

## **Bridging the Gap in International Relations**

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**Abstract:** An increasing number of International Relations (IR) scholars engage with audiences and communities beyond academia as part of their work. In this chapter, we discuss competing perspectives on whether scholars should seek to bridge the gap between research and policy, outline established and emerging practices for bridging the gap, and suggest avenues for further research. While some IR scholars argue that the quality of research is maximized when scholars preserve distance from the concerns of policy practitioners, others maintain that scholars have a societal responsibility to contribute to public conversations and that engagement with practitioners enhances scholarly work. On the practice of bridging, we highlight long-standing practices, such as public writing, media appearances, public sector fellowships, think tank affiliations, government contracts and impact evaluations, as well as newer practices that center on the development of sustained partnerships between scholars and practitioners for the co-creation of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Bridging the gap, research-to-policy, transforming evidence, co-creation, public engagement, policy relevance

## 1. Introduction

Bridging the gap between research and policy used to be an anomaly in International Relations (IR) scholarship. It was the domain of a select few well-established scholars who, by virtue of their robust scholarly record, were called upon to advise policy makers. Today, many more IR scholars make efforts to engage with policy makers and practitioners. Broad discipline-wide surveys, such as the Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) survey, aim to capture the scope and scale of this engagement.<sup>1</sup> Numerous training programs, such as programs run by Bridging the Gap and the Sié Chéou-Kang Center for International Security and Diplomacy, aim to enable effective and ethical policy engagement.<sup>2</sup> Some governmental initiatives, such as the United Kingdom's Research Excellence Framework, even require universities to demonstrate the impact of their faculty's research on policy making or broader society (Blagden 2019).

In this chapter, we discuss the evolution of efforts to bridge the gap between research and policy. We first review the existing debates about why scholars should, and should not, make efforts to bridge the gap. Second, we discuss the different approaches to bridging the gap and provide examples of each approach. Even though these efforts engage both policy makers and other practitioners, for parsimony we use the term “practitioner” to refer to the recipient of all bridging the gap efforts. We discuss the baseline bridging the gap approaches as well as newer approaches that focus more on sustained research partnerships between scholars and practitioners. We conclude by discussing the potential trajectory for bridging the gap efforts and the questions that scholars need to answer to more fully understand how these bridging activities are likely to shape IR scholarship and practice in the years ahead.

## 2. Whether to Bridge the Gap

Before turning to established and emerging practices for bridging the gap, we discuss in this section more foundational questions: Should scholars seek to preserve or bridge the gap, and why? Competing arguments addressing these questions reflect differing perspectives about the types of research that are most valuable for policymaking; the nature of knowledge transmission from academia to policy environments; the ways in which policy engagement can, in turn, influence scholarship; and the societal responsibilities of scholars.

As a starting point, it is helpful to understand what IR scholars mean by bridging the gap. Members of the Bridging the Gap team define the concept as “efforts to connect the knowledge or expertise of university-based scholars to the concerns or responsibilities of policy practitioners and the broader public” (Tama et al. 2023). Scholars have also operationalized the concept as “policy relevance” or “policy-relevant scholarship,” with some scholars defining these terms more broadly than others. On the narrower end of the spectrum, Byman and Kroenig state that policy-relevant scholarship involves ideas that “feature in the deliberations of senior government officials” (Byman and Kroenig 2016), and Desch argues that such scholarship must offer concrete policy recommendations “aimed at shaping government action, directly or indirectly” (Desch 2019, 5). Other scholars provide more expansive definitions of these terms. Jentleson and Ratner define policy-relevant scholarship as “research, analysis, writing and related activities that advance knowledge with an explicit priority of addressing policy questions” (Jentleson and Ratner 2011, 8). Fazal specifies that the audience for policy-relevant work can include governmental,

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://trip.wm.edu/>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://bridgingthegaproject.org/> and <https://korbel.du.edu/sie>.

intergovernmental, or non-governmental institutions (Fazal 2016, 36). Maliniak et al. define policy relevance as ideas or findings that are potentially useful to practitioners (Maliniak et al. 2020, 9).

Skeptics of bridging the gap call for preserving scholarly distance from policy concerns and institutions, for a variety of reasons. One line of argument centers on the notion that scholars make their greatest contributions by developing and testing theoretical models that abstract from events to explain important elements of global affairs. In this view, distance from the day-to-day concerns of policy officials is necessary to facilitate theoretical innovation and investigation of core drivers of global politics (Frieden and Lake 2005; Ericksson 2014). Such foundational research can, in turn, have a more profound effect on decision-making (Jahn 2017; Musgrave 2020). Implicit in these arguments is an assumption that groundbreaking scholarly work eventually diffuses beyond the walls of academia, resulting in broader influence.

Skepticism about bridging also stems from concerns about the potentially corrupting influence of politics. On the one hand, bridging efforts could be pointless given that political considerations, rather than a desire to improve policy outcomes, often drive or constrain decision making in public institutions. On the other hand, a desire to engage with policy officials can create a temptation for scholars to alter their research agenda or present their research in ways that deviate from their scholarly commitments. Some critical theorists go a step further and argue that governmental institutions are inherently colonial and corrupt, a perspective that suggests that scholars should not give these institutions legitimacy by engaging with them (see discussions in R. W. Jones 2001; B. G. Jones 2006; Visoka 2019).

Proponents of bridging offer counters to these arguments, as well as additional rationales for policy engagement. While acknowledging the value of grand theory for illuminating underlying drivers of global phenomena, some bridging proponents argue that policy makers benefit most from middle-range theories that partially explain a limited set of phenomena; conceptual models of foreign policy strategies; and explanations of the conditions under which certain policies are more or less likely to result in desired or unwanted outcomes (George 1993; Jentleson 2002; Cartwright 2020). They argue that pursuing these kinds of research can therefore be more conducive to policy influence than more abstract theorizing.

Scholars that discuss the pathways to bridging, moreover, argue that theoretical models do not automatically diffuse to policy officials, making it necessary for scholars to translate their work for non-academic audiences. To be sure, scholarly ideas can enter public or policy discourse in the absence of such translation efforts by scholars through, for example, “lab leaks:” when a journalist writes about a new piece of research (Musgrave 2021; Nexon 2021). But in the absence of scholars doing that translational work themselves, it is more likely that research ideas or findings will be distorted – either accidentally or intentionally – when they are discussed in policy circles or the public domain (De Bruin 2021). Studies by IR scholars have also found that many practitioners are interested in learning about policy-relevant research findings and ideas, opening up opportunities for scholars to influence policy making and practice (Avey and Desch 2014; Maliniak et al. 2020; Avey et al. 2022).

Some bridging proponents advocate for bridging from the standpoint of social responsibility, arguing that university faculty have a privileged position in society and should use that privilege to try to advance understanding of public issues and solutions to global challenges (Jentleson 2002; Putnam 2003; Berling and Bueger 2013; Del Rosso 2015; Green 2018). Put another way, when developing and carrying out their research agenda, scholars should think of themselves not only as members of a discipline or field of study, but also as citizens of their local

community and the broader world. This perspective offers a normative counter to the perspective of critical theorists who argue against engagement on normative grounds.

Beyond its potential external benefits, engagement with policy communities can also enhance the work of scholars within academia. Conversations with policy officials and participation in policy institutions can give scholars a fuller and more accurate understanding of how policy making works and of the pressures and incentives that influence it – knowledge that scholars can then incorporate into their teaching and research (Adler-Nissen 2021). Policy engagement can also provide scholars with heightened awareness of important emerging issues in the policy domain, thereby stimulating the development of new research questions on cutting-edge topics.

While much of the literature on bridging the gap is descriptive or normative, some scholars have conducted more theoretically or empirically-oriented research on bridging. A few scholars have developed theories designed to elucidate the relationship between research and policy. Avey and Desch summarize three theoretical models for understanding this relationship: 1) a “scientific purist” model that considers the realms of science and policy to be distinct from each other, 2) a “direct relevance” model that considers science to be inherently relevant to policy, and 3) a “trickle down” model that sees scientific progress routinely generating policy benefits (Avey and Desch 2014, 228). Maliniak et al. consider the conditions that facilitate or impede bridging, arguing that the ability of scholars to influence policy and practice is shaped by the amount of uncertainty associated with a policy problem and proposed solutions to the problem, with greater uncertainty creating more opportunity for scholars to exercise influence (Maliniak et al. 2020).

Scholars have begun, too, to conduct empirical analyses of bridging questions. A series of studies using survey data – much of it collected by the TRIP Project – have examined the views of policy makers regarding social science research (Avey and Desch 2014; Avey et al. 2022), as well as variation in bridging patterns across different areas of international policy (Maliniak et al. 2020) and different types of research methods (Fazal 2016; Maliniak et al. 2020; Avey et al. 2022). Other studies have examined the role of new media as sites for bridging (Avey et al. 2021); the attitudes of IR scholars, deans, and department chairs on the value of policy-relevant work (Maliniak et al. 2011; Desch et al. 2022); and the impact of training for scholars in public and policy engagement (Tama, Rublee, and Urban 2023).

One remaining question concerns whether scholars should pursue bridging only at certain stages of their career. This question is particularly salient for early-career scholars who do not have tenure and may worry that policy engagement may make it more difficult for them to devote the time needed to produce the peer-reviewed publications that will have the most bearing on their perceived success within academia. There certainly can be an important trade-off between the amount of time spent on bridging and the amount of time spent on academic research, and it behooves junior faculty on a tenure-track to make sure they are meeting all of the academic standards that will weigh most heavily on their prospects for tenure and promotion. But some modes of bridging, such as publishing translational articles or blog posts in outlets like *The Conversation* or the *Monkey Cage*, can be powerful vehicles for scholars to extend the impact of their research with only a relatively modest investment of time. Scholars who delay all forms of public and policy engagement until after the receipt of tenure are likely to miss out on important opportunities to participate in policy conversations and make their work known to broader audiences.

At the same time, academia needs to do more to incentivize public and policy engagement (Walt 2005; Nye 2008). Although norms within universities are gradually shifting to attribute more

value to these types of outreach, most university tenure and promotion standards still place little or no weight on them (Toft 2018; Desch et al. 2022). Bridging the gap is only likely to become more deeply institutionalized in academia when the professional incentives for faculty align more closely with the societal responsibility of faculty to reach outside the ivory tower with their work.

### **3. The Practice of Bridging the Gap**

In spite of the absence of clear incentives supporting efforts to bridge the research-policy gap in IR, a range of bridging practices have emerged over the past decade. Several of these practices have become so common that we refer to them as baseline practices: public writing and media appearances, public sector fellowships and think tank affiliations, and government contracts and impact evaluations. While all IR scholars certainly do not employ them, these practices are widespread enough that they are considered to be generally accepted practices. The basic aim of these baseline practices is to enable academics to transfer their knowledge and, in some cases, better understand policymakers' realities. We also discuss efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in bridging the gap, which have become central to some bridging efforts. Finally, we outline emerging practices that prioritize sustained and responsible engagement between researchers and policymakers over time to facilitate change in both academic and policy institutions. These newer practices include research and event partnerships between scholars and practitioners, training in the development of such partnerships, and efforts to incorporate consideration of the possible unintended consequences of engagement into bridging decision making and practice.

#### **Baseline Practices**

The practices discussed below—public writing and media appearances, public sector fellowships and think tank affiliations, and government contracts and impact evaluations—focus on the more widely accepted practices for bridging the research-policy gap in IR.

##### *Public Writing and Media Appearances*

Although there have always been public intellectuals who have managed to be successful academics and contribute to policy debates in the media, the resistance of much of academia to policy engagement long prevented this approach from becoming mainstream. In spite of this resistance, a new set of baseline policy engagement practices became broadly accepted among IR scholars over the past decade or so, in large part due to the work of projects like Bridging the Gap and the *Monkey Cage*. The Carnegie Corporation of New York played an important role in funding these and other bridging efforts through its “Rigor and Relevance” initiative (Carnegie Corporation of New York 2014). The proliferation of online media outlets during the digital age also opened up more spaces in which academics could write for public audiences.

Academics began more frequently to publish Op Eds and blog posts, do media interviews, and engage in other types of media communication. The goal of these efforts was to take the knowledge that academics had accrued, take away the jargon, focus on a hook in the current news, and disseminate this knowledge to the public and practitioners via media outlets. These Op Eds, blog posts, and media interviews aimed to ensure that the broader public and policymakers had access to scholarly knowledge in hopes that they could use it to become smarter consumers of policy information and possibly make more informed policy decisions.

Many of these efforts also aimed to help increase the diversity of scholars that appeared in the media. Based on the assessment that the same academics were often speaking in the media and

writing Op Eds and that these academics tended to be older white men, several scholars created initiatives designed to facilitate engagement in public debate by a greater breadth of academics. Efforts such as the Op Ed project explicitly trained women to write Op Eds.<sup>3</sup> The websites and Twitter accounts of Women Also Know Stuff and People of Color Also Know Stuff sought to provide an easily accessible list of scholars for media companies who are always pressed to find “experts” within very short timeframes and may not have the time or energy to search for new faces or perspectives.<sup>4</sup>

Combined together, efforts to enable a wider range of academics to contribute to the public debate via media appearances, blog posts, or Op Eds has increased the acceptance and visibility of this type of public engagement within the community of IR scholars. As indicated above, there is certainly debate about the utility of public writing and media engagement if it detracts from scholarly productivity, but these forms of engagement are now broadly accepted as a complement to scholarship (Desch et al. 2022).

### *Fellowships and Think Tank Affiliations*

Many scholars want a more direct experience with policy institutions and seek to bridge the research-policy gap by working directly with government or other institutions for a period of time. One way to do this is by winning an International Affairs Fellowship managed by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Once selected for an award, the scholar finds a position for a year in an office within the US Government or an Inter-governmental Organization (IGOs), such as the World Bank. Scholars use their research skills to help the public institution solve key policy problems and, in doing so, gain deep understanding of how the policy institution works.

Other scholars establish think tank affiliations. Some become non-resident scholars with think tanks, committing to write reports, blog posts, or other policy-focused publications and, in turn, gaining access to the think tank’s policy connections, invitation-only events, and communications platform. Other scholars establish affiliations where they are partly employed by the think tank and are given a title such as Senior Fellow. These arrangements are usually limited to scholars who have already established their credibility as scholars who do highly regarded work and are able to bridge the research-policy divide.

Although fellowships with public agencies and think tank affiliations may be temporary, they have the potential to establish longer-term relationships for scholars. These networks, then, may enable scholars to repeatedly engage with policymakers over their careers and develop new generative opportunities to bridge the research-policy gap. Furthermore, because of their direct experience with policymakers, these scholars are more likely to be able to frame their research findings in a way that speaks to the concerns of these policymakers and their institutional opportunities and barriers.

### *Research Contracts and Impact Evaluations*

An increasingly common way that scholars engage with the policy community is by taking on contracts from government agencies or other policy institutions. Such contracts can include funding for research, project impact evaluations, trainings, or the convening of meetings (Murphy and Fulda 2011; Mikhael and Norman 2021). Some IR scholars leverage their expertise to obtain many such contracts. For instance, Bryan Early, founding director of the Project on International Security, Commerce, and Economic Statecraft (PISCES) at the University at Albany, has served

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.theopedproject.org/>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.womenalsoknowstuff.com/> and <https://sites.google.com/view/pocexperts/home>.

as the principal investigator for government contracts totaling more than \$18 million. These contracts, mostly from the U.S. State Department, have funded a variety of outreach projects on strategic trade controls and proliferation threats with over three-dozen countries. Early and his PISCES team assist foreign governments in improving laws and regulations, train foreign officials on the use of sanctions and strategic trade controls, and run interactive scenarios with groups of officials.<sup>5</sup>

An increasing array of government agencies, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), and IGOs contract scholars to conduct evaluations of their development, peacebuilding, humanitarian, security sector, or other interventions. In this capacity, the scholar works directly with the policy agency to design and implement the external evaluation and then presents the results to the policy agency. In the case of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), the scholar helps to design the intervention so that it is randomly assigned to recipients, which enables the scholar to assess whether the project, or other factors, lead to the desired outcome. The need for impact evaluations has also led to the creation of organizations that are loosely affiliated with universities, such as Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), and employ scholars to conduct RCTs or quasi-experimental evaluations.<sup>6</sup> These organizations have also produced important, freely available guidance on how to employ these evaluation methods and on the effectiveness of the projects that they evaluate (Gibson et al. 2017).

These contractual relationships between scholars and policy actors often lead to longer-term relationship via repeated contracts, but are also often constrained to the particular type of service-delivery relationship and the particular needs of the agency or organization providing the contract. Below, we discuss several emerging practices that focus more directly on how scholars interact with policymakers and practitioners via a variety of modalities over time, potentially forming more long-term and equal collaborative partnerships.

### *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*

In addition to the baseline practices described above, several other efforts have sought to increase the representation and inclusion of women and underrepresented minorities in IR policy-engagement efforts. We list this as a baseline effort because it has become a priority of all of the practices discussed here. That said, we still have a long way to go. The IR discipline is still heavily dominated by white scholars, and public service organizations often mirror this reality. In addition, when women and underrepresented minority scholars speak or write in public fora, they often face backlash or online bullying (Snyder 2018; Flaherty 2021). In other words, they face a greater potential cost for policy engagement.

But representation, of course, matters. By supporting and enabling the inclusion of a range of scholars in policy engagement efforts, these efforts can help to support broader reform in public institutions rather than simply replicating the social hierarchy that facilitates exclusion of underrepresented minorities and women. The focus of these inclusion efforts is also on scholars who are not from the top Ivy League schools, giving a broader group of scholars from less prestigious universities the opportunity to engage with practitioners and learn from these efforts. Furthermore, many of the practices discussed here focus on partnering with scholars that are based in the Global South in an attempt to foster research that is directly grounded in the global realities under study and, thus, support more informed policy engagement.

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.albany.edu/piscses/about.shtml>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/> and <https://www.poverty-action.org/>.

As an example of these efforts, Bridging the Gap established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Fellowship in 2021. With this fellowship, Bridging the Gap brings onto its leadership team each year a fellow with the mandate to help the organization determine how it can do more to advance DEI. Bridging the Gap also prioritizes inviting scholars from a diverse set of institutions to participate in its training programs and workshops. Furthermore, the Research on International Policy Implementation Lab (RIPIL) has established research partnerships with scholars based at universities in Burundi, Colombia, and Sudan; the Accountability Research Center (ARC) supports organizations throughout the Global South; and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) and Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) regularly support and partner with research institutions based in the countries where they conduct research.<sup>7</sup>

### **Emerging Practices**

Some emerging practices for bridging the policy-research divide focus on forming partnerships between academics and practitioners. These emerging practices aim to establish institutions and practices within academia and at the nexus of academic and policy institutions that enable and support more collaborative, sustained, and diverse engagement between scholars and policymakers.

#### *Co-Creation of Knowledge*

There are several new efforts that aim to establish the capacity within academia to support diverse types of collaboration between scholars and practitioners. In many cases, these efforts build on relationships formed through the baseline practices above to establish these new collaborations. The defining characteristic of these efforts is that they facilitate the co-creation of events or research by scholars and policymakers. In other words, the policymaker is not just contracting the scholar to deliver a good or service, and the scholar is not just contacting the policymaker to share the findings of research that they have already conducted. Instead, the policymaker or practitioner and scholar(s) decide together on the collaboration and often design and implement it together. By definition, these initiatives are often time-intensive and require multiple consultations but deliver collaborative endeavors that transfer knowledge between scholars and practitioners.

One example of this type of initiative is Bridging the Gap's New Voices in National Security program. In this program, launched in 2018 and funded by the Raymond Frankel Foundation, scholars partner with practitioners to design workshops that bring together academics and members of the policy community to exchange knowledge and ideas on an important policy issue. For each workshop, scholar and practitioner leads work together to conceptualize the focus of the workshop – in particular, by developing policy-relevant questions that will serve as the basis of it. The workshop leads then invite emerging scholars who are not already well-known in the policy community to prepare memos prior to the workshop that draw on their expertise to answer the questions. Those memos, in turn, serve as the jumping off point for workshop discussions between the scholars and a select group of practitioners who have key responsibilities in the given policy area. Bridging the Gap has organized such workshops on an array of issues and in partnership with a variety of institutions, including on economic sanctions and on digital authoritarianism in partnership with the Center for a New American Security, on the future of alliances in partnership with the Brookings Institution, on the future of international aid in fragile

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://bridgingthegaproject.org/ripil/>, <https://accountabilityresearch.org/>, <https://www.poverty-action.org/>, and <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/>.



states in partnership with the United States Institute of Peace, and on emerging technologies and international security in partnership with New America.<sup>8</sup>

Another example is the Research on International Policy Implementation Lab (RIPIL), which conducts rigorous multi-method research on important policy questions. RIPIL integrates practitioners throughout the research process and builds international research partnerships with non-US and non-European scholars. The basic theory underlying RIPIL's work is that by focusing on research questions that are of interest to practitioners, and by validating research findings with practitioners, these findings are much more likely to be relevant and communicated to these practitioners. For each new research project, RIPIL first consults with practitioners—often via multiple consultations—to identify new research questions that are of interest both to scholars and to practitioners. Then, RIPIL develops an initial research design and proposal to answer the research question, usually via an initial pilot study, and seeks funding for this proposal. RIPIL shares these preliminary findings with relevant practitioners, ensuring that they remain relevant to their concerns. If the research project still has scholarly and policy merit, RIPIL submits the proposal to a larger funder to support a larger research project and ensures that consultations with policymakers are integrated throughout the research project cycle.

Once the main research findings are available, RIPIL teams translate the findings into policy pieces that it distributes widely and discusses with practitioners in public and private consultations. These scholarly-policy consultations seek to directly support problem-solving by practitioners, enabling them to identify how the research can help them to improve their practice, and identify new research questions that merit further exploration. RIPIL's research is funded by the US National Science Foundation (NSF), United States Institute of Peace (USIP), American Political Science Association (APSA), Humanity United, and the Folke Bernadotte Academy, among others.<sup>9</sup>

An additional example is the Accountability Research Center (ARC), which creates partnerships between researchers and public accountability groups to help make governments more accountable to their populations. First, ARC works directly with these public accountability groups to co-create the research agendas and identify the research questions that they will answer together. Second, it organizes wide-ranging consultations with practitioners in the partner's country, as well as globally, to facilitate the transfer of this research into policy. Third, it supports advocacy campaigns by ARC partners that aim to use research and analysis to improve public accountability in their contexts. ARC is funded by a range of foundations, including the Hewlett, MacArthur, Open Society, and Packard foundations, among others.<sup>10</sup>

These co-creation efforts point to the potential to form longer-term research-focused partnerships between scholars and practitioners. They also speak to the time and financial resources required to establish and sustain these partnerships.

### *Responsible Engagement*

Several efforts have focused specifically on understanding the ethics of policy engagement and improving the ability of scholars to responsibly engage with practitioners. These efforts do not focus on creating sustained research-practitioner partnerships; instead, they aim to help researchers understand how to conduct public or policy engagement ethically and responsibly. The Sié Center's Responsible Public Engagement initiative seeks to do so by training junior scholars in

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<sup>8</sup> See <https://bridgingthegapproject.org/programs/new-voices-in-national-security/>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://bridgingthegapproject.org/ripil/>.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://accountabilityresearch.org/>.

ethical policy engagement practices and by curating an anonymous forum where scholars can seek advice on policy engagement.<sup>11</sup>

These discussions seek to help scholars think about why they want to engage with policymakers and how they can do it responsibly. Scholars involved in these efforts argue that academics should not simply pursue policy engagement just for the sake of it. They should ask whether policy engagement is likely to improve the provision of societal good and benefit humanity. They should also ask if their ideas and findings may be misused by practitioners and, if so, whether the potential benefits outweigh the potential harms (Hendrix 2019; Sié Chéou-Kang Center for International Security and Diplomacy 2019; Akoto 2020; Avant 2022; Barma and Goldgeier 2022).

Like most discussions of ethical research, these efforts do not offer a single clear answer; instead, they provide scholars with guidance that helps them to be reflective and weight the costs and benefits of policy engagement. They also seek to remind scholars that one of the principles of ethical engagement is the equal distribution of benefits, not just the avoidance of risk (Campbell 2017). From this perspective, not engaging with policymakers also has a cost for scholars. If they have research findings that could help to improve policy or practice that benefits humanity, then refusing to transfer this research to policymakers could also be considered unethical.

#### **4. Further Research**

In this chapter, we have focused on the questions of whether and how IR scholars should seek to bridge the gap, emphasizing both established and emerging ideas and practices. Our survey of the literature on whether to bridge revealed a variety of perspectives on the utility and normative merit of policy engagement. These perspectives range from the view that abstraction and distance from policy concerns and institutions enhance the contributions of scholars, to the view that scholars have a societal duty to bring their expertise to bear on pressing challenges and translate their work for non-academic audiences. On the practice of bridging the research-policy gap, we detailed forms of engagement that are broadly accepted among IR scholars, such as writing for policy blogs and doing stints in policy institutions, as well as newer practices that emphasize the co-creation of knowledge by scholars and practitioners or the importance of engaging in responsible ways.

The practices outlined in this chapter are responding to a clear demand from practitioners and scholars for more opportunities for policy engagement. They also make it clear that the onus for facilitating engagement rests primarily with scholars. Practitioners are simply too busy and lack the other resources necessary to translate research into practice. The efforts discussed above demonstrate that universities and scholars can play a crucial role in bridging the research-policy gap in IR, but our experience with these efforts demonstrates that more training and support are needed. In particular, many emerging scholars seem to be especially interested in engaging with policy practitioners during the research process. To this end, Bridging the Gap has developed a New Era workshop model that teaches emerging scholars how to use scenario exercises to develop research questions whose answers may have a high degree of policy relevance several years from now (Barma et al. 2016). RIPIL and Bridging the Gap are also designing a training course for IR scholars in the co-creation of research by scholars and practitioners. These efforts are drawing on broader efforts within the natural, health, and social sciences that aim to improve research-to-policy transfer (see, for instance, Choi et al. 2005; Hamlyn et al 2015; Quinn 2018; Seakins and Fitzsimmons 2020).

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<sup>11</sup> See <https://korbel.du.edu/sie/engagement-initiatives/responsible-public-engagement>.

Much work certainly remains to be done to enhance understanding of bridging. One important area in need of new research is examination of the character of bridging across policy contexts. Most of the literature on bridging centers on a single country, such as the United States (for an exception, see Bailes et al. 2011). Yet policy making dynamics and the relationship between scholars and policy officials vary across countries. Cross-national analyses of bridging will help scholars and practitioners understand how bridging opportunities and constraints vary in different settings.

The field of IR would also benefit from research on the effects of sharpened political polarization and increased societal distrust of expertise on opportunities for meaningful bridging (Drezner 2017; Nichols 2017). In an era when citizens of many democracies loathe people of different political persuasions (Mason 2018; Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro 2022), to what extent are bridging opportunities constrained by the identity of the party in power? Furthermore, how has the decline in societal trust in experts across many democracies eroded the authority of scholars and thereby made it harder for them to exercise influence with public audiences or policy communities?

At the same time, we need rigorous research on the effectiveness of the emerging bridging practices highlighted in this chapter. In what circumstances are different models of co-creation most likely to be useful, and when do different co-creation models lead to changes in policy or practice? What types of training or processes are most effective in leading scholars to pursue policy engagement responsibly? What mechanisms can best promote greater diversity, equity, and inclusion in bridging efforts? Investigation of these and other questions should be part of the next wave of bridging the gap research.

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