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THE POLITICS OF CAPACITY: NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Sophia Keskey

Mentor: Andrew Reeves

I explore the conditions under which states decide to comply with federal intervention involving funding. I focus on the assessment component of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), legislation requiring states to create tests and report student achievement in order to receive federal education funds. I argue that both political indicators—governor partisanship, the election calendar, and teachers' union strength—and compliance costs were central to NCLB compliance decisions. State wealth, Black and Hispanic/Latino populations, student achievement on exams, and state education funding from the federal government affect the cost of compliance, and therefore played a substantial role in decisions to comply. To test the relative influence of these political factors and measures of state capacity, I create an original dataset to test my hypotheses. Using logistic regressions, I find that capacity is significantly related to compliance, although student proficiency did not play a role. Gubernatorial partisanship, teachers' union strength, and the presence of an election year also demonstrated significant influence over the decision to comply. My findings suggest that compliance with perceived federal mandates is a function of both capacity and political consideration.