Review Article: The Diffusion of Policy Diffusion Research in Political Science

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Over the past fifty years, top political science journals have published hundreds of articles about policy diffusion. This article reports on network analyses of how the ideas and approaches in these articles have spread both within and across the subfields of American politics, comparative politics and international relations. Then, based on a survey of the literature, the who, what, when, where, how and why of policy diffusion are addressed in order to identify and assess some of the main contributions and omissions in current scholarship. It is argued that studies of diffusion would benefit from paying more attention to developments in other subfields and from taking a more systematic approach to tackling the questions of when and how policy diffusion takes place.

Between 1958 and 2008 political science journals published nearly 800 articles about the politics of public policies spreading from one government to another, a phenomenon commonly referred to as 'policy diffusion'. More than half of these articles have been published in the last decade of that period, indicating a dramatic surge in interest in diffusion. We believe that it is time to pause and take stock of where we have come from, where we currently are, and where we could and should be going in future scholarship. Although such reviews and assessments have been made from time to time within the subfields of political science and policy studies,[1] our goal here is to look not only within,

[1] See, for example, Colin J. Bennett, 'What is Policy Convergence and What Causes It?' *British Journal of Political Science*, 21 (1991), 215–33; Frances Stokes Berry and William D. Berry, 'State Lottery Adoptions as Policy Innovations: An Event History Analysis', *American Political Science Review*, 84 (1990), 395–415; Andrew Karch, 'Emerging Issues and Future Directions in State Policy Diffusion Research', *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, 7 (2007), 54–80; Covandoga Meseguer and Fabrizio Gilardi, 'What is New in the Study of Policy Diffusion?' *Review of International Political Economy*, 16 (2009), 527–43; Robert L. Savage, 'Diffusion Research Traditions and the Spread of Policy Innovations in a Federal System', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 15 (1985), 1–27; Beth A. Simmons, Frank Dobbin and Geoffrey Garrett, 'Introduction: The International Diffusion of Liberalism', *International Organization*, 60 (2006), 781–810; Rebecca Kolins Givan, Sarah A. Soule and Kenneth M. Roberts, eds, *The Diffusion of Social Movements: Actors, Mechanisms, and Political Effects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Diane Stone, 'Learning Lessons and Transferring Policy across Time, Space and Disciplines', *Politics*, 19 (1999), 51–9.

but also *across* subfields in order to provide a more complete overview of the literature and to integrate the insights of multiple fields.[2]

Examples of the usefulness of integration are plentiful. In the case of international relations (IR), trends beginning in the late twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first include the rise of globalization, where power and information are increasingly decentralized and where barriers to the exchange of ideas, information and resources are in decline. Simultaneously, however, we see nations turning increasingly to centralized, regional bodies (e.g., the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to handle interstate affairs).[3] These trends point towards the increasing relevance of questions related to the potential benefits of devolution versus centralization, longstanding issues confronted by policy diffusion scholars studying American federalism. As scholars turn towards these questions that are central to international relations,[4] they will benefit from communication with earlier diffusion scholarship in the domestic realm.

Conversely, American politics scholars have set aside key points about the diffusion of norms across governments, despite early suggestions by Walker that socialization processes could be of great import in the diffusion of policies.[5] Rather than beginning such analyses anew, American politics scholars would benefit from confronting and building upon the extensive work on norm diffusion within the IR literature.[6]

Such opportunities for mutual engagement and scholarly progress abound. Comparative politics scholars have yet to tackle the concepts of policy reinvention and evolution, which

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[2] In so doing, we naturally limit ourselves to setting aside major parts of diffusion scholarship, such as those arising in economics or sociology (see, for example, David Strang and Sarah A. Soule, 'Diffusion in Organizations and Social Movements: From Hybrid Corn to Poison Pills', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1989), 265–90). However, at various points below, we briefly note connections across fields that we see as providing fertile ground for future scholarship. Due to the breadth of methodologies used to study policy diffusion, we also do not comment fully on the benefits and costs of each approach, instead merely noting some of the exciting new additions to the field in recent years, from event history analysis (Berry and Berry, 'State Lottery Adoptions as Policy Innovations: An Event History Analysis') to dyadic explorations (Craig Volden, 'States as Policy Laboratories: Emulating Success in the Children's Health Insurance Program', Journal of Political Science, 50 (2006), 294–312; Fabrizio Gilardi and Katharina Füglister, 'Empirical Modeling of Policy Diffusion in Federal States: The Dyadic Approach', *Swiss Political Science Review*, 14 (2008): 413–50) to interdependence studies (Robert J. Franzese Jr and Jude C. Hays, 'Strategic Interaction Among EU Governments in Active Labor Market Policy-Making', *European Union Politics*, 7 (2006), 167–89) to network approaches (Xun Cao, 'Networks as Channels of Policy Diffusion: Explaining Worldwide Changes in Capital Taxation, 1998–2006', *International Studies Quarterly*, 54 (2010), 823–54). While these (largely quantitative) methods provide useful counterpoints to beneficial qualitative assessments of policy transfers, norms and the like, our goal is to encourage integration on substantive grounds rather than to adjudicate methodological disputes.

[3] Helen V. Milner and Edward D. Mansfield, 'The New Wave of Regionalism', *International Organization*, 53 (1999), 589–627.

[4] See, for example, David Vogel, *Trading Up: Consumer and Environmental Regulation in a Global Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Aseem Prakash and Matthew Potoski, 'Racing to the Bottom? Trade, Environmental Governance, and ISO 14001', *American Journal of Political Science*, 50 (2006), 350–64; Aseem Prakash and Kelly L. Kollman, 'Biopolitics in the EU and the U.S.: A Race to the Bottom or Convergence to the Top?' *International Studies Quarterly*, 47 (2003), 617–41; Ka Zeng and Josh Eastin, 'International Economic Integration and Environmental Protection: The Case of China', *International Studies Quarterly*, 51 (2007), 971–95.

[5] Jack L. Walker, 'The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States', *American Political Science Review*, 63 (1969), 880–99.

[6] See, for instance, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization*, 52 (1998), 887–917.

have received attention within the American politics literature.[7] Comparative politics and IR scholars separately study the spread of exactly the same policies, despite different emphases on internal politics or international actors; and qualitative and quantitative advances in policy diffusion scholarship are relevant across fields of study and approaches, even if scholars have not fully recognized these mutually beneficial advancements.

More broadly, as political science moves toward its thousandth published article on policy diffusion, the piecemeal and disconnected nature of the research to date has left us intellectually poorer than we should be. Although many illustrative examples have emerged about the politics surrounding the spread of policies, we are nowhere near having a systematic, general understanding of how diffusion works. We believe that such a goal is more easily attained when scholars are aware of one another's path-breaking work and when they share a common language in which to discuss their insights. In an attempt to move the scholarly community closer to such an ideal, in this article we review the literature, lay out the key parameters of diffusion research, and suggest paths to move this broad research agenda forwards.

More specifically, in the next section we begin by documenting the hundreds of studies published on policy diffusion. We report the results of a network analysis designed to identify the central arguments in each field and also to identify which areas have fewer strong connections to other fields of study. We use this quantitative exercise to provide a brief assessment of the diffusion literatures in American politics, international relations and comparative politics. With that background in hand, we detail what is known and what is ripe for further study regarding the who, what, when, where, how and why of policy diffusion research.

DIVIDED WE WRITE

In order to characterize the literature on diffusion, and to see the ways in which theoretical ideas and empirical strategies have developed over time and across subfields, we first identify the set of studies that focus on diffusion. To do so, we begin by adopting a very simple and general definition of policy diffusion, one that is consistent with the conceptions of a number of influential authors.[8] Specifically, diffusion occurs when one government's decision about whether to adopt a policy innovation is influenced by the choices made by other governments. Put another way, policy adoptions can be *interdependent*, where a country or state observes what other countries or states have done and conditions its own policy decisions on these observations.[9]

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[7] See, for example, Henry R. Glick and Scott P. Hays, 'Innovation and Reinvention in State Policymaking: Theory and the Evolution of Living Will Laws', *Journal of Politics*, 53 (1991), 835–50.

[8] See, for example, Walker, 'The Diffusion of Innovations Among the American States'; David Collier and Richard E. Messick, 'Prerequisites Versus Diffusion: Testing Alternative Explanations of Social Security Adoption', *American Political Science Review*, 69 (1975), 1299–315; Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett, 'Introduction: The International Diffusion of Liberalism'.

[9] Although diffusion is often thought to occur over time, with one government's decisions influencing the *subsequent* decisions of others, we adopt a broader definition that allows policy choices to be interdependent, simultaneous or anticipatory, all of which result in one government's policy choices being dependent on others (see, for example, Brady Baybeck, William D. Berry and David A. Siegel, 'A Strategic Theory of Policy Diffusion via Intergovernmental Competition', *Journal of Politics*, 73 (2011), 232–47; Franzese and Hays, 'Strategic Interaction among EU Governments in Active Labor Market Policy-Making').

Based on this concept, we began by building a database of all political science articles on diffusion published between 1958 and 2008.[10] Our first step in this process was to determine which journals to include. We proceeded by using Giles and Garand's list of the top fifty political science journals (which they compiled based on ISI rankings),[11] supplemented by the journals *American Politics Research* (formerly *American Politics Quarterly*), *Governance,* and *Publius,* which each contain numerous important diffusion articles but are not among Giles and Garand's top fifty.[12] Although a handful of political science studies of policy diffusion have been published as books,[13] the vast majority have been published as journal articles; hence, a focus on articles is defensible and appropriate.[14]

Once we identified the relevant set of journals, we conducted a search of all articles published in these journals, using JSTOR, other internet databases, and hard copies of journals not available in an electronic format. Because not all articles about diffusion use the term 'diffusion', we broadened our search to include the following terms: *diffusion, convergence, policy transfer, race to the bottom, harmonization* and *contagion*, all of which are commonly used in the literature on policy diffusion as we define it above. If any of these terms were included in the title or abstract of an article in these fifty-three journals, we then read the abstract to make sure that the article was about diffusion. This process produced 781 articles.

Finally, we coded each article as belonging to one of four categories: American politics (AP), comparative politics (CP), international relations (IR) and other.[15] Two of us separately categorized each article, based on the journal in which it was published, the author's main field of study and the title of the article. For example, papers published in *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* were coded as belonging to the American politics subfield; those published in *Comparative Political Studies* were coded as comparative; and

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[10] The list of publications we included in our analysis, along with relevant citation information, can be found at http://sitemaker.umich.edu/cshipan/datasets. Because we collected the data throughout 2008 and 2009, the numerous works published between 2008 and the present are thus not included in the quantitative analysis. We do, however, discuss many of these studies in our qualitative assessment of these growing literatures.

[11] Michael W. Giles and James C. Garand, 'Ranking Political Science Journals: Reputational and Citational Approaches', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 40 (2007), 741–52.

[12] Surely additional important works are excluded using this method. Yet, given the scope of the included works under examination, individual omissions would not substantially affect the overall patterns uncovered here.

[13] See, for instance, Graeme Boushey, *Policy Diffusion Dynamics in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Andrew Karch, *Democratic Laboratories: Policy Diffusion Among the American States* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Kurt G. Weyland, *Bounded Rationality and Policy Diffusion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[14] Once again, these books are used in the qualitative assessments making up the bulk of the analysis reported here. Meseguer and Gilardi focus their review on two of the more prominent books on international policy diffusion ('What is New in the Study of Policy Diffusion?').

[15] Many political scientists classify the main fields of study in alternative ways, such as with the inclusion of the 'public policy' field. Because the study of policy diffusion is naturally linked to public policy, we do not add this as a separate field, especially given the difficulties that would be involved in drawing distinctions between public policy and comparative politics or between public policy and American politics for many of these articles. Along similar lines, we do not include 'political methodology' as a separate field for present purposes. Studies are categorized as 'other' if they could not be identified as belonging primarily to AP, CP or IR. Most of these articles are mainly theoretical, and while they have implications for studies in these subfields, they do not fall cleanly into one of our categories (see, for example, Robert Axelrod, 'The Dissemination of Culture: A Model with Local Convergence and Global Polarization', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41 (1997), 203–26).
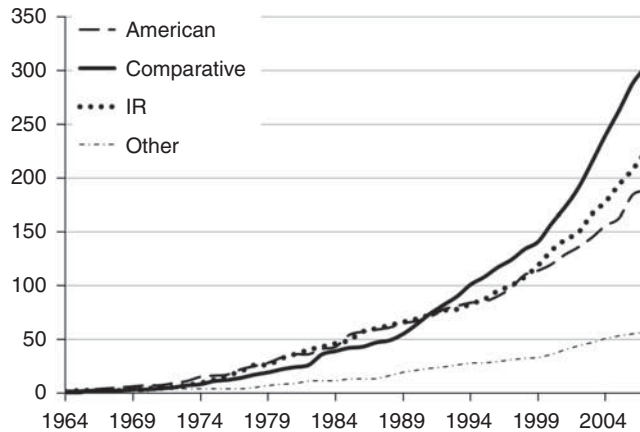
Fig. 1. *Cumulative number of policy diffusion articles, by subfield*

those published in *International Studies Quarterly* were coded as IR. For the primary subfield of the authors, we used data from Bernard Grofman's website,[16] supplemented by looking at authors' webpages.

In cases where the two coders agreed on how to categorize the paper, that categorization was final; in all other cases, the third author read the abstract and coded the paper based on that reading.[17] The initial coders disagreed on 150 of our 781 cases (19 per cent). Not surprisingly, the vast majority of cases in which the initial coders disagreed (130 of 150) represented cases at the intersection of comparative politics and international relations. For studies at this intersection, we coded them as IR if they emphasized the role of international institutions, if they ascribed a primary role to coercion, or if the abstract demonstrated that the article relied heavily on theoretical ideas more prevalent in IR than comparative politics (for example, constructivism). Otherwise we placed them in the comparative politics category.

Figure 1 demonstrates how the literature on diffusion has developed overall and in each subfield. Several aspects of the overall pattern are worth noting. First, the comparative politics subfield has produced more studies of policy diffusion than the other two subfields, with 307 articles. IR has produced 226 studies, while there have been 189 studies of diffusion in American politics and 59 studies that we categorized as 'other'. Secondly, each of the subfields shows a roughly similar pattern – a pattern that looks very much like the beginning of the standard S-curve produced by policy adoptions – with only a handful of articles published in the 1960s, an average of two articles per subfield per year throughout the 1970s, a steady increase throughout the 1980s and 1990s (when an average of four and six articles appeared per field per year) and a dramatic increase in the 2000s, when the rate of publication across all subfields more than doubled, as compared to the 1990s.

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[16] Bernie Grofman, Natalie Masuoka and Scott Feld, 'Replication Data for: The Political Science 400: A 20-Year Update', 2007, hdl:1902.1/10398 UNF:3:2tWRl6UVmdq2DwGz4Rvwnw== Bernie Grofman [Distributor].

[17] The third author also read the abstracts for approximately 20 per cent of the papers for which the first two authors agreed about the category. In every case, this confirmed the coding by the first two authors.

Thirdly, although all subfields showed a steady increase starting in the 1970s and then a steeper rise later on, the subfield of comparative politics produces a pattern that differs from those found in AP and IR. Studies in CP lagged slightly behind AP and IR in the 1970s and 1980s in quantity, but then showed a much steeper rise in the 1990s and continued to increase more rapidly in the 2000s.

To discern lessons emerging from this collective body of scholarship, it is essential to uncover the key ideas and to determine whether scholars in each field are adequately recognizing and joining the scholarly debates in other subfields. Many approaches may be relevant: a detailed reading of this literature forms the basis for the discussion later on, and an examination of the frequency of citations within and across fields will likewise be informative. But before turning to these alternatives, we first draw on network analyses in order to determine which papers have been more influential and, more generally, to shed light on the degree to which each subfield is integrated with the others. To begin, we discuss the relationship between American and comparative politics, before turning to similar discussions of the relationships between AP and IR and between IR and CP.

The network analyses cluster together articles based on the degree to which they cite one another and how those related articles are in turn cited by others. These lead to clusters of articles that are central and well integrated into the network, some articles that serve as bridges across different parts of the network, and additional exterior articles that form clusters but are somewhat less central to the largest scholarly debates being conducted.[18] In addition to classifying each article by political science subfield, we identified the primary search term used to detect the article, as well as the subject area concerning what is diffusing in the article.[19] These latter coding schemes help to interpret the figures generated from the network analyses we conduct.[20]

The development of diffusion scholarship in American and comparative politics has taken very different paths. Figure 2 highlights a striking difference: in American politics, diffusion scholarship is tightly clustered, with most authors drawing on a core set of diffusion studies.[21] In contrast, comparative politics does not exhibit a discernible central

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[18] In order to derive the networks, we utilize the Fructerman–Reingold energizing algorithm, which is the most commonly used algorithm for networks with more than 500 nodes. An energizing algorithm provides information about the clusters of nodes, where each study in our dataset is a separate node, and about the distances between these nodes. Each node may be thought of as a steel ring that is magnetically charged and has a different charge from its neighbour. Thus, each node wants to repel every other node; so pushing the nodes closer together requires energy. The edges connecting the nodes are then thought of as also having springs. Stretching the spring requires energy as well, so now there are two forces acting on the rings at the same time: the springs connecting them that pull the nodes together, and the magnetic charges that push them apart. Energizing algorithms allow the springs and charges to find a balance, minimizing the energy necessary to hold the network together. The Fructerman–Reingold algorithm differs from others (e.g., Kamada–Kawaii) in the way it derives the relationship between the length of the spring and the tension on the endpoints.

[19] For example, while most of the articles study the spread of policies, a large number study the spread of war/conflict in IR, the spread of democracy in CP, or the spread of norms.

[20] While network analyses can be used for a variety of purposes, our purpose here is mainly to demonstrate the degree of connectedness across subfields and the nature of the discussions taking place in each area of scholarship. Colour versions of Figures 2, 3 and 4 allow the patterns to be seen more easily; these are posted online at http://sitemaker.umich.edu/cshipan/datasets.

[21] See, for instance, Walker, 'The Diffusion of Innovations Among the American States'; Virginia Gray, 'Innovation in the States: A Diffusion Study', *American Political Science Review*, 67 (1973), 1174–85.
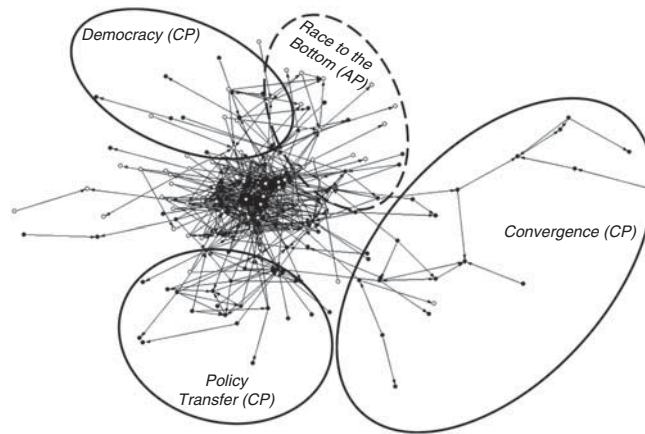
Fig. 2. Networks of American politics (white points) and comparative politics (black points) studies of diffusion

cluster. The relationship between the subfields might best be described as connected, but not integrated, as only a few comparative studies fall inside the core American cluster.

Outside the main cluster of AP articles (which typically study policy choices at the state level) is a small group of articles to the upper right of Figure 2, more tightly focused on 'race to the bottom' concerns (typical in welfare policy making).[22] Such a focus has led authors of these studies to be more interested in the negative consequences of policy making in these areas and in decentralization, rather than focusing on issues that would tightly align them with the policy diffusion literature directly.[23] In this area, there are connections among CP and AP scholars interested in similar concepts. In contrast, the lower left cluster in Figure 2 is composed almost entirely of comparative politics articles written on 'policy transfer'.[24] These studies typically focus on a single policy in a single country to assess the extent to which the policy's origins are found to be heavily influenced by other countries' policy choices. Although still part of policy diffusion studies, such an approach differs markedly from studies of how policies flow to and from multiple governments over time.

To the upper left in Figure 2 is a small literature on the spread of democracy across countries. These studies, although definitely linked to the diffusion literature, are distinct

[22] There has been considerable debate regarding the role of automated drawing algorithms in network analysis. Like many methods, these algorithms can be abused, such as by relying on rotations or projections that offer visually misleading conclusions. Among the many ways to address such concerns, researchers may wish to explore and display results for meaningful subsets of the data, as we do in Figures 2–4. Moreover, although we were careful about accurately illustrating the particular scholarly debates highlighted by subsets in the figures, it is important to note that not every article within the shown subset 'Race to the Bottom' was found with the 'race to the bottom' search terms, nor is every article outside of that subset about something other than a race to the bottom. The same is true for each of the other subsets shown. Rather, these subsets illustrate the main debates taking place in each part of the figure.

[23] See, for example, Craig Volden, 'The Politics of Competitive Federalism: A Race to the Bottom in Welfare Benefits?' *American Journal of Political Science*, 46 (2002), 352–63.

[24] See, for example, David P. Dolowitz and David Marsh, 'Learning from Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy-Making', *Governance*, 13 (2000), 5–24; Claudio M. Radaelli, 'Policy Transfer in the European Union: Institutional Isomorphism as a Source of Legitimacy', *Governance*, 13 (2000), 25–43; Diane Stone, 'Non-Governmental Policy Transfer: The Strategies of Independent Policy Institutes', *Governance*, 13 (2000), 45–70.
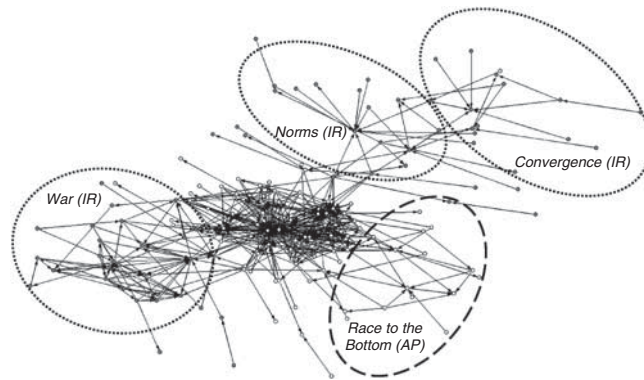
Fig. 3. Networks of American politics (white points) and international relations (grey points) studies of diffusion

in their focus on the spread of governmental institutions rather than policies.[25] And to the right in Figure 2 is a series of studies in comparative politics on the convergence of policies and standards across countries. Rather than judging solely how policies spread over time, this literature confronts the related question of whether these governments are heading in the same direction or to the same endpoints.[26] Such studies are almost entirely absent in American politics.

While the AP and CP studies of diffusion are, therefore, somewhat loosely connected, the divide between American politics and international relations scholarship on diffusion is even starker. Figure 3 shows once again a tight cluster of AP articles, divided only by the related race-to-the-bottom literature. Whereas CP scholars also contributed to race to the bottom studies, this topic has not been of concern to IR scholars. Instead, as shown on the left of Figure 3, the IR literature on diffusion focuses heavily (and unsurprisingly) on the spread of conflict.[27]

Two other groupings appear among IR scholarship in Figure 3. To the upper right, as with the comparative politics literature, scholars in international relations have been concerned with convergence. In many cases, IR scholars in this area study the role of international organizations in facilitating similar chosen ends across countries. Connected somewhat to the convergence studies, but still quite distinct from AP studies of policy diffusion, is IR scholarship on norm diffusion.[28] In these studies, the authors examine how socialization processes and identity politics shape the spread of norms across the international community. Although relevant to state and local politics in the United States, these concepts have not been explored in the American politics literature on diffusion.

In contrast to the divides between American politics and either comparative politics or international relations, these two latter subfields have been well integrated. As shown in Figure 4, there is still a distinct IR literature on war and a separate CP literature on policy transfer. Except for those two clusters, however, the network of scholarship shows these two

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[25] See, for instance, Harvey Starr, 'Democratic Dominoes: Diffusion Approaches to the Spread of Democracy in the International System', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 35 (1991), 356–81.

[26] See, for instance, Bennett, 'What is Policy Convergence and What Causes It?'

[27] See, for example, Benjamin A. Most and Harvey Starr, 'Diffusion, Reinforcement, Geopolitics, and the Spread of War', *American Political Science Review*, 74 (1980), 932–46.

[28] See, for example, Peter M. Haas, 'Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination', *International Organization*, 46 (1992), 1–35; Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe', *International Studies Quarterly*, 43 (1999), 83–114.
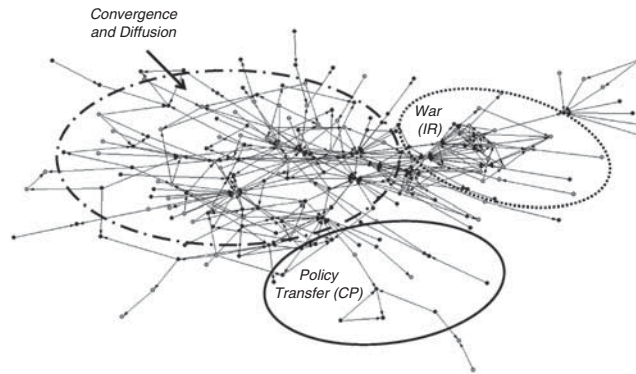
Fig. 4. Networks of comparative politics (black points) and international relations (grey points) studies of diffusion

subfields to be nearly interchangeable. That is, one would find it difficult to guess a particular node's subfield simply by looking at the nodes surrounding it. The relatively high level of integration between IR and CP is reflective of a more general trend towards integration between the two fields, particularly in international and comparative political economy.[29] Articles with the 'convergence' search term, seen as separate from American politics in Figures 2 and 3, are now as central in the network as those discovered with the 'diffusion' search term. Moreover, scholars in both IR and CP cite one another's work in these areas as if there were no discernible subfield boundaries. Perhaps equally striking is the absence of distinct clusters for democracy and norm diffusion, found in the earlier figures. Articles in these areas have been seamlessly integrated with other scholarship across these two subfields. The lessons drawn from democratization are used in other policy diffusion studies, and the spread of norms is seen as a natural and central part of such scholarship.

The preceding figures demonstrate that bridge building between subfields has been somewhat inconsistent. Although there have been some promising connections, our reading of the literature and subsequent discussion indicates that there is sufficient overlap in scholarly interests (and practical applications) across the fields to warrant further integration of diffusion scholarship. Failure to draw on studies across subfields may prevent analytic sharpening or a better understanding of the scope conditions under which a particular concept or mechanism operates. At the same time, outsiders are denied the opportunity to become familiar with and utilize concepts, mechanisms and methodologies that potentially provide useful tools to answer their questions of interest. Further, diffusion scholars run the risk of inefficiency and redundancy.

Before turning to fuller qualitative assessments of these literatures and how they could be better integrated, we present one additional quantitative summary of the data used in our network analyses. Table 1 provides a listing of how frequently each subfield's top-cited articles are cited by those in other fields. The top articles in American politics have been cited within that subfield's diffusion literature between sixteen[30] and

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[29] Helen V. Milner, 'Rationalizing Politics: The Emerging Synthesis of International, American, and Comparative Politics', *International Organization*, 52 (1998), 759–86.

[30] Michael Mintrom, 'Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation', *American Journal of Political Science*, 41 (1997), 738–70.

TABLE 1   *Comparing Citations within and across Subfields*

Most cited diffusion articles in…	Number of times diffusion articles cited in:		
	AP	CP	IR
American Politics			
Walker (1969)	56	16	3
Gray (1973)	38	10	3
Berry and Berry (1990)	28	5	2
Berry and Berry (1992)	17	4	0
Mintrom (1997)	16	7	2
Comparative Politics			
Collier and Messick (1975)	4	15	4
Bennett (1991)	3	14	2
Starr (1991)	0	11	6
Simmons and Elkins (2004)	0	7	7
Radaelli (2000)	0	6	1
International Relations			
Most and Starr (1980)	1	5	10
Haas (1992)	0	11	10
Davis, Duncan, and Siverson (1978)	0	1	8
Starr and Most (1976)	1	1	8
Midlarsky (1970)	5	5	7

fifty-six[31] times each. In contrast, American politics scholars have cited the top five articles in the other subfields a *total* of only fourteen times. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the AP clusters in Figures 2 and 3 were so tight and isolated. Relative to such insularity, three of the top six articles cited by comparative politics diffusion scholars are from other subfields. Indeed, across subfields, most of the connections have been initiated from CP (i.e., from comparative articles citing core American articles). IR scholars draw more heavily on CP studies than on AP works.

The insularity of American politics does provide some advantages. For example, questions asked and conjectures made in early work are now being taken up with empirical knowledge and methodological rigour not possible in earlier studies. The impact of vertical (e.g., national to state) diffusion dynamics, and the new emphasis on learning versus competition (assumed or suggested but not tested in early work) provide examples of this continuity. Despite these linkages, two obstacles to forward progress are worth noting. First, within the tight community of American politics diffusion scholarship, the piecemeal nature of most studies makes generalization difficult. This is particularly the case when variables or mechanisms found to operate in one study are left out of others, leading to concerns of omitted variable bias. Secondly, there are also drawbacks to insularity. Among them is a tendency not to look beyond one's own community for ideas that may be useful in answering relevant questions. For example, much of the early AP scholarship focused solely on whether policies were geographically clustered, rather than on whether and how they spread beyond geographic boundaries. Had there been a search for broader concepts, the top comparative studies surely would have had relevance for

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[31] Walker, 'The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States'.

studies of American politics. Collier and Messick's emphasis on decay[32] and Starr's work on the spread of the features of democracy,[33] while highly relevant to AP, have largely been ignored by Americanists. And, while Haas's study of transnational co-ordination across epistemic communities[34] and Mintrom's work on policy entrepreneurs in the American states[35] present clear research synergies, these connections have yet to be made.

Similarly, the diversity in comparative politics can be seen through both a negative and a positive lens. On the negative side, without a common set of studies serving as a springboard, it may be harder to make sustained scholarly progress, increasing the likelihood of scholars continually reinventing the wheel. To our reading, for example, although Collier and Messick's pioneering study of the adoption of social security programmes systematically puts forth the idea that policy adoptions are driven not just internally, but also by the actions of other governments,[36] many subsequent studies have likewise claimed this insight as a new contribution. On the positive side, the lack of a core set of studies allows scholars more flexibility to veer off in new and exciting directions, often presenting ideas that are lacking in the AP and IR literatures. Thus, Simmons and Elkins, and also Weyland, have provided some of the more insightful and sustained analyses of the mechanisms by which policies have become more liberalized.[37] And Dolowitz demonstrates how the diffusion of rhetoric can precede the diffusion of policy adoptions.[38] In addition, although CP diffusion scholarship can certainly do more to draw on ideas from other subfields, Table 1 makes clear that, as a field, CP does considerably better than either IR or AP in drawing on the other subfields, with integration between CP and IR being particularly high (as in Figure 4).

Diffusion scholarship in international relations has not proceeded along a steady path, but instead consists of three loosely connected streams of literature – on the 'contagion' effects of war,[39] the international diffusion of norms,[40] and the role of power (coercion

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[32] Collier and Messick, 'Prerequisites versus Diffusion'.
[33] Starr, 'Democratic Dominoes'.
[34] Haas, 'Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination'.
[35] Mintrom, 'Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation'.
[36] Collier and Messick, 'Prerequisites versus Diffusion'.
[37] Beth A. Simmons and Zachary Elkins, 'The Globalization of Liberalization: Policy Diffusion in the International Political Economy', *American Political Science Review*, 98 (2004), 171–89; Kurt G. Weyland, 'Theories of Policy Diffusion: Lessons from Latin American Pension Reform', *World Politics*, 57 (2005), 262–95; Weyland, *Bounded Rationality and Policy Diffusion*.
[38] David P. Dolowitz, 'British Employment Policy in the 1980s: Learning from the American Experience', *Governance*, 10 (1997), 23–42.
[39] See, for example, Harvey Starr and Benjamin A. Most, 'The Substance and Study of Borders in International Relations Research', *International Studies Quarterly*, 20 (1976), 581–620; Harvey Starr and Benjamin A. Most, 'A Return Journey: Richardson, "Frontiers" and Wars in the 1946–1965 Era', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 22 (1978), 441–67; Harvey Starr and Benjamin A. Most, 'The Forms and Processes of War Diffusion: Research Update on Contagion in African Conflict', *Comparative Political Studies*, 18 (1985), 206–27; Most and Starr, 'Diffusion, Reinforcement, Geopolitics, and the Spread of War'; Benjamin A. Most and Harvey Starr, 'Theoretical and Logical Issues in the Study of International Diffusion', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 2 (1990), 391–412; see also William W. Davis, George T. Duncan and Randolph M. Siverson, 'The Dynamics of Warfare: 1816–1965', *American Journal of Political Science*, 22 (1978), 772–92; Randolph M. Siverson and Joel King, 'Attributes of National Alliance Membership and War Participation, 1815–1965', *American Journal of Political Science*, 24 (1980), 1–15; Randolph M. Siverson and Harvey Starr, 'Opportunity, Willingness, and the Diffusion of War', *American Political Science Review*, 84 (1990), 47–67.
[40] Amitav Acharya, 'How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism', *International Organization*, 58 (2004), 239–75; Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change'; Ann Florini, 'The Evolution of International

and incentive manipulation) among the causes of diffusion.[41] One might see this as a case of 'splendid isolation' rather than as a cause for concern: what can those who study the adoption of state lotteries or tobacco regulation policies learn from those who study the causes of war, or vice versa? However, there are a number of areas where insights are transferrable across fields and even where similar dynamics are at work. For example, race to the bottom (or top) dynamics operate both domestically and internationally, and international organizations may facilitate policy diffusion across countries just as federal governments do across states.

   How can diffusion scholars avoid (or at least limit) redundancy and reap the benefits of bridge building? One valuable approach is to converge upon a common language and set of understandings for central concepts in diffusion studies. An overview of the literature reveals that scholars in different fields (and sometimes in the same field) use different terms to refer to essentially the same phenomenon. Language barriers can prevent communication and learning. For example, as shown above, despite clear connections between 'diffusion' and both 'convergence' or 'race to the bottom', scholarship using these latter two terms has become isolated from similar diffusion studies using different labels. Towards removing such barriers, a major goal of this essay is to suggest a common language that will enable the fields to move forwards and reach new common ground. Coupled with commonalities in the questions asked and agendas sustained, these three subfields can come together more fully, where appropriate, with mutual benefit. To start down this road, we now turn to an assessment of the who, what, when, where, how and why of policy diffusion.

WHO AFFECTS POLICY DIFFUSION: INSIDE, OUTSIDE AND IN-BETWEEN

Because diffusion studies focus on the policy of a particular government and how that policy relates to those found elsewhere, it may be too easy to forget that these policies are chosen by real people who have varying preferences, goals and capabilities. Indeed, numerous quantitative studies of policy diffusion have focused solely on the policies of governments and how they cluster geographically, but do so without any consideration of the actors involved in bringing these policies into being. And yet, without a focus on the policy makers themselves, studies of policy diffusion may miss important aspects of politics. In this section, we focus on three sets of actors: *internal actors* (i.e., those within the government that may be considering an innovation); *external actors* (i.e., those in the governments from which policies may diffuse); and *go-betweens* (i.e., those who act across multiple governments).[42]

(F'note continued)
Norms', *International Studies Quarterly*, 40 (1996), 363–89; Richard Price, 'Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines', *International Organization*, 52 (1998), 613–43.

   [41] Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett, 'Introduction: The International Diffusion of Liberalism'; Beth A. Simmons, Frank Dobbin and Geoffrey Garrett, eds, *The Global Diffusion of Markets and Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

   [42] All such actors are embedded in social networks, as has long been recognized in political science. That said, exciting developments in innovation diffusion across networks could better be incorporated into the policy diffusion literature from other fields, ranging from economics (Michael Suk-Young Chwe, 'Communication and Coordination in Social Networks', *Review of Economic Studies*, 67 (2000), 1–16; H. Peyton Young, 'The Diffusion of Innovations in Social Networks', in Lawrence E. Blume and Steven N. Durlauf, eds, *The Economy as an Evolving Complex System, III: Current Perspectives and Future*

Internal Actors

Within potentially adopting polities, the actors who play significant roles in policy adoption are familiar to political scientists: the electorate, elected politicians, appointed bureaucrats, interest groups, and policy advocates, to name but a few.[43] These policy makers, coupled with their preferences, goals, capabilities and the environment in which they operate, are central to an understanding of diffusion.

The *preferences* of policy makers may be based on individual opinions and experiences or may be induced by the desires of the electorate, interest groups or others. Such preferences often affect the range of policy choices that policy makers consider, and therefore preferences influence the likelihood of any particular policy spreading from one government to the next.

Preferences provide an obvious starting point. But it is then necessary to turn to goals and capabilities, and to consider how the latter can constrain the attainment of the former. Broadly speaking, the *goals* of policy makers fall into two categories: political goals, such as re-election, reappointment, maintenance of power and appearing legitimate; and policy goals, such as adopting beneficial policies and attracting large tax bases.[44] Policy makers seeking the best policies are likely to seek out information about the policies found elsewhere.[45] Those with broader economic and budgetary concerns may see themselves in competition with other governments and may adopt policies to their own advantage.[46] And those needing to appear legitimate may adopt policies that are deemed appropriate by powerful leaders.[47]

The *capabilities* of policy makers can affect the diffusion process in numerous ways. For example, American state legislators in ten states receive no salary for their services. Their legislatures are among the many that do not meet year-round and often do not have substantial staffs. Such 'less professional' legislatures produce different policies and respond differently to other governments than do more professional legislatures.[48]

(F'note continued)
Directions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 267–81) to physics (Ingve Simonsen, 'Diffusion and Networks: A Powerful Combination!', *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications*, 357 (2005), 317–30).

[43] David P. Dolowitz and David Marsh, 'Who Learns What from Whom? A Review of the Policy Transfer Literature', *Political Studies*, 44 (1996), 343–57.

[44] See, for example, Fabrizio Gilardi, 'Who Learns from What in Policy Diffusion Processes?' *American Journal of Political Science*, 54 (2010), 650–66.

[45] See, for instance, Karen Mossberger, 'State-Federal Diffusion and Policy Learning: From Enterprise Zones to Empowerment Zones', *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 29 (1999), 31–50; Lawrence J. Grossback, Sean Nicholson-Crotty, and David A. Peterson, 'Ideology and Learning in Policy Diffusion', *American Politics Research*, 67 (2004), 521–45; Volden, 'States as Policy Laboratories'.

[46] See, for instance, Volden, 'The Politics of Competitive Federalism'; David Levi-Faur, 'The Politics of Liberalisation: Privatisation and Regulation-for-Competition in Europe's and Latin America's Telecoms and Electricity Industries', *European Journal of Political Research*, 42 (2004), 705–40.

[47] See, for example, John G. Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', *International Organization*, 44 (1990), 283–315; Benjamin O. Fordham and Victor Asal, 'Billiard Balls or Snowflakes? Major Power Prestige and the International Diffusion of Institutions and Practices', *International Studies Quarterly*, 51 (2007), 31–52.

[48] See, for example, Charles R. Shipan and Craig Volden, 'Bottom-up Federalism: The Diffusion of Antismoking Policies from U.S. Cities to States', *American Journal of Political Science*, 50 (2006), 825–43. On the general point of less professional legislatures having lower capacity to create policy, see John D. Huber and Charles R. Shipan, *Deliberate Discretion? The Institutional Foundation of Bureaucratic Autonomy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Likewise, policy experts in specific bureaucracies know many of the details of policies found elsewhere (and their likely impacts) than do generalists like elected politicians. These differences can affect the nature of policy diffusion.[49] Because of their limited time and information, policy makers may rely on cognitive shortcuts that affect the diffusion process and perhaps lead to poor policy choices.[50] These sorts of institutional constraints matter, but so does the broader political environment, acting as a constraint on whether politicians achieve their goals. Politicians likely to lose their next election, for example, may take on riskier policies. Interest group pressures may mount in unpredictable ways. And it may be necessary for citizens to change their opinions in order for policies to spread to a new state.[51] These factors often combine with the need or demand for policy change to form the 'prerequisites' for policy diffusion.[52]

External Actors

The second group of relevant actors includes those in external governments, mainly those who have already adopted a policy. In most diffusion studies, these external actors are ignored, perhaps because they have already made their decisions. Yet neglecting these earlier decision makers may lead to a misunderstanding of the politics of policy diffusion. For example, in order to uncover evidence that earlier adopting governments influenced the subsequent decisions of governments adopting later, it is often important to know what caused these early adopters to innovate. Every new policy idea comes from somewhere, so to the extent that these first adopters acted without information or pressure from outside actors, researchers can be alerted to the causes of policy adoption that exist in the absence of diffusion, thereby minimizing the possibility of a spurious finding of diffusion.

In addition, features of these governments may influence the likelihood that others will follow their leads. Governments with more expertise, for example, may be seen as leaders and may be more likely to provide information to future adopters. Because potential adopters may be more likely to imitate large or wealthy governments,[53] and because these bigger and richer governments may have more success at creating norms that others are likely to follow, scholars need to be attentive to the features of external governments that increase or decrease the likelihood of diffusion.

Finally, these earlier adopters often do not just sit back and allow others to respond to their policy choices, but instead behave strategically and proactively.[54] For example, their business-friendly tax schemes may need to be adjusted if competition emerges. Their regulatory standards may be more effective if others adopt them as well. Their political aspirations may depend on demonstrating their policy's success to others. And their nuclear arms control doctrine's success may depend on the same doctrine being adopted

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[49] See, for example, Volden, 'States as Policy Laboratories'.

[50] Weyland, 'Theories of Policy Diffusion'.

[51] Juliana Pacheco, 'The Social Contagion Model: Exploring the Role of Public Opinion on the Diffusion of Anti-Smoking Legislation across the American States', *Journal of Politics*, 74 (2012), 187–202.

[52] Collier and Messick, 'Prerequisites versus Diffusion'.

[53] See, for instance, Daniel W. Drezner, 'Globalization, Harmonization, and Competition: The Different Pathways to Policy Convergence', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 12 (2005), 841–59; Fordham and Asal, 'Billiard Balls or Snowflakes?'

[54] Baybeck, Berry and Siegel, 'A Strategic Theory of Policy Diffusion via Intergovernmental Competition'.

by others.[55] In all of these circumstances, actors in one polity may wish to preempt, educate, coerce, or otherwise influence others.

Go-Betweens

The third group of relevant actors consists of those who are part of neither the government that is considering adoption nor the government that has already acted, but rather those who act as go-betweens. In hierarchical systems, top-down pressures add a vertical component to typical horizontal policy diffusion. Here, examples such as the US national government offering inducements to states[56] or the European Union government seeking harmonization of policies across EU members[57] offer a sense that actors at higher levels of government can influence policy diffusion through information provision or even coercion. Bottom-up vertical policy diffusion, such as from localities to states,[58] states to national governments,[59] or national governments to supranational governments,[60] also involves extensive go-between activities by key actors.

Although go-betweens may be elected officials, they need not be. Policy entrepreneurs, for example, advocate adoption not only within one government but also from one government to the next.[61] Epistemic communities organized around a particular policy area, sharing principled and causal beliefs, can profoundly influence policy diffusion, in part by facilitating learning.[62] Think tanks, academic entrepreneurs, research institutes,[63] mass media,[64] migrants,[65] and intergovernmental organizations[66] all play significant roles in the spread of policies from one government to the next.

Studying each of these three types of actors and the interactions between them is crucial to a better understanding of the politics of policy diffusion. Early scholarship in American

[55] Emanuel Adler, 'The Emergence of Cooperation: National Epistemic Communities and the International Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control', *International Organization*, 46 (1992), 101–46.

[56] See, for example, Susan Welch and Kay Thompson, 'The Impact of Federal Incentives on State Policy Innovation', *American Journal of Political Science*, 24 (1980), 715–29.

[57] Drezner, 'Globalization, Harmonization, and Competition'.

[58] See, for example, Mintrom, 'Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation'; Shipan and Volden, 'Bottom-up Federalism'.

[59] See, for instance, Keith Boeckelman, 'The Influence of States on Federal Policy Adoptions', *Policy Studies Journal*, 20 (1992), 365–75.

[60] See, for instance, Radaelli, 'Policy Transfer in the European Union'.

[61] See, for example, Theda Skocpol, Marjorie Abend-Wein, Christopher Howard and Susan Goodrich Lehmann, 'Women's Associations and the Enactment of Mothers' Pensions in the United States', *American Political Science Review*, 87 (1993), 686–701; Mintrom, 'Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation'; Steven J. Balla, 'Interstate Professional Associations and the Diffusion of Policy Innovations', *American Politics Research*, 29 (2001), 221–45.

[62] Haas, 'Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination'.

[63] For several examples, see Diane Stone, 'Transfer Agents and Global Networks in the "Transnationalization" of Policy', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11 (2004), 545–66.

[64] See, for instance, Dolowitz, 'British Employment Policy in the 1980s'.

[65] See, for example, Clarisa Pérez-Armendáriz and David Crow, 'Do Migrants Remit Democracy? International Migration, Political Beliefs, and Behavior in Mexico', *Comparative Political Studies*, 43 (2010), 119–48.

[66] See, for example, Sarah M. Brooks, 'Interdependent and Domestic Foundations of Policy Change: The Diffusion of Pension Privatization around the World', *International Studies Quarterly*, 49 (2005), 273–94; Hugh Ward and Xun Cao, 'Domestic and International Influences on Green Taxation', *Comparative Political Studies* (forthcoming); Katharina Füglister, 'Where Does Learning Take Place? The Role of Intergovernmental Cooperation in Policy Diffusion', *European Journal of Political Research*, 51 (2012), 316–49.

and comparative politics that ignored diffusion pressures often mischaracterized the policy making process. But early diffusion studies that set aside internal determinants of policy choices were also insufficient and potentially misleading. Scholarship combining internal determinants and diffusion pressures has become the norm in the literature today, with early leaders theoretically[67] and empirically[68] pointing the way (although often this work focuses only on internal policy makers, without much concern for external or go-between actors).

Yet, the degree of attention paid to different actors in diffusion studies varies substantially across fields of study. For example, Figures 2 and 4 above showed distinct clusters of scholarship on policy transfer, often country-specific studies that offer extensive details about the internal politics within such a country to determine whether and in what form the external policy was adopted. In contrast, much diffusion work capturing similar decisions across all states or numerous countries often lacks significant details of politics among internal actors. Indeed, many such works treat internal politics almost as a nuisance rather than as substantial in its own right. Diffusion scholarship offers the chance not only to explore how and why the policy actions of other governments and political actors influence the home government's policy choices, but also how politics within the home government can be better understood by considering which policy makers respond in which ways to other governments and their policies.

WHAT DIFFUSES: LOTTERIES, WAR AND WELFARE

As Rogers illustrates, patterns of diffusion can be discerned across a fascinating range of areas, from water boiling practices in Peruvian villages to citrus eating in the British Navy.[69] Our focus here is specifically on the diffusion of *policy* innovations, and for the most part we have, therefore, set aside innovations outside of political science while still recognizing non-policy innovations that are central to political science, such as the spread of riots and coups,[70] governmental types[71] and institutional structures.[72]

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[67] See, for instance, Collier and Messick, 'Prerequisites versus Diffusion'; David Klingman, 'Temporal and Spatial Diffusion in the Comparative-Analysis of Social-Change', *American Political Science Review*, 74 (1980), 123–37.

[68] See, for example, Berry and Berry, 'State Lottery Adoptions as Policy Innovations'.

[69] Everett Rogers, *The Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th edn (New York: The Free Press, 2003). An intriguing study, building upon Rogers's review of thousands of studies across dozens of disciplines, would be to systematically analyse his generalizations across these studies, to assess which may apply to policy diffusion, to document which have been supported or rejected in the policy diffusion literature, and to lay out a course of study for the field based on what generalizable findings remain to be explored.

[70] See, for example, Stuart Hill and Donald Rothchild, 'The Contagion of Political Conflict in Africa and the World', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 30 (1986), 716–35; Richard P. Y. Li and William R. Thompson, 'The "Coup Contagion" Hypothesis', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 14 (1975), 63–88.

[71] See, for instance, Starr, 'Democratic Dominoes'; Daniel Brinks and Michael Coppedge, 'Diffusion is No Illusion: Neighbor Emulation in the Third Wave of Democracy', *Comparative Political Studies*, 39 (2006), 463–89.

[72] See, for example, Zachary Elkins, 'Diffusion and the Constitutionalization of Europe', *Comparative Political Studies*, 43 (2010), 969–99; H. George Frederickson, Gary Alan Johnson and Curtis Wood, 'The Changing Structure of American Cities: A Study of the Diffusion of Innovation', *Public Administration Review*, 64 (2004), 320–30; Fabrizio Gilardi, *Delegation in the Regulatory State* (Cheltenham, Glos.: Edward Elgar, 2008). We do, however, note that the diffusion of institutions and governing structures, like the diffusion of societal norms (e.g., Martha Finnemore, 'International Organizations as Teachers of Norms: The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization and Science Policy', *International Organization*,

While differences in the subjects of diffusion studies account for outlying clusters such as 'Democracy' for comparative politics but not American politics in Figure 2, or 'War' in IR in Figures 3 and 4, other topics like 'Norms' are relevant in American politics but are not well integrated into AP studies, as shown in Figure 3 above.

Even when one focuses solely on the spread of public policies, however, diffusion studies tend to ignore a wide range of relevant questions, including how ideas find their way onto the agenda, how agenda items become laws, whether laws are just ideas until an implementer turns them into actual policies, and so on.[73] This emphasis on stages of the policy process has long been central to public policy, yet the diffusion literature sets aside the early and later stages of the policy making process and focuses almost exclusively on the adoption stage.[74] Furthermore, studies usually have focused on *first* adoptions, and tend to characterize policies in a very simple, dichotomous fashion, such as states adopting lotteries,[75] or countries adopting specific gender equality policies[76] or environmental standards.[77]

These approaches have, of course, provided numerous insights. But scholars now need to look beyond adoptions, first innovations and dichotomous characterizations of policies. First, attention to other stages of the process – in particular, which issues arrive on the agenda in the first place, and how policies are implemented – seem just as likely to be subject to diffusion as innovations. Investigating these other stages thus promises to provide a more complete view of how policies move from one government to another. Secondly, there are often multiple adoptions within a specific policy area, a process obscured by looking only at first adoptions. An investigation of these later adoptions can be used to provide additional information about diffusion.[78] Thirdly, although treating adoptions as dichotomous choices may allow clean analyses, and may be appropriate in some cases, many policies come in multiple shapes and sizes. Analysing the *scope* of a policy change may be more important to understanding policy diffusion than studying the adoption of *any* policy within a broad area. Policies evolve and are reinvented as they spread in ways that shed light on the politics of policy diffusion,[79] with the comprehensiveness of some policies expanding as they spread.[80] The components of complex laws that seem to make them more effective are more likely to be chosen as policy modifications in other states.[81]

(F'note continued)

47 (1993), 565–97; Richard Price, 'Reversing the Gun Sights: Transnational Civil Society Targets Land Mines', *International Organization*, 52 (1998), 613–43), may be key precursors to the adoption and diffusion of important policies.

[73] See, for instance, John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1995).

[74] But see Karch, *Democratic Laboratories*.

[75] Berry and Berry, 'State Lottery Adoptions as Policy Innovations'.

[76] Jacqui True and Michael Mintrom, 'Transnational Networks of Policy Diffusion: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming', *International Studies Quarterly*, 45 (2001), 27–57.

[77] Prakash and Potoski, 'Racing to the Bottom?'

[78] Frederick J. Boehmke and Richard Witmer, 'Disentangling Diffusion: The Effects of Social Learning and Economic Competition on State Policy Innovation and Expansion', *Political Research Quarterly*, 57 (2004), 39–51.

[79] See, for example, Glick and Hays, 'Innovation and Reinvention in State Policymaking'.

[80] Scott P. Hays, 'Patterns of Reinvention: The Nature of Evolution During Policy Diffusion', *Policy Studies Journal*, 24 (1996), 551–66.

[81] See, for instance, Volden, 'States as Policy Laboratories'.

Finally, in addition to examining components of single policies, returning to the simultaneous study of multiple policies (for example, the eighty-eight policies of Walker or the three distinct areas of Gray[82]) would help uncover which processes are robust across different policy domains. Even within a single policy area, attributes such as a policy's complexity, its triability (i.e., the degree to which the policy can be tried on a limited basis), and its ability to be observed all appear to influence whether and how it diffuses.[83] Further, studies across policy domains may provide insight into which actors influence diffusion, and how such influence is exerted.

MECHANISMS FROM A TO Z: THE HOW AND WHY OF DIFFUSION

The standard (and quite broad) definition of policy diffusion – that one government's policy choices are influenced by the choices of others – leaves open for debate *why* policies spread and precisely *how* this diffusion comes about. Although a few studies have specified the mechanisms through which the authors contend diffusion is occurring, most rely on vague or implicit causal stories. Possible processes can perhaps be gleaned from the long list of colourful metaphors and modifiers found in the decades of diffusion studies: abandonment, acceptance, adaptation, adoption, amendment, avalanche, bandwagoning, best practices, billiard balls, borrowing, bottom-up, bubbling up, catalytic, change, clustering, coercion, communication, competition, contagion, cookie-cutter, co-operative, co-ordination, copying, convergence, cultural reference, decentralization, diffusion, divergence, disinhibition, emulation, enactment, experimentation, exporting, free-riding, Galton's problem, geographic, globalization, harmonization, hierarchical, horizontal, hybridization, imitation, importing, imposition, incentives, inducement, infection, innovation, insemination, inspiration, integration, interdependence, interstate, isomorphism, jumping, laboratories, laggards, leaders, leapfrogging, learning, lesson-drawing, linkages, localization, magnets, manipulation, mimicking, modelling, neighbours, networks, open method, peers, persuasion, pinching ideas, point source, pressure valve, prestige, problem solving, promotion, proneness, proximity, pruning, race to the bottom, reinforcement, reinvention, remodelling, S-curves, shaming, sharing, similarity, snowball, snowflakes, socialization, spatial, spread, success, synthesis, top-down, transfer, transitions, transnational, unification, vertical, voluntary, and whole-cloth.

Although it may be amusing to consider how snowflakes turn into snowballs and how shaming can become sharing, we believe that these 104 terms fundamentally capture, and thus can be reduced to, four main processes or mechanisms of policy diffusion.[84] These mechanisms are learning, competition, coercion and socialization.[85] For policy makers who seek to formulate effective public policies, *learning* from others is natural and

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[82] Walker, 'The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States'; Gray, 'Innovation in the States'.

[83] Todd Makse and Craig Volden, 'The Role of Policy Attributes in the Diffusion of Innovations', *Journal of Politics*, 73 (2011), 108–24; Sean Nicholson-Crotty, 'The Politics of Diffusion: Public Policy in the American States', *Journal of Politics*, 71 (2009), 192–205.

[84] These four may not be exhaustive. We have a lively ongoing debate among coauthors, for example, about whether 'imitation' (Shipan and Volden, 'The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion') is simply a combination of socialization and learning or whether it contains processes orthogonal to those factors. Here we treat it as the former.

[85] Our list of four mechanisms arises from a comprehensive reading of diffusion scholarship across the AP, CP and IR subfields. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it closely resembles the lists of Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett ('Introduction: The International Diffusion of Liberalism'), studying the international diffusion of liberalism, and of Shipan and Volden ('The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion'), studying diffusion in

expected. Learning is the process through which states act as laboratories of democracy[86] and through which decision makers seek to solve problems.[87] When a policy is effective and others learn about its success, diffusion naturally follows.[88] Learning, however, may be more complicated than simply discerning success. As we discussed above, actors in the potentially adopting government may have differing goals. Learning about policy effectiveness is all well and good, but policy makers may want to learn about more than effectiveness.[89] For example, policy makers may be concerned with learning about the policy's political viability and public attractiveness, about implications for re-election and reappointment, or about whether a glitzy modification of the policy could serve as a vehicle in the pursuit of higher office. Moreover, what makes a policy effective in one polity may have little applicability to its effectiveness elsewhere. While scholars often mention these considerations, systematic studies along these lines have yet to be conducted.

Furthermore, a view that is implicit in most studies is that if another government adopts a policy, learning will increase the likelihood that you will adopt it yourself. This may be true in most cases, but there are good reasons to suspect that there are exceptions.[90] First, as we detail later, diffusion may be contingent on a wide range of exogenous factors. Secondly, it is possible that the adoption of a policy in one country or state may actually *decrease* the likelihood of adoption in another for a host of reasons that extend beyond learning, such as if the adoption in one government leads to positive spillovers for a neighbouring government.[91] Thirdly, not all policies work. While there is evidence that failed policies might diffuse despite their objective lack of success,[92] it is also possible that earlier adoptions may prove to be unsuccessful, and other governments will learn either not to adopt these laws or to adopt them in radically different forms.[93]

Governments not only learn from one another; they also *compete*. On the one hand, competition for tax bases, tourist revenue and attractive economic conditions more generally may be healthy, adding market discipline to government policy making.[94] On the other hand, competition across governments can be detrimental, possibly leading to

(F'note continued)

American politics. One main noteworthy difference is our inclusion of 'socialization', instead of earlier authors' 'emulation' or 'imitation'.

[86] Louis Dembitz Brandeis, 'Dissenting Opinion', *New State Ice Co. v. Liebmann*, 285 U.S. 262, 311 (1932).

[87] Boehmke and Witmer, 'Disentangling Diffusion'; William D. Berry and Brady Baybeck, 'Using Geographic Information Systems to Study Interstate Competition', *American Political Science Review*, 99 (2005), 505–19.

[88] Volden, 'States as Policy Laboratories'; Covadonga Meseguer, 'Rational Learning and Bounded Learning in the Diffusion of Policy Innovations', *Rationality and Society*, 18 (2006), 35–66; Fabrizio Gilardi, Katharina Füglister and Stephane Luyet, 'Learning from Others: The Diffusion of Hospital Financing Reforms in OECD Countries', *Comparative Political Studies*, 42 (2009), 549–73.

[89] Gilardi, 'Who Learns from What in Policy Diffusion Processes?'

[90] See, for example, Most and Starr, 'Diffusion, Reinforcement, Geopolitics, and the Spread of War'.

[91] Franzese and Hays, 'Strategic Interaction among EU Governments in Active Labor Market Policy-Making'.

[92] J. C. Sharman, 'Dysfunctional Policy Transfer in National Tax Blacklists', *Governance*, 23 (2010), 623–39; Sarah A. Soule, 'The Diffusion of an Unsuccessful Innovation', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 566 (1999), 120–31.

[93] Christopher Z. Mooney, 'Modeling Regional Effects on State Policy Diffusion', *Political Research Quarterly*, 54 (2001), 103–24.

[94] Charles M. Tiebout, 'A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures', *Journal of Political Economy*, 64 (1956), 416–24.

trade wars,[95] difficult treaty negotiations,[96] and a 'race to the bottom' in the provision of redistributive goods.[97] Although learning can be accomplished with fairly passive external actors content with their early policy adoptions, competition tends to be characterized by robust and continuing strategic interactions among governments.[98]

An even greater degree of interaction is involved in policy *coercion*, a process through which some actors attempt to impose their preferred policy solutions on a particular government. Coercion can be applied either vertically or horizontally. In the case of vertical coercion, actors who are not part either of the government that is considering adoption or of the government that has already acted can attempt to force their preferences onto the potential policy adopter. Domestically, the national government may fulfil this role, while supranational organizations may do so at the international level (e.g., if the European Union attempts to force member nations into selecting austerity measures). When acting in this way, the coercive actor can rely on the carrots and sticks of intergovernmental grants, regulations and the pre-emptive policies of a centralized government.[99]

Coercion also can be accomplished in a horizontal setting, with one government applying pressure until the targeted government changes its policy;[100] thus, asymmetric power can be an important aspect of coercion in policy diffusion processes.[101] For example, external actors including powerful states or international organizations may attempt to influence the adoption of human rights policies in weaker countries through collaborative efforts such as sanctions,[102] or through issue linkage, making behaviour in one policy area contingent on behaviour in another.[103]

Whereas coercive strategies aim to change governmental *policies*, socialization – 'a process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a community'[104] – can be used to change *preferences*. Although perhaps not immediately resulting in policy change, altered

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[95] See, for instance, John Conybeare, 'Trade Wars: A Comparative Study of Anglo-Hanse, Franco-Italian, and Hawley-Smoot Conflicts', in K. Oye, ed., *Cooperation under Anarchy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

[96] Zachary Elkins, Andrew T. Guzman and Beth A. Simmons, 'Competing for Capital: The Diffusion of Bilateral Investment Treaties, 1960–2000', *International Organization*, 60 (2006), 811–46.

[97] See, for example, Paul E. Peterson and Mark C. Rom, *Welfare Magnets: A New Case for a National Standard* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1990); Volden, 'The Politics of Competitive Federalism'; Michael A. Bailey and Mark C. Rom, 'A Wider Race? Interstate Competition Across Health and Welfare Programs', *Journal of Politics*, 66 (2004), 326–47.

[98] Baybeck, Berry, and Siegel, 'A Strategic Theory of Policy Diffusion via Intergovernmental Competition'.

[99] See, for instance, Jack L. Walker, 'Comment: Problems in Research on the Diffusion of Policy Innovations', *American Political Science Review*, 67 (1973), 1186–91; Welch and Thompson, 'The Impact of Federal Incentives on State Policy Innovation'; Mahalley D. Allen, Carrie A. Pettus and Donald P. Haider-Markel, 'Making the National Local: Specifying the Conditions for National Government Influence on State Policymaking', *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, 4 (2004), 318–44; Andrew Karch, 'National Intervention and the Diffusion of Policy Innovations', *American Politics Research*, 34 (2006), 403–26; Karch, *Democratic Laboratories*.

[100] Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

[101] See, for example, Drezner, 'Globalization, Harmonization, and Competition'.

[102] See, for example, David A. Baldwin, *Economic Statecraft* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey Schott and Kimberly Ann Elliott, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered* (Washington, D.C.: Peterson Institute, 1990).

[103] Lisa L. Martin, 'Interests, Power, and Multilateralism', *International Organization*, 46 (1992), 765–92.

[104] Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'International Institutions and Socialization in Europe: Introduction and Framework', *International Organization*, 59 (2005), 801–27, p. 804.

norms and preferences may lead to even more stable long-term policy change than coercion alone could achieve. For example, establishing one's self as an attractive and prominent leader, worthy of imitation, may improve one's ability to socialize. Countries possessing 'soft power' can attract others by setting an example, making coercion an unnecessary option.[105]

As noted earlier and illustrated in Figure 3, the roles of norms and preference change are most fully developed in the IR and comparative literatures. Ironically, however, this concept (as it applies to diffusion) originates in the American politics literature, with Walker.[106] Since then, however, it has largely been missing from studies of diffusion in the United States. In comparative politics, an early use of this idea can be found in Collier and Messick, who note the status-seeking involved in the social security decisions of late adopters.[107] Still, the role of socialization in diffusion was not fully developed until the constructivist turn in IR emphasized the importance of ideas and norms for understanding international politics.[108] For example, epistemic communities of policy experts can facilitate the diffusion of norms.[109] Internal actors, however, are not simply passive in this socialization process, as norms can be rejected or adapted to local conditions.[110] In addition, rhetoric and ideology are key components of socialization, which ultimately may determine which policies diffuse.[111]

With these four mechanisms in mind, the role of actors in policy diffusion comes into sharper focus. For example, although diffusion is often thought to be a horizontal process (or a bubbling up from below), consider the vertical nature of go-between actors affecting the spread of policies. National policy makers or intergovernmental organizations in federal systems, as well as international organizations, may serve a vertical role in policy diffusion through multiple mechanisms. Such centralized actors can facilitate learning or engage in socialization through the establishment of information clearinghouses, holding conferences or suggesting best practices.[112] They may play a coercive role, with grant and aid conditions, pre-emptive laws, sanctions regimes or use of military force. They may help restructure competitive environments, such as with the European Union facilitating the reduction of trade barriers or the US Constitution limiting interstate regulation of commerce by the states. Precisely *when* external and go-between actors (as well as the internal actors themselves) utilize each of these mechanisms, and to what ends, has not been studied systematically, but is ripe for future exploration.

Because these mechanisms had not been made explicit throughout much of the history of policy diffusion scholarship, most examinations of diffusion proceeded without much theoretical grounding. Most commonly, especially in the American politics literature,

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[105] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Book Group, 2004).

[106] Walker, 'The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States'.

[107] Collier and Messick, 'Prerequisites versus Diffusion'.

[108] See, for instance, Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[109] Haas, 'Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination'; Adler, 'The Emergence of Cooperation: National Epistemic Communities and the International Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control'.

[110] Acharya, 'How Ideas Spread'.

[111] See, for example, Dolowitz, 'British Employment Policy in the 1980s'.

[112] See, for instance, Martha Finnemore, 'International Organizations as Teachers of Norms'; Füglister, 'Where Does Learning Take Place?'.

diffusion scholars looked at clusters of geographic neighbours. Although this was useful both to document the existence of diffusion and to suggest possible pathways, neighbourhood effects unfortunately do little to isolate the politics behind policy diffusion. For example, neighbours compete with one another, learn from one another, coerce one another and socialize one another. Moreover, neighbourhood adoption patterns that appear to be a function of interdependence instead may occur because these neighbouring polities face similar policy problems at about the same time. A focus on similarities other than geography, like race,[113] ideology,[114] budgets,[115] or religion, language and culture,[116] may provide greater insights. And yet these similarities, if not examined with a systematic understanding of the mechanisms and politics of diffusion, may likewise shed little new light on the diffusion process. Similar polities, whether neighbours or not, may adopt similar policies irrespective of their interactions with one another.[117]

It may be possible to separate these mechanisms from one another in order to determine when each is relevant for particular policies across specific governments. Yet doing so requires sophistication in both theoretical understandings and empirical strategies. Some theoretical underpinnings that may allow scholars to discern diffusion mechanisms from one another range from the work of Leichter a quarter century ago to the recent directions of Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett.[118] Empirically, Boehmke and Witmer disentangle the diffusion processes of the initial adoption (learning) or expansion (competition) of American Indian gaming compacts, illustrating that learning from one's own past practices substitutes for learning from others.[119] Shipan and Volden demonstrate that multiple mechanisms account for the diffusion of local anti-smoking policies in the United States.[120]

Although such approaches all show promise, a key challenge for quantitative researchers across subfields lies in operationalization. Better indicators must be developed to match the theoretical concepts underpinning the diffusion mechanisms. Thus far, progress often has been limited to indicators that rule out some mechanisms and, therefore, serve as proxies by default for other mechanisms. For example, in their study of US state lotteries, Berry and Baybeck capture the close geographic proximity needed for competition, and thus regard any additional diffusion evidence as 'learning'.[121] Other scholars have labelled the enhanced spread of successful policies as learning, largely because policy success is not necessarily central to competition, coercion or socialization. While this is a reasonable approach, the diffusion of successful policies serves only as a proxy for learning, rather than as a direct measure of learning itself. While progress has clearly been made in identifying mechanisms theoretically and in initial empirical assessments, major challenges in operationalization

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[113] Anne C. Case, James R. Hines, Jr., and Harvey S. Rosen, 'Budget Spillovers and Fiscal Policy Interdependence: Evidence from the States', *Journal of Public Economics*, 52 (1993), 285–307.

[114] Grossback, Nicholson-Crotty, and Peterson, 'Ideology and Learning in Policy Diffusion'.

[115] Volden, 'States as Policy Laboratories'.

[116] Simmons and Elkins, 'The Globalization of Liberalization'.

[117] Frances Stokes Berry, 'Sizing Up State Policy Innovation Research', *Policy Studies Journal*, 22 (1994), 442–56; Craig Volden, Michael M. Ting and Daniel P. Carpenter, 'A Formal Model of Learning and Policy Diffusion', *American Political Science Review*, 102 (2008), 319–32.

[118] Howard M. Leichter, 'The Patterns and Origins of Policy Diffusion: The Case of the Commonwealth', *Comparative Politics*, 1 (1983), 223–33; Simmons, Dobbins and Garrett, eds, *The Global Diffusion of Markets and Democracy*.

[119] Boehmke and Witmer, 'Disentangling Diffusion'.

[120] Charles R. Shipan and Craig Volden, 'The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion', *American Journal of Political Science*, 52 (2008), 840–57.

[121] Berry and Baybeck, 'Using Geographic Information Systems to Study Interstate Competition'.

remain. Scholars across subfields should be observant of one another's achievements in this area and should themselves help any such advances diffuse across subfield boundaries.

Complicating this progress even further, diffusion mechanisms are often interrelated.[122] For example, governments may *learn* about how to *compete* with one another better.[123] As another example of interrelated diffusion mechanisms, an international organization might try to use socialization and learning mechanisms at the same time in order to change both beliefs and behaviour. Changing norms may be a precursor to policy change. And governments in competition with one another may wish to exert coercive influence when possible. Thus the mechanisms discussed here may be complements rather than substitutes, at least under certain conditions that scholars need to identify. Those attempting to disentangle one mechanism from another should not concentrate only on *independent* effects when *interdependent* effects are both more interesting and more realistic.

Exploration of the mechanisms of diffusion offers one opportunity for greater integration between qualitative and quantitative scholarship. In our view, two of the most fruitful qualitative–quantitative interactions are found *just prior to* and *just after* quantitative analyses. First, the development of hypotheses to be tested cannot be done in a vacuum. Without clear and well-founded facts on the ground, often best provided through qualitative research, quantitative scholars have an insufficient understanding of the relevant politics to produce ultimately fruitful analyses. Secondly, quantitative research is always limited by what can be measured and often leaves readers with a better sense of *what* is happening politically than *why* it is happening. Such limitations offer a further opportunity for qualitative work designed to overcome data limitations carefully and to explore causal processes. With respect to diffusion mechanisms, the quantitative studies noted above would not have been nearly as successful without the qualitative groundwork that detailed the many policy interactions among governments. And we are now at a point where qualitative research could nicely complement quantitative analyses, such as with fuller assessments of what exactly policy makers seek to learn from others[124] or how socialization comes about.[125]

Qualitative and quantitative collaborations may also be productive given the *normative* connotations associated with aspects of policy diffusion. Learning, for example, is often thought to be quite positive – and yet learning processes need not always result in the most appropriate policy choices.[126] Coercion is mainly seen in a negative light, but it can help reluctant politicians rise out of an equilibrium of corrupt and costly practices, perhaps even with an active choice to bind their own hands. Competitive pressures promote efficiency, even

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[122] See, for example, Cao, 'Networks as Channels of Policy Diffusion'.
[123] Hugh Ward and Peter John, *Competitive Learning in Yardstick Competition: Testing Models of Policy Diffusion* (unpublished paper: Department of Government, University of Essex, 2011); Isin Guler, Mauro F. Guillén and John Muir Macpherson (in 'Global Competition, Institutions, and the Diffusion of Organizational Practices: The International Spread of ISO 9000 Quality Certificates', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47 (2002), 207–32) also discuss how learning and imitation can occur for competitive reasons to avoid the risk of a competitive disadvantage (see, e.g., Eric Abrahamson and Lori Rosenkopf, 'Institutional and Competitive Bandwagons: Using Mathematical Modeling as a Tool to Explore Innovation Diffusion', *Academy of Management Review*, 18 (1993), 487–517; R. Pamela Haunschild and Anne S. Miner, 'Modes of Interorganizational Imitation: The Effects of Outcome Salience and Uncertainty', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 42 (1997), 472–500).
[124] See, for instance, Weyland, *Bounded Rationality and Policy Diffusion*.
[125] See, for example, Finnemore and Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change'.
[126] See, for example, Weyland, *Bounded Rationality and Policy Diffusion*.

at the cost of equity. And the benefits or costs of socialization depend on one's perspective, where the socialized and the socializing may hold different views.

Although it may be reasonable to leave such normative considerations aside in positive scholarly endeavours, such considerations may be of use to policy practitioners. For example, devolution of policy control within federal systems often rests on an implicit view of policy diffusion. Allowing states and localities to formulate their own policies may lead not only to experimentation and learning, but also to competition, socialization and even coercion.[127] Intervention by the national government may facilitate information flows or may coerce subnational governments to avoid the most detrimental of competitive practices. For example, devolution of US welfare policies to the state governments in the 1990s encouraged experimentation and learning, while at the same time limiting competitive race-to-the-bottom pressures through coercive grant conditions that mandated the maintenance of effort in welfare payments. Along similar lines, policy makers within countries and international organizations seeking to improve the world through their influence over the choices of others may benefit from understanding which mechanisms have which effects on policy outcomes.

CONDITIONAL NATURE OF DIFFUSION: WHEN AND WHERE

We believe that the most exciting and informative research on policy diffusion today asks not simply whether policies are diffusing and who is involved in those processes; rather, the future of policy diffusion research lies in uncovering the whens and wheres. Intriguingly, there appears to be a divide between studies of the *process* of diffusion and those of the *destinations* of those processes. Thus, Figures 2 and 3 show 'race to the bottom' and 'convergence' scholarship as distinct from other diffusion work both within American politics and outside of that subfield. What is different about such studies is their focus on the direction and possible endpoint (to which they are racing or converging) of diffusion processes, rather than on the processes themselves. Yet because their approaches and findings so closely relate to other diffusion scholarship, these works easily could be more fully integrated into the heart of diffusion scholarship.[128]

Setting aside the destination, diffusion processes themselves are quite complicated, with effects that are difficult to discern coherently from one study to the next. As we have detailed, a broad array of actors, different types of policies and multiple mechanisms all set the stage for a complex play of potentially triumphant or tragic choices. Having been convinced that policy choices across governments are interrelated, scholars have found sparks of insights about the *conditional* nature of policy diffusion but have yet to illuminate a systematic path forward. We know, for example, that not all policy makers pay equal heed to the policies of one another. We know that not all policies spread in the same manner, and we know that not all mechanisms are at work in the spread of all policies.

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[127] For example, the work of Shipan and Volden ('Bottom-up Federalism') has normative implications for public health advocates, who have long argued about whether to target smoking at the state or local levels. Their analysis demonstrates the conditions under which such advocates should pursue each strategy.

[128] Such disparate conversations are by no means solely caused by subfield divides. For example, early works in the AP literature were in many ways talking past one another, with some focused on the spread of policies (see, for instance, Gray, 'Innovation in the States') and others interested in the innovativeness of states as judged by when they adopted such policies (see, for example, Walker, 'The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States').

Yet the studies that demonstrate these things usually offer an illustrative example, rather than a level of understanding that can be transplanted from one situation to the next. Future work needs to discern systematic patterns in the conditional nature of diffusion.

The characteristics of internal actors, for example, seem to play a significant role in which policies spread in what manner. Examples abound. Füglister, for example, shows that joint membership in intergovernmental health policy bodies is related to the diffusion of successful policies.[129] Kelemen and Sibbitt similarly illustrate how economic liberalization and political fragmentization affect the spread of the American legal style around the world.[130] Shipan and Volden show that state legislative professionalism and interest group activism are crucial for anti-smoking policies to diffuse from US cities to states.[131] Milner finds that autocratic governments are less likely to embrace the diffusion of internet technologies than are democracies.[132] Checkel argues that the effective diffusion of norms via socialization depends on whether the decision-making processes within European countries are top-down with elites adopting norms first or bottom-up with the masses or groups changing their norms first.[133] Methodologically, Neumayer and Plumper offer an approach to incorporating such conditional effects into quantitative empirical analyses.[134]

The nature of external actors is also important to understanding when and where policies spread. The classic works of Crain and Walker illustrate that some governments are seen as leaders, due to their size, wealth and cosmopolitan nature.[135] Such leader governments may be tapped more frequently for policy ideas than less innovative governments, and may also be better able to socialize others successfully. Similarly, the go-betweens of policy entrepreneurs and epistemic communities influence when and where policies spread. In many of these studies, however, the conditional nature of the diffusion process was not uncovered as fully as it could have been. For example, numerous scholars have found that the presence of policy advocates affects the likelihood of the adoption of a particular innovation.[136] Yet these analyses did not test the interaction of the existence of advocates with a geographic neighbours variable (or with variables capturing other mechanisms of diffusion). Thus, while the polities with such crucial advocates were more likely to adopt innovative policies, we do not know, for example, whether advocates substitute for a learning process or reinforce such processes.

Moreover, in addition to looking at how each of these crucial actors interacts with diffusion mechanisms, it is important for future scholars to explore the interactions *among* these different actors. For example, Stone suggests that external or go-between

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[129] Füglister, 'Where Does Learning Take Place?'
[130] R. Daniel Kelemen and Eric C. Sibbitt, 'The Globalization of American Law', *International Organization*, 58 (2004), 103–36.
[131] Shipan and Volden, 'Bottom-up Federalism'.
[132] Helen V. Milner, 'The Digital Divide: The Role of Political Institutions in Technology Diffusion', *Comparative Political Studies*, 39 (2006), 176–99.
[133] Checkel, 'Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe'.
[134] Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plümper, 'Conditional Spatial Policy Dependence: Theory and Model Specification', *Comparative Political Studies*, 45 (2012), 819–49.
[135] Robert L. Crain, 'Fluoridation: Diffusion of an Innovation among Cities', *Social Forces*, 44 (1966), 467–76; Walker, 'The Diffusion of Innovations Among the American States'.
[136] See, for example, Balla, 'Interstate Professional Associations and the Diffusion of Policy Innovations'; Mintrom, 'Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation'; Skocpol, Abend-Wein, Howard and Lehmann, 'Women's Associations and the Enactment of Mothers' Pensions in the United States'.

actors are better able to engage in coercion and socialization when internal actors are reeling from a defeat in war or an economic crisis.[137] Bailey and Rom show that competitive pressures in redistributive policy making are limited to those governments that are already more generous than their peers.[138] Prakash and Potoski, as well as Zeng and Eastin, illustrate how standards among trading partners may lead to a race to the top in environmental practices.[139] The existence and nature of the linkages among internal, external and go-between actors may influence which diffusion mechanisms are used. Finnemore, for example, argues that the adoption of particular science policies depended on the interactions between UNESCO officials and national-level politicians in developing countries.[140] And Drezner notes how policy convergence (presumably through coercion and socialization) turns into competition when great powers disagree over policies and political goals.[141]

In addition to the conditional nature of policy diffusion based on *who* is involved and on *what* is being adopted, the *when* of policy choice also has some subtle effects on the spread of policies across governments. In uncovering the innovativeness of different states, Walker implies that there is something fundamentally different about leaders, middle adopters and laggards, and perhaps about how policies spread across these temporally segmented sets of governments.[142] Canon and Baum similarly find some states to be earlier adopters, but also note that the speed of diffusion has changed over the decades their study examines, perhaps with learning or other mechanisms becoming more available, influential and timely in recent years.[143] The speed of adoption likewise is definitionally related to the S-curves associated with diffusion in non-regional models of diffusion.[144] Surprisingly, however, despite the discussion of speed in these earlier studies, very little recent scholarship has examined the factors that affect the rates at which policies diffuse.[145]

[137] Stone, 'Learning Lessons and Transferring Policy across Time, Space and Disciplines'.

[138] Bailey and Rom, 'A Wider Race?'

[139] Prakash and Potoski, 'Racing to the Bottom?' Zeng and Eastin, 'International Economic Integration and Environmental Protection'.

[140] Zeng and Eastin, 'International Economic Integration and Environmental Protection'; Finnemore, 'International Organizations as Teachers of Norms'.

[141] Drezner, 'Globalization, Harmonization, and Competition'. The nature of the diffusing policies themselves also may influence how policy diffusion comes about. Whether policies are observable, whether they easily can be tried and abandoned, and their degree of complexity may affect not only their speed of adoption but also the reliance of policy makers on particular diffusion mechanisms (see, for example, Rogers, *The Diffusion of Innovations*; Boushey, *Policy Diffusion Dynamics in America*; Makse and Volden, 'The Role of Policy Attributes in the Diffusion of Innovations'). The level of controversy surrounding new policy ideas influences diffusion (see, for instance, Scott P. Hays, 'Patterns of Reinvention: The Nature of Evolution during Policy Diffusion', *Policy Studies Journal*, 24 (1996), 551–66), perhaps leading to higher standards for judging successes elsewhere or to a stronger resistance to coercion or socialization. Therefore, although scholars have shown policy diffusion to be relevant across numerous areas of policy adoption (see, for example, Christopher Z. Mooney and Mei-Hsien Lee, 'Legislative Morality in the American States: The Case of Pre-Roe Abortion Regulation Reform', *American Journal of Political Science*, 39 (1995), 599–627), the nature of that diffusion may depend fundamentally on the type of policy that is spreading.

[142] Walker, 'The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States'.

[143] Bradley Canon and Lawrence Baum, 'Patterns of Adoption of Tort Law Innovations: An Application of Diffusion Theory to Judicial Doctrines', *American Political Science Review*, 75 (1981), 975–87.

[144] See, for example, Gray, 'Innovation in the States'.

[145] However, see Boushey, *Policy Diffusion Dynamics in America*.

Another relatively unexplored possibility is that where one looks temporally in the diffusion process may influence what one finds. Numerous studies support this argument. For example, Welch and Thompson find that coercion becomes more important later in the process; Mooney finds that competition matters more early on; Gilardi, Füglister and Luyet provide evidence that learning increases over time, as knowledge accumulates.[146] Moreover, Mintrom and Vergari illustrate what can be missed by focusing only on the later adoption stage of the policy process, as they find that external networks of experts and geographic neighbours were relevant in explaining the initial *consideration* of education reform but not their subsequent *adoption*.[147]

Most of these conditional diffusion patterns, whether dependent on the actors, the policies or the stage in the diffusion process, were uncovered one at a time through careful but perhaps not generalizable empirical studies. As the scholarship on policy diffusion moves forwards, it would be valuable to have a more systematic grounding in theory in order to structure the empirical work around broad and hopefully general claims. Given the complex and conditional nature of policy diffusion itself, it is perhaps unsurprising that rather complex diffusion patterns emerge from such preliminary theoretical works.[148] Volden, Ting and Carpenter find, for example, many similarities between independent adoptions and learning across governments, but also isolate conditions (based on free-riding behaviour and differing learning opportunities) under which learning effects can be isolated.[149] Game theoretic models or systematic claims arising from non-mathematical theorizing also would benefit from incorporating the other mechanisms of diffusion, as well as a more complete set of political actors. Indeed, theoretical and empirical advancements must proceed hand in hand, with new empirical findings informing theoretical developments that are in turn subject to empirical scrutiny. Such a scientific process for studying policy diffusion can be far more transparent and explicit than it has been in the past.

LEARNING FROM ONE ANOTHER?

Just as governments might learn from one another and facilitate policy diffusion, so too should political scientists working in different subfields learn from one another in order to facilitate the diffusion of useful tools and ideas in their studies. Different substantive emphases or methodological commitments may direct attention towards a certain set of hypotheses and away from others. Though different fields may have reasonable explanations for their respective areas of focus – for example, power in international relations or legislative committees in American politics – it is nevertheless useful to look across subfield lines to see what is being tried elsewhere and to think about how it might apply in one's own work. Similar types of actors affect policy adoption regardless of the geographic unit, whether cities, states, countries or intergovernmental organizations. The mechanisms of learning, competition, socialization and coercion remain relevant across these units as well, as do both vertical and horizontal diffusion dynamics.

[146] Welch and Thompson, 'The Impact of Federal Incentives on State Policy Innovation'; Mooney, 'Modeling Regional Effects on State Policy Diffusion'; Gilardi, Füglister and Luyet, 'Learning from Others'.
[147] Michael Mintrom and Sandra Vergari, 'Policy Networks and Innovation Diffusion: The Case of State Education Reforms', *Journal of Politics*, 60 (1998), 126–48.
[148] See, for instance, Dietmar Braun and Fabrizio Gilardi, 'Taking "Galton's Problem" Seriously: Towards a Theory of Policy Diffusion', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 18 (2006), 298–322.
[149] Volden, Ting and Carpenter, 'A Formal Model of Learning and Policy Diffusion'.

Yet, with few exceptions, the policy diffusion literature has developed separately, if concurrently, in comparative politics, American politics and international relations. If communities of scholarship ideally retain both coherence and openness, the network analysis undertaken above shows that although each subfield has its strengths, none is demonstrative of an ideal balance. Comparative scholarship appears to have a high degree of openness, drawing frequently from both AP and IR scholarship. At the same time, however, it is difficult to assess progress, as convergence around a set of core research questions is lacking. American politics appears to suffer the reverse ailment: scholarship draws more sparingly from the other fields, yet we see some coherence in the research programme, with early work producing stylized facts, and later work seeking to explain variation. With the new emphasis on mechanisms, both AP and CP research is beginning to test competing hypotheses of diffusion, though this work remains in its very early stages. IR scholarship seems to fall somewhere between the others, fostering separate communities in diffusion scholarship that make progress on their own, but which are somewhat isolated from others.

We suggest that each subfield will be better off by being both more coherent and more open. Coherence calls on scholars to address a core set of research questions, to take into account past work and to attempt to improve upon it, aiming towards producing a better understanding of the causes of policy diffusion across time and space. Openness will facilitate this better understanding by alerting scholars to relevant concepts, actors, mechanisms and research strategies that may be useful in the endeavour.[150]

Throughout this study, we have raised numerous ideas for future research that we believe will be particularly fruitful. We conclude not with a restatement of these directions, but rather with three ways in which diffusion scholarship across the fields of political science could become more fully integrated with mutual benefits. First, a mere *awareness* of the related work being done by scholars across fields may spur new ideas, synergies and collaborative projects in the future. We have tried to highlight many such connections in the citations and topics explored above. Secondly, a *common language* of diffusion scholarship would be helpful. For example, rather than adding another diffusion metaphor to our list of more than a hundred terms, we should reflect on whether the processes we are studying fit nicely into the categories of learning, competition, coercion or socialization. By clearly labelling the mechanisms we study, we open our work up to more natural comparisons to similar studies elsewhere. Not only should scholars use common terms for diffusion mechanisms, but also for specific types of actors (internal, external and go-betweens) and policies (on such dimensions as their complexity, and the possibility of testing or observing them).

Finally, whereas any individual scholar may be overwhelmed by the many areas for future research that we discuss, the collective scholarly community is well suited to take on these tasks. As with any substantial and advanced field of study, further insights can be gained by the field embracing both micro and macro levels of analysis simultaneously, through *both specialization and aggregation*. In terms of specialization, for example, scholars who know a particular policy area extremely well and can tease out the central

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[150] We are also hopeful that the current trend of increasing coauthorships and collaborations will help scholars overcome interdisciplinary and subfield barriers, in ways already becoming apparent between sociology and political science (see, for instance, Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett, 'Introduction: The International Diffusion of Liberalism', Simmons, Dobbin and Garrett, eds, *The Global Diffusion of Markets and Democracy*; Givan, Soule and Roberts, eds, *The Diffusion of Social Movements*).

actors or the exact diffusion mechanisms dominant in that area would add crucial building blocks.

At the same time, aggregation is critical. Where such earlier individual studies can be well categorized in terms of actors involved, mechanisms uncovered, and policies investigated, larger systematic patterns may come into focus. We may find, for example, that go-betweens in learning-based diffusion vary between policies that can be easily tried and abandoned as opposed to those that are more fixed upon adoption. And such go-betweens may serve quite different roles for similar policies spreading through coercion or socialization. Alternatively, the capacity of policy makers may be a crucial determinant in the spread of highly complex policies, but largely inconsequential for diffusion of less complicated policies. As a healthy and robust field of study, policy diffusion research can thus build upon the disparate interests and strengths of all its scholars, illustrating the benefits of an integrated and collaborative approach to political science.