

Understanding Educational Policy Formation: The Case of School Violence Policies in Israel

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Abstract

This study explores mechanisms underlying processes of educational policy formation. Previous studies have given much attention to processes of diffusion when accounting for educational policy formation. Less account has been given to the day-to-day institutional dynamics through which educational policies develop and change. Building on extensive governmental archival data, complemented with interviews and media analysis, I study the development and transformation of school violence policies in Israel. I argue that diffusion of global policy ideas and practices provides the menu of possible policies, while within-country struggles over legitimacy in the policy domain serve as a mechanism shaping which items on the menu becomes actual policy. Specifically, in the Israeli case, the interest in and action toward school violence were influenced by a global trend, but the actions of Psychological-Counseling Services (PCS) who struggled to assert their legitimacy as the authority on school violence in the Israeli Ministry of Education (MOE) shaped the adoption, rejection, and institutionalization of the specific school violence policy ideas and practices.

Keywords

educational policy, policy formation mechanisms, school violence policy, institutional theory, legitimacy struggles

This study examines the process of educational policy formation. I demonstrate how educational policy is shaped by actions of a bureaucratic-professional group vying for legitimacy over a policy domain,¹ focusing on their constant struggles to claim, gain, and maintain their position. The analysis contributes to an understanding of the mechanisms underlying educational policy formation, an area that is underexplored in the sociological study of educational systems (see Johnston 2014; Walters 2011).

My analysis bridges two bodies of literature.² On the one hand, studies on education policy formation commonly use the lens of policy diffusion to explain why policy issues and solutions become salient in national contexts (Schofer and McEneaney 2003). On the other hand, organizational and

institutional scholars discuss how struggles over legitimacy, authority, status, and prestige shape how social actors and ideas gain ground (see Abbott 1988; Deephouse and Suchman 2008; DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Gieryn 1999; Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway 2006; Suchman 1995). Here, I position my analysis at the intersection of these processes of global diffusion and

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local struggles. In particular, I explore when an issue becomes salient in the educational policy realm, where policy ideas and practices come from and how they become viable alternatives, what makes policymakers change their positions toward issues, and what components influence which ideas and practices will become institutionalized into written policies and regulations. I ask how the interaction of global policy trends with dynamics of legitimacy struggles in a policy domain transforms educational policy over time.

My analysis is based on the development of school violence policies in Israel. Despite no apparent rise in school violence, addressing violence within schools nevertheless became a dominant policy theme in Israel during the 1990s and continues to be so today. The centering of school violence within educational policies in Israel echoes a change that also took place in the United States, England, and Europe. Specifically, scholars argue that school violence, punishment, and crime control became central to educational policy discussions and zero tolerance, accountability, and standardization have become the main agendas for school management in local and global contexts (Apple 2000; Hirschfield 2008; Kupchik 2010; Kupchik and Monahan 2006; Lyons and Drew 2009; Simon 2007; Smith 2004).

The ideas guiding school violence and punishment policies and the practices that are instituted do vary across and within countries (for variance across countries, see Kupchik, Green, and Mowen 2014; for variance within the United States, see Ramey 2015). Such variation is also evident in the Israeli case. The Israeli Ministry of Education's (MOE) policy toward school violence changed substantially over the years. Initially, in the 1990s and early 2000s, Israel's policy was psychologically oriented, based on anti-punitive pedagogy, rejected suspension and detention, and supported principals' autonomy in treating school violence. By the end of the 2000s, the policy was behaviorally oriented, punitive, "zero tolerance" approach that standardized collection of violence data and eliminated principals' autonomy. These changes took place even though the Psychological-Counseling Services (PCS) in the MOE held the official mandate over school violence policies throughout these years.

I explore these changes and how they were brought about to understand the elements shaping educational policy formation. I start by reviewing previous literature on policy formation and diffusion, both generally and in education in particular,

and discuss how legitimacy struggles may act as a mechanism of policy formation. I follow by presenting my case and explaining why Israel is a constructive example for studying the intersection of local policy formation with global policy diffusion. I then consider two alternative explanations for school violence policy formation, published data on school violence trends and newspaper publications, and explain why these cannot fully account for the changes in policy over the years. In the bulk of my analysis, I elaborate on the role of diffused policy trends and of struggles over legitimacy as the main authority on school violence in shaping the changing nature of school violence policies and in driving the institutionalization of different policy ideas and practices. I finish with a discussion on how my analysis contributes to our understanding of processes of education policy formation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Policy formation and diffusion theories

Scholars of lawmaking and policy have examined variation in timing, content, and the institutionalization of policy ideas, decisions, and practices (Burstein 1991; Jenness 2004). From 1980 throughout the 1990s, a widespread explanatory framework for changes in policy content and their timing focused on policy uniformity and similarity across countries (see Campbell 2002; Guillén 2001; Jenness 2004; Wejnert 2002). Often naming this process *policy diffusion*, scholars suggested that policy ideas and practices are carried from core countries, international organizations, and professional elites into national contexts by networks of politicians, professionals, intellectuals, and scientists (Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007; Drori et al. 2003; Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002; Haas 1992; Hironaka 2014; Jenness 2004; Strang and Meyer 1993). This perspective suggests that local policymakers draw on existing repertoires of viable policy ideas and ideologies, often from other countries or international actors, which constrain their options and lead them to pick ideas from a given set of available issues and practices when developing national and local policy (Abbott 1997; Béland 2005; Burstein 1991; Cloutier and Langley 2013).

Simultaneously, however, scholars suggested there is great contextual variation in how local

dynamics shape diffused policies (Campbell 1998, 2004; Dale 1999; Johnston 2014). Global policy trends provide nation-states with frameworks, norms, and practices that shape their policies, but institutional and organizational dynamics and innovation among policy carriers shape how global themes are carried out in local contexts (Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002; Haas 1992; Hironaka 2014). Therefore, analyses of policy and political changes must take into account both the broad scheme within which processes of change take place and the actions, interactions, and contingencies of actors within specific contexts (Boyle, Songora, and Foss 2001; Burstein 1991; Maman and Rosenhek 2009; Martin 2003; Saguy 2000).

Research on educational policy formation relies heavily on the policy diffusion model to account for the development of strikingly similar educational policies and ideas across nation-states. Specific examples include the structure of national education systems (Meyer et al. 1977), perceptions of the role of education in society (McGinn 1997), standardization of national school curricula (Benavot et al. 1991; Kamens and Benavot 1991), the push toward “evidence-based education” (Schneider and Keesler 2007), and the proliferation of international comparison tests as a means to improve educational outcomes worldwide (Baker and Wiseman 2005). These studies all point to diffusion as a crucial mechanism shaping the trajectory of educational policy around the globe.

The diffusion framework is widely used in studies of educational policy, but several previous studies also identify mechanisms shaping local processes of policy formation. For example, analyses of the development and spread of school choice policies in the United States found that policy entrepreneurs’ relationships with local and national policy networks (Mintrom and Vergari 1998), the strength and clout of teachers’ unions (Renzulli and Roscigno 2005), and discursive battles between policymakers over alternative frameworks of meaning (Johnston 2014) were key in shaping local variation in broadly similar policies. In another example, Arum (2005) suggests that court rulings are an institutional mechanism that shapes changes over time in how moral authority is pronounced and used in schools. These studies indicate that educational policy develops differently across time and place and the actions of local policymakers coupled with contextual influences shape how policy is written and practiced in specific places.

Policy diffusion matters as it brings the issue of school violence to the attention of policy carriers, supplies policymakers with alternative policies, and gives ideas and practices authority. Here, I further our understanding of the elements shaping local educational policy formation by suggesting that struggles between policymakers vying for legitimacy as experts of school violence shape which ideas and practices out of the menu of available policy trends eventually become institutionalized.

Why legitimacy matters for policy

Legitimacy struggles are the ongoing attempts by social actors to become and remain the unquestionable authority in their domain of activity. In order for legitimacy to be valid, it must be gained or granted and not only claimed as claims for legitimacy might be left unanswered. Legitimacy is challenged when those claiming it are perceived to have failed to execute the purpose of their mandate. When individual or organizational actors achieve legitimacy, they enjoy the taken-for-granted right to be in charge of a domain, their approach becomes the main acceptable choice for how to manage a policy domain, and they have access to the resources that allow them to pursue what they perceive as the best course of action (see Bensman 1979; Cloutier and Langley 2013; Deephouse and Suchman 2008; Suchman 1995). Legitimacy is most apparent when it is challenged as one can then track attacks and challengers. When legitimacy is achieved, conflict subsides and is harder to record (Deephouse and Suchman 2008).

Legitimacy struggles are a useful analytic tool for understanding policy formation as they influence how issues emerge and become salient or highly regulated. When social actors identify new opportunities or are mandated to deal with a new issue, especially if the issue was previously absent from policy discussions, they work to draw attention to the relevance of the issue and gain recognition for their role as its proprietor (Dobbin 2009; Dobbin and Kelly 2007; Fligstein 2001; Kelly and Dobbin 1998; Suchman 1995). In this process, issues become salient and regulated by actors’ attempts to forge a place for themselves or legitimate their appointed role (see also Abbott 1988). Legitimacy struggles thus play a role in shaping whether issues and their carriers will gain traction and in what way (see Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Legitimacy struggles also shape which ideas and practices gain ground in the policy domain. Actors and organizations involved in policymaking come from different positions. Policymakers might be professionals, bureaucrats, or politicians, and their varying positions lead to different approaches and perspectives on what should be done and have different interests associated with them (Amenta 2006). When policymakers work to gain authority over a particular domain, they are struggling not only to advance their point of view but also to achieve the considerable gains in prestige and potential material benefits that being the legitimate authority might hold (Cloutier and Langley 2013; Creagh 2006; Fligstein 2001; Gieryn 1999). To do so, policymakers take action, generate ideas and data, set priorities, and adopt certain policies while neglecting others, thus shaping what becomes institutionalized as actual policy (on the role of legitimacy in organizational activity, see Deephouse and Suchman 2008).

My argument concerning legitimacy struggles and their role in shaping policy formation is twofold. First, I claim that the official nomination of the PCS as responsible for dealing with school violence contributed to the topic's transformation into a salient policy issue in the Israeli context. Second, I demonstrate that the PCS institutionalized school violence policies after its legitimacy as the authority on school violence was challenged. The PCS was constantly undermined by other actors who brought different notions about data collection and pedagogy into the policy domain. Without being proactive and flexible enough to co-opt others' demands, the PCS could not achieve legitimacy.³

In addition to exploring the role of diffusion and legitimacy struggles in shaping policy formation, I also rule out two prominent alternative explanations for policy formation. First, students of policy formation argue over the extent to which objective circumstances shape which policy issues come to prominence and how they are handled (Jeness 2004). I evaluate this argument and look into the association of published data on school violence with changes in policy. Second, some scholars argue that the media creates heightened attention that influences which topics policymakers focus on (Cook et al. 1983), whereas others suggest that prominent policy events shape how media attention is allocated and distributed (see Burstein 1991). I account for this debate and discuss the role that three major Israeli

newspapers had in shaping school violence policy formation.⁴

THE CASE OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE POLICIES IN ISRAEL

Over the past 20 years, school violence and discipline have become central to education policies in Israel (Shavit and Blank 2012). School violence was almost completely absent from policy discussions until the 1990s. In 2009, however, the Ministry of Education (2009) declared it to be one of its top priorities. Furthermore, during this period, the nature of school violence policies substantially changed. In their analysis of policy discussions surrounding discipline and school violence in Israel, Shavit and Blank (2012) find an ongoing tension between students' rights and the need for authority in schools. Indeed, from the middle of the 1990s through the middle of the 2000s, school violence policies were anti-punitive. School violence was perceived via the lens of the "school climate" approach, focusing on students' emotional well-being and the school as a community of students, staff, and parents. This approach was explicitly against the use of suspension and detention (State of Israel 1999), and principals had autonomy to deal with violent incidents in their schools (Parliament Education Committee 1989). However, by 2009, the MOE adopted "zero tolerance" policies that instituted suspension and supported teachers and principals when they were confronted by parents of violent students (Makover-Balikov 2010). Additionally, the MOE published clear guidelines on how to punish students taking part in violent incidents. While prior studies have detailed the content and tensions of the policy, they have not offered an account of their development and changes.

Israel presents an illuminating case for exploring the intersection of policy diffusion with local policy mechanisms. The country enjoys a unique military, financial, academic, and professional relationship with the United States (e.g., Traubman 2004), and its policy is also highly influenced by ideas and trends coming from international organizations and global political entities. Research demonstrates that these professional and academic connections influence Israeli economic, welfare, and environmental policies (Gal 2007; Magen 2012; Mandelkern and Shalev 2010). Such diffusion is also relevant for

education. Several studies show that the Israeli education system is changing in accordance with global policy trends. These changes are seen in the call to dismantle central state authority and increase principals' accountability (Yonah, Dahan, and Markovich 2008), adoption of local and international standardized tests as a primary tool for school evaluation, establishment of the National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education (Michaeli 2010; Resnik 2008, 2009), and introduction of environmental education programs into the Israeli education system (Pizmony-Levy 2011).

However, studies on Israeli policymaking processes also indicate that diffusion alone cannot account for how policy developed and why certain policies were implemented at different times as local dynamics have substantial weight in how global policy themes are introduced into the Israeli context (Maman and Rosenhek 2009; Pizmony-Levy 2011). In the case of school violence policies, a question remains as to where policy ideas generated from and what drove the transformations in policy over time, especially given the fact that the same administrative body, the PCS, was officially in charge of school violence policies throughout these years.

DATA AND METHOD

The data in this study mainly comprise governmental archives spanning from the end of the 1980s to today. I supplemented the archives with interviews, newspaper analysis, and analysis of studies and surveys on school violence. To analyze how school violence policies in Israel emerged and changed over time, I combined archival data and information from the interviews to generate a timeline of the policy development process. This timeline revealed that prior to 1989, only a handful of discussions in the Parliament Education Committee were devoted to school violence. School violence was also conceptualized differently; it was discussed mainly as instances of school break-ins or as related to juvenile delinquency outside of school (Iram 1997; Parliament Education Committee 1979) rather than incidents of students attacking each other. The timeline also indicated that the final transformation to zero tolerance happened in 2009. Thus, the main timeframe for this study is 1989 to 2009, with additional materials as needed from prior or subsequent years.

Table 1 presents the full list of resources, by year, from 1987 to 2009.⁵ The archival data in this study include 23 protocols of the Israeli Parliamentary Education Committee's discussions on school violence in the years 1989 to 2012;⁶ 60 parliament discussions of school violence in the years 1981 to 2014, most of them in Questions & Answers (Q&A) sessions where members of parliament raise issues with the MOE and for which a written reply is mandated;⁷ 19 directives to schools from the MOE's CEO; one pedagogical program aimed at school violence intervention published by the MOE in different versions between 1996 and 2007; three special publications by the PCS on school violence; and five protocols of PCS workshops aimed at writing new violence directives for schools from 2008. The data also include the 1996 Parliamentary Special Investigation Committee on Children and Youth violence, reports by the 2000 Public Special Investigation Committees on Children and Youth Violence in Schools (known as the Vilnai Committee⁸), a report by the State Comptroller and Ombudsman (2008) on MOE performance in the struggle against bullying and violence in schools, and a report of the Parliamentary Research Center (Natan 2002) on the ministry's progress in dealing with school violence. Finally, the data include findings from analysis of six national surveys on school violence.

I identified data from the Parliamentary Education Committee by searching the online Parliament Committees archive for any protocols using the words *violence* or *discipline* in the meeting's agenda, headline, or transcribed text. All meetings prior to 1994, which are not available online, were searched by employees of the Parliament archives. I identified discussions in parliament by searching the Parliament online archive for the term *violence* combined with *students*, *schools*, or *education*. I uncovered the relevant directives to schools by manually reviewing all directives (usually published once a month) since 1985. I found relevant school curricula based on references to them in the Parliamentary Education Committee meetings, in MOE directives, and following conversations with teachers about what violence prevention programs are well known in schools. To make sure no program was missed, I also searched the Tel Aviv University School of Education's library database for all mentions of school violence. The protocols of the workshops, the Parliament Research Center's report, and the report by the State Comptroller and Ombudsman are all available online.

Table 1. Archival Data by Year of Publication

Year	Parliament Education Committee Protocols	Parliament discussion	Media publications	School directives	Psychological- Counseling Services' publications, curricula, and workshops	Special investigation reports	Studies on school violence
1987	0	2	1	1 ^a	0	0	0
1988	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
1989	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
1990	0	3	8	0	0	0	0
1991	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
1992	0	1	1	1 ^a	0	0	0
1993	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
1994	0	4	11	1 ^a	0	0	0
1995	0	2	13	1	0	0	0
1996	0	1	6	2	1	1	0
1997	2	2	8	1	0	0	1
1998	1	5	15	1	1	0	0
1999	1	1	38	4	0	0	0
2000	2	4	14	1 ^a	0	1	1
2001	0	2	14	4	1	0	0
2002	2	2	12	3	0	0	2
2003	2	4	10	1	0	0	1
2004	5	11	21	0	1	0	0
2005	2	7	22	0	0	0	0
2006	0	2	13	2	0	0	1
2007	0	0	6	0	0	1	0
2008	3	0	16	0	5	0	0
2009	1	2	15	2 ^a	0	0	0
Total	23	60	246	19	9	3	6

^aDirectives devoted solely to school violence (vs. directives where school violence is included among other issues).

I coded all texts with ATLAS.ti software. The Parliament Education Committee protocols comprise the main body of data and thus the grounding for the coding scheme. Table 2 presents the full list of codes I developed for the analysis of archival data. I first identified the *actors*, coding each text for the various participants or text publishers. Each actor was coded by its name as an individual and by its group affiliation (e.g., politician, MOE, or nongovernmental organization). I then used thematic coding to gauge the *debates surrounding school violence*. I coded for each of the following: *frames* actors used when discussing school violence, their *definitions* of violence, *reasons* and *blame*, and *solutions* (for institutional-focused text analysis, see Adler and Haas 1992; Stone 1997). In addition to thematic coding, I also compared the length, headlines, and content of

pedagogical intervention programs and monthly directives.

To complement the archival data, I conducted interviews with key members in the policymaking process. I interviewed (1) the previous head of the PCS, who led the group during its formative years (1996-2007) and was the leader of the school climate approach; (2) the manager of the Student Rights Hotline in the MOE, who was an outspoken representative against implementing a zero tolerance policy; and (3) the chair of the first Parliamentary Education Committee meeting on school violence, to hear his reasoning for calling the meeting. I conducted the first and third interviews over the phone, per the interviewees' request. The second interview was conducted face to face in the interviewee's office. I took notes during the interviews and later coded them for themes and events,

Table 2. List of Codes by Subject

Subject	Codes
Discussion themes	Violence as a disease; voicing concern; connection to other social problems; problem: daily violence; problem: extreme violence; problem: not enough budget; criticism on other actors; teachers face problem; principals face problem; youth are no problem; before was better; violence in Arab communities; drugs-violence connection; reported findings; rights versus authority dilemma; red lines; sectors; bill of students' rights; place of violent students in school
Actors	Politicians; academic scholars; child protection services; municipality representatives; psychologist; MOE; PCS; parents; teachers' unions; police; NGO; Ministry of Welfare; student; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Public Security; principal; Ministry of Justice
Causes of school violence	Not enough psychologists; school yard; class size; violent society; popular culture; abused children; competitive society; frustration; parents-children relationship; alienation; no boundaries; no security; racism
Solutions for school violence	Help the weaker students; punish daily violence; deterioration; prevention education; giving students tools to cope; boundaries; values; measurement; tools and authority to staff; school environment; rewards; parents education; hot line; more budget; local committee; writing laws; police involvement
Blame and responsibility	Violent society; parents; teachers; PCS

Note: MOE = Ministry of Education; PCS = Psychological-Counseling Services; NGO = nongovernmental organization.

as I did with the archival data. The main focus of the interviews was to understand the timeline and development of events from the actors' point of view. I asked about the timeline of events concerning school violence policies, their role in the events, their reasoning for why the policy developed as it did, their perceptions of other actors involved in the policy process and current policies, and their understanding of how the policy unfolded over time.

The observations gained from the interviews were crucial for understanding the policy formation process. First, they allowed me to inquire about gaps in information arising from the protocols. Second, they provided opinions and perspectives that were not always stated bluntly in official forums. Third, and most important, the interviews highlighted the contentious nature of the process. The interviews emphasized how these actors perceived each other professionally, underscoring each participant's self-perception as the legitimate authority on school violence as well as highlighting their points of disagreement.

In addition to the interviews, I attended a lecture given by the most prominent school violence scholar in Israel. The seminar was open to the public; there were at least 30 people in the room, and I

had no direct contact with the lecturer. During the seminar, he discussed the process through which he started studying school violence and his relationship with the MOE. This allowed me to capture his important perspective as a researcher outside the MOE who was prominent in the development of school violence policies.

Finally, to account for the media's role in shaping school violence policies, I conducted an analysis of the number of newspaper articles on the issue of school violence published between 1987 and 2009 in Israel's three major newspapers. Charting the presence and prevalence of articles allowed me to assess whether the media was a source for emergence and change in school violence policies. To understand the attitude toward school violence in media publications, I refer to a content analysis by Shavit and Blank (2012). To understand the role of data on school violence and how it contributed to policy formation, I conducted a search for all studies done on school violence in Israel. I analyzed the introduction of different waves of the two nationwide surveys to understand scholars' approach to the issue of school violence and summarized the trends they reported.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The role of data in the formation of school violence policies

Analyzing archival data suggests that members of the Parliament Education Committee were frequently concerned over the rise in school violence incidents. For example, the chairman of the Parliament Education Committee framed the 1989 meeting on school violence around “the worsening” of school violence (Parliament Education Committee 1989). Did Israeli policymakers thus create and shape school violence policies as a reaction to increasing rates of school violence? Looking at data on school violence rates and trends suggests no conclusive evidence for a connection between data on school violence and trends in school violence policies.

First, searching for publications on school violence in Israel’s most extensive social sciences database (the Henrietta Szold Institute) shows that between the 1970s and the middle of the 1990s, only a handful of studies on school violence were published, and they were mostly small in scale and scope. Furthermore, the first major study of school violence in Israel took place in 1994 and was published in 1997. This evidence suggests that no systematic data were available to prompt the growing concern over school violence among politicians at the end of the 1980s.

Second, evidence on school violence rates cannot entirely account for the increase in policy attention and shift in policy content around 2008 to 2009. Initially, when national data did become available, school violence seemed to be a problem: Israel was number 5 out of 24 countries in measurements of bullying, harassment, and aggravation (Harel, Kenny, and Rahav 1997); another national study also indicated high rates of violence in schools (Benbenishty, Zeira, and Astor 2000). These findings generated repeated statements of condemnation in the Parliamentary Education Committee. For example, in 2002, the chairman of the committee asked whether Israel had become Sodom and Gomorrah (Parliament Education Committee 2002). These reports likely precipitated the establishment of the Vilnai Committee.

However, the emergence of additional data suggested no meaningful increase in school violence (e.g., Harel, Molcho, and Tillinger 2003). In 2007, the MOE summarized the results of three waves of the Violence in the Israeli Education

System study and found no rise in school violence; along some dimensions, there was even a decline (Psychological-Counseling Services, Ministry of Education 2007). Despite these findings, in 2009 the MOE announced school violence to be a top priority and published directives that reinstated detention and suspension in Israeli schools. Intensive policy engagement leading to the institutionalization of harsher policies occurred despite the lack of evidence that school violence rates were rising. Although a wave of studies in the mid-2000s prompted much debate and policy action, trends in data cannot entirely account for transformations in school violence policies.

The role of media in the formation of school violence policies

Figure 1 presents the number of newspaper articles on school violence from 1987 to 2009 and timing of major policy developments. Newspaper coverage is presented separately for articles on incidents of school violence and for articles on policy-related issues, op-eds, and data releases. The figure also shows the total number of all articles.

The timeline I established indicates that school violence became a policy issue around the end of the 1980s. During this time, however, there are no parallel mentions of school violence incidents in the newspapers. The greatest peak in newspaper articles on this topic was in 1999, but almost half the articles on school violence published that year reported on the work of the Vilnai Committee. The media may thus have reflected major policy events and not the other way around (see also Shavit and Blank 2012).

In 1995 and 2005, newspapers briefly gave heightened attention to school violence events. Although 2005 did not see meaningful policy events, 1995 did. Most of the articles in 1995 were from January, and the Youth Violence Investigation Committee was formed in July of 1995. This sequence of events could suggest that the committee was formed due to heightened media attention. Looking into actual policy development, however, the 1995 committee never submitted final results or recommendations and had no influence on policies. Furthermore, it did not generate changes in regulations to schools or in data collection. Even if the committee formed due to heightened media attention, it did not affect the formation of school violence policies. After school

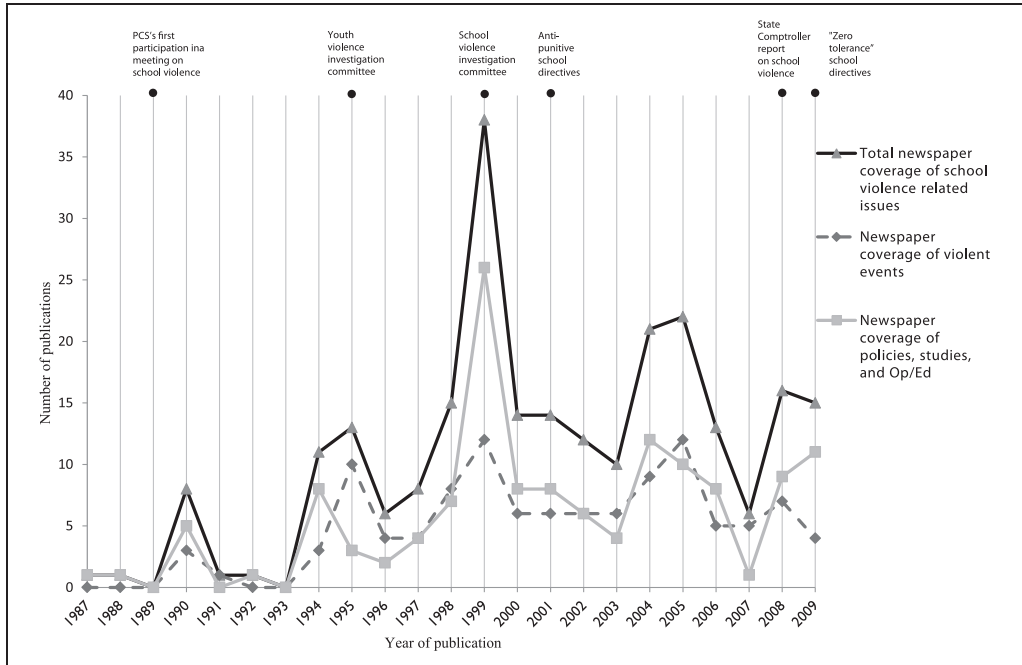


Figure 1. Number of newspaper articles on school violence incidents and policy and timeline of major policy events, 1987 to 2009.

violence became a major policy issue around the beginning of the 2000s and after the peak in interest following the work of the Vilnai Committee, media coverage of school violence appears to have declined. In 2004 and 2005, which saw another peak of media attention, coverage of violent incidents and coverage of policy issues and data releases was comparable in size. Heightened media attention thus does not appear to fully account for changes in school violence policies.

Legitimacy struggles as a policy formation mechanism

Table 3 summarizes the process of the school violence policy transformations by years, divided into periods. Because I order the narrative by themes, the table clarifies the chronological order of the transformations in school violence policies. For each period, the table presents the central policy-makers,⁹ areas of debate, and major policy developments. The table shows the important promoters and challengers of school violence policies in each period, which ideas and practices they were struggling over, and what eventually became policy.

Introduction of the PCS into the policy field. There is contradictory evidence on what precipitated the Parliament Education Committee's meeting on school violence in 1989. The chair of the committee at the time claims the meeting was held in response to a violent incident in a specific school that created heightened media attention (personal communication, January 2015). Yet data on newspaper articles reveal that the specific incident mentioned took place several years after the first meeting, and no specific event generated much media discussion in 1989. What prompted this meeting, then, remains unclear.

It is clear, however, that this is the first time the PCS appeared in front of the Parliament Education Committee as the official authority on school violence in the MOE. Analysis of Parliament Education Committee meetings prior to 1989 suggests that before the PCS's official designation in the MOE in 1987, no specific agency, department, or official was responsible for school violence (Parliament Education Committee 1979).¹⁰ When the PCS was designated as the authority on school violence in 1987, neither the nature of the problem nor the PCS's role in treating it were well defined (Parliament Education Committee 1989). At this

Table 3. The Chronological Development of School Violence Policies in Israel

	Main participants by order of importance	Issues and debates	Policy events
First Period 1987 to 1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politicians • Psychological-Counseling Services (PCS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of school violence as a policy issue • The absence of data collection and the PCS responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological-Counseling Services are made the official authority for school violence • First Parliament Education Committee meeting on school violence in its current meaning • Directives demanding reports of "severe" incidents of violence (not clearly defined or enforced)
Second Period 1994 to 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic researchers • Psychological-Counseling Services • Politicians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of data collection • The PCS "school climate" approach • The PCS's performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliamentary Committee appointed to study youth violence, no conclusions published • First national school violence surveys • Public Investigating Committee • Anti-punitive school directives • First voluntary violence diagnostic kit by the PCS
Third Period 2000 to 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological-Counseling Services • Politicians • Principals and teachers • The Minister of Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has the right to study violence in schools • SHEFI's "school climate" approach and its consequences • The introduction of "zero tolerance" to the Israeli education system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of the Climate Survey to national standardized tests • Workshops involving all participants in the field writing new school directives • New directives, punishment by a given index of severity, reinstatement of detention

stage, the PCS was nominally responsible for school violence policies, but this responsibility did not entail substantial activity.

The 1989 Parliament Education Committee meeting is an exemplar of the PCS position, or lack thereof, in those years. During this meeting, the PCS was asked to provide a review on school violence trends, especially compared to what happened in the past. The PCS representative responded that they were unable to provide any information regarding the scope of school violence, either present or past, as they were only recently appointed to be the authority for school violence in the MOE and were not sure how to define school violence. Subsequently, the PCS brushed off a request to formulate a standardized report for principals to file after every violent event in school, claiming that such a form would be too complicated to create. The chair ended the meeting abruptly, expressing his shock that a public servant officially designated to deal with a problem had no idea what was going on (Parliament Education Committee 1989).

Until the middle of the 1990s, the PCS remained comparatively inactive and persisted in its belief that the MOE should not compel principals to report incidents of school violence. On several occasions, the PCS declared it was unable to present systematic data on school violence beyond what was reported to the police as there was no regulated and systematic data collection on school violence (e.g., Parliament Education Committee 1993). In an interview for this study, the former head of the PCS recalled that until the middle of the 1990s, no one in the PCS central office took the issue too seriously. Accordingly, these years saw no development in school violence policies, and schools were not systematically obligated to report violent incidents to the MOE.

There are several possible explanations for the PCS's lack of action between 1987 and the middle of the 1990s. First, the PCS's pedagogical preference was to let school principals use their discretion when dealing with violence issues and not to engage in broad monitoring (see Parliament Education Committee 2000). Second, as they clearly stated in their first meeting, they saw data collection as a complicated task that required significant time and expertise. Additionally, and most important, except for the Committee's chair, who clearly thought the PCS failed to execute its mandate, the PCS was not challenged by other policymakers during these years—no other actor

was yet active in the school violence policy domain. This enabled the PCS to reject the Committee's requests for systematic data collection and refrain from any action beyond what it perceived to be in its ability and what it perceived to be right. As long as its new mandate was not challenged, the PCS did not put school violence front and center in its work, and school violence policies did not become an important part of the MOE agenda.

First policy shift: struggles over data collection. Analysis of the archival data suggests that the PCS's inactivity began to change when its approach was challenged and its position was undermined by university scholars who started collecting data on school violence and reporting to the Parliamentary Education Committee. Scholars active in the school violence policy domain imported the idea of studying school violence into the Israeli context from their international professional networks. The first national, systematic study of school violence in Israel in 1994 was part of the World Health Organization (WHO) comparative study Health Behavior in School-Aged Children conducted in parallel in 28 countries (Harel et al. 1997). A second survey, Violence in the Israeli Education System, was conducted in 1999 by a different scholar, who claimed his survey was the result of a suggestion by a U.S. colleague to replicate a similar study done in the United States. He also said the study was precipitated by a call for studies by the MOE, but the perspective the study eventually took on school violence was different from the MOE's original intention (Benbenishty 2010). The questionnaires in both studies were adapted from U.S. surveys (Benbenishty, Khoury-Kassabri, and Astor 2006; Harel et al. 1997).

These studies transformed the discussions in the Parliament Education Committee and generated criticism of the PCS for its inability and unwillingness to collect data. These scholars publically accused the PCS of not systematically documenting school violence, not establishing any centralized support system for schools dealing with violence, and not compelling schools to join any violence treatment program (Natan 2002). To the great chagrin of the PCS, the chair of the Committee cited these accusations, called the PCS out for its incompetence, referred to the scholars as his reliable source of information, and demanded that the

PCS improve its performance (Parliament Education Committee 2002). At this point, however, data collection was still not institutionalized into the MOE's practices.

Likely in response to these accusations, the PCS began actively collecting data. As a first step, it created a violent incidents report program. This program was voluntary, and principals could independently analyze their schools' results without reporting them to the MOE. In developing this program, the PCS simultaneously claimed its place in the policy domain while maintaining its pedagogical position on school autonomy. However, because the program was voluntary, the Committee's chair attacked the PCS for its continued failure to establish systematic data collection and for allowing school principals to "cover up" violence (for discussion of this data collection activity, see Parliament Education Committee 2000). The chair's attack suggests that as long as the PCS held on to its pedagogical stance on principals' autonomy and did not establish mandatory national data collection policies, it could not gain the legitimacy it was trying to achieve as the authority on school violence policies. The PCS's attempts to bolster its achievements in front of the committee were constantly struck down by the Committee's chair.

The PCS's practices eventually changed in 2002, when it administered the Violence, Discipline and Behavior-Monitoring questionnaire (or Climate Survey) in all Israeli public elementary schools. This was done in cooperation with National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education, which, as other scholars observed, was directly influenced by global accountability trends. This move was another claim for legitimacy by the PCS, this time by taking full control of data collection and analysis. The PCS gave up its pedagogical approach advocating principals' autonomy and adopted its challengers' demands into policy. Until 2006, the PCS and the scholar conducting the national Violence in the Israeli Education System study operated in conjunction to gather data in schools. However, the scholar claims that after the last wave of his survey in 2006, he was denied further access to schools to conduct his survey. He claims, however, that his survey deeply influenced the current Climate Survey (Benbenishty 2010). In contrast with PCS's previous policies, the Climate Survey was mandatory, and the PCS first analyzed the results and then informed principals of the outcomes.

The Climate Survey marks a fundamental change in school violence policies and the PCS's position. It turned school violence into an issue Israeli public schools had to account for on a regular basis. This marked a substantial shift from the complete lack of data when the PCS was first mandated to manage the issue of school violence. This was also a substantial shift from the PCS policy of supporting principals' autonomy and discretion and its objection to broad monitoring. The PCS now explicitly put school violence front and center in the education system and institutionalized practices of mandatory data collection. In addition, this policy action turned the PCS from a nominally important actor in the school violence domain to the main source of data and information on school violence rates and trends. This position was symbolically and practically different from its inadequate performance in front of the Parliament Education Committee in 1989.

Eventually, regular attacks on its performance and the undermining of its legitimacy as the authority on school violence led the PCS toward a proactive approach to data collection. Initially, studying school violence on a national scale stemmed from policy activity in the United States and Europe. The carriers of these practices were familiar and respected scholars who, for a while, became the most important figures in the school violence policy domain. The PCS's activity to establish its place vis-à-vis the scholars who undermined its legitimacy precipitated the institutionalization of systematic data collection on school violence. The PCS's struggle for legitimacy as the actual, and not only nominal, authority on school violence influenced its efforts to implement a nationwide, yearly assessment of school violence trends and thus shaped the landscape of school violence policies in Israel.

Second shift: struggles over pedagogy.

Legitimacy struggles shaped not only data collection practices and the place of school violence in educational policy but also the content of this policy. Data indicate that from the beginning of its tenure in 1987 until 2008, the PCS held firmly to the school climate approach and pushed for policies encouraging prevention instead of punishment. Discussing the origin of this approach, the former head of the PCS described "the growth in the popularity of the positive psychology approach" in international professional circles as

a major source for the PCS's ideas on school violence and its motivation to promote prevention, emotional prosperity, and well-being as the best treatment course for violence (personal communication, January 2012). Although they were fighting over data collection, the scholar who conducted the Violence in the Israeli Education System survey also promoted the school climate approach, although he was less active in shaping actual policies and mostly pronounced his opinion in professional publications.

The centrality of the school climate approach was most noticeable in two important policy events. First, it was introduced in the Vilnai Committee final report, in which the PCS took a central role. In its recommendations, the PCS elaborated on programs and goals aimed at enabling nonviolent conflict resolution and avoiding any use of punishment (State of Israel 1999). Second, the school climate approach was pronounced in directives on school violence written by the PCS and published in 2001. These directives were the first elaborated set of guidelines for schools on how to treat violent incidents and also the PCS's first substantial claim for legitimacy as the pedagogical authority of school violence policies. These directives defined very strict circumstances under which suspension from school was allowed. As a rule, the PCS directives strongly recommended avoiding any type of suspension, or other extremely punitive solution, regardless of the incident (Ministry of Education 2001).

However, the PCS's anti-punitive school directives soon backfired and led to much resentment toward the PCS among members of the parliament, principals, and teachers. The PCS's legitimacy to write school directives was challenged because their policy was perceived as promoting lack of authority in schools. In several heated discussions in 2003 and 2004, principals and teacher union representatives publicly attacked the PCS for its inability to provide needed safety nets for educational staff and suggested it was time for clearer restrictions:

We are in an extremely difficult situation, which demands an intensive care for the issue of discipline, and especially violence. . . . When we put the child in the center, and that was the slogan, we get a child who is a tyrant. . . . it's about time to move from tolerance to saying no, it's time to set clear rules of what is allowed

and not allowed to do. (Parliament Education Committee 2004:13)

Furthermore, the Committee chair stated that the PCS was apparently not doing the work it was assigned to do.

Trying to defend themselves in the Committee, members of the PCS claimed on several occasions that they resented the constant attacks as they were doing their job well (e.g., Parliament Education Committee 2004:20). However, tension was growing within the MOE. In my interviews with them, both the former head of the PCS and the head of the Students' Rights Hotline described the MOE in those years as a battlefield between the PCS and its allies who believed in the school climate approach and opponents who wanted to try the new zero tolerance pedagogy (personal communication, 2010).

The zero tolerance approach had several carriers in the Israeli context. During the same years the debate over the directives was heating up, a parallel discussion was taking place in Parliament about the Student Bill of Rights, a law that established what is allowed and forbidden in disciplinary actions in schools. The Student Bill of Rights was under attack for the same reasons as the PCS's climate approach: Many believed it deterred teachers and principals from executing their authority. In a speech in front of Parliament in 2004, a Parliament member who was previously a teacher and school principal suggested that the zero tolerance approach, which was growing in popularity around the world, was the solution for the perceived "authority crisis":

I read laws from different countries, and I translated laws that are called "zero tolerance for violence." . . . I did not invent anything new; I translated laws from other enlightened countries in Europe and from the United States. I saw they have laws that accord teachers with authority . . . in Scotland, England, Carolina, and Maryland. (Israeli Parliament 2004)

At the same time, an academic scholar began to aggressively promote the relationship between students' behavior and school achievement, and he suggested schools in Israel were not safe for their students because they were not authoritative enough. He explicitly opposed the school climate approach and presented Israeli schools as chaotic.

In newspaper articles, online blogs, television appearances, and performances in front of parents across the country, he advocated the authoritative approach, zero tolerance, and standardization of behaviors as best practices in dealing with issues of discipline and violence.

Both the school climate and the zero tolerance approach had support from publicly known experts who advocated their opinions through various venues. However, analysis of the archival data suggests that as long as the PCS did not take action to change the MOE policy, no changes took place and the disputed regulations remained in effect. Despite the strong opposition, the PCS held their ground for several years, insisting on the value of the school climate approach and brushing off the allegations.

In 2008, however, things deteriorated for the PCS. The State Comptroller published a report on the MOE's performance in addressing school violence, and the PCS was directly attacked:

The PCS's theoretical approach [to school violence] is that the key for reducing school violence is in school climate. In the years 1997-2006 the Ministry did not look at any alternatives to this approach . . . the Ministry did not establish mechanisms for following, regulating, and drawing conclusions outside of the PCS to assess the PCS's premises, objectives or intervention plans. (State Comptroller of Israel 2008:694)

In addition, results of the third Violence in the Israeli Education System study showed the grim reality of the relationship between educational staff and the PCS. The study found that two-thirds of Israel's teachers and principals believed the policy forbidding any type of suspension hurt their ability to deal with violence, there was a slight increase in principals' and teachers' hostility toward the MOE, and there was a decrease in their willingness to consult those responsible for school violence policies in the Ministry (Psychological-Counseling Services, Ministry of Education 2008).

These findings shed light on the role of teachers and principals in the school violence policy process. In the 2000s, teachers' unions tended to be very active and loud in the Parliament Education Committee meetings on school violence. Principals usually attended these meetings but were not as active as members of the teachers' unions.

However, although very active in the meetings, teachers' unions did not write policies. Their main role in the policy process was as challengers of both the school climate approach and PCS's position as the authority on school violence.

Eventually, when questioning of its position became widespread, the PCS started to respond. First, toward the end of the first decade of the 2000s, the PCS replaced leadership figures, and the former head who supported the school climate approach left her office. Second, in 2008, the new head initiated a process of writing new directives to replace the disputed ones from 2001. Opening the discussions, she cited the comptroller report and the findings on teachers' trust as reasons for these workshops (Psychological-Counseling Services, Ministry of Education 2008). The writing process included teachers, principals, and municipal workers.

The new directives, published in 2009, were long and detailed how to respond to different behaviors at school according to age, severity, and circumstances. In addition, the new directives reinstated suspension, which was almost completely banned in the previous directives, and made suspension mandatory under certain circumstances. According to these directives, punishment was no longer an issue for principals' discretion. The guidelines institutionalized standardization of school behavior, punishment, and the zero tolerance approach into official MOE school violence policies.

Growing criticism provoked PCS to adopt a new approach and turn its opponents' complaints into policy. The PCS's struggle against politicians' accusations and declining trust from teachers and principals led to the proactive institutionalization of the zero tolerance approach into policy, which included standardization of school behavior that fundamentally changed the reality of school violence policies. At the end of the day, the PCS was the engine behind the introduction of these policies into the Israeli education system. The PCS established new policies to contest accusations of its illegitimacy and retain its position as a growing and central unit in the MOE. Currently, the school violence policy domain is not experiencing any visible conflicts or attacks. I read this absence as a testament to the PCS's current position as the authority on school violence, which was achieved as a result of transforming school violence policies in accordance with others' demands.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to broaden our understanding of the processes of educational policy formation. Exploring changes in school violence policies in Israel, I showed that school violence became a salient issue when it became important on the global agenda and because a unit within the MOE needed to justify its direct responsibility over educational policy by making its authority legitimate. I also demonstrated that policy ideas and practices diffused into the Israeli context through authoritative figures, mainly academic scholars, but these ideas did not become policy until a policy actor used them as tools in a legitimacy struggle to gain and maintain its position. Policy changes occurred when policymakers' legitimacy in the policy field was questioned. When their legitimacy was undermined, policymakers were willing to incorporate others' practices and frameworks to maintain their position. These incorporations played a key role in motivating how Israeli school violence policies unfolded. Legitimacy thus matters for policy because it drives policymakers to take seriously policy issues that were previously ignored and to prefer and institutionalize some policy ideas and practices over others.

The events described in this article demonstrate that diffused ideas are sources for local policy and they are meaningful in the policy domain when they are carried by authoritative figures. My analysis suggests, however, that diffusion and the authority diffusion carriers have cannot alone account for the institutionalization of policy ideas and practices into actual regulations. For example, the climate approach was supported by the same professors who instituted studies on school violence in Israel. Yet zero tolerance became official policy because what motivated the institutionalization of policies was not their source but the PCS's actions to gain legitimacy. Authority in this case was not a cause for institutionalization of policy ideas but rather, the outcome policymakers aspired to by institutionalizing one policy and not the other.

My analysis suggests several contributions to the current literature. First, I account for the role of diffusion in educational policy formation by showing how global policy trends are institutionalized at the local level by policymakers' struggles over legitimacy and authority. Previous literature on education policy formation gives much

attention to processes of policy diffusion. It is well established that national and local policies are shaped by the diffusion of policy ideas and practices. I accept that diffusion is important but suggest it is not the complete answer to how policy happens. As Kupchik and colleagues (2014) observed, the fact that school violence and punishment became a central policy issue in several countries around the same time does not mean the treatment of these issues or the translation of policy frameworks into laws and regulations was similar across different settings. My analysis deepens our understanding of how these ideas and practices become actual policies in a given context. Future studies should compare the institutionalization of policies across countries, looking into what shapes the differences in school violence policies across contexts, investigating whether legitimacy struggles play an important role in other places, and adjudicating between global and local mechanisms.

Second, I contribute to our understanding of educational policy by suggesting a mechanism that shapes policy formation. Generally speaking, sociological analyses of educational phenomena tend to focus more on broad structural ideas and processes and less on the day-to-day dynamics that shape the reality of educational systems (see Hallett 2010). However, as Renzulli and Roscigno (2005) and Johnston (2014) show, educational reality is made up of interactions in national ministries, municipal settings, and schools. I capitalize on institutional and organizational literature discussing the role of actors, their positions, and their struggles in shaping ideas and political outcomes (see Abbott 1988; Amenta 2006; Fligstein 2001) to suggest that policymakers' struggles over who has the legitimacy to shape policy and to become the unquestioned authority in a policy domain shape which policy ideas and practices become actual regulation.

One may ask how this analysis contributes to our understanding of daily realities in schools. Most work on educational policy tends to neglect some link in the chain from policy formation to policy implementation. For example, Arum (2005) focuses on the relationship between courts and school atmosphere and gives less attention to policymakers. Ramey (2015) looks at how execution of policies is related to the socioeconomic structure of inequality, but he empirically ignores the role of bureaucrat and educational agents in these connections. Studies such as Johnston's

(2014) and the current one focus on the state or country level, but they do not provide the link between policy developments and changing realities in schools. Future studies should continue analysis of mechanisms to enable further understanding of the junctions where education policy is shaped. Furthermore, future studies should investigate how these policies translate into actual consequences in schools, the work of educational staff, the experiences of students, and school outcomes (see also Hironaka 2014). Education policy studies should link ideas, bureaucratic and governmental processes, and experiences in school to understand how these processes work in conjunction.

Third, I contribute to literature on school criminalization, which identifies the rise of school violence and punishment policies as taking center stage in education policy. This literature underscores broader structural and cultural conditions—such as the decline of the welfare state, industrialism, and the rise of neoliberalism—that motivate a turn toward a focus on violence and punishment (e.g., Hirschfield 2008; Simon 2007). Recently, Ramey (2015) pointed to the relationship between disciplinary approach and categories such as race and ethnicity, linking school violence and punishment policies with the structural forces underlying the current reality in the United States. This study contributes a previously missing micro-institutional analysis of the development of these policies. This allows a better understanding of actual discussions and debates that lead to educational policy changes rather than the ideological or structural forces underlying them, which, while important, are hard to detect in action (see Campbell 2002). Future studies on school violence policies should keep in mind that alongside structural components, policymakers and social actors play a crucial role in shaping educational policies and systems.

My analysis of the formation of school violence policies is another step forward in exploring how educational policy is shaped and understanding the dynamics behind our educational systems. This study does not suggest that Israeli policymakers are not genuinely concerned with school violence or that they promote it as part of some conspiracy to gain power. School violence worries many policymakers, and I hope my study can be of interest to them by suggesting the need to retrace and rethink perceptions surrounding the issue and by creating discussion among policymakers on the ways issues become salient and change.

RESEARCH ETHICS STATEMENT

My research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board. All human subjects were made fully aware of my research interests and aims and gave informed consent for participation. As the interviewees in this study are (or were) public officials or figures, it is not in my ability to protect their confidentiality. However, I do not disclose or discuss any personal information beyond their public position.

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NOTES

1. In this article, I use the concept *policy domain* as defined by Burstein (1991:1) to note “components of the political system organized around substantive issues.”
2. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this article’s contribution of bridging large-scale diffusion studies and micro-institutional analysis.
3. I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting co-optation of opponents’ demands as a way to conceptualize the process.
4. Two common questions come up in response to the mechanisms suggested in this article. What is the role of school shootings and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in shaping school violence policies? Unlike in the United States, Israel has never experienced a mass school shooting, and gun violence is not a prevalent problem in schools (Psychological-Counseling Services, Ministry of Education 2001). Moreover, policymakers never referred to school shootings in the United States as a motivation for changing school violence policies. Second, I find that policymakers do not perceive the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as generating school violence. “Terror” is sporadically mentioned by some speakers in the Parliamentary Education Committee as a reason for students’ tendencies toward violence, but it is not one of the main frames used to discuss school violence.
5. A full list of protocols and directives by name is available from the author on request.

6. I also include Parliament Education Committee meetings from 1979 to 1980 as references for how school violence was discussed previously. These years were not part of the scope of the study, so these meetings are only cited in the body of the article but not included in the description of the archival data.
7. Overall, it seems as though the parliament has very little impact on educational policy in Israel. Most of the discussions on school violence in the parliament end with a generative call for the Parliament Educational Committee to discuss the issue. Out of the eight legislative attempts, only one amendment became law. Most of the regulation of school violence is done through the Ministry of Education's (MOE) monthly directives.
8. The Vilnai Committee was a Public Investigation Committee aimed at studying children and violence in and out of schools. The committee's goal was to propose policies and regulations for the MOE to adopt in its treatment of school violence (State of Israel 1999).
9. This is not a full list of actors involved in discussions on school violence policy but a list of those who were important for the process and influenced policy discussions and decisions. A full list of actors involved in all discussions can be found in Table 2 in the coding scheme.
10. There is no available documentation in the MOE on who decided in 1987 to make school violence the Psychological-Counseling Services's responsibility or why.

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