Defining the State from Within: Boundaries, Schemas, and Associational Policymaking

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ABSTRACT

A growing literature posits the importance of boundaries in structuring social systems. Yet sociologists have not adequately theorized one of the most fraught and consequential sites of boundary-making in contemporary life: the delineation of the official edges of the government – and, consequently, of state from society. This paper addresses that gap by theorizing the mechanisms of state boundary formation. In so doing, we extend culturalist theories of the state by providing a more specific model of how the state-society boundary is produced. Further, we contribute to institutionalist accounts of politics by highlighting boundary-work during policy creation as a crucial site of political struggle, one with causal implications insofar as it illuminates a process that determines fine-grained distinctions in policy forms.
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Introduction

While extensive research specifies how boundary work shapes much of social life (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, and Lamont 2007; Tilly 2004), scholars have paid surprisingly little attention to one of the most fraught and consequential contemporary sites of boundary-making: the delineation of the official edges of the government – and, consequently, the delineation of state from society. Although a rich research tradition examines how states impose boundaries upon and within their populations (e.g., Bourdieu 2014; O’Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999; Scott 1998; Starr 1992), and how boundary-work contributes to the development of national identities and the physical boundaries of the nation (e.g., Anderson 2006 [1983]; Wimmer 2008), with a few important exceptions (see Mitchell 1991) the study of how the state itself is bounded has drawn scant attention.

This gap is troubling because scholars have shown that states and societies regularly interpenetrate (Balogh 2015; Clemens 2006; Hawley 1966; Jepperson 2002; Novak 2008). While political actors, when designing policies, may choose to provide new services directly through classic bureaucratic channels, they may also choose from a large menu of associational policy forms that engage with non-government actors to different extents. In the United States, these
associational policies emerged in the nineteenth century and blossomed alongside the modern federal government in the Progressive Era and New Deal (Balogh 2009, 2015; Hawley 1966, 1974, 1979). This approach leveraged an American tradition of voluntarism (Bellah et al. 1985; Clemens 2010; Clemens and Guthrie 2010), which by the early twentieth century had yielded an array of community-based organizations, including universities, which resembled “parastates” collaborating in local governance (Eisenach 1994; Loss 2012).

Associational policies take a variety of forms. They range from fully-hybrid organizations where costs and administrative control are shared, such as public authorities, charter schools, and government-sponsored entities (Radford 2013; Ravitch 2010); to subcontracts with private organizations to deliver services, such as faith-based initiatives (Sager 2010); to incentive-based structures like loans, guarantees, and tax expenditures (Quinn 2013; Howard 1997; Hacker 2002). While there are important differences in the extent to which the organizational boundaries of the state are erased in these various forms, all of them pose challenges to traditional understandings of the state and its boundaries.

Although each associational policy form involves a melding of government and private actors, they are not completely equivalent. Different forms may give certain actors privileged access to and control over resources, and alter or disrupt pathways of political recognition (Eaton and Weir 2015; Hacker 2002; Howard 1997; Mettler 2011). Different forms also have distinct
implications for government accountability, equity, and risk (Donahue and Zeckhauser 2011; Freeman and Minow 2009; Landow and Ebdon 2012). Understanding why policymakers choose one of these forms over another is therefore an important question, with potentially far-reaching social and political consequences.

Despite its importance, however, this question has received very limited attention in the scholarly literature. In recent years, scholars have begun to examine why government officials might prefer an associational policy form over direct service provision. In most cases, they find that doing so offers a pragmatic solution to the problems of governance. For example, associational policies allow officials to reduce costs (Rosenau 1999; Landow and Ebdon 2012), draw upon the administrative capacity of the private sector (Clemens 2006; Donahue and Zeckhauser 2011; Frasure and Jones-Correa 2010; Moore 2011), and overcome institutional or political roadblocks (Clemens 2006; Hacker 2002; Hawley 1966; Howard 1997; Mettler 2011; Morgan and Campbell 2011), including ideological objections to the expansion of central state power (Balogh 2015; Hawley 1974). Yet despite this interest, scholars have yet to examine why officials choose one associational policy form over another.

We contend that boundary work is an important factor affecting these choices. If politics is who gets what, when, and how (Lasswell 1990 [1936]), we suggest that in order to understand the “how,” we must expand our focus beyond
traditional political and institutional pathways of influence on policymaking, to include the kinds of symbolic constraints associated with questions of jurisdiction over policy implementation.

In this paper, therefore, we theorize how boundary work unfolds within the policymaking process, and how it affects the form that policies take. We argue that such boundary work is a recurrent and consequential facet of political life. The normal processes of making and implementing policy pose near-continual opportunities for the inscription, erasure, or re-inscription of the existing boundaries of states. In these moments, political actors (that is, both government officials and the non-government actors with whom they interact) must reflexively categorize their own actions as either belonging or not belonging to the state. Within the policymaking process, therefore, boundary work takes the form of classification struggles, during which interested parties contest the logic of appropriateness of specific policy designs. We identify three mechanisms that organize these episodes: demarcation, politicization, and matching games.

We demonstrate the usefulness of this framework by applying it to a case wherein the boundaries of the state became openly contested: attempts to create a new associative policy as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965. For officials in the Johnson Administration, the ability to classify their work as “state” or “not state,” in part by manipulating the financial, administrative, and symbolic ties envisioned within the legislation, was an
important tool that helped achieve a desired expansion of state influence. Their efforts were policed by outside actors who used ideas about what an appropriate boundary looked like to challenge policy outcomes they opposed.

Our paper makes two primary theoretical contributions. First, we extend culturalist accounts of the state by more fully specifying a model of how the state-society boundary is produced. Our goal here is not to offer an exhaustive theory of how government boundaries are determined. Rather, we make the more modest first step of calling attention to an overlooked analytical space and specifying the mechanisms therein. While there is still much work to be done in this arena, we hope our efforts contribute to advancing this larger conversation. Second, the mechanisms we identify also contribute to institutionalist accounts of politics by highlighting boundary-work during policy creation as a crucial site of political struggle, one with causal implications insofar as it illuminates a process that determines fine-grained distinctions in policy forms.

The Elusive State and Its Culturalist Interpreters

Scholars of political life working in vastly different traditions have converged on a central insight about government action: states are not monoliths cleanly divisible from social environments, so much as they are complex entities extensively entangled with their broader societies (Nettl 1968). More radical approaches in the Marxian and Foucauldian traditions claim this means the state is
little more than a chimera produced by particular arrangements of the practices of
many historical and organizational sociologists, see the state as having an
autonomous core that is enmeshed with society along its edges (Clemens 1997;
Laumann and Knoke 1987; Morgan and Orloff, forthcoming).

This complexity—and the definitional problems it creates—can have
important social effects. Associational policy forms give some groups privileged
access to public resources and shut out others. Private firms tasked with
distributing government resources may likewise privilege their own interests over
other beneficiaries or the general social welfare (Morgan and Campbell 2011).
Additionally, programs that are enacted through private channels may be
misrecognized as resulting from private efforts, limiting the degree to which they
are subject to public oversight and affecting citizens’ awareness of the role of
government in their lives (Freeman and Minow 2009; Hacker 2002; Mettler
2011). The ambiguity of partnerships further allows them to act as a brokerage
mechanism that allows politicians to cultivate reliable electorates (Marwell 2004).
While welfare programs deployed through non-profit or for-profit firms may
create opportunities for input that activists can exploit (Eaton and Weir 2015), this
still seems to be an exception rather than the rule. Understanding the dynamics of
partnerships and other associational forms of governance at the boundary is thus
an important and growing topic in political sociology (Morgan and Orloff forthcoming).

A culturalist strand of state theory has gone the furthest in providing a means of theorizing the complex edges of the state. Culturalist theories argue that the state is simultaneously a set of governing practices and a cultural phenomenon, variously described as an “image,” an “idea,” or an “effect” (Abrams 1988; Carroll 2009; Migdal 2001; Mitchell 1991, 1999). According to these culturalist accounts, the idea of the state does important political work. Most importantly, it creates the appearance of a stark division between state and society, producing the sense that the state is something set apart and distinctive, despite the fact that it is regularly intertwined with “non-state” actors (Mitchell 1991). The idea of the state can also act as an ideological tool to justify political actions (such as political subjugation [Abrams 1988]), assert “the special status of state authority” (Migdal 2001:257), or bind individuals to political authority. In nearly all accounts, the idea of the state, as an entity coherent and distinct from other elements in society, is produced and reproduced through practices, rituals, and ceremonies (Migdal 2001:18; Mitchell 1991:94).

For this reason, culturalist accounts emphasize the importance of studying the political dynamics surrounding the state’s image and boundary. As Mitchell (1991:90) notes, the apparent boundary of the state “never marks a real exterior,” but is instead drawn within the political order. The delimitation of a state
generates power and legitimacy by associating certain actions with a special sphere of activity—“the state”—that appears to morally rise above the regular machinations of social life (Migdal 2001; Mitchell 1991; Wilson n.d.). Viewed in this light, studying the political dynamics surrounding the state’s purported boundary is a crucial facet of understanding how government power circulates. Indeed, Mitchell (1991) has argued that the study of the state should be reoriented toward how the apparent distinctiveness of the state is produced and the political consequences that flow from it.

Yet while culturalist approaches have identified the boundary of the state as an important site for research, it remains unclear exactly how this boundary is produced and reproduced. The practices of governance are clearly important to this process, and culturalist state-theorists have identified a wide array of such practices that help to signify the boundary. Mitchell (1991:81), for example, lists some of the devices that constitute the troubled boundary of the state, such as “the language of legal practice, the architecture of public buildings, the wearing of military uniforms, or the marking or policing of frontiers.” Migdal (2001:18) similarly lists visas, passports, and schoolbooks alongside “ceremonies, such as a coronation or inauguration …[and] the consignment of state work to special spaces such as courthouses or city halls or federal buildings.”

But while it is clear that practices and ceremonies help to create the appearance of the state as a distinctive entity, these practices are left
disconcertingly disconnected from each other, and from the agents who deploy them. These elements cannot be mobilized at will, however, or in just any combination. Consider, for example, the use of private contractors like Blackwater to enforce security in Iraq. Who gets to decide what kinds of uniforms they wear, or which buildings they are allowed use, and how? These are part of the stakes of how boundaries are rendered; yet neither Mitchell nor Migdal provides a theory of how people assemble these various elements in specific constellations recognizable as “the state.” It remains unclear, consequently, what social and political dynamics structure, or even limit, attempts to categorize something as belonging to “the state.”

One reason why the production of the boundary of the state remains underspecified is that culturalist scholars have not yet adequately theorized how the image and boundary of the state are produced in mature, modern settings. Statecraft and policymaking in modern states does not operate on virgin ground, and understanding the contextual effects of existing policy structures is the key to specifying how the boundaries of states are maintained or changed. Many culturalist analyses of the state focus on periods of state formation (e.g., Bourdieu 2014; Loveman 2005; Mitchell 1991; Norton 2014; Wilson 2011), where processes of classification are readily evident, but where organizational and institutional legacies play little role.
This lacuna is problematic, since modern states differ from early-modern or postcolonial examples in that they are organizationally elaborated, and evince more well-established and taken-for-granted ideas about “the state.” Thus it is not clear how political actors create and maneuver around either the practices of governance or the idea of “the state” when it already confronts them as a mature category and organizational form. Yet if the cultural construction of the state is an important aspect of the state’s “routine exercise of symbolic power” (Loveman 2005:1657), then managing the appearance and boundaries of “the state” may be particularly important in such settings. Since chains of accountability and opportunities for democratic input are often linked to “state” or “public” actors (Freeman and Minow 2009), determining what is and is not “the state” is a fraught and recurrent question.

Mitchell explicitly distances himself from attempts to incorporate insights from organizational or institutional analysis, out of the concern that doing so might reify the state and mystify its actual function (Bendix et al. 1992). Yet doing so closes the door to grappling with core facets of modern contexts. By failing to engage with organizational and institutionalist theories, Mitchell has effectively bracketed a deep well of academic knowledge directly relevant to his own project. When “the state” is a mature category, it does in fact take on an organizational form, and the symbolic delineation of states is strongly ordered by administrative hierarchies, legal boundaries, contracts, and financial flows. In
these contexts, the delineation of boundaries activates an array of practices and rules that will necessarily apply to these programs.

*Extending Culturalist Theory: Boundaries, Schemas, and “The State”*

We believe that culturalist theories of the state can be improved by drawing upon scholarship on boundaries in the sociology of culture. Recent years have seen an explosion of work, in diverse fields, exploring how boundaries work in social life (e.g., Barman 2013; Bourdieu 1977; Bowker and Star 1999; Brubaker 2004; Edgell 2012; Gieryn 1983; Jenkins 1996; Lamont 1992, 2000; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Pachucki et al. 2007; Santos and Eisenhart 2005; Tilly 2004; Wimmer 2008, 2013; Zelizer 2007; Zhao 2005). This research shows that people create meaningful distinctions by classifying an otherwise continuous social reality into categories (Bourdieu 1977; Douglas 1966; Durkheim and Mauss 1963; Zerubavel 1996). Categories presuppose the existence of boundaries, or lines of division that enable the “lumping” or “grouping” of practices, actors, and spaces into a recognizable groups (Starr 1992; Zerubavel 1996). Boundaries are tools of social and symbolic closure, because they include some groups in spheres of action and exclude others (Gieryn 1983; Lamont and Molnár 2002). The delineation of boundaries is therefore a fundamental social process, one that forges the meaningful differences upon which other social processes like classification, ranking, labeling, and identification rest.
Boundaries exist in shared understandings, but they may also be forged through rituals (like pledges of allegiance or citizenship ceremonies), symbols (like flags and anthems), and technologies and practices (the census, budgetary reporting, official paperwork) that mark the existence of a social divide. In this way boundaries contribute to the development of more elaborate cognitive schemas, or “knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information” (DiMaggio 1997:269). Through schematic processing, new information is interpreted in light of already-familiar schemas, thereby guiding perception and organizing action (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004; Steensland 2006). While schemas are co-constitutive with the practices of governance, and are not ontologically distinct (Carroll 2009; Sewell 1992), this cognitive dimension can be distinguished from symbolic boundaries and their associated strategies of action for analytic purposes.

Viewed in this light, states are not objects with natural boundaries, so much as entities forged through boundary work. During episodes of boundary work, actors struggle to make sense of the organization of governance in light of an existing schema of the state. Invoking the category of “the state” activates a set of pre-existing understandings about what the state is; what it does; and how it relates to other actors, agents, and objects in the social world. In response, actors make claims about whether particular governing arrangements exceed or comply
with ideas about “stateness,” and adjust and negotiate policy forms accordingly. It is this process that governs how the boundaries of the state are reproduced, and which we elaborate in the ensuing section.

State Boundary Mechanisms

To understand state boundary mechanisms, it is useful to distinguish between the objects and mechanisms of state boundary work. The objects of state boundary work (summarized in Table 1) are the practices, symbols, technologies, and resources that may be rearranged in order to change the demarcation of a boundary. In mature states, boundaries are constructed through the normal organizational building blocks of administrative hierarchies, financial flows, and symbolic markers. Administrative practices include such things as the allocation of oversight, control, and responsibility among various individuals, groups, and organizations; and the physical location of offices, staff, or other essential pieces of the administrative apparatus. Financial practices include all flows of property and other resources, encompassing not only all financial, fiduciary, and custodial ties among the component parts of government, but also the distribution of revenue, credit support, titles, profits, loans and risk. Symbolic practices include all visible signs of the state or of a private entity (for instance, those indicating ownership); all claims-making about the state and its boundaries. Since policies are multifaceted and involve multiple practices, however, no single element alone
is enough to demarcate the state; evaluations of “stateness” are made regarding configurations of multiple such practices.

[Tables 1 and 2 about here]

The mechanisms of boundary work (summarized in Table 2) are the specific recurrent social processes through which boundaries change or are maintained. We draw upon Charles Tilly’s (2004) analysis of boundary mechanisms in elaborating the particular ways that the boundaries of states are forged. Here, we focus on three primary mechanisms: demarcation, which may take the form of boundary inscription or erasure; politicization, which incorporates activation and boundary policing; and matching games, which may take the form of reconfigurations or organizational repurposing, and which are ruled by path-dependent and policy-specific logics of appropriateness. While these three mechanisms are analytically distinct, in practice they often occur in combination or simultaneously.

(1) Demarcation: Inscription and Erasure. Policy proposals can be thought of as inscribing a new boundary, reinscribing an existing boundary, or erasing an existing boundary. As Tilly (2004) suggests, inscription involves heightening the differences across the boundary, while erasure reduces or reverses such difference. The rearrangement of chains of authority, for instance, may make the administrative dimension of governance more closely subject to democratic
and electoral processes, thereby inscribing more deeply the state-society boundary. By contrast, the boundary of the state may be substantially erased—i.e., made impossible to determine—within Government-Sponsored Enterprises, which have boards of directors staffed by a mix of government and non-government members, and which may be capitalize by a mix of funds from the Treasury and private sector. Within modern states, inscription and erasure take the specific form of adjustments in configurations of administrative, financial, and symbolic resources that together indicate the official boundary of a state (though not necessarily the boundary of a state’s realm of influence).

(2) Politicization: Activation, and Boundary Policing. The proposal of a new policy that would adjust a state boundary raises the salience of the state boundary “as an organizer of social relations…or of shared representations” (Tilly 2004: 223). This is because adjustments of state boundaries (through new or rearranged financial, administrative, or symbolic practices) may alter the existing distribution of state resources, spurring mobilization among those actors who perceive that proposed adjustments affect their interests. Generally speaking, actors prefer boundaries that further their own interests, that allow them to claim advantages relative to other actors, or that provide them with claims to legitimacy, moral worth, or prestige (Wimmer 2008). However, this does not imply a perfect relationship between positions and interests. Like others (e.g., Anderson 2013;
Campbell 2002; Wilson 2011), we view cultural understandings as filters or prisms that express and refract interests and influence. Boundary work thus regularly features a wide variety of competing claims, each of which is related, but not reducible, to particular interests. These claims also typically reference existing state-schemas and practices, either to make the case that the repositioned boundary offends understandings of what the state is or does, or that it is compatible with it.

While those who stand to benefit from a repositioning of the boundary will align in support of the reconfiguration, actors invested in the defense of the existing symbolic boundary may engage in boundary policing (cf. Lamont 2000), or attempts to return the configuration of resources to a pattern more closely matching the existing practices and schema of the state. Boundary policing may be initiated in response to the announcement of a new policy, but it can also take on a semipermanent, lingering character, as interested parties remain vigilant during and after the passage of policy legislation to make sure that a boundary is respected. In this way, boundary policing can be thought of as a particular form of policy feedback (Pierson 1993).

(3) Matching Games: Reasoning by Analogy, Reconfiguration and Repurposing. In matching games, policymakers and other interested parties evaluate and arrange configurations of practices in light of their schemas of the
state. Just as novel biological “chimera” are rendered meaningful and evaluated through comparisons with hybrid organisms (Friese 2010), so too do constellations of practices and configurations of resources become meaningful in comparison to the ontological and performative assumptions embedded in state-schemas. These evaluations may be pre-conscious, and are more likely to become articulated and openly discussed at moments when a policy or proposal fails to fit with an existing schema.

In economic and intimate life, Zelizer (2007:37) has observed how matching games can help establish boundaries by “distinguish[ing] different sorts of social relations, establish[ing] which sorts of transactions belong appropriately to each relation, employ[ing] appropriate media for those transactions, and mark[ing] off the combination by means of names, symbols, and practices.” Similarly with respect to the state, matching games mark a boundary when officials fine-tune configurations of administrative, symbolic, and financial resources to bring them into alignment with understandings generated by state-schemas. Like other organizations, states are subject to “logics of appropriateness that specify who should use what form for what purpose” (Clemens 1997: 49). If an action is supposed to be “private,” for instance, it should not be run out of an office housed in government buildings; if it is supposed to be “state,” by contrast, it should not be festooned with advertisements implying corporate sponsorship. Drawing upon their schematic understandings of what the state is and does, actors
reason by analogy to make claims about the appropriateness of the proposed program relative to existing practices.

Matching games often appear as reconfigurations of resources, as policymakers attempt to design (or redesign) a policy, in an attempt to construct a policy form that corresponds well (or well-enough) with existing state-schemas.² One specific tool they may use as part of these reconfigurations is repurposing. This is a specifically political type of institutional “conversion” (Streeck and Thelen 2005). In repurposing—typically undertaken when policymakers seek to maintain or respect an existing boundary—existing institutions that already fit more or less easily within a schema of “the state” (or “society,” “the market,” etc.) may be used to manage resources derived from the other side of the boundary.³ Repurposing allows policymakers to draw on the symbolic resonance of “state” or “private” organizations to activate the sense that a boundary is being respected. In this sense, policymakers may literally match the resource configurations to the schema, since existing institutional arrangements are partly constitutive of those schemas. Repurposing may be particularly useful as a means of obfuscating or laundering resource flows or chains of authority that could otherwise be perceived to violate the state-society boundary (cf. Rossman 2014). By repurposing institutions already coded within existing schemas, exchanges can be structured to preserve the appearance of an existing state boundary, while nevertheless allowing the flow of government resources or control across it.
Enabling and Constraining Boundary Work

Culturalist approaches remind us that the state is not just a web of organizations and actors, but also a web of understandings about the proper classification and configuration of those organizations and actors (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Morgan and Orloff forthcoming). When faced with a new policy or program, the state-schema allows actors to quickly interpret its form in terms of these classifications (i.e., “state” or “not-state”), and to identify any potential discrepancies that may challenge it. However, state-schemas are themselves the legacy of institutional and organizational settlements left behind by prior episodes of boundary-making. For this reason, state boundaries, like ethnic boundaries (cf. Wimmer 2008), are subject to path-dependent effects (Mahoney 2000; Pedriana and Stryker 1997; Pierson 2004). In the absence of crisis or structural change, there is a degree of “inertia” (Mahoney 2000) that tends toward the general reproduction of existing boundaries. This tendency is often reinforced where political actors have repeatedly defined themselves and their interests around a particular positioning of the state-society boundary. In such cases, boundary policing will be more prevalent, and practices and arrangements that violate it will be more likely to be politicized.

One consequence of this path-dependence is that state boundaries may take distinct forms in different policy domains. States overlap with a variety of subfields, some of which follow markedly different institutional logics (Friedland
and Alford 1991). The kinds of institutional configurations considered appropriate in the market, like profit-maximizing, may not be considered appropriate for a church, family, or artistic community. The rules that govern interactions across the state-society boundary thus often vary. As a result, the potential universe of practical configurations between government and non-government organizations varies by subfield. And because the interactions across the boundary in each subfield are governed by different rules in different domains, the politics of the boundary will therefore be distinct as well.

It should be borne in mind, therefore, that the specific politics of the boundary that we identify below in our educational case study would not necessarily be identical to that found in other policy domains. What provokes a boundary struggle in education, which we detail below, is likely to look quite different from what provokes it in the subfield of military research where a pattern of regular reliance on partnerships exists (Block and Keller 2010). At the end of the case study, we briefly consider an episode of boundary work in such a field, housing finance, which illustrates how logics of appropriateness influence boundary work where state-schemas are more amenable to associational policymaking. Nevertheless, the mechanisms we identify here apply irrespective of the particular schemas and logics of appropriateness that govern a particular subfield.
Bounding the State: A Case Study

We illustrate the analytic promise of our theory with an important policymaking episode in education: the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Specifically, we focus on negotiations over whether and how the Act would relate to Catholic parochial schools, to show how a close examination of an associational program at its point of origin may yield insights about the boundary work such policies entail. From the perspective of this paper, the episode makes for an excellent case study for a number of reasons. First, the case is substantively important as the moment when the American federal government first entered into the educational sphere in a substantial and sustained way. Second, because the educational domain featured a strong existing boundary and state-schema, it reveals the mechanisms of boundary work in particularly sharp relief, thereby facilitating analysis. Third, the design and passage of this section of ESEA featured sequential episodes where administration officials experimented with two different associational policy forms—a hybrid consortium plan, and a loan scheme. The shift from the consortium plan to the loan scheme clearly illustrates how boundary work can shape the form of policymaking.

During the debate over ESEA, policymakers and interest groups engaged in extensive boundary work, and grappled over the design of the program in terms of state boundaries, classifications, and schemas—that is, in terms of what the
state is and does, and where it officially begins and ends. In the first phase of policy-making for the Act, the Johnson Administration tried and failed to create a new hybrid administrative form that would have substantially erased an existing state boundary. However, their efforts activated the boundary, generating a defense sequence from interested participants who were policing the boundary. In response, the Johnson Administration pivoted to a loan-based policy design that loudly and obviously announced a sharp distinction between state and society.

Throughout, actors engaged in matching games to determine which configurations of practices could qualify as belonging or not belonging to the state. In both cases, the official boundary did not mark the actual end-point of state influence or activity, but rather was a set of rules that determined how that influence could be practically enacted.

Because our interest is in the design and adjudication of associational policies, we differ from typical policy case studies in that our relevant unit of analysis is not the legislation in its entirety, but instead only its associational aspects. The ESEA was an enormously complicated piece of legislation, and its passage and ultimate structure emerged out of intense debate and negotiations over how the federal, state, and local levels of government should interrelate; whether the aid should be delivered in a general or categorical form; and whether local educational agencies would retain control over the curriculum (Davies 2007; Graham 1984; McAndrews 1991b). Although these aspects of policy design were
important (and highly consequential [McGuinn 2006; Patterson 2001]), we do not attempt to explain these aspects of the Act’s design in this case study. Rather, our goal is only to explain the structure of the Act’s associational aspects—that is, how the state developed and managed its relationship with private-sector, non-state actors.

The case study is drawn from a larger project looking at changes in American education policy throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Mayrl forthcoming). Data were collected using a classic “targeted primary” approach, combining the strengths of the copious secondary literature on American educational history with supplemental primary data collection geared to shed light on particular theoretical questions (Skocpol 1984). The case study accordingly draws upon original archival documents drawn from the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library; Congressional hearings, debates, and other records; and secondary sources on educational policy before and during the Johnson administration.

Political and Historical Background

ESEA marked the American federal government’s first large-scale intervention into education. Yet while it was the federal government’s first foray into education, it was not the first encounter between the state and the educational sector. Public education had developed through a grassroots campaign for
common schools in the nineteenth century, leading to the development of local school districts who managed education under the loose auspices of state departments of education (Kaestle 1983; Tyack, James, and Benavot 1987). These schools existed alongside a network of private schools that, by 1965, were educating some 15% of American children, 87% of them in Catholic schools (Carper 2001; USOE 1968).

In the early republican period, it was often difficult to distinguish between public and private schools (Jorgenson 1987). The fact that today they are sharply differentiated is the consequence of the development of a strong state boundary that emerged out of a conflict between Catholics and Protestants in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Protestants felt a proprietary relationship to the United States and were suspicious of Catholic immigrants, whose primary allegiance they believed was to the Pope rather than the Republic (McGreevy 2003). They therefore waged a long and bitter struggle to keep public money from supporting Catholic schools. This battle crystallized in the ideal of “separation of church and state,” which amplified and reinforced a stark boundary between the state and non-state forms of education (Hamburger 2002).

Separation of church and state implied two schemas—one for the church and one for the state—and rules about how they were supposed to relate to one another. It required a sharp divide, made manifest by the absence of financial, administrative, or symbolic ties across the boundary. Throughout the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, repeated episodes of boundary work occurred as Protestants sought to establish and then police this boundary (Green 2012). In the years leading up to ESEA, the boundary was reaffirmed through a series of conflicts in both the courts and in Congress. Beginning in 1947, the Supreme Court issued a series of rulings that elevated the principle of separation into constitutional law (Witte 2005). However, it also permitted textbook loans to parochial schools under the “child-benefit” theory, which held that loans were permissible so long as they were made to the schoolchildren and not to the schools (Davies 2007). While this legal theory permitted some financial resources to pass to private schools, it also symbolically reaffirmed the sharp division between church and state. Accordingly, the implications of this novel jurisprudence for educational policy were somewhat ambiguous in the early 1960s (e.g., Kurland 1962)—although generally speaking, it reinforced public understandings of the boundaries of the state in education (e.g., United States 1961:5382).

In addition to these legal battles, a sharply defined boundary also structured federal legislative debates over education in the postwar years. As efforts grew to bring the federal government into education policy after World War II, policymakers were repeatedly faced with—and frustrated by—similar boundary struggles. Under the Truman administration, multiple attempts to pass federal educational legislation failed, as national educational groups and
Protestants insisted that federal aid go only to public schools, and Catholics refused to support any legislation that failed to provide at least some supports for Catholic schools (Munger and Fenno 1962). In 1961, a proposed federal aid bill by John F. Kennedy failed in the face of similar dynamics (Davies 2007; McAndrews 1991b). These legislative battles hardened both the boundary between church and state and the positions of the boundary’s defenders and opponents.

Accordingly, the introduction of ESEA occurred in a field where path-dependent effects had bequeathed a particularly sharply defined state-society boundary, with entrenched interests accustomed to vigilantly policing it. Federal policymakers were well aware of this dynamic, and were worried that their attempt to introduce federal aid to education might be hamstrung by it. Catholics had repeatedly rejected efforts to implement federal aid to education, except on the condition that the boundary be redrawn in ways that would permit them to receive federal funding. And, by the mid-1960s, exploding enrolments in Catholic schools made obtaining such assistance a non-negotiable condition for Catholic support of any federal education legislation (Munger and Fenno 1962).

**Attempted Erasure: Hybridity and the Activation of the Boundary**

By 1964, the Johnson Administration had accepted that providing some financial assistance to Catholic schools would be politically necessary for passage
of any legislation that sought to significantly expand the flow of federal funds into education. Early drafts of the legislation thus expressed concern about designing a program that could gain Catholic support: “Since no aid [is] provided directly to parochial schools,” one memo mused, regarding Title I,6 “Cardinal Spellman and others in [the] Catholic hierarchy may attack this Title…Office of Education is exploring ways of making ‘shared services’ more attractive to Catholics, especially through supplementary education centers described in Title III” (Anonymous 1964b:1-2). At the same time, however, providing such assistance risked jeopardizing the support of Protestants and secular teachers’ unions, who continued to hold that only “public” schools should receive federal funds.

Johnson administration officials, therefore, had to find a way to maintain the image of a sharply delineated “public” state while still somehow permitting benefits to flow to Catholic schools. Consequently, framing the role of the state was a major concern from the outset. Following the “child-benefit” theory outlined by the Supreme Court, Johnson officials constructed a categorical aid program that would distribute aid to poor children in both public and private schools (Davies 2007). By stressing that their goal was to provide aid to poor children, rather than to schools, administration officials hoped to respect the boundary enough to allow them to work around it. This approach required a policy design that minimized institutional linkages between the government and private schools. As the outlines of ESEA were formulated throughout 1964,
therefore, internal documents repeatedly noted the need to emphasize the public aspects of the program. Even though benefits would be allowed to flow to private school children, early plans emphasized that “all programs aided would have to be under public supervision and control” (Anonymous 1964a; Celebrezze 1964). Administration officials emphasized the need to configure the program’s symbolic and administrative resources in a way that would respect the boundaries of the state enough to allow some financial resources to transgress the boundary.

Yet when the legislation was unveiled in 1965, its design strayed from this approach, instead proposing considerable direct linkages with the Catholic school system. Financially, it would have allowed Catholic schools to assume ownership of books and instructional materials purchased with federal dollars. More problematically, administratively, it would have allowed Catholic schools to participate in newly created “supplementary services centers.” These centers were to be administered through new community consortia, whose boards were to be appointed by consortium partners. This would have permitted both direct grants to consortium members (including religious schools and churches) and private school administrative control (even if partial) over the supplementary service centers (Kelley and LaNoue 1965). In other words, the initial legislation envisioned a substantially hybrid administrative structure to route resources to Catholic schools.
This proposed hybrid structure, whose plentiful direct financial and administrative linkages amounted to a significant erasure of the existing state-society boundary, activated that boundary. On the first day of Congressional hearings, Undersecretary for Education Wilbur Cohen testified that the bill allowed the granting of funds “directly to the private school” for textbook purchases (US House of Representatives 1965:150). In a moment of boundary policing, members of the public opposed to aiding religious schools objected that large amounts of money might soon be flowing directly into Catholic coffers in violation of the separation of church and state. Johnson officials quickly dismissed Cohen’s remarks as a “slip of the tongue” (US House of Representatives 1965:749), but it was clear that the structure of the program would have to be brought into clearer alignment with existing understandings of appropriate state boundaries for the legislation to pass.

*Reinscribing the Boundary: Reconfiguration, Repurposing, and Policy*

*Retrenchment*

In response to this criticism, Johnson’s congressional allies reconfigured the program’s material, administrative, and symbolic elements to more closely match the existing sharp boundary between state and society in education. In so doing, they reinscribed the boundary enough to permit passage of the legislation. This reinscription had several facets. First, the flow of material resources to
Catholic schools was significantly reduced, though not altogether stopped. An entirely new section added to the bill specified that “Title to library resources, textbooks, and other printed and published instructional materials…and control and administration of their use, shall vest only in a public agency” (United States 1965b:38). Under the revised statute, no money or materials would flow to parochial schools; instead, they would all flow to local public schools, who would then visibly mark them as “public property” (Kelley 1966) and “loan” them to the Catholic schools.

Further, Congress also required that any supplementary educational facilities built with federal funds be owned by the state or by a local school board (United States 1965b:42). Public schools alone would be permitted to receive grants, and direct grants to external agencies were forbidden (United States 1965b:41). Under the revised statute, therefore, no money or materials would flow to parochial schools; they would instead flow to the local public schools, who would then “loan” materials to religious schools. In practice, Catholic schools would have access to the same resources, but the official property rights to those resources, their titles, would be located in the state.

In addition to changes in material flows, the administrative apparatus of the program was redesigned. Legislators abandoned the plans for hybrid consortia and instead restored complete administrative control to local school districts (Eidenberg and Morey 1968). In so doing, local school districts—already
schematically understood as part of the government—were repurposed to act as administrative centers. This reallocation of oversight and control prompted a bitter denunciation from Catholic Representative Clement Zablocki (1965):

A consortium would have been composed of at least one public educational agency but could also have included representatives of all interested agencies, including non-public schools… The consortium idea has been scrapped in the new version of the bill. Although all persons who wish to participate in these supplementary education centers and services may do so, the control has been placed squarely with the local public school agency. Other educational agencies may advise but will have no real voice in the establishment of services under Title III.

While it angered Catholics, this administrative structure took advantage of the symbolic resonance of school boards as “public” institutions already accepted as part of the state.

Finally, the policy’s proponents symbolically reinforced the financial and administrative modifications that they had made. Language was inserted into the bill highlighting public control of all administrative facets of the funding stream, and sponsors repeatedly emphasized this language during Congressional hearings (e.g., United States 1965a:7528). Administration talking points similarly emphasized that the new program would be “publicly controlled, publicly
sponsored, and publicly administered…under the direct responsibility, control, and supervision of public educational agencies” (Anonymous 1965). And the administration used the ideal of public control to reassure Protestant leaders that parochial schools would not control any of the new services (Billington 1987).

In short, the Johnson Administration and its allies in Congress achieved their goal of providing support to Catholic schools by reinscribing a clear and obvious boundary between state and society. The rhetoric and architecture of the program were specifically altered to pay tribute to the strong existing state/non-state boundary.\(^7\)

\textit{Ironies of Design: Policy Administration and Boundary Policing}

The symbolic and administrative crispness of the boundary obscured the fact that, financially, the boundary was actually somewhat more permeable than it had been before. An early survey by the US Office of Education found that over 26,000 private schoolchildren had benefited from the provision of books and instructional materials in the program’s first year (US Senate 1966:617), while the National Catholic Welfare Conference found that 88% of its dioceses were participating in some aspect of the program (Bailey and Mosher 1968:201). While some of these financial ties were expected, the flow of resources and chains of custody also quickly flowed beyond what had been envisioned thanks to the legislation’s unsustainably complex policy design. The byzantine design of the
legislation made administration and management of resources extremely difficult, and program administrators were often quite willing to undercut the boundary in practice when it promised a less burdensome delivery route (LaNoue 1966).

Those who had signed onto ESEA on the condition of a stark state-society boundary actively policed the boundary after the passage of the legislation, and quickly challenged any violations of the carefully-negotiated boundary that came to light. A particular flashpoint was the title to materials. In some locations, the definition of “loan” was relaxed such that parochial schools began to receive books on “indefinite loan” to their school libraries, as well as “loans” of consumable materials like paper (LaNoue 1968). Within a year, Senators were receiving grateful letters from Catholic school representatives thanking them for the direct disbursement of ESEA funds: “Our school, St. Patrick, Menasha, has been allotted $938.60 under Title II. It is like receiving a gift from heaven!” wrote one nun to Senator William Proxmire in March 1966, adding that she “plan[ned] to use the full amount on purchasing library books” (Bertram 1966).

Opponents contested these arrangements by engaging in matching games that called attention to practices that violated the state-schema in the educational domain. Writing in the Christian Century, the National Council of Churches’ Dean Kelley complained that purchasing two sets of encyclopedias for the public and parochial schools in a district violated the state boundary:
In what library system is a set of encyclopedias—or even one volume—loaned to a child or even to a teacher for use outside the library? Large reference works are not normally circulating materials...If the day comes when a state library will lend out sets of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* on interlibrary loan, then the same could be done under this act (Kelley 1966:629).

In drawing unflattering parallels between an acknowledged part of the state—the “state library”—and the loan arrangement, Kelley drew upon an existing schema to challenge a boundary violation. Through similar challenges in Congress and the courts in ensuing years, the flow of resources to Catholic schools was strongly delimited throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

**A Counterpoint: Erasure and the Associative State**

Our analysis of ESEA focuses on an effort to implement an associational policy in a domain where they had historically been prohibited. We would expect efforts at boundary erasure in domains like policing, where a similarly strict public-private divide has historically existed, to evince a similar pattern. In such domains, attempted erasure has a higher likelihood of triggering politicization, resulting in weaker or absent associational forms. However, our model suggests that attempts to erase a boundary should be more likely to succeed in policy domains with an established history of associative policies, not simply because of
the well-established influence of powerful actors, but also because the relevant schemas of state action in that policy domain allow for (or even encourage) associative government action.

A brief consideration of the Housing Development Act of 1968 illustrates how associative policies may proliferate in such a domain. The 1968 Housing Act was an omnibus housing bill that relied extensively on an array of associative policies to overhaul American housing policy. Importantly for our purposes, it passed a mere three years after the Johnson Administration tried and failed to implement a similar associational policy form in the educational domain. Why did a boundary shift occur so effortlessly in housing finance, so soon after it was a major issue in ESEA? And what did the successful erasure of a state boundary actually look like in practice?

In housing, a long history of associative policies had generated a powerful set of interest groups and a general acceptance of the idea that government can and should be involved in various aspects of housing policy. In contrast to education, where confessional conflict aligned closely with the public-private divide, in housing finance the major players had forged parallel partnerships with the state during the New Deal. The Savings and Loans relied on the Home Loan Banks for credit support, while the mortgage brokers, who dealt with loans insured by the Federal Housing Administration, worked with the Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMA, or Fannie Mae).
In his analysis of the expansion of public-private partnerships for low income housing, implemented with the 1968 Housing Act, Alexander von Hoffman (2013) shows that every major policy actor – the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Congress, the President’s Office, and private-sector interest groups – advocated for associational policy forms. The main question debated among officials and interested parties was not the acceptability or desirability of close associations and partnerships per se, but instead with whom the government would partner and under what terms. In the end, von Hoffman (2013:186) notes that the plan provided nearly every major player some kind of associational alliance with the state, “in a kind of social policy log-rolling.” In a terrifically rich and exhaustively researched history of the Act, however, Hoffman stops at noting that the partnerships were put in place; he does not problematize or explore any formal differences among those policies. Still, the terms of debate he lays out are consistent with the notion that in domains with a history of associative policies and public-private partnerships, relevant schemas of state action (which underlie matching games and reasoning by analogy) more readily permit blurred boundaries; and that in these contexts, boundary policing may not be a primary focus of political struggle. That is, our theory of schemas offers a viable theoretical explanation for why associational policies in housing finance proliferated so soon after their failure in education, while also opening up...
the differences among those associational housing policy forms as a worthwhile site for future research.

Although existing state-schemas in housing finance inhibited the politicization of the boundary, the erasure of that boundary was nevertheless accomplished through the same kind of reordering of administrative, financial, and symbolic objects that was visible in the educational domain. We see this, for example, in the Act’s reorganization of FNMA from a government agency to an organizationally hybrid Government Sponsored Entity. Financially, erasure was accomplished by having the Treasury divest in Fannie Mae stock while reconnecting to it through a $2.25 billion line of credit. Under the new financial structure, Fannie could not issue securities or adjust its debt-to-equity ratio without the approval of HUD and the Treasury (Mesirow 1970; United States 1968). Administratively, the boundary was blurred by reconfiguring Fannie’s authority structure. The FNMA Board of Directors, for instance, had members elected by shareholders and five members elected by the President of the United States. The federal government retained regulatory and auditory power over Fannie, however, and HUD could require Fannie to invest in some low- and middle-income housing. Symbolically, erasure was accomplished through the deployment of new, hybrid terminology. In the years following the spin-off, government documents described Fannie as a “government sponsored corporation”; a “bank for HUD” (Lapin 1969); “quasi-private” (United States
1970); and “a privately owned company with limited government supervision” (Anonymous 1970). Just as occurred in education, therefore, a boundary shift was accomplished in practice through the rearrangement of organizational and symbolic forms.

**Discussion**

The boundaries of the state are reassessed, reaffirmed, and altered on an ongoing basis as political actors clash over how to square policy forms with existing schematic understandings of the state. In education policy, where a clearly demarcated state boundary historically existed, the Johnson Administration’s attempt to route resources to Catholic schools generated fierce political opposition. Officials therefore abandoned one plan, which would have substantially erased the state boundary, for another that financially, administratively, and symbolically highlighted it. The federal government was ultimately allowed to engage with Catholic schools, but only in a way that was mediated by local school boards and that paid tribute to the ideal of a tightly-bounded state. Calling attention to the ways their policy respected the state-society boundary was what enabled officials to extend their reach beyond it. Their strategy created a symbolic divide even as, in practice, the boundary remained somewhat porous. In this way, boundary work both structured how the state would be permitted to reach beyond its official boundary, and simultaneously
reproduced the distinctiveness of the state as a bounded, demarcated set of symbolic, financial, and administrative practices. At the same time, as our brief comparison with the housing sector showed, this boundary work was conditioned by the existing state-schema and strong state boundary in the educational field.

*Extending Culturalist Theories of the State*

Our theory of state boundaries makes two primary contributions. First, it extends culturalist analyses of the state by providing a more specific model of how the state-society boundary is produced. While Mitchell (1991) has pointed to the importance of the boundary as the key feature of the modern state, neither he nor other culturalist state-theorists provide a fully elaborated account of how people arrange various elements so that a coherent sense of a state boundary is produced or contested. By contrast, we identify three mechanisms through which that boundary is produced: demarcation, politicization, and matching games. These are domain-dependent struggles in which boundaries become activated through attempts to reconfigure arrangements of financial, administrative, and symbolic resources. Political actors engage in matching games, reasoning by analogy to consign particular practices to the category of “state” or “society.” Existing ideas about what the state is and is not, encapsulated in state-schemas, constrain these struggles and give the idea of the state stability, while the
struggles themselves—governed by a variety of interests—introduce the possibility for change.

A central advantage of our approach is that by taking seriously the organizational facets of states, we are better able to account for the production of states as distinctly bounded entities in modern contexts. Policymaking does not occur in a vacuum, but rather is shaped by the legacies of previous political struggles whose results crystallized in both existing organizational forms and schemas associated with those forms. One implication of this insight is that because the state encounters different institutional logics in different social arenas, outcomes are likely to vary by policy domain. This means that there is no single boundary to “the state,” but rather a variety of boundaries between the state and other sectors of society in different policy domains. This insight has implications for contemporary scholarly interest in whether and how citizens perceive the role of government in their lives (e.g., Mettler 2011; Morgan and Campbell 2011). Because the boundaries of the state are governed by path-dependent institutional logics that vary by domain, “the state” is likely to be understood and perceived differently for actors situated differently in social space (Mayrl and Quinn forthcoming).

More importantly, we show how the category of “the state,” and the schemas it activates, can become resources in political struggles and so affect what political actors can and cannot do. This is an extension of the culturalist
insight that ideas about the state are analytically distinct from its physical aspects (e.g., Abrams 1988; Migdal 2001; Mitchell 1991). While existing studies emphasize how the category of “the state” enables the exercise of power, our approach details how the category of “the state” may also serve as a meaningful constraint on privileged actors. While it is well recognized that the state is the foremost classifying body in modern society, with the power to produce categorical divisions that structure how we see the world (Bourdieu 2014), it is less often recognized, though nevertheless true, that “the state” itself is one of the most important categories that policymakers produce. Officials must reflexively classify their own programs as belonging or not belonging to the state, and must confront existing understandings of the state, forged through prior political struggles, in order to do so.

Viewed in this light, understandings about what the state is and what it does are important political resources highly relevant to the analysis of governance. Government officials cannot just blur state boundaries or partner at will; they are beholden to existing conceptions of the state even as they seek to escape the constraints of those conceptions. In this respect, we show the importance of supplementing the question of how ideas about the state are produced, with the question of how ideas about the state are wielded as a political weapon. The category of the state has discursive power (Reed 2013) which allows it to act as a filter and constraint on the policymaking process.
There is, therefore, a politics to the state’s cultural dimension that goes beyond the insights of previous scholarship, and which has implications for important sociological debates in historical institutionalism and political sociology. Because cultural forms refract interests (Anderson 2013; Wilson 2011), they may be mobilized in politics for particular ends. Boundary work and categorization can thus become the tools by which actors get what they want. Ideas about the nature and boundaries of “the state” therefore function as resources and constraints for policy battles, in ways which may constitutively shape the structure of administration, the origins of chains of authority, and the degree of state autonomy.

The kinds of adjustments made through boundary work can have large downstream consequences. Had the Johnson administration succeeded in developing a more substantially hybrid education policy, for instance, additional resources would likely have flowed to Catholic schools, and Catholic officials might have had greater say over how programs were constructed and carried out. Because states are highly path-dependent systems characterized by feedback loops (Pierson 2004), even small decisions about the distribution of authority and resources in a given program may, over time, come to have significant ramifications for the distribution of resources. Our approach therefore suggests that investigating the long-term consequences of boundary work is a worthy topic of future research.
In short, our approach extends culturalist theories of the state by providing a more specific model for the production of the boundary of the state, showing why the boundary of the state should be thought of as multiple, explaining how history factors into boundary production, and calling attention to the importance of the category of “the state” and the schemas it implies as resources in political struggles.

Implications for Institutionalist Approaches to Policy Development

Our argument also has implications for more traditional institutionalist approaches to policymaking. By theorizing the specific mechanisms that constitute state boundaries, we help explain why complex policies take the form they do, and in the process provide new insights into how schematic and symbolic constraints influence policy development.

Existing studies of associational policies have typically focused only on why an associational policy form was pursued, and not attempted to explain its particular form. Our theory, however, offers an explanation for how such forms are forged: balance-of-power struggles among interest groups take the form of negotiations over the boundaries of the state in which state-schemas and matching games play an important mediating role. Schemas, categories, and boundaries of the state are the tools actors use to express their interests in these games, and the choice of associational form—or whether an associational form is chosen at all—
may be determined by how interests are refracted through such boundary work. With ESEA, for example, interest group politics explain why the Johnson Administration initially chose to pursue an associational form, and why that form was contested; but to explain the exact policy design that won in the end (i.e., a loan structure rather than a consortium), one must take into account as well the ways those interests were expressed through and beholden to existing ideas of the state. Just as understandings of target populations can have important independent effects on the policymaking process (e.g., Steensland 2006), so too can understandings of “the state.”

Current accounts stress that governments often adopt complex associational forms because government officials seek to mobilize the existing administrative capacity of the private sector when designing programs (e.g., Clemens 2006; Donahue and Zeckhauser 2011; Frasure and Jones-Correa 2010; Moore 2011). By contrast, our focus on schemas suggests that, for legislators, categorizing a given practice as “state” or “not state” by affiliating it with a public or private entity (that is, repurposing existing institutions to take advantage of their schematic associations) may be as important a motivator in designing policies as these administrative or financial considerations. In other words, policymakers may use associational forms, not because they are short on funds or lacking in capacity or expertise, but instead in response to symbolic constraints. Attempts to make use of the *symbolic designations* of existing institutions as
“state” or “society,” in other words, are also significant. Just as, in our case study, local public school boards were repurposed for administrative duties in order to take advantage of the symbolic designation of local school boards as “public” or “state” agencies, so too may policymakers enter into associational policies (rather than providing new direct services) in order to avoid disrupting existing state schemas and boundaries. After the fact, this may be seen as hiding the state (e.g., Mettler 2011; Morgan and Campbell 2011; Morgan and Orloff forthcoming), but in actuality, the process is better characterized as an effort to design a new organizational form that aligned with existing understandings of the state in that policy domain.

While in this paper we have focused on the United States, we believe that the U.S. represents a particular expression of a more general phenomenon. All governments are forged through and maintained by ongoing processes of boundary work, and there exist ready examples in existing sociological studies of such complexity in other nations—from the hybrid financing of railways in France (Dobbin 1994), to state funding of private schools in Australia (Mayrl forthcoming), to public-private banks in post-socialist Hungary (Stark 1996), to the privatization of prisons in Britain (Sparks 1994). No state, at any point, exists in a way that is cleanly divisible from the nation, or is free from the demands of boundary work. But because boundary work involves the activation of existing understandings of states that are historically (and culturally) specific, we expect
the negotiation of state boundaries to be resolved in distinct ways both across and within nations. Indeed, we hope to have facilitated future comparative research by shining a light on the underlying mechanisms at play.

**Conclusion**

Government officials must continually negotiate organizational and symbolic linkages within the various interpenetrating organizations of state and society. As a result, managing the boundaries of states is an essential and quotidian part of governance. It is out of the regular and contentious enactment of state boundary mechanisms that the appearance of the state as a distinct entity is managed and reproduced, even as new associational forms are forged.

By focusing on the mechanisms through which boundaries are constituted and adjusted, our approach grounds governmental symbolic power in concrete organizational practices without reifying the state-society distinction. It further shows how struggles to bound “the state” structure both the politics of policymaking and the organizational ties that constitute governmental action. In so doing, we suggest that classificatory struggles and boundary work may play an important intervening role in determining the specific form that associational policies take, and possibly the kinds of outcomes we may come to expect from those policies.

Boundary work is an essential part of modern statecraft with important
distributional and organizational consequences. Culturalist theories of the state have advanced our knowledge about statecraft significantly, but there is potential to expand their analytic utility through a focus on how state boundaries and state schemas are manipulated and conscripted into political battles. By highlighting the importance of boundary work to the process of policymaking, we hope to have demonstrated its analytic importance, provided new insights into policy formation, and pointed the way to new lines of research within political sociology.

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## Tables

### Table 1: Objects of Boundary Mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practices</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>The allocation of oversight, control, and responsibility among various individuals, groups, and organizations; the physical location of offices, staff, or other essential pieces of the administrative apparatus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Flows of property and other resources; all financial, fiduciary, and custodial ties among the component parts of government; the distribution of revenue, titles, profits, credit, and risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Visible signs of the state or of a private entity; and claims-making about the state and its boundaries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Summary of State Boundary Mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demarcation</strong></td>
<td>Inscription</td>
<td>Changes to, or perpetuation of, practices that articulate the existence of, or differences across, a boundary</td>
<td>Including a stamp on books to indicate government-ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Changes to a boundary that reduce its articulation or difference</td>
<td>Proposed supplementary services centers that would combine government funding with private administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politization</strong></td>
<td>Activation</td>
<td>The increased political salience of the state boundary</td>
<td>Concerns raised in response to the initial proposal of the ESEA legislation featuring substantial associational ties with Catholic schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary policing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Efforts to maintain the status-quo deriving from the ongoing monitoring of an existing boundary</td>
<td>Separationist advocacy groups calling attention to violations of the complex design of the ESEA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Matching Games</strong></td>
<td>Reasoning by analogy</td>
<td>Comparison of particular configurations of practices against an existing schema of the state</td>
<td>Comparison of the textbook loan lending system against public library lending practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconfiguration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adjustments to a policy form to make it reflect existing state-schemas</td>
<td>Changes to ESEA proposals so that government books are lent to Catholic schools rather than directly provided to Catholic school libraries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repurposing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporating a new function to an existing institution to preserve an existing boundary</td>
<td>The use of local school districts (in lieu of new supplementary services centers) to administer resources to Catholic schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Endnotes

1 Associational policy forms occur at virtually every site of governance, including social welfare (Klein 2003; Morgan and Campbell 2011), housing (Jackson 1985; von Hoffman 2013), education (Loss 2012; Mayrl forthcoming), defense (Sparrow 2011), economic policy (Block and Keller 2010; Mazzucato 2013), and more (for reviews, see Balogh 2015; Donahue, Zeckhauser and Breyer 2011; Novak 2008; Rausser and Stevens 2009).

2 These reconfigurations necessarily inscribe or erase the boundary relative to the one envisioned in prior policy proposals. In this way, matching games are intimately connected to both demarcation and politicization—though the primacy of schematic processing within matching games makes it analytically distinct.

3 We show below, for example, that local school boards were enlisted in the effort to lend school books paid for by federal funds to Catholic schools. Similarly, Block and Keller (2010) show how DARPA uses contracts with private research firms to conceal the extent to which it is acting as a developmental state.

4 This debate was in some respects the “undercard” of the larger debate over the legislation, which focused more heavily on questions of poverty, race, and federal control (Davies 2007; Graham 1984; McGuinn 2006; Patterson 2001). Our focus on the Act’s religious aspects here reflects the fact that this was where the legislation most closely and strongly engaged with non-state actors—primarily, Catholic parochial schools.
While this paper theorizes the boundary between non-governmental actors and the U.S. state—including its federal, state and local levels—this is not to deny the importance of questions of federal vs. local control, which loomed large in the debate over ESEA (Davies 2007). Although classic sociological accounts of the state tend to focus on federal bureaucracies, more recent analyses demonstrate that local government must be considered part of the state as well—particularly in the United States, where local government is where much of the action is (Novak 2008; Sheingate 2009). Accordingly, we believe that debates over the dynamics of federalism often entail important boundary work themselves (e.g., Lara-Millán forthcoming), but because this relates to drawing boundaries internal to the state, it lies beyond the scope of the current paper.

ESEA consisted of five titles. Title I provided financial assistance to provide special educational programs for “economically and culturally deprived” children. As a condition for receiving funds, school districts needed to demonstrate an ability to create “shared services” with children in private and parochial schools. Title II provided funding for new books, library resources, and other instructional materials, to be made available to both public and private school students. Title III provided funding for “supplementary educational centers and services,” to provide additional training in science, languages, arts, and music through community partnerships. Titles IV and V provided funding for state departments
of education and the construction of new educational research and training laboratories (USOE 1965). Titles II and III were the main pathways for funding Catholic schools.

7 Interestingly, at two points alternative versions of the education bill which would have blurred the state-society boundary were considered and rejected (Eidenberg and Morey 1968:112-13; McAndrews 1991a:53). Considered alongside the demise of the original consortium plan, this provides further evidence that the program was designed to highlight the state’s role in the program in order to ensure its political viability.

8 Fannie Mae had been founded as a government agency in 1938 to keep money flowing through the nation’s housing markets by buying and reselling existing mortgages from private lenders, and partially privatized in 1954 when it was permitted to issue stock to the U.S. Treasury and debt to capital markets. In 1968, as part of a broader campaign to reduce reported federal expenditures in the context of fiscal crisis (Quinn 2010), the Johnson Administration used the 1968 Housing Act to officially “spin-off” Fannie Mae from the government.