

PROSPECTS FOR REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

Lessons from the Miami Abolition Vote

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Circumstances surrounding the 1997 city dissolution vote in Miami were ideal for establishing a metropolitan government, based on arguments from the traditional urban politics literature. Yet it did not happen. How did the issue make it onto the public agenda but fail to be adopted? The author argues that changes in metropolitan governance need to be understood as the outcomes of an agenda-setting process and not solely based on the distribution of winners and losers, as suggested by the public-choice/metropolitan reform literature. The Miami case clearly illustrates the importance of focusing events, a skilled policy entrepreneur, and timing of events as interest fades and the window of opportunity closes. It also illustrates the power of a policy image to trigger emotional attachments that can mobilize inattentive publics.

On September 4, 1997, a referendum to disincorporate the city of Miami was held. Dissolution would have had the immediate effect of consolidating the city with the unincorporated territory governed by Metro-Dade County. The county government already had primary service delivery responsibilities for more than half a million people. Consolidation with the city would have added another 350,000 and created a very extensive regional government, similar to that advocated in several contemporary works in urban politics (Orfield 1997; Pierce 1993; Rusk 1993). Based on the traditional urban politics literature, conditions were very favorable for this version of a city-county consolidation to occur, yet it failed. In the past, consolidation efforts were successful in cities where a public service or corruption scandal had occurred, suburban residents could not block the vote, minority political power would not suffer, and local elite groups such as business, union, or media leaders did not oppose the plan (Harrigan 1993). All of these factors held in Miami, making it the most likely case for creation of a new metropolitan government in recent time. Examining reasons for its failure illustrates

the limitations of traditional urban politics theories on metropolitan government and suggests that ideas from the agenda-setting literature may provide a better understanding of the politics involved in urban governance issues.

A substantial literature exists in urban politics on the relative advantages of consolidated versus fragmented government arrangements, most originating from the early debate between public choice and metropolitan reform advocates. This body of work identifies the likely political and economic impacts of the two systems on different groups of potential voters. On the basis of this projected distribution of winners and losers, the chances of metropolitan reform in a specific area can be evaluated. Orfield (1997) used this approach in his study of metropolitan cooperation in the Minneapolis area.

However, this view suffers from two limitations. First, it implicitly assumes both that the complete set of issues relevant to the outcome have been identified and that all voters accurately know the objective effect the government structures would have on them.¹ These assumptions ignore the dynamics of the agenda-setting and policy debate process. Riker (1990) has argued that politicians will search for new dimensions in a policy debate to break up the coalition that supports the status quo (heresthetics) and that they will engage in efforts to redefine the existing issues to change voter preferences (rhetoric). Neither the set of issues nor the voters' view of their effects is necessarily static. The second limitation of the traditional urban politics literature is that it emphasizes policy impacts at the expense of discussing the policy process. Policy impacts can contribute to the prediction of the likely resolution of an issue, but they do not address why the issue is considered in the first place.

To illustrate the above points, I compare the projected outcome of the Miami dissolution vote under the metropolitan government arguments and under an agenda-setting model. The major tenets of the two models and their role in the Miami case are laid out in Table 1.

PREDICTED OUTCOME FROM URBAN POLITICS LITERATURE

The traditional public choice versus metropolitan reform debate on the advantages of fragmented and consolidated government systems focused on six major impacts of the two systems (Bish 1971; Bish and Ostrom 1973; Lyons and Lowery 1989; Ostrom 1972, 1983; Ostrom, Tiebout, and Warren 1961; Parks and Oakerson 1989). For the first three issues, neither system has an *a priori* advantage. Arguments for both suggest improved efficiency in

TABLE 1: Summary of the Urban Politics and Agenda-Setting Models

<i>Model Feature</i>	<i>Impact in Miami</i>
Characteristics of traditional public-choice/metropolitan reform models	
Efficiency in government services	Minor issue in Miami
Political and bureaucratic accountability	Not an issue in Miami
Political participation	Not an issue in Miami
Citizen satisfaction with the tax/service package	Favored city abolition; support from wealthy communities and Hispanics
Political power of minority groups	Favored city abolition; support from African-Americans
Equity	Mixed; support from wealthy communities; opposition from poorer African-American communities
Characteristics of agenda-setting models	
Convergence of problem, policy, and political streams	Worked to get abolition on agenda
Timing of the policy window	Worked against abolition
Costs and benefits to policy entrepreneur	Worked against abolition
Expansion of conflict to activate latent groups	Worked against abolition; supporters never expanded support; opposition activated latent groups
Policy image, especially emotive images	Worked against abolition; opposition used emotive images

government services, greater political and bureaucratic accountability, and higher political participation.

First, metropolitan reform advocates argued that government efficiency could be improved under a consolidated system by incorporating service externalities, capturing economies of scale in service provision, and eliminating duplication in bureaucracy. Public-choice theorists countered that a single local government would exhibit monopoly power and the same inefficiencies in pricing and service quality seen in private-sector firms lacking competitive pressures.

Second, under a consolidated government, political and bureaucratic accountability was expected to be higher because government overlap would be eliminated and a single executive could be held responsible for all services. In a fragmented system, service responsibilities would be assigned across multiple local governments—cities, county, special districts, school districts, and so on. Residents would face high information costs in knowing which elected officials and government agencies to hold accountable for

service delivery. Public-choice theorists countered that politicians in smaller electoral districts with fewer constituents would be more responsive to them. Government agencies would be more aware of local service needs and less subject to competitive pressures across multiple neighborhoods to respond to service problems. Residents also would be more likely to contact both elected officials and bureaucrats in smaller jurisdictions because they are not part of a remote "gargantua" government.

Third, political participation would also increase under a consolidated government with fewer local elections. Information costs would be less, and the value of casting an informed vote for an official with a greater scope of power would be higher. Public-choice theorists countered that in a single, large electorate, voter perceptions that their actions can influence election outcomes would decrease, discouraging participation.

In the three remaining arguments that are part of this metropolitics debate, one government system has an expected advantage over the other. First, citizen satisfaction with the tax/service package provided by local government is expected to be higher in a fragmented government system. With multiple jurisdictions, residents are more able to sort themselves on the basis of preference for local services, as Tiebout (1956) suggested. Variance in preferences will be less, so the maximum distance a voter's preferred outcome can be from the median voter outcome also will be less, and potential dissatisfaction with outcomes diminishes. Second, the smaller governments in a fragmented system can increase political power of minority groups. Consolidated government dilutes the geographic concentration of votes that provides political power to some groups in smaller jurisdictions; fragmented government protects these bases of minority influence. Finally, equity within metropolitan areas might be better served by a consolidated government. Cities could provide higher levels of redistributive services with less chance that their above-average taxpayers would simply move to neighboring jurisdictions. Development of exclusionary tax enclaves would be more difficult, preserving more of the metropolitan tax base for the expanded central city.

Of these six issues, four were explicitly addressed in the debate over Miami's dissolution. Efficiency arguments were raised but played a small role in the debate. Because the Metro-Dade county government was already providing those services in which economies of scale and externalities would be issues, the only efficiency argument made was for lower government costs through eliminating duplication of bureaucracy. County government also had a reputation for greater professionalism and better management, so increased efficiency was predicted even if the number of positions eliminated by the consolidation was small.

Citizen satisfaction with tax and service outcomes was a major argument in the debate. The discussion focused on the potential for lower taxes rather than change in services and the prospect of eventually creating smaller governments that could more closely reflect residents' service preferences. A flier that accompanied the referendum petition for abolition focused on both these issues:

An immediate 50 percent reduction in municipal property taxes is certainly appealing. We pay almost twice as much as they do in Coral Gables. . . . Our city government is too big to be an effective community government like Coral Gables, Bal Harbour, Miami Springs. . . . Ending the city of Miami means better services, lower taxes, and better community government. (Garcia 1996a, B1)

Miami's property tax rate of \$9.60 per \$1,000 assessed value was nearly double that of neighboring Coral Gables (\$5.30) and more than four times the tax rate in unincorporated Dade County (\$2.20). Tax revenues were about a third higher in Miami (\$312 per capita) than in Dade County (\$194).

However, this argument was predominately addressed to residents of the dissatisfied wealthier communities. Several areas (downtown and shoreline residential neighborhoods such as Coconut Grove) were identified as "donor" communities—providing more tax dollars than they received back in services. The tax/service benefits of abolition were expected to occur in two stages. First, even as a part of the unincorporated Dade County, taxes would be lower but service quality would not be worse. Second, once the Miami area had merged with the county, it legally would be easier for neighborhoods to incorporate, thereby establishing smaller community governments. These smaller governments could better reflect service preferences of residents than either Dade County or Miami, provide higher quality services than either, and do it at a lower per capita tax cost than the city of Miami (Puente 1996). Closing of city pools and police stations, shutdown of the recycling program, reduced trash pickup, and proposals for higher garbage fees and new fire rescue fees—all in response to Miami's fiscal crisis—also suggested that the tax/service mix in the city would only get worse.

Equity issues were also a major part of the debate. Abolition proponents pointed out that Miami had the fourth highest poverty rate of U.S. cities and a higher unemployment rate than the nation, state, and adjacent Broward County. Merger with Metro-Dade would mean a larger tax base and therefore the ability to provide better services probably at a lower tax rate. This reflected Peterson's (1981) argument in *City Limits* that as fiscal capacity increases, more redistributive services can be provided in a city. But it was also clear that the proponents of the merger were looking down the road to a

point where they could break away from the county and form their own city government, taking their large tax base with them. If Metro-Dade's fiscal capacity was seriously drained at that point, equity might not be achieved and actually could be worsened. Improving equity tended to be in conflict with the citizen satisfaction arguments that the proponents of city abolition were making.

The last major argument used from the public-choice literature was the impact of the change on political power. Hispanic influence would decrease, but Hispanics would still remain a majority of the voters and retain control of significant elected offices. Hispanics were 70% of the voting population in Miami and about 50% in the county as a whole, with a record of higher turnout than other racial/ethnic groups in the area. Both the mayor of Miami (Carollo) and of Metro-Dade (Penelas) were Cuban-Americans. Miami's city council was composed of four Hispanics and one white non-Hispanic. The county commission was more mixed, but Hispanics still held a majority. African-American representation was higher on the county commission, 4 of 13 seats compared with zero seats on the city council. Non-Hispanic white representation also increased marginally at the county level. If city dissolution occurred, Hispanic political representation would drop slightly, but they were in no danger of losing their dominant position (Puente 1996).

PREDICTED SUPPORT FOR ABOLITION

On the basis of the arguments made during the campaign, abolition support should have been very strong in two areas of the city—Coconut Grove and other shoreline communities. These were the donor communities that would benefit most from reduced taxes and had the greatest interest in the possibility of eventually forming their own governments.

Support among Hispanics also should have been at least moderately high, based solely on these arguments. Reduction in taxes is a popular position within the Cuban-American community. Strong support from this group led the Metro-Dade County commission to repeal a local two-cent gasoline tax in 1996, despite strong opposition by county administrators and a total benefit of only \$12 per year for each resident. Miriam Alonso, a successful candidate for a county commission seat in 1996, had formed an anti-tax group several years earlier that helped defeat a multimillion-dollar bond issue for jails and police. Core support both for the bond campaign and her election was from older Cuban-Americans. Finally, a *Miami Herald* survey in February 1997 found the highest level of dissatisfaction with tax rates in the predominantly

Hispanic neighborhoods of Little Havana and Shenandoah (58% not satisfied vs. 48% on average) (Finefrock 1997). The potential decrease in taxes from the city dissolution would have been an issue with appeal to the Hispanic community, whereas their loss of political power would be minimal or nonexistent. Based on the traditional issues in the consolidation literature, this group should have been supporters of the change.

Support from the African-American community was less certain based on these traditional issues, but possible. They had greater political power at the county level than in the city. Lower taxes also was a potential issue for them. In the *Miami Herald* survey cited earlier, the next most dissatisfied neighborhoods were African-American communities at 47% (Liberty City, Edison, and Overtown) and 48% (Wynwood and Allapattah). However, the potential long-term effects on equity if wealthier communities did break away from Metro-Dade would be most damaging to their neighborhoods. Overall, African-American support for the consolidation based on these issues likely would have been a draw.

Most of the traditional opponents to consolidation were neutralized by the specific provisions of the Miami case. City employees did not need to fear for their jobs. Under the Metro-Dade charter, employees of any city that dissolved itself would be absorbed onto the county's payroll, in all likelihood doing the same job. Suburban voters who traditionally oppose city mergers could not vote on the issue. Because the referendum was on city abolition, rather than a city-county consolidation, county residents were deemed to have no standing on the issue and precluded from voting (Cauvin 1997). Support for the dissolution was voiced by the *Miami Herald* political editor, Tom Fiedler, in several columns (1996a, 1996b, 1997), and the editor, Jim Hampton, in his personal column (1996).

Based on the distribution of winners and losers according to the traditional urban politics view of consolidation, the abolition vote should have won, with high support from wealthier communities, moderate to high support from Hispanic communities, and possibly some support from African-American communities. However, as seen in Table 2, all three of these areas ended up voting against the proposal, most by large margins. Arguments based solely on projected winners and losers from the policy change failed to explain voters' actions. These projections assumed that the only relevant issues were the six described earlier, predominantly economic and political power concerns, and that there was no ambiguity in how the issues were framed or what the distribution of costs and benefits from the consolidation would be.

TABLE 2: Vote Outcome by Neighborhoods (in percentages)

	<i>Retain City</i>	<i>Abolish City</i>
Wealthy communities		
Brickell-Coconut Grove	55	45
Shoreline-Biscayne	61	39
Hispanic communities		
Miami-West	92	8
North Little Havana	92	8
South Little Havana	89	11
African-American communities		
Allapattah-Culmer	89	11
Edison-Wynwood	86	14
Model City	89	11
Total	85	15

SOURCE: Branch and Keating (1997).

PREDICTED OUTCOME FROM AN AGENDA-SETTING PERSPECTIVE

Events in the Miami dissolution case fit more closely predictions that can be derived from the agenda-setting literature, specifically from the process described by John Kingdon (1984), with insights from some newer work in the field. Kingdon argued that issues come to prominence on the government agenda when three streams come together. The problem gains attention in the media, often due to a focusing event; policy analysts attempt to attach their preferred policy as a solution to this particular problem; and politicians support the solution, typically because they used the issue to win their last election. When the three streams converge, a window of opportunity for policy change opens. Windows stay open for only a short time. Eventually, attention shifts to other issues, some action may be taken that makes it look as if the problem is being addressed, or delay prevents any action, and the window of opportunity closes regardless of the outcome.

Kingdon's (1984) model of agenda setting focuses more on how issues make it onto the government agenda than it does on the resolution of the issues once there. More recent work on agenda setting has expanded on the reasons for the success or failure of a proposed policy change. Both Baumgartner and Jones (1993) and Cobb and Ross (1997) discussed the need to expand the scope of conflict and generate support beyond the initial

proponents of the policy to disrupt the existing policy equilibrium. Activation of otherwise latent publics is achieved through manipulation of the policy image, including the use of emotional appeals. Cobb and Ross specifically focused on the use of cultural and symbolic factors and the effect of attaching a political issue to a group's particular worldview, framing new ideas as a threat to that latent group. Schneider, Teske, and Minstrom (1995) expanded on the role of policy entrepreneurs, who are the primary actors in both framing an issue and moving it through the policy process. Their work emphasized that entrepreneurs only participate when the benefits for them are greater than the costs associated with promoting the policy. Without those conditions, an entrepreneur will not remain involved in the process, decreasing the likelihood of any change. In the Miami case, both failure to expand support for city abolition beyond the initial backers and failure to control the policy image contributed to the proposal's demise.

KINGDON'S MODEL APPLIED TO MIAMI

Applying Kingdon's (1984) basic framework to the Miami case, there were two focusing events—public corruption and an ensuing fiscal crisis—that drew attention to the state of city government and opened the problem stream. A local political activist played the role of policy entrepreneur, attaching one of his preferred policy options to the defined problem. The political stream is less clear-cut in this case because city politicians had no reason to support a policy that would eliminate their jobs. However, one group did have an incentive to endorse the proposal. After 30 years of representation on the city council, the single African-American member lost his seat, leaving no black elected officials in city government. African-American leaders began campaigning for some structural change in government that would increase representation. All three streams identified by Kingdon came together at this time, opening a window of opportunity for policy change. Also, as Kingdon described, this policy window eventually closed. The crises that pushed the issue into the problem stream seemed to be resolved, the policy entrepreneur had moved on to other issues, and the African-American politicians had found a different solution to their problem.

FOCUSING EVENTS

In early September 1996, the finance director for the city of Miami (Manahor Surana), the city manager (Cesar Odio), and one city councilman (Miller Dawkins) resigned or were removed from office due to allegations of

taking kickbacks and fixing city contracts. Two weeks later, acting city manager Stierheim announced that a deficit of at least \$38.9 million, possibly \$60 million, existed. Both Moody's and Standard and Poor's dropped the city bond rating to the lowest investment level by early November. On December 4, 1996, Governor Chiles declared the city in a state of financial emergency and announced plans to appoint a state oversight board (Lantigua and Adams 1996; Silva and Garcia 1996).

In the next two months, the board rejected two city plans to address the following year's deficit (on December 17, 1996, and January 15, 1997) before accepting a third plan under pressure from the board chairman, MacKay, who intended to run for governor in next election (Tanfani and Garcia 1996; Garcia and Tanfani 1997). The board also imposed a requirement that a five-year recovery plan be in place by April. The Miami city commission continued to reject any recovery plan that included either an increased garbage fee or a new fire rescue assessment (Garcia 1997a). The oversight board refused to extend the deadline and sent back the plan it received from the city commissioners in April (Chardy 1997).

Finally, on May 5, 1997, the city commissioners approved a five-year plan that the fiscal board members had earlier commented on favorably. A week later, the board officially accepted the plan, and members stated it was now time for them to step back. MacKay also announced he would step down (Branch 1997c). Bond ratings from both agencies improved slightly (Garcia 1997b). The fiscal crisis appeared to be over.

In Kingdon's (1984) model, the corruption scandal and ensuing fiscal crisis functioned as focusing events that created the problem stream. However, dissolution of the city as the solution to these problems was not an obvious policy option; rather, it was one brought to the public through the actions of a local policy entrepreneur.

POLICY ENTREPRENEUR

In early November 1996, the Citizens for Lower Taxes began its petition drive for a referendum on the abolition question—one month after the corruption scandal broke, two weeks after Stierheim initially announced the budget deficit, and at the same time that the city bond rating was plummeting (Garcia 1996a). The principal force behind this grassroots group was lawyer Gene Stearns, a prominent advocate for the neighborhood incorporation movement in Dade County. Stearns had previously led the battles for several wealthy enclaves (Key Biscayne, Aventura, and Pinecrest) to break away from the Metro-Dade county government. As in Kingdon's (1984) description of the policy entrepreneur, Stearns had his favorite policy proposal

already prepared—neighborhood government—and looked for situations in which he could attach it to an issue in the problem stream, whether it was the best solution or not. He argued that dissolution of Miami was a necessary step to create more responsive, smaller community governments. Initially, he did not even focus on the first stage of the merger with the larger Dade County but simply emphasized the better tax rates and responsiveness of small cities in the metropolitan area.

POLITICAL STREAM

Kingdon (1984) primarily identified the political stream as support from politicians because the new issue had been critical in their recent election campaigns. Often, it had been the new policy dimension that broke apart the previous governing coalition (Riker 1990). The new administration then would support the proposal from the policy entrepreneur to be able to claim credit for addressing the problem. In the Miami case, the political stream was slightly different. No Miami politicians campaigned for or supported dissolution of the city. However, one subset of city politicians did have an incentive to support change in the local government structure.

For 15 years, Miller Dawkins had been the sole African-American representative on the five-member city council. When he was forced to resign for his alleged involvement in Operation Greenpalm, an African-American was also appointed to replace him, Richard Dunn. In the upcoming special council election, the mayor and all city council members (three of the four were Cuban-Americans) urged that Dunn be elected. However, despite these endorsements, Humberto Hernandez challenged Dunn and won with overwhelming support from Hispanic voters (Branch 1996). Electoral representation for African-Americans, approximately 27% of registered voters, no longer appeared viable under the existing form of government in Miami. Abolition and the resulting governance by Metro-Dade County would have had the immediate effect of increasing black representation. Plus, the county commission was elected by districts, whereas the Miami city commission was elected at large, so black representation at the county level was likely to continue. There was a major issue in the political stream at this time, and dissolution of the city was one alternative that African-American politicians could have supported to resolve it.

CLOSING OF THE WINDOW

The petition to put the dissolution question to a referendum vote was circulated in November 1996 and approved by the election commission the

following January. Gene Stearns interpreted the county charter provision on referendums to require that the election be held 120 days after certification of the petition. This would have meant a May 1997 election. At that time, the fiscal crisis was still an issue, although things were starting to look better. However, the county attorney interpreted this section of Metro-Dade's charter to mean that there was a 120-day deadline to draft the referendum language and another 120 days to hold the election (Branch 1997a).

This allowed a delay of up 240 days between the petition calling for the referendum and the actual vote. In those ensuing eight months, circumstances changed, closing the policy window. New political and bureaucratic leaders who had not been tainted by the corruption scandal were in office. Ed Marquez, a respected professional in local government, was appointed city manager in Miami. At the same time, problems at Metro-Dade were coming to light. One of the county commissioners was implicated in the Operation Greenpalm corruption case. Separate mismanagement scandals concerning operations at the port and street paving contracts were in the news. The Miami city corruption scandal had passed, and county-level government no longer looked as pristine (Viglucci and Branch 1997a).

As noted earlier, the fiscal crisis also seemed to be under control well before September 1997. The turning point in coverage of the issue was mid-May, the time Stearns originally expected the referendum to be held. At that point, the fiscal oversight board finally approved the city's five-year recovery plan, and following this, both the tone and number of media stories changed dramatically.² Between the announcement of the state oversight board and final approval of the five-year plan (December 4 to May 5), 68% of the stories had been negative, 19% positive, and 13% neutral. Following acceptance of the recovery plan to the referendum vote (May 5 to September 3), 72% were positive, 7% negative, and 21% neutral, with the number of stories also dropping off significantly. Both the corruption and fiscal crisis issues from the problem stream appeared to be resolved months before the referendum on the proposed solution to them.

The single set of politicians who might have supported the dissolution, African-Americans, had also moved ahead with a different policy solution to their concerns. PULSE (People United to Lead the Struggle for Equality) initiated a federal Voting Rights Act lawsuit challenging Miami's at-large election system, advocating a seven-member commission elected by districts as a solution. The Miami city council agreed to support district elections but with a five-member council (Branch 1997b). Although black representation would have been higher with the seven-member city council (most likely 2 of 7 seats or 28%) or with the existing Metro-Dade county commission (4 of 13 seats or 30%), support of the five-member district plan provided more

immediate and certain gains in political power than continuing the legal challenge or campaigning for city dissolution. So by the time of the referendum, African-American politicians had achieved most of their goals without having to support the city abolition vote. The policy window had closed before the referendum was held.

Although Kingdon's (1984) model explains the events in Miami quite well, two other factors contributed to the demise of the city abolition proposal. Proponents of the change were never able to expand the scope of conflict and draw new participants into their coalition. They also failed to create a policy image with appeal to other potential supporters, whereas the opponents of city abolition were very successful at framing an image to activate voters and redefine the policy debate to their benefit.

FAILURE TO EXPAND SUPPORT TO OTHER INTEREST GROUPS

The initial backers of the disincorporation referendum never won support for the proposal from other groups. Despite the potential appeal of tax relief (targeted to conservative Hispanic voters) and fairer political representation (targeted to African-American voters), city dissolution remained an issue associated with the self-interest of wealthy residents only. The equity argument that the larger tax base in Metro-Dade would support better services was seen as a cover for the donor communities to later break away from the county, draining that tax base in the process (Viglucci and Branch 1997a).

One possible explanation for this failure to expand the policy arena and control the policy image was the decreased involvement of the policy entrepreneurs as the costs associated with the campaign increased (Schneider, Teske, and Minstrom 1995). The Miami City Commission put pressure on abolition supporters with a proposal that all city board members sign a pledge to support continued existence of the city or face being replaced. Sergio Rok, a downtown real estate owner and principal financial backer of the abolition movement, backed out one week later. Stearns blamed this resignation on a campaign of intimidation by city hall and the Spanish-language radio stations, although Rok claimed he was not swayed by city threats to kick him off the influential Downtown Development Agency board. The Rok family corporations had contributed nearly a quarter of the funds that the disincorporation movement had collected. At the point of Rok's withdrawal, the group had only \$4,800 remaining, leaving it without resources to campaign for the passage of the referendum (Viglucci and Branch 1997b). Also, the policy entrepreneurs in the abolition campaign were private citizens, not

government employees or politicians. Their jobs were not tied to this policy issue, and eventually they shifted attention to their own businesses. Stearns, for example, was a trial lawyer involved in several high-profile cases at the time. As the initial leaders of the disincorporation movement were pulled away by demands of their jobs, no one else stepped in to lead the campaign (Wisckol 1997).

IMAGE OF THE ISSUE

A second reason for failure to expand the conflict and mobilize new participants was neglect of the role played by policy image. In the Miami case, not only did the proponents of dissolution fail to structure the image to reflect a broader set of objectives than their personal gain from eventual secession, but the opponents of dissolution also structured a very potent image of their own.

The battle was fought primarily for the image that the action would have among the Cuban-American voters. One possibility was that of a more efficient government achieved by merging with the county—still controlled by Hispanic politicians and with lower taxes. The alternative image was of a city built by Cuban-Americans, a “second Havana,” now lost. Preservation of Miami as a symbol of the Cuban experience in the United States was a rallying point for the opposition.

A Miami Herald/TV-6 survey, reported on February 2, 1997, showed that the proponents of consolidation were losing on the straightforward economic (tax and service) arguments. As shown in Table 3, respondents were about evenly split in their beliefs that taxes would be lower if the city were abolished, with a plurality disagreeing (36%). They also did not believe that services would be better under the county government than the city government (37% felt city services would be better, 28% disagreed). Proponents were doing slightly better with the argument that Miami was too poor to support the city government (43% agreed) and that Dade County government was more representative (40% agreed). Nonetheless, even among the respondents who accepted all four of the arguments in favor of abolition, a majority supported maintaining the city. The reasons given were that the city was a symbol of Hispanic achievement and had unique cultural and historical significance (Viglucchi, Chardy, and Keating 1997).

Table 3 also shows the high level of support for these more emotive policy images. More than a majority of respondents agreed that Miami’s cultural and historical importance would be lost if the city were abolished (54%), with majority support among both African-Americans (54%) and Cuban-Americans (66%). On Miami’s importance to the Hispanic community

TABLE 3: *Miami Herald* Survey on Arguments Concerning Miami's Abolition (in percentages)

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>
Our taxes would be lower if the city government were abolished	33	36	33
Government services are better under Miami's city government than they would be under Dade County	37	28	36
Taxpayers in the city of Miami are too poor to support a city government	43	34	22
Miami's cultural and historical importance will be lost if the city is abolished	54	34	12
Non-Hispanic white	38		
Black	54		
Cuban	66		
Other Hispanic	43		
Miami's importance to the Hispanic community in Florida and throughout the world will be lost if the city is abolished	46	39	15
Non-Hispanic white	21		
Black	40		
Cuban	60		
Other Hispanic	41		

SOURCE: Viglucci, Chardy, and Keating (1997).

specifically, support was also high across Cuban-Americans, other Hispanic groups, and African-Americans. Issues of ethnic and cultural identification ended up being more significant in determining public attitudes toward city abolition than traditional economic or political representation issues.

The relative importance of emotional appeals such as these was noted by Baumgartner and Jones (1993). They pointed out that a policy image is always a mix of empirical information and emotive appeals and that "those wishing to mobilize broad groups attempt to focus attention on highly emotional symbols or easily understood themes, while those with an interest in restricting the debate explain the same issues in other, more arcane and complicated, ways" (p. 30). In Miami, the opponents of city abolition framed the issue in highly emotional symbols, but the proponents focused on the more arcane financial issues of tax burden and service levels. Not surprisingly, mobilization ended up higher among the opponents.

Cobb and Ross (1997) also emphasized the emotional aspects of policy image. They argued that mobilization can often only be understood in terms of group attachment and perceived threat to that identity. A focus on cultural and symbolic factors can draw attention away from questions about the

distribution of resources and can effectively block policy change. People outside the newly mobilized group often underestimate the salience of the policy image because it focuses on an area where relatively little seems to be at stake. The target population, however, sees the issue as a direct attack on their group and their identity. For Cuban-Americans in Miami, city dissolution was painted as a way to eliminate the city they had built, an attack on the ability of their politicians, and resentment of the growing power of Cuban-Americans. Spanish-language radio stations in particular had argued that the abolition effort was anti-Cuban from the beginning (Garcia 1996b; Viglucci and Branch 1997a). Again, once policy image and its effect on mobilization of different publics are considered, city abolition was an unlikely outcome in Miami.

CONCLUSIONS

The agenda-setting literature, particularly Kingdon's (1984) model, effectively explains the outcomes of the Miami disincorporation effort—both why it made it onto the agenda and why it failed to be adopted. The corruption and fiscal crisis acted as focusing events, a policy entrepreneur linked his preferred solution to the existing problem, and at least some local politicians and interest groups were interested in that solution. However, delay of the referendum led to many of these problems being solved by other methods, the costs of the campaign led the policy entrepreneurs to withdraw before mobilizing other supporters, and the policy image of city abolition was framed by emotional appeal to ethnic identity, which effectively mobilized the opponents.

On the other hand, the traditional urban politics literature predicted that abolition would have passed with support from wealthy neighborhoods (economic gains), Hispanics (economic gains with no loss of political power), and possibly African-Americans (political gains). The agenda-setting perspective provides a much stronger explanation for the outcome than the traditional public-choice/metropolitan reform urban literature.

Given the resurgent interest in regional governance and metropolitics, understanding the limitations of the traditional urban politics approach and the insights from the agenda-setting perspective may lead to a better theoretical framework for study of these issues. The two most significant insights from the Miami case were the critical role of a policy entrepreneur and the importance of creating powerful supporting images in a policy debate. One individual with some resources can get an issue on the agenda, especially when the venue is a referendum, but without continued involvement on his or

her part or expansion of leadership to other groups, the policy effort is likely to fade. One crucial task of policy entrepreneurs is creating the policy image used to mobilize latent publics and build a coalition of support beyond initial proponents of the change. In Miami, the battle over framing the debate was won by the opposition through use of emotional and cultural appeals, especially those based on ethnic identity. Objective questions of potential economic benefits and distribution of political power were lost in the focus on how this proposal would threaten the Cuban-American identity and recognition of their achievements in the city.

Analysis of urban governance issues may require consideration of a new set of issues as well as more attention to how those issues are framed than was common in past work. The critical question may not be the economic impact or loss of political power emphasized in traditional metropolitics but loss of a symbolic, cultural image. Although it appears to the general public that little is at stake, resistance to change may be high among those who perceive a threat to a highly salient image in their worldview. Ethnic identification may be one mechanism of establishing these emotive, highly salient policy images in a variety of cities. If a change in metropolitan governance is portrayed as an attack on an ethnic enclave—undercutting ethnic politicians by removing services from their purvey, for example—then its prospects of success may be limited, regardless of the objective impact on political power, distribution of public resources, or economic consequences.

NOTES

1. Early public-choice studies were based on the assumption of perfect information—that voters had all the information necessary to make a decision on a policy or candidate and they had complete ability to understand and use the information. There were no information or transaction costs. This assumption has been relaxed in later rational choice work, but the public-choice metropolitan government literature is predominantly from the earlier era and has not been updated to incorporate these changes.

2. Following Baumgartner and Jones's (1993) approach, I coded the tone of media coverage in the *Miami Herald* newspaper from September 26, 1996, when Stierheim first officially announced the deficit, until September 3, 1997, when the abolition referendum was held. Positive stories were those that reported improvements in credit ratings, oversight board approval of city actions, city programs being restored, and progress on reducing the deficit. Any actions that would result in a balanced budget, even increased fees, were coded as positive stories. Negative stories were those that reported drops in credit ratings, board rejection or criticism of city plans, programs being cut, and the size of the deficit and the mismanagement responsible for it. Over the entire period, approximately 55% of the stories were negative in tone, 30% were positive, and 15% were neutral.

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