appears in a state’s constitution it is likely to remain even as the document ages.

While the length of state constitutions continued to grow, larger proportions of each document on average became devoted to policy content.

Constitutions adopted during the same era, exhibit a good it of similarity with respect to content.

End Goals:

1) Provide a “genealogical” mapping of state constitutional evolution that will allow the testing of path dependency and other theories of institutional development.

2) Create a series of scores that can be used to assess the extent to which a state government’s capacity to act in a specific policy area (e.g., Health, Education, Taxation, Gaming, etc.) is constrained by policy directives embedded in the state constitution.

*Collaborators: Keith E. Hamm and Maria Aroca (Rice Univ.) and Ronald D. Hedlund (Northeastern Univ.)