

Examples of Research Needs – Yale State and Local Policy Review

Professor Nestor Davidson, Fordham Law School

Founder and Faculty Director, Urban Law Center

One area of focus that would help state and local governments is empirical research on links between particular features of governmental structure and policy outcomes. To take local governments as an example, cities frequently change their macro structure with respect to questions such as strong mayor, weak mayor, council-manager form of governance, as well as more nuanced questions such as mayoral control of education policy, the independence of police departments, budget process, and the like. States, similarly, tinker with their governmental structures with some frequency, albeit with more constitutional constraints. As states and local governments contemplate these changes, there is a relative paucity of contemporary research that links specific structural changes and outcomes across various metrics, whether cross-cutting (such as economic growth or socioeconomic and racial equity) or policy specific.

A second area of need would shift from the empirics of internal governmental structure to a renewed focus on the policy-outcome consequences of the allocation of state and local authority, a set of topics that used to garner more attention. For example, over the past decade, state preemption of local authority has become significantly more explicit, sweeping, and even punitive. The evidence base on the policy consequences of this reallocation of authority—again, both cross-cutting and in terms of specific areas of policy (in labor/employment, public health, antidiscrimination, environmental protection, emerging technology, among other active areas of

state preemption)—is growing but this development is still relatively understudied in a rigorous and technically sophisticated way.