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Policy Diffusion Dynamics in America

Policy Diffusion Dynamics in America integrates research from agenda setting and epidemiology to model factors that shape the speed and scope of public policy diffusion. Drawing on a data set of more than 130 policy innovations, the research demonstrates that the "laboratories of democracy" metaphor for incremental policy evaluation and emulation is insufficient to capture the dynamic process of policy diffusion in America. A significant subset of innovations triggers outbreaks – the extremely rapid adoption of innovation across states. The book demonstrates how variation in the characteristics of policies, the political and institutional traits of states, and differences among interest-group carriers interact to produce distinct patterns of policy diffusion.

Graeme Boushey is Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Health Policy Research at the University of Michigan, on leave from his post as Assistant Professor of Political Science at San Francisco State University. His teaching and research are organized around practical and theoretical questions of state and federal policy making. He recently coauthored a review of individual and organizational decision making for the *Handbook of Public Policy*, and he also has coauthored an article in the *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* on immigration policy in federations.

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To my parents, Homer and Virginia Boushey

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Acknowledgments

This work explores the diffusion of public policy innovations in the United States. I became interested in the topic as a graduate student at the University of Washington, where I was introduced to research on policy making in federations. Although I appreciated the purported benefits of decentralized policy making, I could not reconcile ideal models of innovation and diffusion with my experiences growing up in California, where many of the prominent policies that the state adopted in the 1990s did not match the neat, cost-benefit decision-making processes outlined by researchers of an earlier generation. As I began to read research on agenda setting, it became clear that the process of public policy innovation and diffusion is dynamic, one in which incremental decision making is often interrupted by sudden moments of attention-driven policy change. I became interested in identifying what determines the pattern of innovation diffusion, whether by gradual increments or by sudden outbreak.

In pursuing this interest, I could not help but notice that a similar pattern emerged in my own work – long periods of gradual improvement interrupted by new insights and sudden productivity. Unlike models of the policy process, the causes of these breakthroughs are easy to explain. They came after meetings and conversations with those friends and colleagues who graciously showed an interest in this project, and who took the time to offer suggestions for improvement. I wish to thank each of them for their attention and support.

I am fortunate to have worked with an extraordinary group of people at the University of Washington, and thank each of them for the time and energy they invested in the development of this research. This book

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would not have been possible without the mentorship of my committee, Bryan Jones, Mark Smith, and Erik Wibbels. Bryan Jones encouraged my interdisciplinary approach to modeling diffusion dynamics and provided feedback and support for this research from its conception. My interest in policy diffusion grew out of challenging discussions with Mark Smith and Erik Wibbels, whose respective mastery of the literature on interest groups and federalism provided an invaluable resource as I began to explore the questions of why and how innovations spread across states.

A number of others provided key advice at various stages of the project. Peter May volunteered feedback as I began to explore how the initiative process shaped the diffusion of innovations. I benefited enormously from the friendship and advice of David Olson, whose knowledge of state and local politics is limitless. Anne Ganley provided insight on how to organize and execute a major research project. John Ahlquist, Christian Breunig, and Josh Sapotichne were valuable critics and good friends. They pushed me to expand my conceptualization of the processes leading to innovation diffusion and often took time from their own research to help me work through various technical challenges that emerged as I worked on this project.

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I was welcomed to San Francisco by a wonderful community of scholars. Max Neiman, of the Public Policy Institute of California, took an early interest in this project and graciously gave detailed comments on an entire draft of the manuscript. Richard DeLeon commented on a full draft, adding the perspective of a scholar who has made a career of studying the innovative politics of San Francisco. Jesse Cohen provided technical support for ArcGIS and helped produce the maps that appear in Chapter 4.

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I am blessed to have a family that has provided unwavering support over the years that I have worked on this research. As I collected data for this project, my parents Homer and Virginia Boushey became active students of policy innovation and diffusion. My mother forwarded newspaper clippings about interesting new policies and the problematic legacy of California's initiative process. My siblings Geoff and Sarah Boushey were close confidants when I became excited by a new idea or frustrated by a setback. My father, a professor of medicine at the University of California San Francisco, was always willing to read drafts of my manuscript, and provided perspective on examples I chose from studies of epidemiology.

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late evenings and long weekends on this project. I always found it easier to return to writing after the long hikes we took on the coast or in the redwood forests of Northern California, where I gained perspective in the calm that comes during a long walk with a good friend. I cannot imagine completing this book without her extraordinary love and support.

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