Refining the Political Sociology of International Migration: Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion

Conference on “Determinants of International Migration”
Sept. 23-25, 2014, University of Oxford

David FitzGerald, University of California - San Diego
David Cook-Martín, Grinnell College
The puzzle:

Why did a strong consensus to select immigrants based on racial criteria in the 1920s switch to an anti-racist norm?

What role did policy diffusion play?
Harper’s Weekly, August 7, 1869

San Diego poster 1882
Pres. Johnson signs the 1965 Immigration Act at Ellis Island
Art. 25.
“El Gobierno federal fomentará la inmigración europea...”
Argentines of Korean descent, 2010
Number of countries in the Americas with negative immigration discrimination against six groups, 1790-2010

- Chinese
- Japanese
- Middle Eastern
- Black
- Gitano
- Unassimilable
The comparativist’s problem:

Millian logic misses how diffusion affects policymaking.

Method of agreement:
A B C D occur together with w x y z
A E F G occur together with w t u v

Therefore A is the cause, or the effect, of w.

Method of difference:
A B C D occur together with w x y z
  B C D occur together with x y z
Therefore A is the cause, or the effect, of w.
Three mechanisms of diffusion:

1. **Strategic adjustment** – role of geography?

2. **Emulation** – shaped more by power differentials or shared culture?

3. **Leverage** – under what conditions can weaker countries use it effectively?
Strategic adjustment

Policies of other countries change policymakers’ perceptions of the objective conditions in ways that push them to adapt accordingly.

Post-factum: U.S.-Japanese “Gentlemen’s Agreement” 1907 effects on Brazil and Canada

Pre-emptive: Costa Rica bans blacks 1862 in anticipation of U.S. move
Strong effects of strategic adjustment:

- Main way that U.S. policy has influenced ethnic selection in other countries

- Adjacency matters, but long-distance effects too
Cultural emulation

Policymakers in one country voluntarily model their policies on those of another country or institution

E.g. diffusion of literacy requirements

- 1896. U.S. Congress passed, vetoed
- 1897. Natal Act
- 1898. New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand
- 1901. Australia
- 1910. Union of South Africa
- 1913, 1915, and 1917. U.S. Congress passed, vetoed
- 1917. U.S. Congress overrides veto
- 1919. Canada
Direction of emulation:

- Extensive flows from strong to weak...
- and/or within cultural communities...
- but *not* across cultural community divides from weak to strong
Leverage

Diplomatic, military, or economic pressure that one country puts on another to change its policies

E.g. High coercion: U.S. military governor bans Chinese immigration to Cuba 1902

E.g. Low coercion: U.S. pressure Canada and Mexico to exclude Chinese after 1882
Leverage by the weak:

• Collective action

• Issue linkage to critical foreign policy concerns of the strong
Comments welcomed:

David FitzGerald
Department of Sociology &
Center for Comparative Immigration Studies

University of California, San Diego
dfitzgerald@ucsd.edu