Policy Studies and the Policy State

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Introduction

Barack Obama once famously remarked that the job of the government is to "get stuff done". In the eyes of Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, Obama's remark is emblematic of the 'policy state'. In their eponymous book, Orren and Skowronek (2017) elaborate on this emergent state form, now common across the Western world. The policy state describes an organization of the state in which policy has become the preferred problem-solving tool of governments. As governments are doing more over a broader range of issues, the policy infrastructure thickens, permeating almost all areas of social, political and economic life. This has profound implications for politics and policymaking.

In this article, we review 'The Policy State' and related research in the field of American political development and explore its implications for policy studies. We suggest that policy studies can profit from the macro perspective adopted by the research on the policy state. Unlike most theories and frameworks on policy-making processes, research on the policy state does not intend to explain the trajectory of particular policies, but considers the policy infrastructure in its entirety and interplay, and systematically explores the connections between policy and politics. We argue that research on the policy state has three specific implications for policy studies. First, we suggest that policy scholars are well placed to add a comparative dimension to research on the policy state, which so far has only been described and analyzed in the

American context. Second, research on the policy state urges us to more carefully consider the intensity of political conflict that policy-making theories and frameworks implicitly presuppose, and to critically reflect on this variable in the light of real-life policy-making situations. Third, research on the policy state provides policy scholars with a fit occasion to contribute to a better understanding of political conflict. In the policy state, much of political conflict actually revolves around policy – and policy scholars have developed useful frameworks for understanding the conflicts about controversial policy issues.

In the next section of this article, we give an overview of recent research on the policy state. Our primary reference is Orren and Skowronek (2017), as it represents the most profound analysis to date of the trajectory of the policy state and its implications for politics. Like Orren and Skowronek, we will focus on the American policy state, but here and there, we will already add observations and examples taken from other countries, before we elaborate more systematically on the international dimension of the policy state in the later part of the article. The second section contrasts the macro-perspective on 'policy' applied in research on the policy state with the more procedural and particularistic perspectives dominant in policy studies. In the final section, we present and discuss three implications for the study of public policy and reveal potentials for cross-fertilization between subfields of political science.

The trajectory of the policy state

Research on the policy state (e.g. Pierson and Skocpol 2007; Jenkins and Milkis 2014; Orren and Skowronek 2017) takes its starting point from a well-known and well-documented development: an increasingly dense policy infrastructure that permeates almost all areas of social, political and economic life. The policy state, sometimes also referred to as the 'activist state' or 'activist government', "sets down prohibitions and requirements for everything from hiring practices to the design of entryways for private buildings to the kinds of wordings prohibited or required on consumer packaging" (Pierson 2007a, pp. 114–115). The fact that

governments are "doing more over a broader range of affairs" (Orren and Skowronek 2017, p. 6) can be read from the expansion of four dimensions of state activity over time: public spending, rule making, granting of rights, and tax subsidies. For the American policy state, Paul Pierson (2007b) documents a marked increase in the application of these 'instruments of political authority'. During the second half of the 20th century, the federal state substantially increased nondefense spending as a share of GDP, devised ever more federal regulations and increased their extent, guaranteed ever more social rights, and subsidized an increasing number of private activities such as housebuilding or retirement planning through the tax code.

The emergence of the policy state: A central observation of research on the policy state is that the ubiquity of policy has not always been with us, but is the result of a peculiar historical trajectory that has its roots in the 19th century, and only in the second part of the 20th century experienced a strong culmination. Historically, democratic polities are governed by different forms of rule. The most important forms of rule are constitutionally or socially entrenched rights, the formal arrangement of institutions ('structure'), and policy. Rights, structure, and policy work together in governing a democratic polity, but also mutually contain and equilibrate each other. Rights and structure, in particular, traditionally constrained the expansion of policy.

Rights form the basis for most policy interventions. They preset the space in which political or private actors can come up with policy initiatives. For example, in the US, rights persisting until the 1930s guaranteed the sovereignty of the entrepreneur. The latter could dictate the working conditions of his employees almost at will. Rights, in other words, kept policy away from the workplace. Workplace safety and other regulations could only be implemented after the rights of entrepreneurs were constrained with the passage of the National Relations Labor Act in 1935 (Orren and Skowronek 2017, pp. 61–70). In Switzerland, a failed attempt in 2009 by the government to get a federal law on health promotion through parliament primarily explains why Switzerland has a relatively weakly developed public health policy (Vatter and Ruefli 2017).

Because in Switzerland, 'health' is traditionally a private matter, such a law on health promotion would have been needed for the Swiss authorities to develop significant policy-making initiative in the area of public health (Sager et al. 2018). But not only rights have a constraining effect on policy; also structure keeps policy at bay. Federal structures, which exist in many democratic polities, often constrain the reach of national policy initiatives (Orren and Skowronek 2017, pp. 92–105). In Germany, for instance, federal structures repeatedly prevent the national government from launching policy initiatives in the area of education because the latter is traditionally under the control of the federal states (Hepp 2011).

In the course of the 20th century, the delicate balance between different forms of rule has gradually given way to a strong preponderance of policy. The policy state is the result of the gradual dilution of the nature of rights and of the erosion of structure. Orren and Skowronek (2017, p. 29) define rights as absolute claims of persons against other entities that constrain political discretion and foreclose programmatic goals. However, as rights have multiplied over the course of the 20th century, they gradually lost their absolute character. The more rights there are, the more contingent each right becomes, because ever more competing claims must be balanced out. In this complex web of interrelated, contingent and competing rights, policy pushes forward for two interrelated reasons. First, contingent rights are less good at keeping policy at bay because the space they protect from policy interventions is much more permeable than the space protected by more absolute rights. Second, 'new' rights usually need the support of policy interventions in order not to remain a formality (Pierson 2007b). Orren and Skowronek (2017, pp. 43–52) illustrate the relationship between the multiplication-cum-erosion of rights and the advance of policy in the context of the traditional family. In the US, the father's right to rule about the family was almost absolute until well into the 19th century. Over time, however, mothers and children gained individual rights separate from those of the father, diluting the latter's absolute control over the family. For the rights of mothers and

children not to remain mere formalities, advocates soon came up with policy plans supposed to enforce those rights. Over time, several policies and regulations, from "restraining orders to husbands on behalf of wives and children" (Orren and Skowronek 2017, p. 48) to a fully-fledged child custody policy, permeated the space formerly protected by the father's right to rule the family.

The dilution of the nature of rights and policy's related advance also led to the erosion of traditional structures. As Pierson points out (2014, p. 283), "[a]lmost by definition, once something is legally enshrined as a right, it becomes a national rather than local matter". The multiplication of rights meant that more and more federal policy initiatives encroached on domains formerly in states' hands, thereby gradually eroding the structure of federalism (Orren and Skowronek 2017, pp. 92–105). Next to its impact on federalist structures, policy's advance also blurred the division of labor among the three branches of government. In the policy state, policy-making is no longer confined to the legislature. It is now common to

> "observe that contemporary judges are doing more to 'make' law than just to 'find' it; that contemporary presidents are not just executing the law but declaring it unilaterally; that modern bureaucrats do not just administer the law but give it content" (Skowronek 2012, p. 336).

With all branches involved in policy-making, administrative structures – a prerequisite for the successful implementation of policies – began to grow around and between them, thereby eroding the traditional administrative structure of the federal state (Orren and Skowronek 2017, pp. 105–123).

The reasons for policy's advance: We have seen that the dilution of rights opened a void in which policy could push forward. But this is not the full story behind policy's advance. What made and makes policy so attractive in the first place is the ubiquity of problems in modern polities in combination with policy's unique capability in addressing them. We will present both issues in turn.

In modern, complex, and fast-changing polities, 'problems' arise on a daily basis. We put 'problems' in quotes here because many of them are actually welcome by-products of modernizing, emancipating, and diversifying societies. To give a more systematic overview of the manifold problems that polities have to address, we distinguish between the various drivers that make problems emerge and between different types of problems. The drivers behind problems can be divided in economic, demographic, technological, and societal changes that modern polities are constantly exposed to. Some of the problems generated by these changes are genuinely new for a polity. Other problems are recurring, i.e. a polity had addressed them before, but changes in circumstances require updating exercises (Hacker 2004). Still other problems were 'managed' (or suppressed) by other forms of rule, but the dilution of rights and the erosion of structure subjected them to the influence of policy. While the categories and examples in Table 1 are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, they still give an idea of the extent and variety of problems that modern polities have to address.

Table 1. Problem categories (with examples) that modern polities need to address.

Type of problem		**Driver of change**			
		economic	*demographic*	*technological*	*societal*
	genuinely new	Regulate financial innovations like crypto-currencies	Integrate an unprecedented number of immigrants	Regulate the use of technological innovations like cloning	Address political demands of the LGBT movement
	recurring	Adapt tax brackets to inflation rate	Adapt pension levels	Manage spectrum auctions	Addressing social inequality
	previously addressed differently	Create work place security	Care for the elderly (formerly addressed within the family)	Devising safety standards for industries	Regulate the role of the church in education

If the examples in Table 1 intuitively appear as 'policy', 'regulation', or 'governance' problems, then this is because we have come to regard them as 'solvable' through policy interventions. In the policy state, policy is the primary form of rule because it is government's primary instrument for "dealing with issues and problems as they arise" (Orren and Skowronek 2017, p. 3). Unlike rights and structure, policy can relatively easily be adapted to changing problem constellations. Therefore, of the three forms of rule, policy is the most 'forward looking'. Policy's unique problem-solving affinity is also the reason why political actors have historically developed strong incentives to use it to reach their goals.

The political consequences of the policy state: A major claim of research on the policy state is that the ubiquity of policy fundamentally transforms politics. As research is only beginning to systematically "explore the implications for politics" (Pierson 2014, p. 290), the causal processes by which policy's advance influences contemporary political phenomena have yet to be fleshed out in detail. What is already quite clear, however, is that the policy state distinguishes itself from earlier state forms by more abundant and fiercer political conflict about policies, and by heightened contingency in several regards.

In the policy state, political conflicts have increased in number and intensity. With the dilution of rights and the erosion of structure came the politicization of an increasing range of issues that absolute rights and federalist structures had locked out from democratic deliberation, such as race, gender, family, or labor relations. These developments "opened policy making to wholly new influences, and vastly broadened the scope of political conflict over the state priorities" (Skowronek 2012, p. 334). With more and more issues thrown up for grabs and politicized, political actors find more reasons and occasions for quarreling. Both Orren and Skowronek (2017, pp. 172–192) and Pierson (2014, pp. 286–289) point out that one of the reasons for why contemporary politics is particularly polarized is that the policy state provides political actors with abundant opportunities for conflictual interaction.

Another reason for more conflictual politics in the policy state has to do with the latter's maturation. The advance of the policy state heavily drew on the elevation of science as a basis for 'adequate', evidence-based policy-making. Science was widely believed to provide a basis for problem-oriented discussions and for producing among political actors what John Dewey called 'like-mindedness'.

> "The idea that public problems have rational solutions, that they should be addressed scientifically and with an eye toward fine-tuning down the line, requires for their successful implementation a measure of agreement on goals and a continuity of support over time" (Orren and Skowronek 2017, p. 175).

However, as the authors hasten to add, a maturing policy state begins to consume its most important resource. A more confusing and controversial policy landscape has contributed to a more heterogeneous scientific basis on which consensus is harder to achieve. In the hands of ever more diverse "experts and their legions of enlightened followers", science tends to lose its capacity to generate consensus among originally disagreeing actors (Orren and Skowronek 2017, p. 162).

A development that goes hand in hand with more abundant and fiercer political conflict is heightened confusion and contingency. Policy's advance led to the sprawl of agencies, commissions, and policy-related organized interests (Pierson 2014; Orren and Skowronek 2017, pp. 105–123). The multiplication of actors resulted in ever more confusing and idiosyncratic alliances in particular policy domains. As a consequence, every policy domain "tends to develop a politics of its own" (Skowronek 2012, p. 335). What is more, the policy achievements in those domains tend to become more provisional. More conflictual political interactions make it harder to achieve continuity of support for policy achievements, as opponents are likely to renegotiate or repeal the latter at the next best opportunity.

A different perspective on policy

The careful reconstruction and analysis of policy's advance is instructive in its own right. However, research on the policy state does more than inform policy scholars about how the phenomena they study came into being and became so dominant. The research on the policy state bears particular relevance for the study of public policy because it adopts a macro-perspective on 'policy' that is different from the more particularistic views on specific policies commonly held in the public policy discipline. Because the latter

> "regards the new state that has emerged matter-of-factly, moving directly to its exemplars, it offers no alternative point of reference, no opposing governing principle, against which we might follow the transformation or gauge its significance" (Orren and Skowronek 2017, p. 9).

The dominant focus on particular areas of substantive policy such as labor policy, environmental policy, immigration policy, foreign policy, or education policy is not very surprising given that the "universe of public policies is both heavily populated and extremely heterogeneous" (Pierson 2007a, p. 119). Understanding policy-making trajectories, from agenda setting, through formulation and adoption, to implementation, usually requires zooming in on particular areas of substantive policy.

Of course, the canonical frameworks and theories about policy-making processes, by adopting a comparative perspective, strive to explain the emergence, the trajectory, and the effects of a wide range of substantial polices. However, also in these frameworks, the unit of analysis is usually a particular policy, and not the policy infrastructure in its entirety. Accordingly, the questions asked by this research still overwhelmingly focus on what is going in particular areas of substantive policy. For example, why does one policy (or policy field) receive considerable political attention but not another (e.g. Jones and Baumgartner 2007)? Why are some policy proposals adopted but others never come into being (Kingdon 1995)? Why are particular policies successfully implemented but others not (e.g. Pressman and Wildavsky 1984; Lipsky

2010)? Why do some policies move public opinion but others are met with indifference (e.g. Mettler and SoRelle 2014)? A focus on particular policies and their trajectories is even dominant in research that explicitly focuses on policy regimes and the interrelations between the policies constituting the regime (e.g. May et al. 2006; Howlett and Rayner 2017).

Implications for policy studies

By considering the policy infrastructure in its entirety and interplay, the research on the policy state is able to ask (and answer) questions that do not come into focus if the emphasis is on particular policies and their trajectories. As we try to show on the next pages, this macro-perspective allows us to take into account the political consequences of policy's advance and provides us with an impetus for rethinking and better conceptualizing the relationship between policy and politics.

Developing a comparative perspective on the policy state: Originating from the field of American political development, research on the policy state so far misses a comparative perspective. However, the policy state is clearly an international phenomenon. The ubiquity of problems and policy's unique affinity to problem solving are constants across developed polities. In the words of Orren and Skowronek (2017, p. 8), "[p]olicy states are now common. We suspect, however, that each bears the marks of its particular path of development". In our view, policy studies should help in reconstructing and comparing the development and organization of policy states, and explore their political consequences across countries. At least three dimensions need to be analyzed and compared.

A first important difference between policy states lies in the historical configuration of different forms of rule. While policy states, by definition, distinguish themselves from other state forms by the preponderance of policy over other forms of rule, interrelations between them may diverge across countries. For example, Orren and Skowronek point out (2017, p. 8) that constitutional provisions on structure were much less firmly set in Britain than in the US. This

would mean that structural resistance to policy's advance is weaker in Britain than in the US. Moreover, the role of rights in containing policy may play out differently across countries. Constitutionally enshrined rights present in the German and US polities arguably provide different territory for policy's advance than the more flexible common law in Britain. As common law is built on inferences from past rulings, one can imagine that common law represents a weaker obstacle to policy's advance than statutory law. These examples suggest that there are important differences across countries in how forms of rule work together in organizing the polity, and that these differences should have important implications for the shape of specific policy states.

A second, and related, difference between specific policy states consists in their peculiar historical trajectories. This can be read from the dimensions of state activity associated with the rise of the policy state: public spending, rule making, granting of rights, and tax subsidies. Pierson (2007b), tracking the advance of the American policy state in the second half of the 20th century, identifies a specific historical pattern. US federal government spending started to increase during the 1950s, with regulations and social rights expanding from the 1960s onwards and tax subsidies only increasing from the 1970s onwards. A look at the European 'regulatory state' (Majone 1994; Caporaso 1996) suggests a different trajectory. In the absence of possibilities to raise significant revenue for public spending, the European Union started its policy-making trajectory almost exclusively by means of rule making. If current political plans become reality, however, rule making will be joined by increased European public spending in the near future. While we cannot delve into the constellations behind these different trajectories, they direct our attention to the building blocks of modern policy states and how they are related to each other.

A third, important difference should consist in public attitudes towards the expansion of the policy state. Orren and Skowronek (2017) leave now doubt that in the US, mainly due to

historical reasons, policy's advance is met with significant disdain especially from conservatives. Widespread criticism towards policy's advance makes conflict about policy even fiercer than a policy issue alone would suggest. In other words, it is often not only a particular policy issue that arouses emotions, but over and above the government's pretension to address a problem at all. Policy conflicts thereby tend to develop emblematic character and resonate widely. In some European countries, where citizens are less critical towards policy's advance (Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003), such processes of conflict amplification may be weaker or almost absent. Consequently, European policy states may be characterized by fewer and less intense political conflict about policy. Overall, there are several fruitful starting points for comparing varieties of policy states with each other.

Accommodating more conflictual politics: Increased interest in phenomena such as polarization, populism, blame generation, 'negative messaging', or 'attack politics' in advanced democracies bespeaks a widespread tendency towards intensified and more conflictual interactions between political actors (e.g. Tushnet 2003; Hetherington 2009; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Nai and Walter 2015; Hinterleitner 2018; Weaver 2018). While the ascent of these more conflictual forms of political interaction cannot be solely ascribed to the rise of the policy state, the existing research strongly suggests that an increasingly dense policy infrastructure is one of the main reasons for the current flourishing of these more conflictual forms of political interaction.

A politics that is more conflictual and polarized forces us to reconsider the assumptions about political conflict presupposed in major policy-making theories and frameworks. Every theory or framework that seeks to explain policy-making processes contains assumptions on how strongly the actors involved in decision-making disagree on a policy issue, and (related) assumptions on how (intensively) they compete to leave an imprint on the final decision. Whether we assume that political actors compete in a rather problem-oriented way or that they

pull out all the stops to reach their policy goals, attacking their opponents and portraying them as utterly incompetent, arguably makes a huge difference for our understanding of policy-making processes. Therefore, if frameworks presuppose a rather consensual style of decision-making, then this may be at odds with the more conflictual style of politics associated with the rise of the policy state.

The 'issue networks' framework developed by Hugh Heclo (1978) helps to illustrate this point. This framework adopts a rather consensual and technocratic understanding of policy-making, with administrative actors, interest groups and experts loosely organized around issue networks. An issue network enables information exchange and debate between the actors, and allows expertise to enter the decision-making process. In a polarized political environment, the likelihood increases that actors, at least with regard to some policy issues, are no longer organized around one network, but that each 'pole' has its own network with regard to a policy issue (see also Pierson 2014; Schneider 2015). American think tanks are a case in point. Both Republicans and Democrats today have their think tanks that rarely collaborate with the other side. Instead, each side has its own network from which policy proposals are sourced. Consequently, there are fewer possibilities for expertise and informed debate to produce proposals that are principally able to reach consensus. One can therefore legitimately raise the question whether the 'issue networks' framework provides us with a realistic picture of policy-making in the policy state.

We do not mean to suggest that Heclo's issue networks are representative for the explanatory problems that theories and frameworks on policy-making encounter when the latter occurs under more conflictual conditions. In fact, some of the canonical frameworks in the field seem to be able to accommodate more conflictual political interactions. The advocacy coalition framework, for example, allows for significant distance between the believes of major advocacy coalitions (Weible et al. 2011). Nevertheless, many of our frameworks were built in an

unusually consensual phase in the trajectory of Western democracies. Earlier work, especially by Otto Kirchheimer (1957) and Robert Dahl (1965), shows that, back in the 1950s and 1960s, students of politics were still aware of the fact that the postwar era had heralded a politics that was markedly different from earlier times. According to Dahl (1965), the postwar era was characterized by a 'surplus of consensus', i.e. a "growing extent of agreement among political actors" on both policy and system issues (Mair 2007, p. 6). Hence, there is enough reason for taking a closer look at the assumptions on conflict in our theories and frameworks to see whether they can accommodate more conflictual politics.

To be sure, not every policy area is equally affected by more conflictual politics. Eric Montpetit (2016), for instance, has recently examined the type and intensity of political conflict around biotechnology policy-making in North-America and Europe. He concludes that contrary to what media coverage may lead us to assume, policy-making is not intractably polarized and conflictual, but actually quite consensus-oriented. While administrative actors, interest groups and experts necessarily disagree on some policy aspects, Montpetit finds that the degree of disagreement is far from irreconcilable. The actors involved in biotechnology policy-making "understand that their participation in policy-making means that they have the opportunity to promote their own distinctive beliefs, but they are also aware that participation requires a mindset of compromise" (Montpetit 2016, pp. 13–14). This example suggests that even under generally more conflictual political circumstances, there are still policy-making situations characterized by significant degrees of problem-orientation and compromise.

Two implications follow from these observations. First, the study of public policy needs to become more sensitive to the type and degree of conflict that characterizes particular policy domains. Second, the discipline needs to put policy-making theories and frameworks to the test and ask: What are their (implicit) assumptions about the type and degree of political conflict about policy? Do they presuppose a certain degree of conflict, or can they accommodate varying

degrees of conflict? Such an undertaking is an important precondition for understanding policy-making in a political context that, at least with regard to some policy issues, has become more conflictual.

Understanding policy-centered political conflict: As we have seen, research on the policy state provides a strong impetus to reconsider the role of conflictual politics in policy-making theories and frameworks. But introspection aside, we think that policy studies can make contributions to the understanding of conflictual politics that are relevant to political science at large. Our claim follows from the simple observation that in the policy state, political conflict increasingly revolves around policy issues. As policy conflicts increase in number and intensity, it becomes increasingly difficult for polities to handle them through formal institutions of decision-making. Most importantly, elections, with their limited issue space, cannot possibly cope with all the policy conflicts that constantly arise in modern polities.

This observation is at odds with much contemporary political science scholarship, which in the tradition of the Downsian paradigm, conceives of politics as revolving around vote choice, elections, and campaigns (Hacker and Pierson 2014). In this conception of politics, 'policy' is treated as a mere commodity in and residual of the 'electoral connection', a term coined by David Mayhew (1974) regarding the interactions between vote-seeking representatives and their constituents. To see why this is a problem in the light of an increasing number of policy conflicts, consider the following scenario. We assume that modern polities address policy conflicts in three different ways. We do not treat these 'ways' as discrete categories, but rather as accentuations of how polities manage or 'digest' policy conflicts. Some, if not many conflicts, are addressed in particular policy subsystems, i.e. policy-making actors in the subsystem address them without causing ripples beyond the particular subsystem (*Type 1* conflicts in Figure 1 below). An example of a *Type 1* conflict would be biotechnology policy-making as described in Montpetit (2016). Other conflicts become politicized and develop into

major issues during elections, with subsystem actors such as experts or organized interests often losing control over them (*Type 2* conflicts). A concrete example is the German immigration crisis, which developed into a major issue during the 2017 federal election campaign. *Type 3* conflicts also transcend the boundaries of subsystems, but in the absence of elections (or because their limited issue space is already populated with other issues), develop into political events in their own right. Typical examples for *Type 3* conflicts are government decisions that impose losses on constituents, such as military base closings or pension cuts. Governments often time these decisions to make sure that losses do not become a major issue during elections (Pal and Weaver 2003). Other examples are policy failures that get politicized at some point in between elections. With policy studies traditionally focusing on *Type 1* conflicts and mainstream political science predominantly focusing on *Type 2* conflicts, there is the risk that *Type 3* conflicts are neglected.

Figure 1. Conflict types that modern polities need to address.
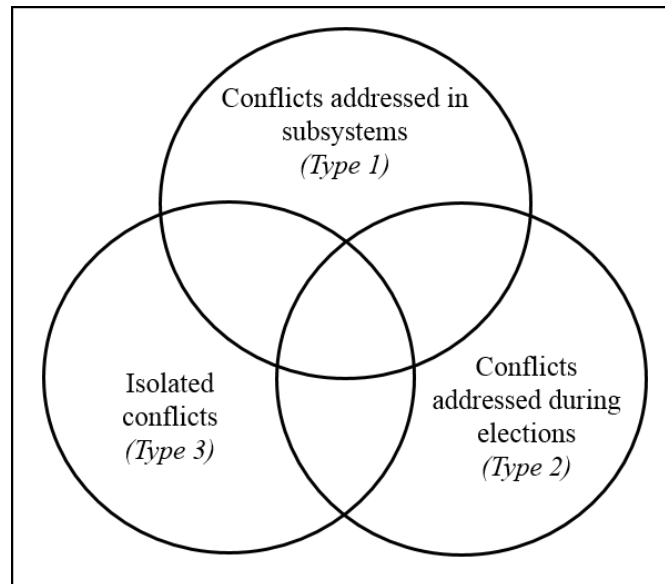
However, if research on the policy state is right that policy conflicts are more widespread and intense, Type 3 conflicts automatically increase in number. In other words, we need to sharpen our focus on *Type 3* conflicts to grasp the full spectrum of policy-centered political conflict in modern polities. Policy studies can help in this undertaking. A rich research tradition in public

policy focuses on policy conflicts[1] as political events in their own right. In accordance with research on the policy state, the literature on policy conflicts starts from the observation that a more proactive state unavoidably produces more controversies. As Mark Bovens and Paul 't Hart (2016, p. 654) put it, only "a part of this myriad of ambitions and activities unfolds as hoped, expected and planned for by policymakers. Another part throws up surprises, complications, delays, disappointments and unintended consequences".

According to this literature, polities usually subject policy controversies to a factual or programmatic assessment of what happened and why, and about which consequences need to be drawn (e.g. Birkland 2006; Howlett 2012). However, there is also a political side to the assessment of policy controversies, because political actors most often disagree about what actually happened and whether this is good or bad (Bovens and 't Hart 2016). Research on policy conflicts (e.g. McConnell 2008; Boin et al. 2009; Hood et al. 2009; Hood 2011; Mortensen 2012) conceives of these political assessments as 'framing contests' during which politicians, bureaucrats, organized interests and the media try to impose their opinion on others. Winning the framing contest increases the chance to influence the future trajectory of the policy at the root of the controversy. This notion of political conflict about policy carves out distinct analytical room and provides fruitful concepts and tools for capturing and analyzing *Type 3* conflicts. On one hand, the research makes an important distinction between rather problem-oriented and rather political assessments of policy controversies and is well aware that there can be significant differences and contradictions between the two (Bovens and 't Hart 2016). On the other hand, instead of subsuming policy conflicts under electoral competition, the research treats them as distinct political events consisting of a trigger, interactions between actors involved in the conflict, and political and policy consequences (Hinterleitner and Sager

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[1] The literature does not only use the term 'policy conflicts', but alternately speaks of 'policy failures', 'policy controversies', 'policy blunders', 'policy fiascoes', or 'policy crises'.

2017). Hence, policy studies disposes of fruitful theoretical and conceptual terrain for studying *Type 3* policy conflicts.

Conclusion

In this article, we reviewed the research on the policy state in the field of American political development and explored its implications for the study of public policy. The perspective on 'policy' in the research on the policy state is different from views commonly held in the public policy discipline. Instead of looking at and analyzing the trajectory of particular policy-making processes, research on the policy state analyzes the policy infrastructure in its entirety and interplay. We have tried to show that this shift in perspective can enrich the study of public policy in several ways. First, it provides an impetus for introspection, i.e. it encourages us to re-examine our frameworks and eventually adapt them to accommodate the more conflictual style of politics associated with the expansion of the policy state. Second, it reveals exciting new research directions by pointing to the need for comparative research on the policy state. Third, it suggests that policy studies are well placed to contribute to a better understanding of the more diverse forms of policy-related political conflict observable in modern policy states. Overall, we think that research on the policy state provides a welcome opportunity for reviving dialogue and exchange between subfields of political science.

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