

Chapter 7

Conceptualizing State Policy Adoption and Diffusion

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Since the 1970s, state higher-education policy has undergone profound and widespread change. During this period, the 50 states, long the nation's laboratories for testing novel solutions to such social and economic problems as poverty and economic development, emerged as workshops of policy experimentation in the arena of postsecondary education, as well. In the early 1980s, for example, most states used their powers of taxation in an effort to expand college access for low-income students, practiced a form of oversight that rested primarily on monitoring the flow of resources into institutions, and governed public colleges and universities in a more-or-less centralized fashion. In contrast, by 2010, many states had adopted new, incentives-based programs in college student finance, increased their subsidization of college for middle- and upper-income students, experimented with outcomes-based accountability systems, and enacted reforms in state-level governance and coordination that upended long-established patterns.

These historic shifts on the state policy landscape of higher education raise questions about the origins and the nature of policy change. What factors prompt state governments to adopt new policies for higher education at the times they do? That is, what drives states to adopt changes in the ways they finance, govern, and hold responsible their colleges and universities? More specifically, how do conditions within the states, such as their demography, economic patterns, postsecondary

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organizational patterns, and political institutions, shape states' likelihood of experimenting with new policies? And to what extent might pressures that operate at the boundaries between states shape policy experimentation as states compete with one another for resources, people, and ideas? To what extent do the states influence one another in the spread of policies across geo-political boundaries?

A growing number of researchers have empirically addressed these questions over the past three decades. The first two authors of the chapter have each examined state higher-education policy adoption since the 1990s and have worked together to examine this topic since the early 2000s. Over the course of these empirical efforts, a kind of "standard theoretical model" of adoption has been distilled from higher-education studies, political science, organization theory, economics, and sociology for pursuing questions around postsecondary policy adoption in the American states. In the chapter, we aim to advance a comprehensive theoretical framework for interpreting this research tradition and shaping future work.

Our framework builds on several lines of theory and research in the fields of political science, public policy, and higher-education studies. Cutting across these three fields a body of scholarly literature focused on *state policy innovation and diffusion*. This literature, along with the distinctive analytic approach evolving alongside it, posits that two sets of factors drive policy adoption: internal and external. That is, states adopt the policies they do in part because of the influence of their internal socio-demographic, economic, organizational and political characteristics, and in part because of the influence the 50 states have on one another's policy behavior. The latter influence is a byproduct of emulation and competition among the fifty states, which comprise semi-autonomous, yet semi-interdependent, actors.

From this perspective, any satisfactory explanation of state governmental behavior must account both for the within-state and the across-state determinants of that behavior. The first set of policy influences, those arising exclusively within a given state, are *intrastate* determinants of public policy; the latter ones, occurring at the intersections between and among states, are *interstate* determinants. Guided by this perspective, we examine in this chapter the conceptual underpinnings of a variety of state-level factors and interstate influences that may have helped drive state policy experimentation in higher education.

Within states, we devote particular attention to the potential catalyzing role of state politics in driving policy change. Specifically, we attend to both certain institutional facets of states' political systems (e.g., how much power is vested in the governor's office?) and to states' partisan profiles (e.g., what is the level of competitiveness of the two major political parties at a given moment in time?). State political institutions and actors have traditionally been neglected as topics of serious scholarship in the field of higher-education studies (McLendon, 2003a, 2003c). A recent wave of empirical research, however, points to these factors as exerting a powerful influence over the policy behaviors of the states in the realm of postsecondary education (e.g., Hearn, McLendon & Mokher, 2008; Hearn, Lacy, & Warshaw, 2014; Hicklin & Meier, 2008; McLendon & Hearn, 2013; McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006; McLendon, Hearn & Mokher, 2009; McLendon, Mokher & Doyle, 2009; McLendon, Tandberg, & Hillman, 2014; Tandberg & Ness, 2011;

Tandberg, 2010a, 2010b, 2013). Clearly, political factors warrant serious attention in examination of intrastate policy emergence.

We begin this chapter by sketching the origins and development in the 1950s and 1960s of a systematic line of research in political science and sociology focused on state policy innovation and diffusion. We trace some of the key conceptual questions and issues that gave rise to this scholarship in core disciplines and highlight important methodological improvements that more recently have sharpened and rejuvenated this line of inquiry.

Having constructed this broad scaffold, we then present the core elements of an integrative conceptual framework for understanding state policy innovation in higher education. In distilling ideas and key findings from a number of areas of research in the subfield of comparative-state politics and policy, we consider how states' socio-demographic contexts, economic contexts, postsecondary organizational and policy contexts, political contexts, and interstate diffusion can propel state governments to undertake innovative policy initiatives for higher education. After reviewing empirical work relating to this perspective, we conclude with reflections on prospects for future scholarship in this arena.

State Policy Innovation: An Emerging Theoretical and Analytic Concern

Why do states adopt lotteries, or new taxes, or abortion regulations, or, for that matter, reforms to their systems of higher and postsecondary education, at the times at which they do? Although social scientists of many disciplinary traditions and backgrounds have studied this question, the bulk of theory and research resides in the domain of political science, in particular, in the subfield of comparative-state politics and policy. Indeed, efforts to explain systematically the sources of variation in public policy outcomes across the 50 American states stand as one of the pillars of modern political science. A number of related research traditions have arisen around this question, all of them dating, in their contemporary forms, to the 1960s—era social sciences. The tradition of scholarship upon which we most closely build finds its roots in several important works of this era, notably Jack Walker's (1969) pioneering research into state policy innovation and diffusion.

The tradition of research that Walker initiated, and upon which we build, is distinct from another tradition called "policy process" studies (e.g., Sabatier, 1999; DeLeon, 1999; McLendon, 2003b). Theory and research on the public policy *process* typically examine how policy problems are defined and formulated, how policy choices are made, and how those choices are subsequently evaluated. Many classic publications exist on the different stages of the public policy process, including those by Nelson Polsby (1984), John Kingdon (1984), and Barbara Nelson (1984) on policy agenda-setting Kingdon (1994, 1995), and ones by Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky (1973), Eugene Bardach (1977), and Daniel Mazmanian and Paul

Sabatier (1983) on policy implementation. These lines of work have influenced scholarship in the realm of higher-education studies, too. Studies by Olivas (1984), McLendon (2003a, 2003b), Ingle, Cohen-Vogel, and Hughes (2007), and Ness (2009, 2010a) all clearly build on the policy-process genre of political science. Notably these works have tended to rely on comparative-case studies aimed toward theory generation or elaboration regarding the nature of policy formation in higher education, rather than on quantitative, empirical testing of hypotheses about the determinants of policy choices and outcomes.

With his highly original work, Walker (1969) defined a new genre. In doing so, he substantially expanded research into the determinants of state governmental spending that Thomas Dye (1966) and others had popularized. Walker synthesized different strands of research in the fields of rural sociology, organization theory, communication studies, and political science in an effort to identify factors contributing to governmental actions. Observing that there had been a “growing awareness...that levels of expenditure alone are not an adequate measure of public policy outcomes” (p. 880), Walker argued for the merits of scholarship on the determinants of decisions outside the budgetary process, focusing on what he considered the most fundamental policy decision: whether to initiate an individual program in the first place. Because ultimately every policy can be traced to a non-incremental change, Walker reasoned, the key question was: What explains patterns in state adoption of altogether new policies? In other words, what accounts for policy *innovation* among the American states?

In using the term “innovation,” Walker meant a policy that is *new to the jurisdiction adopting it*. He thus differentiated “innovation” from the concept of invention or the process through which altogether original policy ideas are conceived. Most researchers have followed this convention, and we do so in this chapter, defining a state innovation in higher education as any policy that is new to the state adopting it, regardless of how many other states already may have adopted the policy.

As Walker turned to the American states as units of analysis for his study of the factors influencing policy innovation in America’s democratic systems, he immediately observed that some states had long been regarded as policy leaders and others as policy laggards. He set out to understand better this aspect of American federalism, specifically the “relative speed and spatial patterns of adoption of new programs” (p. 881) or the reasons some states adopt innovations faster than others. Using scores that he assigned to states based upon the dates of their adoption of more than 90 different public policies since the late nineteenth century, Walker identified correlates of the states’ overall innovativeness. Using simple correlations and factor-analytic techniques, Walker found evidence that states of greater urbanicity, industrial development, wealth, political turnover, and urban representation in their legislatures tended to adopt new programs more rapidly than states with lower levels of these attributes.

Walker was not content, however, to simply examine the internal political, economic, and social characteristics of states as factors in innovation patterns. He argued that policies in other states must also be influential. In looking beyond state

lines, Walker added an important new angle, asking to what extent policies spread or, diffuse, among the American states.

Walker was one of the first scholars to empirically examine policy diffusion but, by the time he came to this focus, diffusion studies had long been a staple of the academic literature of sociology, organizational theory, and decision sciences.¹ Most influential in this vein was Everett Rogers' (1962) *Diffusion of Innovations*, a book that left an indelible imprint on scholarship in the area. Rogers' synthesis of more than 500 studies found that the diffusion of innovations across a variety of organizational settings seemed to be characterized by an "S-Curve," whereby the adoption of a new program or technology began little by little, then rapidly accelerated before ending slowly as the product matured or as new technologies emerged.² This conceptualization, and subsequent works by Katz, Levin, and Hamilton (1963) and Mohr (1969), helped to inspire the development of so-called "leader-laggard" models, which sought to explain the order in which organizations within a given field adopt a given innovation.

Walker brought this approach to diffusion to the state level, declaring that states' "inter-organizational contexts" may hold the key to understanding why some states seemed to adopt new programs faster than others. Using factor analysis, Walker found that geographically proximate states tended to adopt similar policies in a similar order over time. What's more, he suggested, certain regional leaders – for example, New Jersey in the Mid-Atlantic region; Florida in the South; and New Mexico in the Mountains and Midwest – tended to adopt a given policy first, followed by other states within the same geographic region. He interpreted this pattern as evidence of *regional* policy diffusion, and characterized it as being an inevitable byproduct of the states' embedment in the fixed community of sub-governmental systems that comprise American federalism. Walker characterized the phenomenon of governmental innovation in the American states overall as that of a national system of emulation, with regional variation in policy innovation driven by states' imitation of their bellwether neighbors.

Walker speculated on three possible explanations for the policy mimicry that he observed. These explanations themselves have become widely diffused throughout the growing literature on state policy innovation and diffusion. First, Walker surmised that states copy one another because of the "satisficing" tendencies of government officials. Incorporating the groundbreaking work of several contemporary theories of decision making in complex organizations (notably Simon, 1957, Cyert

¹ Interestingly, early scholarship in rural sociology examined the diffusion among farmers of agricultural innovations developed at state land-grant universities. One influential analysis of diffusion of hybrid seed corn across Iowa communities found that more educated and cosmopolitan farmers tended to adopt the new seeding practices first, and that direct experiences and communication with nearby farmers were key mechanisms in spreading those practices (Ryan & Gross, 1943).

² Rogers' longer line of research pointed to a number of factors as having influenced a unit's probability to innovate. Such factors included resources, organizational size and complexity, education levels (individual or aggregate), the unit's age, the unit's tolerance for risk, the extent to which the unit may be networked with others, the extent to which the unit seeks the advice of opinion leaders, and the unit's propensity for innovativeness overall.

and March, 1963, and Lindblom, 1965), Walker argued that state officials are able neither to process comprehensively all of the information available to them, nor to evaluate every possible policy option. Confronted with the demands of too-little time and incomplete information, officials rely on certain heuristics, rules of thumb, or decision shortcuts, when attempting to resolve, or at least address, complex policy problems. One such shortcut is that of analogy, in which state policymakers compare their own situation to similar situations in other states. Consequently, Walker argued, policymakers may look to their neighbors in an effort to disencumber themselves of the complexities that normally attend decisionmaking in America's democratic subsystems.

Walker cited two additional possible explanations for the diffusion of policy ideas: the presence among the states of both competitive and normative pressures for policy change. He emphasized in particular the role of interstate competition. For example, the awareness by governmental officials of a policy initiative in a given state can shape the conditions for policy consideration and debate elsewhere, especially when officials perceive the prior state's actions as possibly disadvantaging the relative competitiveness or the material well-being of their own state. This pattern is prominently seen in the examples of tax cuts and business deregulation, Walker contended. Because a frequent argument against raising taxes or, passing measures that more stringently regulate business, is the fear that such actions could make a state less competitive than its neighbors in attracting new industry, changes in the fiscal and regulatory climates of a state's neighbors can prompt officials to undertake similar policy actions in response.

Normative pressures among the states also can spur policy innovation, Walker speculated. Although "uncertainty and the fear of unintended consequences have always been formidable barriers to reform," wrote Walker, "inertia can more easily be overcome...if the proponent of change can point to the successful implementation of his program in some other similar setting" (pp. 890). As more states adopt a program deemed successful elsewhere, other states face increased social pressures to follow suit. This condition, Walker maintained, can create its own momentum for reform, however weak the demands for a particular policy may be in a given state. Similarly, states mimic one another, he argued, because of social desirability; sometimes a given policy simply becomes fashionable, prompting states to adopt it in an effort to 'keep up with the Joneses.'

Underlying these three explanations, argued Walker, are the interactions and communications of state officials across state lines. He surmised that certain well-established patterns of communication between and among the states had likely shaped the regional clustering of policy innovations that he observed. Walker acknowledged that traditional boundaries probably had become more permeable over time, reducing regionalism's role in policy diffusion, but it remained clear to him that regionalism continued to be a force in the complex processes of state policy innovation. That influence would likely continue for as long as the states viewed their neighbors as a basis for legitimate comparisons about the problems that they faced and about the solutions that they would entertain.

Walker's work shaped subsequent scholarship on state policy adoption in at least four important ways. First, by examining the forces that gave rise to *new* state policies, he helped broaden the range of governmental decisions of interest to social scientists, moving the frontier of scholarship beyond the study of levels of public expenditure alone. Second, by seeking to account empirically for the influences of states upon one another, Walker popularized the study of the "horizontal" migration of public policies (that is, innovations that travel from state-to-state, rather than from the federal government to the states, or from the states to the federal level.). Indeed, much of the research on state policy adoption that arose in the wake of Walker's work has sought to incorporate the concept of "diffusion." Notable in this tradition is the influential work of Frances and William Berry (e.g., see Berry & Berry, 1990, 2014) and Michael Mintrom (Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom & Vergari, 1998).

A third meaningful contribution involves the specific diffusion framework that Walker developed. His view clearly was that of a regional diffusion model, whereby the nation was comprised of fixed multiple regions within which constituent states emulated the policies of their most proximal neighbors and peers. Although an alternative model, emphasizing contiguity, rather than fixed regions, later would gain ascendance, Walker's formulation of the role of regionalism in state policy innovation deeply influenced later scholarship.³

Walker's fourth contribution to the literature entails the rationales that he cited as explanations of policy change: the decisional predisposition of public officials toward satisficing and the existence among the states of competitive and normative pressures for policy change. These explanations for interstate policy diffusion have become standard in the literature. States are said to "learn" from one another in an attempt to simplify decisionmaking, using shortcuts to ameliorate the complexities that inescapably attend policy formation in America's fragmented governmental systems. States are also said to vie with one another to achieve competitive advantage or avoid being disadvantaged relative to their neighbors or peers. Indeed today it is conventional to view competition among the states as a prime catalyst for the spread of ideas throughout the nation (Ingle et al., 2007; Lacy & Tandberg, 2014; McLendon, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Polsby, 1984), a phenomenon that Dye (1990) and others later termed, "competitive federalism." Finally, because states – more precisely, the officials who lead and manage their governments – occupy a distinct social system consisting of certain norms around the legitimacy of policy ideas,

³Other diffusion models exist. A prominent one is Gray's (1973) "national interaction model," which posits that public-sector officials learn about innovative policies elsewhere from peers in other states through national communications networks. Gray proposed that officials from states that have already adopted a particular program interact thoroughly with officials from states that have not yet adopted the program, and that each contact between the members of the two groups provides an added stimulus for the latter to adopt. Whereas both regional- and contiguous-diffusion models posit that states are most influenced by their geographically proximal neighbors, the national-interaction model conceptualizes the social system as consisting of the entire community of American states, with each state capable of exerting an equal influence over other states regardless of spatial distance.

states also may look to their neighbors or peers for cues about the acceptability of a given course of action.

Following a period of unevenness in scholarship during the 1970s and 1980s, William Berry and Frances Stokes Berry (1990, 1992, 1994, 2014) rejuvenated the study of state policy innovation and diffusion with their introduction into the field of a powerful new research methodology: event history analysis [EHA]. Previous studies in this area, such as Walker's (1969), shared several serious weaknesses in design and methodology. For example, the cross-sectional approaches dominant in that era were well suited for neither the dynamic nature of the policy-adoption phenomena that scholars studied nor the time-variant data that they employed. Berry (1994) pointed to an even more fundamental limitation, however. Because often researchers had relied analytically on separate tests of the intrastate (i.e., internal-determinants) and interstate (diffusion) explanations, analysts typically failed to account for the causal factors specified in each of the rival models (Berry, 1994). Consequently, extant research could not validly discern the true policy impact of state-to-state policy influences net of the effects of various within-state factors, such as demographic, economic, or political conditions.

The Berrys creatively addressed this limitation through their use of event history analysis [EHA], a longitudinal analytic technique that had become popularized in biostatistics. This analytic tool, a form of logistic regression applied to grouped data over time, permitted the Berrys to test the simultaneous effects both of internal state determinants and of state-to-state influences, combining the two explanations into a single, "unified" model of state policy innovation and diffusion. They tested the model in two different studies on the factors influencing state adoption of new lotteries and new taxes (Berry & Berry, 1990, 1992). In both studies, the dependent variable was dichotomous: whether or not a state adopted a lottery or a tax in a given year. The Berrys then included as independent variables a variety of indicators of the states' demographic (e.g., ethnicity, population, religious preference), economic (e.g., income, unemployment) and political (e.g., partisanship, election timing, ideology) conditions, along with a variable indicating whether and when each state in the dataset had adopted the policy. This information about the timing of each state's adoption enabled them to model the sequence in which states had adopted the lotteries and the taxes, permitting them to draw inferences about the effects of a given state's behavior on that of its neighbors. The two studies yielded similar results: certain internal determinants of states influenced the timing of a state's adoption of the new policies, but so, too, did the past actions of a state's neighbors.

At about the same time as the Berrys produced their EHA findings, Paul Peterson and Mark Rom (1990) published their provocatively titled study on state "welfare magnets." Their analysis further popularized interstate competition as a leading explanation for the spread of public policies among the American states. Peterson and Rom described the U.S. system of social welfare as highly decentralized: each state could establish its own levels of welfare benefits, which, along with patterns in social mobility, enabled the poor to cross state lines in pursuit of the largest possible benefits. Because of these conditions, a state would have strong incentive to take action so as to avoid the impression that its welfare assistance was more generous

than that of its neighbors, a conspicuousness that could make the state a “welfare magnet” for the poor coming from other states. Consequently, Peterson and Rom argued, states whose benefits levels stood above those of neighbors are especially likely to allow benefits to decline. This seemingly perverse competition among states created, the authors wrote, a veritable “a race to the bottom” in the provision of welfare benefits in the U.S. Peterson (1995) would later develop the argument further, claiming that such races “to the bottom” are likely to be found operating in many other areas of redistributive public policy and that these races could be extended to other features of welfare programs (e.g., program creation, design elements) that made the programs a source of potential competition among states.

These different strands of scholarship converged at about the same time as the so-called “devolution revolution” in American government. That movement focused on the states’ reemergence as preferred arenas for policy experimentation in the U.S., and sparked renewed interest in understanding the conditions driving state policy reform in such areas ranging from public health to the environment to education. The creation, recreation, and spread of public policies among the states had become a phenomenon for which the policy innovation and diffusion framework seemed notably well suited.

Since 1990, more than 150 published studies have followed in the tradition of state-level research first popularized by Walker, and later refined by the Berrys, and others. A growing subset of this work applies event history analysis in studying the origins and spread of a wide range of public policies including, abortion regulations, capital-punishment legislation, health insurance reforms, hate-crime laws, same-sex marriage bans, utility regulation, welfare benefits, anti-smoking mandates, administrative reforms in state government, and state decisions to join across-state compacts (Ka & Teske, 2002; Karch, Nicholson-Crotty, Woods, & Bowman, 2016; Mooney & Lee, 1995, 1999; Schram, Nitz, & Krueger, 1998; Shipan & Volden, 2006; Soule & Earl, 2001; Volden, 2002, 2006).

Only more recently has a discernible body of research arisen around policy innovation and diffusion in the arena of state education policy. Most of these works, undertaken in the wake of the comprehensive (and frenetic) school-reform movement in the U.S., examine the conditions that are associated with specific kinds of school reforms, particularly vouchers and other school-choice measures (Karch, 2010; Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom & Vergari, 1998; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005; Wong & Langevin, 2005, 2006; Wong & Shen, 2002). Wong and Langevin (2006), for instance, make use of the state policy innovation and diffusion framework and of event history analysis to study how certain social, economic, and political factors influenced passage of charter school laws in the states. These analysts found significant positive effects for Republican governors, minority legislative representation, and the percentage of private school enrollments, and a negative effect for classroom spending. They found no evidence, however, of a diffusion effect.

In one particularly creative endeavor, Mintrom (1997) melded event history analysis with surveys of state officials to ascertain the influence that “policy entrepreneurs” had played in the spread of state adoption of school choice policies. Mintrom found the likelihood of adoption of these initiatives to have been higher in states

with larger percentages of students enrolled in private schools, looming statewide elections, weaker unions, and poorer student test score performance, relative to national norms. What's more, he also found the probability of state adoption of these measures as being higher in states where so-called policy entrepreneurs had helped facilitate passage of the laws. In addition to these within-state factors, Mintrom's research found evidence of state-to-state diffusion: states with a larger proportion of neighbors that had already adopted a school-choice policy were themselves more likely to adopt one.

Scholarship on the role of diffusion and other factors in state policy innovation and change in the arena of higher education evolved comparatively late, relative to scholarship on other policy arenas. Although, a rich vein of research, spanning more than four decades, exists on the determinants of state spending on higher education (e.g., Archibald & Feldman, 2006; Humphreys, 2000; Hossler et al., 1997; Lowry, 2001; McLendon, Hearn & Mokher, 2009; McLendon, Mokher & Doyle, 2009; McLendon et al., 2014; Ness & Tandberg, 2013; Peterson, 1976; Toutkoushian and Hollis, 1998), scholarship on the factors influencing state adoption of distinctively new programs is both rarer and of a more recent origin.

Hearn and Griswold's (1994) study was one of the earliest, systematic empirical works on state-level policy innovation in postsecondary education. Drawing primarily from sociology, policy studies, and organizational theory, Hearn and Griswold used a cross-sectional research design and multivariate regression to test hypotheses about the factors prompting states to innovate in such areas as policies mandating assessment of undergraduate students, college savings bonds and prepaid tuition plans, and alternative licensure for K-12 teachers. One of their core conceptual interests was in the relationship between centralized governance structures for higher education and state policy behavior. They found governance structure, along with population size, wealth, and postsecondary enrollments, had a statistically significant relationship with a state's propensity to innovate, although the relationships varied across the six policies the authors studied, and were in ways sometimes inconsistent with the hypothesized expectations. Hearn, Griswold, and Marine (1996) soon afterward investigated factors associated with state tuition and student aid policies, finding again that governance structures were significantly associated with certain policy directions.

Later, in a series of conceptual writings, McLendon proposed that the core policy-innovation-and-diffusion model of political science could be applied to the study of state governmental decision making in higher education (McLendon, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c). In that spirit, McLendon, Hearn, and their colleagues then launched the most intensive line of policy-adoption research in higher education, encompassing accountability and governance policies, administrative reforms, state economic development policies, attainment and outcomes-driven policies, and market-based, student financing schemes (inter alia, see Hearn et al., 2008, 2010, 2013, 2014; McLendon et al., 2005, 2007, 2006; Mokher and McLendon, 2009).⁴

⁴Other analysts have pursued a similar course, using EHA to study such decisions as state adoptions of broad-based merit-scholarship programs (Doyle, 2006, 2010). Of course, analysts have

In building this research program, McLendon, Hearn and colleagues built on conceptual scaffolding distilled from political science and other core literatures as well as major recent methodological refinements. Specifically, they extended the early work of Hearn, Griswold, and others by making use of both a broader conceptual framework descended from Walker (1969) and the EHA methodology that the Berrys (1990, 1994) had productively imported for state policy-adoption analysis.

As will be reviewed in more detail later in this chapter, the findings from this line of research are mixed in their details regarding the power and direction of various specific influences, depending on the nature of the policy. This is not surprising: as the authors' conceptual thinking evolved, they tested different hypotheses, utilized different variable indicators, and employed different forms of EHA modeling. These inconsistencies over time and across studies pose some constraints on the generalizations to be drawn from regarding particular influences (see Lacy, 2015).

Nonetheless, the empirical findings have been strikingly consistent in one respect: states' higher-education policy choices are unquestionably linked to identifiable features of states' socioeconomic, organizational, policy, political, institutional, and diffusion contexts. Reflecting what has been learned from our work and that of others working in this arena, we develop in the following section an integrated conceptual framework for examining state-level reforms in postsecondary financing, accountability, and governance policy. Our framework incorporates elements found in the conventional policy innovation and diffusion literature and the emerging political-science literature as well as insights gleaned from our and others' higher-education studies. Our goal is to produce a useful, inclusive conceptual model that, over time, can be further tested, refined, and extended. Ideally, that process can enable researchers to generalize more confidently from specific findings, thus strengthening understanding of state governmental behavior in higher-education policy.

Conceptual Framework

In the preceding section, we outlined the broad contours of established approaches to understanding state governments' policy innovation and the diffusion of innovations across state lines. In this section, we elaborate on and extend the existing theoretical foundation, building on scholarship regarding factors that have influenced state policy reform over recent decades in the arenas of postsecondary financing, accountability, and governance and management.

As with all frameworks for state policy innovation and diffusion, ours accounts for the conditions both within individual states and at the intersections between and among states that may explain states' propensities to adopt new policies. Our model, as summarized in Fig. 7.1, conceives of state policy innovation and change as being

also studied innovation using a variety of research methods and strategies other than EHA, including some qualitative investigations (e.g., see Cohen-Vogel, 2007).

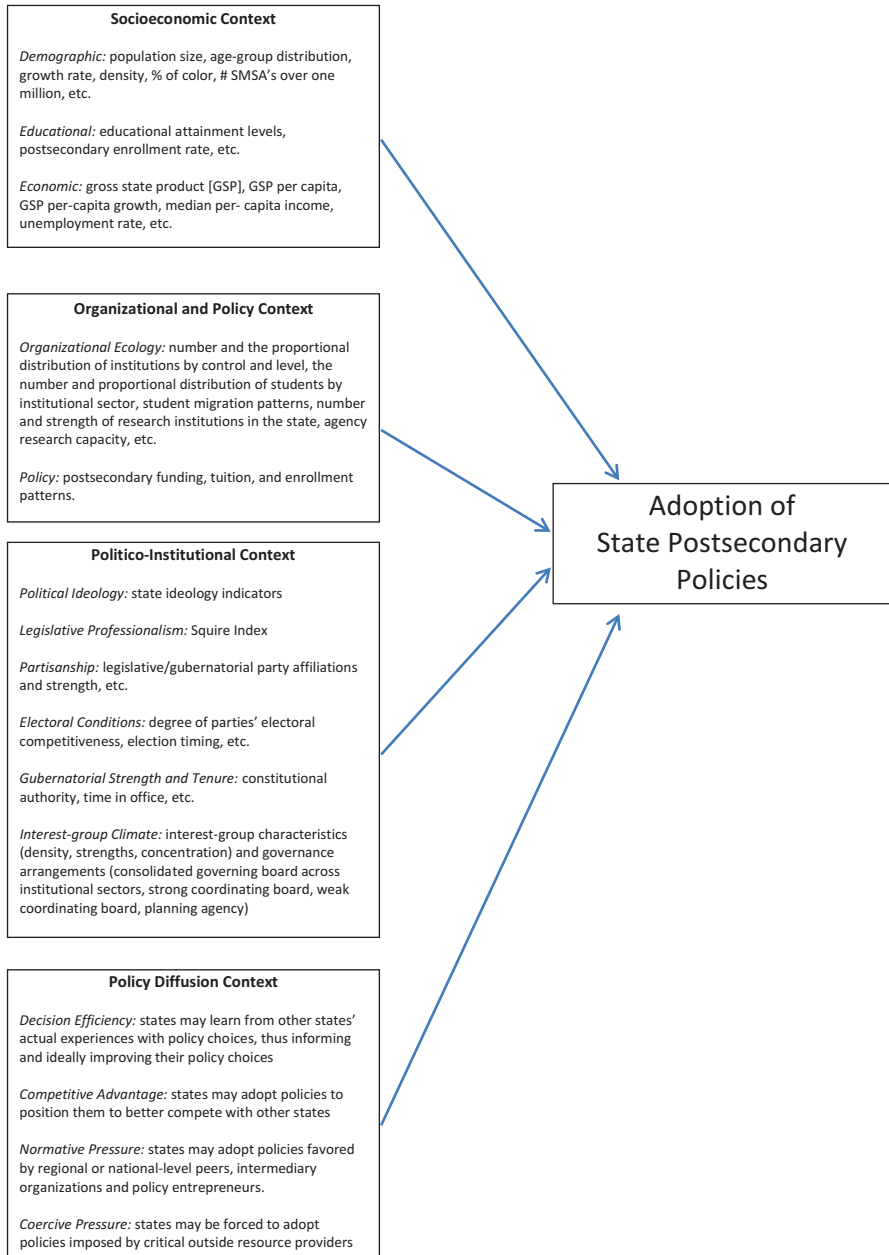


Fig. 7.1 A conceptual model of state policy innovation and diffusion in higher education

a product of four distinct sets of forces: (1) the socioeconomic contexts of states; (2) the organizational and policy contexts of states; (3) the politico-institutional contexts of states; and, (4) the interstate policy diffusion contexts of states. The first three categories represent internal-state determinants likely to influence the probability that states will innovate, while the fourth category represents the inter-organizational context within which states can influence one another's policy behavior. Of course, these various kinds of influences are not as conceptually distinct as the figure implies: they can intersect and overlap. Still, the schema serves to provide a straightforward overview of our thinking. For each category, we describe specific kinds of factors that can help catalyze policy change, discussing their relevance to our conceptual framework in light of research findings distilled mainly from the fields of comparative-state politics and policy and higher-education studies.

Our primary goal for the remainder of the chapter is that of developing a framework for studying state-level policy reform in higher education that is, at once, sufficiently broad as to enable the incorporation of a meaningful array of influences that can capture the complexity of state-level decision making, yet suitably specific as to yield a comprehensible and realistic set of testable hypotheses for future research in this arena.

State Socioeconomic Context

The framework's first set of explanatory factors includes state demography, economic conditions, and other elements comprising the *socioeconomic contexts* of the states. These conditions can be crucial in shaping governmental behavior. A state's socioeconomic context can both produce problems with which a state government may choose to grapple and provide the resource capacity by which the state may choose to address those problems and pressures.

Demography plays a key role in shaping state postsecondary policy outcomes in a number of important respects. Two broad sets of demographic factors, in particular, are especially likely to shape state policy choice in the realm of higher education: 1) certain facets of a state's population and 2) patterns in educational attainment. Regarding population characteristics, we know from the larger research literature on state policy innovation that more populous states often adopt programs and policies of greater technical sophistication (Berry & Berry, 1990; Mohr, 1969; Walker, 1969). There is evidence for such a relationship in some of our own work, for example, in the area of student unit-record systems, where more populous states tend to adopt these programs, perhaps as a way to address the complexities of larger postsecondary enrollments and of the greater array of institutions that dot the postsecondary landscapes of these states (e.g., Hearn et al., 2008). The size of a state's population is clearly capable of influencing postsecondary policy outcomes, but the proportion of a state's population by age grouping (e.g., the youthfulness or, alternatively, the agedness of a state's population) also conceivably affects those outcomes. Age distributions have been influential in other areas of public policy, and

work by Doyle (2006) and Tandberg and Ness (2011) suggests that the youthfulness of a state's population, in particular, can influence state postsecondary policymaking. Beyond size and age distributions, factors such as population growth, density, diversity, and urbanicity may be influential.

Second, educational attainment levels can exert a powerful influence on state policy outcomes in a variety of direct and indirect ways and have been linked with an array of policies, including spending levels and certain innovations. We can think of these influences both on the "supply" and the "demand" side of the policy equation. The supply of an educated citizenry is widely acknowledged to have become a crucial ingredient in state economic competitiveness. Alongside the rise in the 1980s of the "knowledge economy," which rests on the production and management of knowledge and information technologies as engines of state economic growth, state governments began focusing on ways to spur human-capital formation. Rather than winning competitions for industrial plants, states began emphasizing the production of new knowledge and the formation of human capital, overall, as key elements in their economic-development strategies (Hearn et al., 2014). Because states with less educated citizenries stand at a competitive disadvantage relative to those with more educated ones, low attainment levels can sometimes prompt states to adopt new policies that hold promise for building the informational and knowledge infrastructures needed to compete and to grow their economies. Many observers and analysts have pointed to broad-based, merit-scholarship programs as an example of one such innovation in the policy realm of higher education that can deepen a state's supply of human capital (see Doyle, 2006; Doyle et al., 2010; Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Heller, 2002).

The link between educational attainment and policy outcomes can also be examined from the "demand" side: levels of educational attainment in a state can shape the very preferences of citizens for certain governmental services. One of the strongest findings in the literature on innovation, across many different disciplines and fields, is that, persons with higher levels of education are more likely to innovate, or to support innovative ideas and practices, than are those with lower levels. A high level of education provides individuals access to knowledge about innovative practices and an openness to new ideas (Berry & Berry, 2014).

Closely associated with the demographic and educational characteristics of states are economic characteristics, the third class of notable socioeconomic influence in our schema. The literature on state policy and politics speaks clearly with respect to this factor's importance: patterns in state economic development and fiscal capacity "matter." Many classic studies of the 1960s and 1970s, such as those by Dawson and Robinson (1963) and Dye (1966), found strong, positive statistical relationships between economic development patterns – principally state wealth, employment, and gross product – and public expenditures. Much evidence also points to connections between higher levels of wealth and economic activity and state adoption of altogether *new* policies, particularly ones requiring substantial new expenditures (e.g., Berry & Berry, 2014; Walker, 1969). For example, personal income can be an important determinant in initiating certain state programs, because wealth determines what a state can afford to do for its citizens. Although the prepon-

derance of research over the past 25 years has dispelled the myth of economic determinism, which viewed economic-development patterns as the exclusive, driving force behind all governmental activity, the literature nonetheless points to economic conditions as crucial factors in helping to shape much of what government does. The direction of these economic influences on the policy behavior of states can vary, however.

In the literatures of political science and public policy, economic advantage tends to be associated with a greater propensity for state policy action, including the adoption of distinctively new policies, but not always so. Indeed, economic privation, taking the form of declines in gross product or of increasing unemployment rates, can sometimes catalyze policy change. In some recent studies of policy adoption in higher education, researchers have found economic disadvantage associated with certain forms of policy experimentation, for example in the cases of merit-scholarship programs (Doyle, 2006), state-funded eminent scholars policies (Hearn et al., 2013), and research and development tax credits (Hearn et al., 2014). Thus, while the broad economic conditions of states, and the resulting fiscal capacity which those conditions can produce, likely influenced many of the postsecondary reforms of the past 30 years, the direction and the magnitude of these relationships was unquestionably contingent, varying across different kinds of policies or policy designs. In general, ample fiscal resources may be a precondition for certain reforms in the postsecondary policy realm requiring substantial new investment, while economic disadvantage may have helped to prompt state adoption of new policies that promised improvement in the economic or the infrastructural capacity of states.

State Postsecondary Organizational and Policy Context

Our framework's second set of explanatory factors points to the organizational and policy contexts of postsecondary education as prospectively important influences on state governmental behavior. The *organizational ecology* of a state's postsecondary system refers to such conditions as the number and proportional distribution of institutions within a state both by control (i.e., public or private) and level (2-year or 4-year), the number and proportional distribution of students by institutional sector, student migration patterns (in-state and out-of-state), and the number and strength of research institutions in the state. Importantly, states vary in their level of reliance on their public- and private-systems of postsecondary education, as well on their two- and four-year colleges and universities. Thus, the context for governmental decision-making in Arizona, which has large numbers of students enrolled in the state's many public two-year institutions, is unquestionably different from that Vermont, where community-college enrollments are comparatively few and most students attend private colleges. Some analysts have argued that the variation in these system-ecologic patterns produces for states different kinds of pressures, problems, and opportunities in the provision of higher education, and thus can account for differences in certain policy outcomes for higher education across the

states (Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Hossler et al., 1997; McLendon and Mokher, 2009; Zumeta, 1992, 1996).

Another organizational factor worthy of attention is the nature of a state's higher-education governance arrangement. States vary in whether they employ a consolidated central governing board (as in the highly centralized systems in Iowa, Utah, or Georgia), or rely on system- and institution-level boards, overseen (but not controlled) by a state coordinating board or planning agency (as in Texas, Virginia, and Indiana). What is more, as Lacy (2013) has noted, agencies in some states have policymaking authority themselves, independently of other branches of government. This authority contributes to the argument of some observers (e.g., see Glenny and Dalglish, 1973) that higher-education governance bodies have been at times sufficiently autonomous to constitute a "fourth branch" of state governments.

Regardless of level of governing autonomy and centralization, state-level postsecondary organizational and governance arrangements can be consequential for decisions on such issues as presidential hires, mission differentiation, and tuition increases. Those arrangements can also help determine the value of the information, data, and research provided policymakers. A central agency's research capacity can facilitate cost-effectiveness studies, the formative and summative evaluation of postsecondary policies, and the identification of problems in such areas as postsecondary access and persistence (Hearn and Griswold, 1994; McLendon, 2003b).

Still, on the question of how governing arrangements affect the adoption of important new state policies (our focus in this chapter), we believe those arrangements are most appropriately considered under our next category of influences (states' politico-institutional contexts). Higher-education agencies are closely implicated in the ways innovative policy ideas fare in processes involving governors, legislators, interest groups, media, and other stakeholders. Unlike the organizational factors outlined just above, governance arrangements holistically shape the nature and outcomes of a state's postsecondary policymaking, reaching across the particularized concerns of any given moment. In effect, governance arrangements constitute a core institutionalized element in state legislators' and governors' decisionmaking regarding innovations in postsecondary education. In distinctive ways, they shape and channel the interests of colleges and universities, students, and parents (McLendon et al., 2006). Governing arrangements, therefore, comprise a critical element in states' politico-institutional contexts.⁵

The *postsecondary policy* context of the states includes such factors as levels and trends in state appropriations for higher education and tuition and enrollments at the campus or the system levels. State funding levels, funding effort, and funding disparities vary across states in ways that may differentially draw the attention of policymakers to newer ideas or proposals for funding higher education. Some states, particularly those in the South and the Southwest regions of the U.S., have experi-

⁵In a significant recent report, McGuinness (2016) argues that governing boards should take an increasingly central leadership role in policy creation, debate, and initiation in the states. Hearn and Anderson's (1995) study of Minnesota's "Design for Shared Responsibility" presents an example of a coordinating board taking such a role.

enced historic surges in demand for postsecondary education, which can focus governmental attention on alternative routes to postsecondary educational attainment or accountability approaches that reward improved completion rates at public colleges and universities. Rapid tuition rises likewise may prompt state officials to consider increased institutional oversight (McLendon & Hearn, 2013) or the introduction of innovative ways to help citizens plan for and pay for college (Mumper, 2001). These policy conditions, relating to postsecondary funding, tuition, and enrollment patterns in the states, can shape the perceptions of public officials about the postsecondary conditions warranting consideration and can fix their attention on the suitability of some solutions over others.

State Politico-Institutional Context

The third set of explanatory factors in our theoretical framework points toward the state politico-institutional context, which we characterize as the political conditions and institutionalized arrangements that can shape governments' behavior in policy innovation. As Tandberg and Griffith (2013, p. 648) have suggested, examining governing arrangements and partisan patterns in states may be characterized as a "new institutionalism" path in higher-education policy studies. Clearly, socioeconomic, educational, and organizational factors alone do not drive state actions in higher education. By incorporating also the influences of states' politics and their political and governmental institutions, Tandberg and Griffith suggest, scholars are working in the tradition of Shepsle (1989), who stated that those in this analytic school "seek to explain characteristics of social outcomes on the basis not only of agent preferences and optimizing behavior, but also on the basis of institutional features" (p. 135).

For our conceptualization, we focus on six particular dimensions of the state politico-institutional context that may have played a determinative influence in the rise of state policy reforms in postsecondary policy over the past several decades: 1) political ideology; 2) legislative professionalism; 3) partisanship; 4) electoral conditions; 5) gubernatorial strength and tenure; and, 6) interest-group climate.

We begin by considering states' *political ideology*. The politico-ideological climates of the states have long been considered a prospective source of influence on policy change and reform. One of the staples in the early literature in the field of comparative-state policy studies was Daniel Elazar's (1966) influential work on "political culture." The term refers to contrasting collective conceptions of the American political order that, according to Elazar and others, have shaped both the structure of state political systems and the policies arising therefrom. Elazar argued that early migration and settlement patterns in the United States produced several regional political subcultures, each of which held a distinctive vision for the role of government in public life. He characterized the three major, political subcultures in America as "moralist" (predominant in New England, the upper Midwest, and the far West), "individualist" (comprising the Mid-Atlantic and lower Midwest regions),

and “traditionalist” (primarily the South and Southwest). A large volume of research subsequently explored the relationships between Elazar’s politico-cultural archetypes and different policy outcomes (e.g., patterns in state taxation and expenditures or the adoption of certain kinds of policies) in the states. Although Elazar’s ideas remain intuitively appealing, Fitzpatrick & Hero (1988), Erikson, Wright, & McIver (1993) have concluded that the research evidence in support of his thesis is quite limited. In higher education, in particular, Louis et al. (2015) recently observed that examinations of the influences of political cultures on state higher-education policy have been largely fruitless.

As enthusiasm for political culture waned among policy researchers, many shifted their attention to a more refined notion of political ideology as a determinant of public policy in the states. Broadly speaking, political ideology may be understood as a coherent and consistent set of orientations or attitudes toward politics, and is usually defined as being situated along a continuum ranging from liberal to conservative. Scholars often differentiate between two forms of ideological influence, that of citizens and that of the governmental elite. Berry, Ringquist, Fording, and Hanson (1998), for example, defined “citizen ideology” as the mean position on a liberal-conservative continuum of the electorate in a state, and state “government ideology” as the mean position on a liberal-conservative continuum of elected public officials in a state. In one creative undertaking, Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) pooled the results of over 100 national telephone surveys conducted from 1976 to 1988 to obtain measures of ideology by state, concluding both that the political attitudes of Americans vary according to where in the U.S. they live and that these attitudes appear linked with certain state policy choices. Berry et al. (1998), in an effort to address some of the shortcomings of earlier, cross-sectional measures, created indicators of state political ideology that now are the leading ones of the field. These indices, which assign ideology scores for all states for all years since 1960, have demonstrated high levels of validity and reliability.

Using the Berry measures, many studies have found strong empirical connections between the ideological proclivities of a state’s citizens and of its politicians and certain policy outcomes. For example, states with more liberally minded populations and elected officials tend to support higher levels of public welfare benefits, more expansive social services, and larger government. States with more conservative ideological bents, by contrast, tend to adopt abortion regulations, more market-oriented reforms in health care, and more stringent penal laws, such as death-penalty statutes (e.g., Barrilleaux, Holbrook, & Langer, 2002; Berry et al. 1998; Soss et al., 2001; Yates & Fording, 2005).

Some research examines the link between state political ideology and policy outcomes in higher education. Most early investigations of this kind shared the same limitations as those in political science, because of their reliance on cross-sectional designs. Recent longitudinal investigations have found strong evidence that ideological patterns can shape the choices that states make for higher education, including their decisions about spending levels and their choices to experiment in the areas of college student financing, for example, in adoption of prepaid tuition policies, college savings programs, and merit scholarship programs (e.g., Doyle,

2006; Doyle et al., 2010; Hearn et al., 2008; McLendon et al., 2014; Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003; Tandberg, 2010a, 2010b, 2013). To date, no firm rule has emerged about the direction of these influences. Some studies have found liberal-leaning citizenries and states more likely to support robust public spending on public colleges and universities and more prone to enact the newer financing initiatives, while other studies have found conservative leaning states more likely to do so. A standardized set of measures uniformly deployed in studying policy change both across states and over time, would certainly be useful in helping to determine whether, how, and to what extent political ideology has contributed to the recent wave of policy change in postsecondary education.

With our second politico-institutional influence, *legislative professionalism*, we turn to the organizational context in which legislation arises. In operational terms, professionalism includes certain institutional attributes of state legislatures which make them resemble organizationally the U.S. Congress: lengthy sessions, ample resources in the form of committee and personal staff, and high pay for members. State legislatures that meet in more-or-less year-long session (in contrast with those that meet for only 90 days each year), pay their members well, and have available large numbers of staff relative to the number of elected members are deemed as being professionalized. Conversely, legislatures with session lengths of only a brief duration, relatively few staff, and little pay for members are called non-professional or “citizen legislatures” (Squire, 2000).

Scholars have studied the policy impacts of legislative professionalism since the 1950s, when many states undertook a campaign to improve their legislative organization designed to enhance the process and the outcomes of lawmaking. The success of legendary California Assembly speaker, Jesse Unruh, in transforming that body’s legislative capacity sparked similar efforts nationwide (Squire, 1997). One leading observer described the professionalization “revolution” of this era as, “the most dramatic metamorphosis of any set of U.S. political institutions in living memory” (Mooney, 1995, p. 47). By 1975, the professionalization movement had reached its high-water mark, the end of a 10-year period during which “traditional assemblies [had] become modern ones; reformed legislatures [had] emerged” (Rosenthal, 1993, p. 70). According to Rosenthal (1996), the clearest consequence of this reform movement was the strengthening of the institutional capacity of state legislatures, and the single biggest boon to this enhanced capacity was that of professional staffing. As a result of the professionalization movement, he suggested, standing committees in state senate and house chambers gained staff with expertise in their own substantive domains; fiscal staffs helped finance and appropriations committees become more centrally positioned in the legislative process and provided more and better fiscal analysis; and, audit staffs increased the capability of legislatures to assess the effectiveness of government programs and monitor the efficiency of the executive branch. Many analysts (e.g., Squire, 1997, 2007; Fiorina, 1994) have concluded that these changes helped deepen the institutions’ capacity to deliberate, develop policy alternatives, and enact legislation.

To be clear, this movement to professionalize state legislatures penetrated the institutions in some states far more than it did in others. Peverill Squire, a foremost

scholar of legislative design and decision making, has noted that while most state legislatures have been professionalizing over the past several decades, only a small number of them can be considered fully professionalized (e.g., see Squire, 2007). As a consequence, the organizational profile of legislatures, and the role that staff and facilities play in policymaking, today vary considerably (Squire & Hamm, 2005). For example, in 2003 the California General Assembly, the most professionalized of the legislatures, paid its members \$99,000, maintained a staff approximately 70 % the size of the U.S. Congress, and met in almost year-round session. Other states with highly professionalized legislative settings include New York, Massachusetts, and Michigan. New Hampshire's "citizen legislature," by contrast, paid its members only \$100 annually, maintained a staff one-seventieth the size of California's (despite a similarly sized legislative body), and met in session for fewer than 10 weeks of the year (Squire, 2007; Squire & Hamm, 2005). Other non-professionalized legislatures include those of North Dakota, Utah, and Alabama. Although state population tends to be highly correlated with professionalism, one can find exceptions. Georgia is among the ten most populous states, for example, yet its legislature is less professionalized than the size of its population might suggest. Conversely, Hawaii's legislature is more professionalized than its population would suggest.

Political science theory contends that variation in the decision capacity of the states should influence legislative behavior and outcomes in a number of ways, including the likelihood that a state will undertake certain policy experiments. Some arguments suggest that the influence itself can vary depending on the policy at-hand (e.g., Squire & Hamm, 2005). In some instances, greater decision capacity may heighten the chances for state passage of a certain kind of public program, while in other instances higher capacity levels may lessen the probability. States that possess a great deal of decision capacity, for example, may be more likely to experiment with regulatory policies, some have suggested, because the development of such initiatives often requires of state governments the capability for designing complex systems of oversight and processing large amounts of technical data in support of the regulatory schemes. On the other hand, because professional staff lend legislators expertise and information of the kind for which legislators might otherwise have to rely on interests groups, the presence of professional staff can buffer the legislative institution against interest group pressures, thus diminishing the prospects of passage of some policies and programs that are of high public salience (Lowi, 1964).

Although the empirical record concerning these relationships isn't uniformly strong, there is ample evidence that organizational attributes such as staffing, session length, and member pay, can influence state policy outcomes in both direct and indirect ways (Squire, 2007). Professionalism can directly shape policy inasmuch as full-time legislators who are paid more may commit more time and resources to the act of lawmaking, thereby resulting in more bills introduced and passed. There is also some evidence linking professionalism with the adoption of more complex and technically sophisticated policies. Professionalism can also influence policy indirectly, insofar as more professionalized settings tend to attract better-educated

legislators, the very ones who may be most inclined toward new policies and policy approaches (e.g., Barrilleaux et al., 2002; Squire, 1992, 2000).⁶

Only a relatively small number of studies have assessed the impact of legislative professionalism on state policy outcomes in the realm of higher education, although the number has grown appreciably in recent years. A few studies have documented distinctive associations between states' levels of legislative professionalism and funding effort for higher education (e.g., McLendon et al., 2009, 2014; Ness & Tandberg, 2013; Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003; Toutkoushian & Hollis, 1998; Tandberg & Ness, 2011; Tandberg, 2010a, 2010b, 2013), a result that would seem to bolster the purported link between lawmaking capacity and state policies promoting equity. In addition, at least two studies (Lacy & Tandberg, 2014; Hearn et al., 2013) have found positive links between legislative professionalism and policy adoptions. These connections indicate professionalism's likely importance in shaping state behavior in at least some areas of postsecondary policy.

Curiously, researchers for many years disregarded *partisanship* – our third highlighted politico-institutional influence – as a factor capable of explaining outcomes in the policy realm of higher education. Whereas scholarship in the field of K-12 education long ago began building a research base on the interrelationships between partisanship and education-policy outcomes in the states (e.g., Browning, Marshall & Tabb, 1984; Meier & Rutherford, 2014; Mintrom, 1997; Peterson, 1974; Wong & Shen 2002), empirical investigations in the field of higher-education policy studies until recently have been few. Indeed, the bulk of the literature tended to ignore or dismiss the prospective role that party control of state political institutions may have played in influencing state behavior in the policy realm of higher education, focusing instead on demographic and economic drivers of state policy choice and change. Scholars seemed to view higher education as existing above “the partisan fray,” perhaps because the perceived social significance of the sector elevated it beyond the realm of petty partisan differences. As McLendon (2003c) noted, few studies examined partisanship's effects, leading inevitably a paucity of findings regarding their role in states' postsecondary policy postures.

A recent burst of empirical activity in the field has called into question these long-standing assumptions, however (Dougherty et al., 2013; Hicklin & Meier, 2008; Lowry, 2007; McLendon et al., 2009; Tandberg, 2010b). While economic, demographic and organizational factors clearly can influence state policy formation

⁶There are other possible indirect policy effects of professionalism. An oft-debated question is whether professionalization leads to a higher incidence of divided government **DOUBLEHYPHEN**—the condition in which one of the two major parties controls one or more legislative chambers while the other party controls the executive branch. Fiorina (1994) has argued that increased levels of member compensation, one of the components of the professionalism measure, can induce government service-oriented Democrats to hold on to their legislative seats even when GOP candidates are elected governor. Squire (1997) advanced a somewhat different argument, claiming that professionalization “generates electoral resources that incumbents may use to insulate themselves from changing political tides” (p. 17). In either event, professionalization can be viewed as shaping legislators' incentives, which in turn may influence party control of legislatures and thus policy outcomes.

for higher education, recent research tells us that party control of government institutions seems to matter, too. For instance, our own previous research finds that states where Republicans have greater legislative strength have been more likely to pass rigorous performance-accountability programs. This is so, we surmised, because of the party's traditional aversion to public bureaucracy and its espoused commitment to efficiency and accountability in government programs (McLendon et al., 2006; McLendon & Hearn, 2013). Other researchers have identified Republican strength with accountability initiatives (Dougherty et al., 2013). A growing body of empirical research finds state spending on higher education linked with party control of legislatures. Often, but not always, Democratic strength and control of government have been linked with higher appropriation levels, for example (e.g., Archibald & Feldman, 2006; Hicklin & Meier, 2008; Lowry, 2007; McLendon et al., 2009; Tandberg, 2010b, 2013).

This evidence aligns with research evidence in the field of comparative-state politics and policy. There, one finds Democratic Party strength in state legislatures linked often with higher overall levels of state spending, with higher levels of spending on education and welfare, and with passage of certain civil liberties and equal-protection statutes. Republicans and conservatives, on the other hand, have been associated with opposition to lotteries, stem cell research, and abortion access, and with regulatory and tax policies that often are viewed as favorable to business interests (Alt & Lowry, 2000; Barrilleaux & Bernick, 2003; Barrilleaux et al., 2002; Berry & Berry, 1990; Holbrook & Percy, 1992; Mazzoni & Clugston, 1987; Stream, 1999). We acknowledge that these relationships between party control and government output are by no means clear-cut: parties may stake out a position on a given issue at a given moment in time, either because of a genuine commitment consistent with the party's true policy preferences or as a strategic adjustment in order to attract voters. Too, some research, including our own, has shown the absence of a partisanship effect on certain higher education policies (e.g., Doyle et al., 2010), thus the empirical support for partisan strength and control of state political institutions is mixed.

Yet this newer cluster of empirical findings regarding partisanship is a noteworthy development in the field. Based on both higher-education findings (e.g., Archibald & Feldman, 2006; Knott & Payne, 2003; McLendon et al., 2005, 2006, 2009; Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2003; Rizzo, 2004) as well as findings in other policy arenas (Alt & Lowry, 2000; Barrilleaux & Bernick, 2003; Barrilleaux et al., 2002; Berry & Berry, 1990; Holbrook & Percy, 1992; Stream, 1999; Yates & Fording, 2005), it seems reasonable to speculate that Republican legislative strength and gains in Republican strength in the 1980s and 1990s, may have been an influential factor in the rise of many of the state reforms and innovations in postsecondary education in the past several decades.

Quite aside from the question of which party controls government (and to what extent), there is the important issue of *electoral conditions*, our fourth politico-institutional influence. Electoral conditions incorporate the degree of parties' electoral competitiveness and the timing of elections.

Regarding electoral competitiveness, scholars have long recognized V.O. Key's insight well over half a century ago (1949) that the degree of competition between the two major parties for elective office can influence state policy outcomes. In his classic work, Key suggested that in the South, where electoral competition was minimal, the lack of competitiveness resulted in policies that benefited the economically advantaged rather than those less advantaged. Many subsequent works formalized and tested this claim, with mixed results. For example, using a variety of approaches to studying and measuring competitiveness, some studies have found electoral competition increases funding for programs that primarily benefit the poor, while other studies have found evidence supporting the counter-argument, that electoral competition can decrease the likelihood of state action in behalf of the interests of lower-income citizens (Besley and Case, 2002). Although until recently the matter had largely been ignored in higher education research, a few studies have found that electoral competitiveness is related to changes in spending for postsecondary education (Tandberg & Ness, 2011; McLendon et al., 2014).

Related to electoral competitiveness is the timing of elections. Political scientists, especially political economists, have long been interested in the extent to which election timing – that is, whether an election is 4 years away, or 1 year away, or today – can influence the behavior of elected officials, hence the policy choices of states. One popular formulation, the “political-business cycle hypothesis,” posits that, as elections draw nearer, politicians may become more likely to enact popular programs in an effort to shore-up electoral support among key constituencies. Once elections are over, however, those politicians, having won office, then become more likely to enact less popular programs, like new taxes. With the time until the next election serving as a buffer politically, elected officials wager that the public's memory of past unpopular policies will likely fade.

In one classic formulation of this phenomenon, Nordhaus (1975) suggested the policymakers will turn from macroeconomic policies for reducing inflation to policies for reducing unemployment, and back again, depending on the timing of the election. Policies aimed toward reducing unemployment will be utilized most heavily at the end of an electoral term (i.e., nearer to an election), while more fiscally aggressive policies to reduce inflation will be pursued nearer the beginning of an electoral term. Nelson's (2000) empirical analysis on this question found that tax increases in fact are most likely to occur in the period immediately following a governor's election. It appears, Nelson argued, that states undertake “painful” policy changes when the next election is at the farthest possible distance.

Few studies of state policy choice in higher education have examined the relationship between electoral timing and policy adoption (e.g., McLendon et al., 2007). Research on K-12 education policy, however, has found the passage of charter-school legislation and of other school-reform measures was more likely in years closer to a statewide election (e.g., Mintrom, 1997; Wong & Shen, 2002). Scholars argued that timing was prompted by the programs' popular appeal and incumbent politicians' desires to position themselves as education reformers. The link overall between state election cycles and policy change in higher education is a tantalizing one meriting close attention.

Governors can be an especially significant source of policy influence in postsecondary education, so *gubernatorial strength and tenure* represents the fifth factor in our conception of politico-institutional influences. Theory and informed observation tell us that the separation-of-powers system that characterizes American state government ensures governors a structurally prominent role in policy formation. What's more, the past several decades have witnessed notable institution-building efforts, which in many states, have resulted in a strengthened chief executive, as well as more-empowered bureaucracies over which governors preside (Barrilleaux & Berkman, 2003). The precise nature and extent of a governor's influence can vary, depending in part on their formal powers of office. Governors in some states possess formidable formal powers, such as the line-item veto, which they can use to strike (or threaten to strike) specific legislative spending provisions; broad appointment powers, through which governors can influence both the strategic and the day-to-day functions of the executive branch; and stout tenure potential, which enables some governors to outlast their opposition and to insinuate their preferences into the sinews of state government over long periods of time.⁷ Governors with less-robust institutional powers enjoy fewer such instruments of formal policy control, a condition that can limit their overall policy influence, overall (Dye, 1969; Dometrius, 1979; Beyle, 2004).

Yet these relationships are not as straightforward, nor is the empirical evidence for the impact of governors on public policy outcomes in the states as uniform, as some observers have suggested. For example, in two classic 1960s studies, Dye (1969) found that economic development variables consistently were more influential than the formal powers of governors in determining a wide variety of important policy outcomes at the state level,⁸ while Sharkansky (1968) found evidence that governors' influence over budgetary allocations was stronger in states where they had long tenure and robust veto powers. Such inconsistencies in the literature persist to this day.

Although governors may appear to be central actors in American politics, relatively few studies have rigorously assayed their influence. In one such undertaking, Barrilleaux and Berkman (2003) found that governors with greater control over the budget process tend to use those powers to deliver a higher proportion of policies that confer benefits statewide as opposed to more localized constituencies. Other studies have shown that the policy influence of governors depends on other factors, for example, their electoral margins, the size of legislative majorities, the professionalism of a state's legislature, the strength of political parties, or the vigor

⁷Schlesinger's (1965) index of gubernatorial power was the first to array the states according to the formal powers of their chief executives in such areas as veto, appointment, tenure, and budget authority. Different measures were subsequently developed (Dometrius, 1979; Beyle, 2004), notably the index that Beyle popularized.

⁸Among other relationships, Dye's (1969) multivariate model examined the impact of governor's formal powers on 25 different policy outcomes, including funding and educational performance of public K-12 school systems. The budget powers of governors rarely were found to significantly affect educational outcomes, but the appointive powers of governors did positively affect per pupil expenditures and average teachers' salaries.

of a state's economy (e.g., Sigelman & Dometrius, 1988). Overall, the literature indicates that governors can influence policy outcomes, although the precise influence they wield is likely to be contingent upon a combination of structural and contextual factors beyond the chief executive's exclusive control. Barrilleaux and Berkman (2003) lamented over a decade ago that there was a paucity of empirical research on governors' influence on state policymaking and on policy outcomes, and that observation still holds.

Studies of state policy formation in the realm of higher education likewise have paid too little empirical attention to gubernatorial influence. To be sure, the case study literature describes how governors have sometimes provided strong political "backstopping" for their own appointees to leadership positions in state agencies and public colleges and universities (e.g., Marcus, 1997; McGuinness, 1997; McLendon, 2003a; Protopsaltis, 2004). Yet empirical treatments are few. In an earlier longitudinal investigation, the first two authors of this chapter found the length of governors' tenures negatively associated with the likelihood that states would enact reforms of their postsecondary governance structures. The longer governors occupied office, the lower the probability that their states would enact structural changes for higher education (McLendon et al., 2007). We conjectured that a longer tenure might make the chief executive more dependent on his or on her bureaucracy, dampening gubernatorial interest in overturning existing bureaucratic structures and leadership.

A recent body of empirical writing has also taken up the question of whether and to what extent governors' formal powers can influence state policy for higher education, and has produced some evidence that they do. Using time-series cross-sectional analysis, a number of researchers have found the formal powers of governors as having distinct associations with state spending patterns and campus tuition setting, independent of other factors, although the direction of the influence has varied across the studies (e.g., Hearn et al., 2013; Lowry, 2001; McLendon et al., 2009; Ness & Tandberg, 2013; Tandberg, 2010a, 2010b; Tandberg & Ness, 2011; Tandberg, 2013). In an EHA investigation, Mokher and McLendon (2009) found stronger governors associated with an increased likelihood of states adopting dual-degree programs, a popular policy promoting alignment of the K-12 and higher education sectors. Other studies have found stronger, activist governors associated with policy adoptions related to P-16 council creation (Mokher, 2010), outcomes-based funding (Dougherty et al., 2014), and efforts to spur economic development through research (Hearn et al., 2013, 2014). Although nascent and sparse, this emerging line of research in higher-education studies suggests that the influences of governors in state policy formation warrant further examination.

Our sixth and final politico-institutional influence involves the *interest-group climates* of the states. The study of interest groups comprises one of the most venerable research traditions in political science. Scholarship in this tradition entails examining what lobbyists do and how and why they do it, the factors facilitating group mobilization, and the impacts of interest groups on governmental behavior. For many years, interest-group research at the state level developmentally lagged relative to interest-group research at the national level. Since the 1980s, however,

state interest-group scholars have made noteworthy gains, both theoretically and empirically (e.g., Browne, 1985; Gray & Lowery, 1996; Nownes & Freeman, 1998; Rosenthal, 1993).

The empirical link between interest groups and the policy behaviors of state governments is better established today than it was 25 years ago. In reflecting on a decade of empirical gains around this topic, Gray and Lowery (1996) concluded: “when such [organized] interests, as well a government interests, add their weight to efforts to pass legislation, it has a greater likelihood of passage, all other things being equal” (p. 242). Jacoby and Schneider (2001) found that interest groups can have a visible impact on establishing state spending priorities. Specifically, they found that the level of interest group diversity and strength influenced whether the state favored general policy areas or particularized policy areas, such as aid for the needy. Less diversity and strength were correlated with policymakers focusing more resources on programs that provided particularized benefits. Additionally, Gray and Lowery (1988) found that interest groups not only affect policy outputs, but also influence states’ economies and economic development. Yet research has also found the actions of governors and of legislative party leadership as being capable of counteracting the lobbying efforts of interest groups (e.g., Wiggins, Hamm, & Bell, 1992). Thus, while interest groups have been shown to influence policy outcomes in some areas, the impact can be offset by the efforts of other governmental actors.

Research on interest groups in higher-education policy remains underdeveloped. While researchers have produced a large, conceptually developed body of work on interest-group activities in K-12 education (e.g., see Malen, 2001), scholars in higher education had produced until very recently little systematic research on state interest-group activity in higher education. As Ness, Tandberg, and McLendon (2015) note, prior to recent efforts, the small volume of existing scholarship tended to be descriptive rather than conceptual, and anecdotal rather than analytical.

Three important limitations have emerged in the development of a research literature on interest groups and state-level higher-education policymaking: definitional challenges, the absence of a clear theory of action for the influence of interest groups in this realm, and the lack of data on which researchers could rely. “Lobbying” can refer to an extraordinarily wide array of activities undertaken by a potentially very large number of visible and invisible actors. In addition, state laws pertaining to lobbyist registration and disclosure widely vary, masking much of what individual lobbyists or organizations do. Although political scientists long ago devised ways to delimit their research into interest groups and their activities, such that these definitional challenges might be reasonably met (e.g., see Browne, 1985; Cigler, 1991; Gray and Lowery, 1996), few in the field of higher-education studies have attempted to do so. The literature also has suffered from the absence of any sustained efforts to postulate the bases of group mobilization and influence in the context of higher education and at the level of the American state. A final limiting factor, one that has both contributed to, and resulted from, the prior two conditions, involves the dearth of readily obtainable data on higher education lobbying, in particular data that covers multiple states and extends across time.

Some recent scholarship on interest groups in higher education is beginning to overcome these challenges, however. To review that emerging line of work, and build understanding of interest-group influence state policy change in higher education, we propose two distinct conceptual bases, each with its own correspondingly distinct measures and literature.

The first conceptual framework emphasizes the notion of interest-group density, and builds on work by Tandberg (2010a, 2010b, 2013; Tandberg & Ness, 2011; Ness & Tandberg, 2013; Ness et al., 2015). Tandberg studied the relationship between higher education interest groups and state funding for higher education by borrowing from Gray and Lowery's (1996) widely cited finding that interest groups are most successful when there are relatively few of them within a state, all things equal.⁹ Gray and Lowery's scholarship on the "relative density" of state interest-group climates spurred Tandberg to develop a measure of interest-group influence that gauges the size of the higher education lobby in a given state relative to the size of the entire state's interest-group universe; i.e., the ratio of the number of public higher education institutions to the total number of state interest groups in a given state. Tandberg's time-series cross-sectional analysis found the relative size of the higher education lobby predicted the amount of state expenditures devoted to higher education; the larger the relative size of the higher-education lobby, the higher the levels of appropriations (Tandberg, 2006). Tandberg interpreted his findings as evidence that, when the interest group landscape is densely populated, the higher education lobby becomes less competitive. Indicators such as those of Tandberg and Lowery can facilitate examining the manner and extent to which the competitive interest-group "space" for higher education in a given state influences the probability of the state enacting new policies that are deemed as benefitting or threatening the presumed preferences of the sector.

One can also study interest-group influences on state policy change for higher education in a second way, testing the proposition that different kinds of statewide governing boards can organize and channel interests in different ways. That is, the kind of statewide governing arrangement that a state employs may independently influence state policy outcomes for higher education. Recall that earlier we introduced statewide governance arrangements as an element in the statewide organizational context of higher education, but promised to return to those arrangements later. We divide our treatment of governance in this way because we believe that, beyond their informational roles, governance structures play critical roles in the expression and evolution of interests in state higher-education policy. Thus, we consider here these arrangements in greater detail.

Because state-level structures are so central for the oversight of higher education, we begin with a brief overview of patterns in statewide coordination and governance of higher education in the twentieth century. Most writings on statewide organization

⁹In that same vein, Jacoby and Schneider (2001) found that, when there are fewer interest groups, specific interests tend to receive more funding. See the work of Browne (1990), Cigler (1991), and Heinz, Laumann, Nelson, and Salisbury (1993) on other aspects of interest-group power and effectiveness.

of higher education acknowledge three distinct modes of state oversight: the planning agency; the consolidated governing board; and the statewide coordinating board. The planning-agency model is distinct organizationally because it provides for very weak state-level oversight of higher education. Under this governance arrangement, campuses enjoy vast latitude over their internal affairs, including budgets and program planning. Michigan, for example, has long drawn attention as providing one of the nation's least regulated or, least-governmentally directed, climates for higher education. Michigan's state constitution more than 150 years ago granted the boards of the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University sweeping powers over their own academic and fiscal affairs, powers the universities have ardently defended from encroachment by state authorities.¹⁰ Consequently, in Michigan, and in other states where state boards for higher education hold relatively weak powers, the central board functions mainly as a planning body whose role primarily is that of collecting information and monitoring state and federal student financial aid systems.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the governance pendulum swung decidedly in the direction of greater state oversight and control of public colleges and universities. In part, this trend stemmed from the growing financial involvement of the states in higher education. By 1908, California, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin had begun making direct "lump-sum" appropriations in excess of one million dollars annually to their respective flagship universities (Thelin, 1982). As state investment deepened so, too, did state officials' interest in assuring the funds were well spent. One vehicle for achieving this goal was the establishment of state consolidated governing boards, the second of the three primary models of statewide organization of higher education.

Consolidated governing boards were formed by consolidating the local boards of individual institutions into a single, state-level board responsible for all higher education (or a sector of higher education) in a given state. Under these centralized arrangements, the state granted a single, state-level board line authority over constituent campuses. These empowered boards then made certain day-to-day decisions for institutions, including the hiring and firing of campus leaders, the development and review of academic programs, budget allocations, and other important management functions (Berdahl, 1971; McGuinness, 1997). By the early 1970s, some 20 states had created centralized governance arrangements for governing higher education.

¹⁰Michigan, in 1850, was the first state to grant its flagship institution, the University of Michigan, constitutional standing. This practice was pursued to further remove public universities from the reach of "meddlesome politicians" in legislatures and governors' offices. By codifying the self-governing authority of universities in the constitution, state constitutional conventions elevated the status of their flagship university to that of a "fourth branch of government" with powers that, in theory at least, placed the university on a legal plane coordinate to that of the state's legislature, executive, and judiciary (Glenny and Dalglish, 1973). Over the next 20 years, California and Minnesota, and a handful of other states, followed Michigan's lead (Chambers, 1965; Douglass, 1992).

In the post-war boom of the 1950s and 1960s, a third distinctive form of statewide organization of higher education arose: the statewide coordinating board. By this time, many state officials had grown both acutely concerned about the unbridled growth of postsecondary education and weary of the internecine warfare over public resources that had arisen among individual institutions. These officials in many instances no longer trusted the information they received from individual campuses, believing it to reflect the provincial views of the separate campuses, rather than contributing to an understanding of statewide needs overall. Officials desired unbiased information about the funding and the academic planning needs of the rapidly developing postsecondary systems. Consequently, some states established coordinating boards, with full-time professional staffs, as entities responsible for integrated planning, budgeting and academic review for an entire state.

Over time, two distinct kinds of coordinating boards emerged. To assist legislatures and governors in making informed decisions about statewide needs and the appropriate allocation of limited public resources, some coordinating boards, the so-called “regulatory coordinating boards,” were empowered to authorize new academic programs, terminate existing programs, and approve institutional budgets. The second kind of coordinating board, a less-empowered entity known as “advisory coordinating boards,” merely made recommendations to legislatures and governors about programs and budget allocations. These boards had to rely more on their powers of reason and persuasion, rather than formal powers or line authority, to help steer state systems of higher education. Reformers conceived of both kinds of coordinating boards, staffed by professionals with expertise in public finance and management, as neutral third-parties capable of balancing campus freedoms with the public’s interest in maintaining high quality in and broad access to higher education. More than 20 states erected coordinating-board systems in the period from 1950 to 1974 (Berdahl, 1975).

Yet, the coordinating-board model has long demonstrated its vulnerability to outside political influence. States initially designed coordinating boards to serve as buffering bodies, with dual obligations to campus and to state. The historian, Hugh Davis Graham (1989, p. 96), once described them indeed as, a “middle man in a bimodal distribution of power” between the campuses and state elected officials. As the intermediary between two sets of entities, each more powerful than itself, coordinating boards have survived through their delicate balancing of these different, often competing interests. Because of the boards’ lack of an independent power base, or a core constituency, many observers have asserted that coordinating boards in effect are beholden to the interests of powerful elected officials, notably governors. Governors typically control, for example, the appointment of members to coordinating boards, and sometimes have used these appointment powers as a means for influencing the boards’ agendas.

Capitalizing on this variability across states in the design of postsecondary governance systems, a large body of scholarship has examined the extent to which statewide governance can influence the policy choices states make for higher education. Indeed, one of the most consistent empirical findings in the state policy literature is that governance “matters:” the particular form of statewide governance that

a state practices can shape the state's policy choices (McLendon, 2003b). Some studies have shown that states with consolidated governing boards tend to be less likely to adopt some harder-edged regulatory policies, while other studies have linked the structures with an increased probability of state adoption of certain newer financing policies, such as merit-aid policies and college savings, outcomes-based funding policies, and prepaid tuition programs (e.g., Hearn & Griswold, 1994; Hearn et al., 2008, 2014; Lowry, 2007; McLendon, 2003a; McLendon & Hearn, 2013; McLendon et al., 2005, 2006, 2014; Tandberg & Ness, 2011; Tandberg, 2013; Zumeta, 1992, 1996).

Whereas the research evidence overwhelmingly points to postsecondary governance patterns as a factor capable of shaping state policy choice, the reasons for this influence are not well understood. As noted earlier, one long-standing tradition in the literature equates the different modes of governance (i.e., planning agency, coordinating board, and consolidated governing board) with varying levels of informational and decision capacity, and suggests that these capacities in turn differentially influence the probability of states undertaking new policy initiatives (Hearn and Griswold, 1994). Because consolidated boards often possess more staff than do the two other types of boards and thus lend their states more of the decision capacity believed to be needed for policy deliberation and change, states with this type of governance arrangement may be more inclined to innovate. This line of reasoning has been persuasive to us as well as other scholars, and is widespread in the literature, although the assumptions that underpin it generally have not been closely examined. One problematic assumption is that the three types of boards are not rigidly stratified with respect to the size of their professional staffs. While the staff sizes of planning agencies tend to be smaller than those of the other two modes of statewide governance, some coordinating boards boast larger and more professionalized staffs than do consolidated governing boards, thus complicating the question of whether one or the other type of board necessarily affords states more analytic capacity than the other type.

There is yet another limitation of the familiar analytic-capacity perspective: in its exclusive focus on the information that boards provide, this explanation of state action ignores the interests that boards serve. In addition to providing certain analytic capacities, different boards can channel preferences and interests in distinctive ways. As a few analysts have commented, consolidated governing boards are distinctive organizationally inasmuch as they function much like an academic cartel, whereby central university-system administrators set the policy agenda and make many day-to-day governance decisions for campuses (Lowry, 2001; McLendon et al., 2006; Zumeta, 1996). Because consolidated boards tend to institutionalize the preferences of faculty and administrators, their existence in a state should lead to policies that are more consistent with the preferences of academic stakeholders. By contrast, coordinating boards, because of their explicit mission to report to elected officials on statewide needs, can be considered extensions of elected officials' capacity to supervise, and thus behave in a manner that is more consistent with the

preferences of elected officials and voters, rather than those of university administrators and faculty.¹¹

In our earlier work on the drivers of performance-funding program adoption in the states (McLendon et al., 2006), we used this line of reasoning to explain why states with consolidated boards tended to adopt performance-budgeting policies, which are programmatically weaker, rather than the harder-edged, performance-funding programs: the preferences of consolidated boards, which are dominated by academic stakeholders, is to avoid rigorous, externally imposed performance regimes that would firmly hold constituent campuses to account. Consistent with those preferences, we argued, consolidated governing boards, behaving in cartel-like fashion, could have leveraged their centralized resources in such a fashion as to have influenced their states' adoption of the weakest form of accountability mandates, because those programs would have lent the appearance of accountability, yet lacked real enforcement teeth. Governance structure "matters," we concluded, because authority structures can help determine whose interests will prevail. Building on this earlier work, we posit that different governance arrangements institutionalize the preferences of different sets of stakeholders, which seek to shape policy consistent with their preferences.

State Policy Diffusion Context

The final category in our conceptual framework looks beyond intrastate influences, and toward the forces operating between and among the states, what we have termed the interstate diffusion context of policy change. As we earlier noted, policy diffusion refers to the pressures that the 50 states exert upon one another, as a result of the states' embedment in the fixed geopolitical community that is American federalism. Building on the conceptual strands already outlined from the fields of political science, public policy, and K-12 education studies, we consider the extent to which state governments engage in this "copycat" form of behavior in postsecondary education policy adoption.

Somewhat surprisingly to us, the question of whether states influence one another's policy behavior in the postsecondary arena – that is, the extent to which policies diffuse – remains unanswered. Some studies have documented diffusion-like forces at work in the adoption of recent postsecondary financing innovations, such as state merit scholarship programs, college savings plans, and prepaid tuition programs (e.g., see McLendon et al., 2005; Cohen-Vogel et al., 2008), while other studies, such as those on the emergence of some newer accountability mandates for higher

¹¹In states with coordinating boards but highly centralized sector-specific systems (e.g., for a research university sector, a state comprehensive sector, and a community-college sector), it is possible that coalitions can build between sectors to wield influence sufficient to parallel that of a consolidated governing board system (Austin Lacy, personal communication, May 28, 2016).

education, have found little evidence in support of the diffusion thesis (e.g., McLendon et al., 2006).

In our conceptualization, we note four explanations for the horizontal migration of policies (i.e., state-to-state, rather than state-to-federal or federal-to-state).¹² First, states may borrow ideas from their neighbors or peers because, in doing so, officials gain certain decision efficiencies – so-called, shortcuts – that can simplify the range of alternatives from which the officials can choose. States look to, and “learn” from, one another’s past policy behaviors for a variety of reasons. A state can learn from others what has (and has not) worked elsewhere, thus enabling it to bypass costly and time-consuming searches for policy solutions that may already have been tried (and failed) somewhere else (Dougherty et al., 2013, 2014; Lacy & Tandberg, 2014).

Second, states may adopt others’ policies in an effort to gain a competitive advantage, or avoid being disadvantaged, relative to their neighbors or peers. Actions taken by one state can affect the state’s neighbors in ways beneficial or detrimental (and sometimes both), which in turn may prompt those other states themselves to take action. Just as a state’s decision to lower welfare benefits can trigger a “race to the bottom” in public-assistance spending by neighboring states seeking to avoid becoming “welfare magnets” for low-income populations, one state’s establishment of a broad-based, merit scholarship program may likewise lure the state’s neighbors to follow suit in an effort both to retain their own talented, college-bound students and to prevent “brain-drain” to competitors (Doyle, 2006). Similarly, one state’s decision to adopt a research-centered economic-development policy may prompt neighboring states to adopt similar policies to remain economically competitive within a region (Warshaw & Hearn, 2014).

Third, states may adopt others’ policies as a result of pressures to conform to nationally or regionally accepted standards. This explanation of policy diffusion suggests that states (i.e., officials who decide government policy) experience powerful normative influences. Some civil-liberties legislation, education reforms, and changes in state administrative practice bear the hallmarks of having arisen in part because of normative pressures on states to legitimize themselves by evidencing compliance with “best practice” (or “most popular practice”) in a given policy arena. Likewise, some adoptions may be compelled by growing acceptance of their importance, necessity, or even fashionableness within the “field” of higher education. The movement in higher education toward adoption of student unit-record systems and of newer student financing strategies deemed as institutionalizing certain societal values may also be examples in this vein.

Fourth, of course, *de facto* coercion is also a possible influence in policy adoption, although it seems rare. Under this scenario, states may adopt policies chosen by other states out of necessity: if providers of critical financing, prestige, or other

¹²Our four bases for state policy adoption diffusion in higher education have roots in social and political theories regarding institutionalism and isomorphism, including the works of Walker (1969) and the Berrys (2014) in political science and, from sociology, works in the pioneering tradition of DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Most recently, such theoretical influences can also be seen in the conceptualizations of Sponsler (2010) and Lacy and Tandberg (2014).

resources to states make adoption of a particular policy central to continuing support, and if peer states are stepping into line and not revolting, then a given state may have no real choice but to adopt the policy itself. For example, if an important interstate entity like a regional association or consortium or a powerful athletic conference imposes certain policy criteria for continued membership, and if authority over such policies lies at the state level, then failure to act at the state level could endanger a state's higher-education institutions vis a vis institutions in peer states.

The influence of any one of these different sources of policy adoption can be shaped significantly by the perceived success or failure of a given policy experiment elsewhere (Berry & Berry, 2014; Dougherty et al., 2013; Karch et al., 2016; Levine, Lacy, & Hearn, 2013)). When a state adopts a program that becomes, for example, more costly, complex, or controversial than initially anticipated, such an experience may actually diminish the likelihood of other states following suit. In other words, in quantitative terms, we would see not an absence of influence from adopting states but rather a significant negative influence from outside adoptions. A prominent recent non-education example: North Carolina's experience with boycotts after adopting transgender bathroom legislation may have created negative influences on the likelihood of similarly inclined states adopting such policies. In such cases, one might say states sometimes exert upon one another negative, in addition to positive, diffusion pressures.

While diffusion (whether positive or negative) remains an intuitively powerful explanation for policy adoption in higher education, evidence is mixed. Some earlier quantitative studies have found no evidence of diffusion, while others have found evidence of positive diffusion, and still others have found evidence of negative diffusion. Representative of these diverse diffusion findings are Cohen-Vogel & Ingle (2007); Doyle (2006); McLendon et al. (2006); Mokher & McLendon (2009); Hearn et al., (2013), (2014).

Traditional EHA studies of specific policies may not be ideal for uncovering the motivating forces for any particular instance of diffusion. Lacy and Tandberg (2014) raised a noteworthy question: might the attention in postsecondary policy-adoption studies to finite differences among policies be missing the ways the postsecondary policy is understood by most state policymakers? For example, are legislators really attuned to the differences between state 529 savings plans and prepaid-tuition plans, or are they simply seeking to adopt affordability policies serving constituents more generally, without close regard to the particular kinds of policy visible in the policy window at that time? If the answer is the latter, then analysts may need to turn away from traditional EHA studies of specific policies. One alternative may be to aggregate specific policies to encompass a broader domain of legislative concern (e.g., affordability), then conducting quantitative analyses with more inclusive definitions of "adoption events." Alternatively, researchers may turn to in-depth qualitative analysis aimed at probing legislator understandings and perceptions. Cohen-Vogel and Ingle (2007), for example, conducted interviews with policymakers in six southern states in an effort to understand better where, in the policymaking cycle, the influence of a state's neighbors is most felt. Such work can facilitate deeper understanding of context and the "how and why" of diffusion, including the roles of

such factors as research information, policy and political networks, as well as factors relating external financing and leverage. While qualitative studies tend to be context-bound and thus may have limited transferability to other issues and other contexts, they may suggest critical insights for untangling causality at the state level.

Quantitative analysis may be especially useful for empirically discerning leads regarding the varied kinds of influence paths in this arena. For any of the four reasons highlighted above, states may adopt innovations that are in place in other states. Yet, identifying the particular *kind* of state-to-state influence taking place is not the same thing as identifying the particular *channel* for state-to-state influence taking place. For example, facing an EHA finding that neighboring states' adoptions seem to shape a given state's adoption likelihood, what can analysts conclude about the actual processes taking place? Are intermediary organizations and policy entrepreneurs successfully prescribing or "selling" policy ideas "door to door?" A careful reader of Fig. 7.1 will note that the items within the diffusion box are distinct from those in the other boxes in their focus on the kind of influence rather than on particular measures of that influence. Quantitative findings of significant diffusion effects are more often merely "trace elements" of policy influences rather than meaningful actual measures of the nature of influences.

Helpfully, researchers in other fields are making major strides in addressing the many challenges of diffusion research. Boehmke and Witmer (2004) identified useful methodological approaches to untangling learning-based versus competitive roots for state diffusion patterns. Arguing that different factors working in different ways in the initial adoption of a particular policy and the subsequent expansion of similar adoptions across state lines. To address the proposition that learning and competition might be distinctly powerful influences at different stages of across-state diffusion processes, they introduced the counting of prior events within and across states as a factor in subsequent adoptions. Their findings upheld their proposition and their methodological approach, contributing a new theoretical and methodological approach to diffusion research.

In other breakthrough work, Volden (2006) has helpfully identified a hidden assumption that seems worth questioning: should the unit of measurement for diffusion influences be multi-state, as has been the tradition in the field? Historically, numerous possible forms for a diffusion indicator in EHA models have been explored, ranging from indexes of action in neighboring states to measures of regional collaboration to identification of actions among peer states and institutions at the national level. As Volden (2006) perceptively noted, however, the most promising focus for studies of adoptions may be dyadic rather than inclusive - pairs of states may turn to each other regularly, forming policies in anticipation of or in reaction to developments in their partner state.

More recently, Berry and Berry (2014) have produced a remarkably comprehensive and detailed examination of various potential kinds and channels of state-to-state diffusion, the theoretical grounding for these, and the methods appropriate for examining diffusion in its full variety. Among their many insights are a valuable reconsideration of three classic channels of diffusion (national interaction, regional

diffusion, and leader-laggard) and a new, more inclusive diffusion typology including five potential kinds of mechanisms (learning, imitation, normative pressure, competition, and coercion). This essay seems essential for those wishing to learn about past research and current thinking on innovation and diffusion processes in the states. With the tools being developed by Boehmke and Witmer, Volden, the Berrys, and numerous others, more nuanced understandings of states' diffusion influences seem to be on the near horizon.

Conclusion

There is no sign that governors and state legislators in the U.S. are slowing down in their aggressive and prolific experimentation with innovative, and frequently controversial, approaches to controlling, expanding, assessing, and improving public higher education. Too often, system and campus leaders find themselves limited to simply scurrying after the parade, trying to retroactively understand the factors that drove largely unanticipated actions. No political activity will ever be fully understood by those outside the decisions, but sharpening our ability to forecast developments would almost certainly serve policy and theory development and improvement. Better forecasting heavily depends on analysts better understanding the dynamics of state action, including the factors driving states to make the choices they do, when they do. It is to that end that research on policy adoption and diffusion has proceeded.

Consider the question of educational attainment. Arguably, there is no more important issue in postsecondary policy. Inarguably, attention to the issue has grown dramatically in recent years: states have joined foundations, the federal government, business leaders, and others in pushing the nation toward improved competitiveness in an increasingly globalized, knowledge-driven economy. Deservedly, the role of states in improving attainment rates is increasingly being scrutinized, with an eye on establishing and refining policies likely to be effective, equitable, and efficient (Perna, Klein, & McLendon, 2014). But identification of good policy choices is only part of the battle: those policies must first be adopted by policymaking bodies, including often-recalcitrant state governments. Certain choices, like "free college" or performance funding, may have strong intuitive appeal to policymakers (and citizens), but may not represent the choices most likely to work "on the ground" in improving students' attainments while also serving other state goals. As McGuinness (2016) noted, the leadership of well-informed policy actors is essential to maximizing the congruence between the political prospects and the cost-effectiveness of potential policy choices. Ideally, the postsecondary policy adoption and diffusion concepts and findings assayed in this chapter can inform leaders and analysts regarding the contours and paths for success in educational policy choices.

In this essay, we have argued that many of the new postsecondary financing, accountability, and governance and management policies of the past few decades have arisen because of certain conditions involving states' demographic and

economic context, the structural aspects of their postsecondary systems, their political-system dynamics, and the prior policy behavior of their neighbors and peers. Several points about this framework merit more attention.

First, we outline here a conceptual framework rather than a theoretical model. Suggesting that a broad category of factors, or a specific factor, is part of the context shaping policy emergence is different from assigning a direction of influence. For example, Republican-dominated legislatures may be especially likely to adopt incentives-based policies for institutions or students, but especially unlikely to adopt policies expanding a state's need-based aid funding. Similarly, state research-and-development tax-credit policies favoring corporations that establish partnerships with research universities may be especially likely in states with strong research universities. In contrast, there seems little reason to add an indicator of research university strength to modeling of, say, prepaid-tuition policies. The conceptualization vs. theory distinction also applies to state-to-state diffusion effects. Diffusion must be theorized and studied in direct relation to the policy at hand. Some policies clearly have been adopted within a context of keen competition among neighboring states (merit scholarships seem a prime example), while other policies seem to reflect other motivations (for example, states have learned from each other in framing their performance-funding policies). In sum, directional theoretical propositions are contingent upon the nature of the particular policy being considered.

Our goal in proposing our conceptual framework has been to iterate and examine the relevant array of factors shaping policy adoptions, not to suggest consistent directions of impacts from any one of them across policies. Analysis of particular policy innovations must be adaptively creative, rather than a mechanical extension of any singular overarching theoretical notion.

Also, it should be stressed that the influences of the factors highlighted in Fig. 7.1 can be variable or stable over time. For example, the governor's constitutional power in a given state rarely shifts over time, and thus shapes policy outcomes year after year. But other contextual influences can be dynamic: beyond certain baseline conditions, we theorize that a state is most likely to undertake changes in postsecondary policy when it has experienced recent, dynamic change in the demographic, economic, political, and diffusion contexts in which it is situated (e.g., see McLendon et al., 2009). Rapid demographic shifts, periods of economic growth or decline, changes in the partisan balance or control of legislatures, shifting electoral competitiveness, and the rush by a state's neighbors or peers to adopt a given policy each may increase the likelihood that a state would choose to undertake new policy directions. Virtually every one of our own team's EHA analyses has provided evidence that the power of particular influences waxes and wanes over time, as larger national and international socioeconomic and political conditions shift.

In the context of such changing contextual influences, the temporal nature of the policy should help determine whether we focus on recent *changes* in a variable's values, the latest value of the variable, or a lagged value of the variables. All else equal, one can propose that we might use simple indicators reflects the basic, rather stable aspects of a state's policy environment (e.g., a state's stock of college-educated

workers or its reliance on a highly professionalized legislative staff) while we might use change indicators to reflect shifts in more dynamic aspects of the environment (e.g. rapidly rising unemployment, or rapidly falling tax revenues).

Further, the influences of factors in the framework can be interactive with each other and with time. For example, while some states may develop a particular new higher-education financing scheme to cope with challenging economic conditions, other economically similar states may resist such a reform, owing to some ameliorating or mediating political condition, such as a governor facing a strong election challenge discouraging costly new initiatives. For example, governors elected to a first term in a context of longstanding state domination by the other party and pressing economic conditions may be especially likely to push for greater attention to cost-effectiveness and accountability in the funding of institutions and students.

Looking Ahead. While much has been accomplished in the profusion of research on higher-education policy adoption and diffusion since the 1990s, we find it hard to disagree with our colleague Will Doyle's (personal communication, May 5, 2016) characterization of this research as only now beginning to move past its "hunter-gatherer phase" theoretically and methodologically. In a similar vein, McLendon, Cohen-Vogel, and Wachen (2015) note that the knowledge base in educational policy adoption and diffusion studies remains "thin and piecemeal" overall (p. 111), and that seems particularly the case for studies in higher-education contexts. Much remains to be done. We can highlight three significant challenges.

First, current quantitative models of policy adoption often rely on distal variables to build understanding of complex social processes. For example, what does it mean to say that a state's educational attainment levels or partisan make-up affect policy-makers' decisions on postsecondary policies? Thinking more deeply about the particular mechanisms at work in specific outcomes, and constructing persuasive narratives about those processes, is necessary. As noted earlier, we believe that new qualitative and mixed-methods analyses can serve to buttress the existing findings and substantially enrich the existing literature. Ideally, our conceptual framework, along with the many new theoretical and methodological advances noted in this review, can contribute substantially to addressing this progression.

Second, for the field to build cumulatively, it is critical that researchers emphasize employing more precise, meaningful, and consistent definitions of policies and adoptions. For example, should legislative and gubernatorial sign-off merit being coded as an adoption, as has been the case in some earlier studies, or is funding at a particular level or a particular proportion of state funding essential for that designation? When, exactly, is an implementation of sufficient magnitude to be "counted" in adoption studies. Does it still make sense, for example, to define performance funding as one "thing", when in fact states devote widely differing funding amounts to it and focus on widely different objectives in their individual policies (Gándara, 2016; Hearn, 2015). Prominent policy advocates (e.g., Albright and Lumina Foundation, 2004.) suggest that, to implement a successful performance funding system, a state must tie a significant proportion of its postsecondary funding to an outcomes-based policy. Yet, using a rather modest cut-off of 25 %, only six states currently meet that level, and all of those states have met the cut-off only within the

last decade (Snyder & Fox, 2016). Imposing strict policy definitions can create a trade-off by reducing the data needed for convincing across-state statistical analyses. That said, inconsistent policy definitions severely limit generalizability, and severely limit the building of a coherent body of knowledge on adoptions. For this research arena to move ahead further, there is need for analysts to investigate the implications of alternative definitions for the results of policy-adoption studies (Hearn, 2015).

Another aspect of policy and adoption definitions also merits attention in future work. Much of the quantitative research on policy adoption has relied on coding adoptions as occurring in a single year. In the terms of EHA, the state/year indicator moves in that year from 0 to 1. Yet many adoptions take states multiple years to implement (Berry & Berry, 1990). Recently, analysts have begun to specify adoptions in graded, non-binary ways, assigning values based in the level and stage of adoptions (Berry & Berry, 2014). Higher-education researchers may well want to follow suit. Even more ambitiously, there is a need to consider not solely the birth of new higher-education policies but also their declines and deaths. This life-cycle perspective seems especially appropriate in such areas as performance and outcomes funding. That policy approach first arose over 30 years ago, then declined, then re-emerged in the early 2000s after a seeming decline in popularity among the states in prior years (a phenomenon that inevitably called to mind a well-known Monty Python skit centered around a parrot that was, at least arguably, “not dead yet”). Fortunately, promising new research is beginning to consider the benefits of taking more inclusive perspective on the lives of postsecondary policy ideas (Gorbunov, 2013). Expanding this vein of research could provide a valuable complement to social-historical analyses of the tides of educational policy history, such as that of Loss and McGuinn ([forthcoming](#)).

Conclusion. Taken as a whole, the policy-adoption research of the last three decades has unquestionably yielded a number of insights on the forces driving change in state higher-education policy. Ideally, the work will continue and expand. The framework provided here is meant to help guide both theory development and practical application. It is also meant to help shape both quantitative and qualitative analysis of policy adoptions. Many studies of adoption in higher education have fruitfully employed quantitative designs, and promising methodological advances arrive almost every year. And, as we noted earlier, opportunities are extraordinarily rich for other, less statistical approaches (McLendon et al., 2015; Ness, 2010b). This good work should continue and grow. Certainly, there is a well-established need for analysis of adopted policies, but there is also great value in work on the front end, at the stage when new ideas are emerging and actors are beginning to array themselves to consider those ideas and, potentially, to act on them. The ways novel policy approaches emerge from the maw of the fifty states’ diverse internal and external contexts continue to merit serious attention.

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