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Introducing a New Dataset
● ● ● *The Israeli Policy Agendas Project*

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ABSTRACT: This article introduces a new dataset to study Israeli politics. Taking an agenda-setting approach, the dataset includes longitudinal series of political outputs—legislative, executive, judicial, and public opinion—as a measure of policy attention in Israel from 1981 to 2019. Each item in each series is hand-coded using the coding scheme of the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), providing a unified longitudinal overview of the Israeli political agenda. The dataset enables scholars interested in Israeli policy and politics, as well researchers from communication, economy, and law to study agenda dynamics within specific venues, between venues over time, and across countries. It also enables comparative studies that situate Israel among other countries and provides empirical evidence to assess whether, in what, and to what extent Israel is exceptional.

KEYWORDS: agenda setting, policy, content analysis, legislature, executive, judiciary, public opinion

Elmer E. Schattschneider famously claimed that the struggle over what to fight about is the most fundamental political struggle (1960). The Israeli policy agenda project focuses on assessing this struggle in Israel. In doing so, the project answers questions about the issues the Israeli political system fights for, how they change over time, and differences in issue attention of and between political institutions and actors within them. In other words, what is the policy agenda in Israel?

Theoretically, the project draws on the political agenda-setting approach. According to this approach, political attention is limited. Therefore,

studying the allocation of attention to different issues in different venues and over time can contribute to our understanding of politics and policy. Methodologically, the project uses a universal, mutually exclusive coding scheme in which each observation is coded based on its policy topic. This coding theme provides a reliable and valid measurement system of trends in issue attention over time.

The project was established in 2018 as part of the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), an international collaboration of researchers from around the world who collect and code information on government activities and the agenda of various political actors over time. The Israeli project (CAP-IL) examines the executive, legislative, judiciary, and public agenda from 1981 and until 2019. For each political institution, the project collects several series that include all available observations (e.g., bills, cabinet decisions, court decisions) and codes them for policy content using the universal coding scheme. The commitment to this universal coding scheme allows scholars using CAP-IL data to identify trends in the policy agenda over time, between fields and venues, and in comparison to other countries.

In this article, we present the CAP-IL project, its theoretical and methodological basis, the universal codebook and the adjustments we made in it for the Israeli polity, and review several data series we collected and coded.[1] We propose that the detailed data of CAP-IL will allow scholars of Israeli politics to analyze various policy dynamics over time, across, and between fields. By doing so, scholars using these data will be able to explore novel questions and contribute to our understanding of old ones. Applying the policy agendas approach to Israel integrates Israel as part of the CAP project. It also enables scholars of Israeli policy and politics to test the generalizability of their findings and examine the value of the Israeli case to the study of comparative politics and public policy. Moreover, scholars interested in a comparative assessment can add CAP-IL to the growing number of country observations in the CAP community. This broadens the published scholarly work on Israel and enhances knowledge about Israel and its politics in a comparative perspective.

Comparative Agendas Project (CAP): Objectives and Methodology

A policy agenda is the list of issues to which political actors devote their attention. Political elites struggle to affect the agenda because the issues placed on the agenda also define the locus of the political conflict and its scope. Therefore, to understand political outcomes, we should first examine which issues were placed on the agenda by whom and why, and which

were not (Bachrach and Baratz 1962; Cobb and Elder 1971; Schattschneider 1960).

The policy agenda-setting approach sees politics as a struggle over the policy agenda. It asks which issues are placed on the agenda, by whom, where, when, and what the underlining mechanisms are for affecting the agenda. Studying policy agenda is, therefore, the starting point for understanding the dynamics of political systems.

The key point in policy agenda-setting research is that political attention is limited and consequential. It is limited because although problems deserving government attention are almost infinite, political actors cannot attend to all problems due to cognitive and institutional constraints. It is consequential because selecting issues that deserve political attention determines all other steps in the political process (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). When the public or interest groups do not pay attention to an issue, they do not pressure the government to address this issue. The government, in turn, does not look for plausible solutions for the issue. Hence political attention is the precondition for political action, and agenda-setting is about how political institutions and the actors in these institutions turn societal conditions into political problems (Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014).

Research in this approach focuses on answering why political actors and institutions turn their attention to a specific issue and how this attention affects other political actors and institutions. The explanations given to answer this question focus on the institutional structures, cognitive and ideational limitations, actors' preferences, and the development of real-world problems (Baumgartner, Breunig et al. 2019; Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014).

The now-rich scholarly work on policy agenda-setting encompasses a wide range of political actors and institutions: Executive (Baekgaard et al. 2018; Workman 2015), legislative (Palau et al. 2015; Wilkerson et al. 2015), political parties (Bevan and Greene 2018; Green-Pedersen 2007; Walgrave, Varone et al. 2006), interest groups and lobbying groups (Baumgartner, Berry et al. 2009; Binderkrantz and Rasmussen 2015), the systematic media (Boydstun 2013; Walgrave, Soroka et al. 2008), and high courts (Robinson 2013). Several scholars study the effect or congruence of agendas across political actors and institutions. For instance, relations between the media and the parliamentary agendas (Vliegenthart, Walgrave, Baumgartner et al. 2016), party and executive agendas (Borghetto et al. 2017; Green-Pedersen et al. 2018), interest groups and the legislative agendas (Fischer et al. 2019), and public opinion and its relations with other policy agendas (Cavari 2017; Green and Jennings, 2017; Vliegenthart, Walgrave, Wouters et al. 2016). Taken together, studying policy agenda-setting provides an opportunity to understand better the dynamics within a specific political

venue, between groups and actors, and the interdependence between political venues and actors. By doing so, this approach encourages interdisciplinary research that captures politics, communication, the public, and interest groups.

Policy Agenda Setting as a Methodological Approach

To study policy agenda-setting, Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones (1991) developed a measurement and retrieval system that provides systematic and reliable measures for assessing changes in policymaking activities of various political actors from one time period to another (Jones 2015). Originally developed to study the US political system, this system has expanded in the last fifteen years to include twenty-four polities (twenty countries, two US states, and the EU) (Baumgartner, Breunig et al. 2019). The collected data by these projects are as comprehensive as possible, including a longitudinal collection of all available observations. Today, the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) maintains more than forty longitudinal data series in multiple countries, with thousands of observations in each.

The coding of the data is based on a unified policy codebook. Each observation (bill, hearing, law) is classified using the coding scheme based on its policy content; the substantive focus of the policy used that is proposed or discussed. The scheme utilizes twenty-one major public policy topics such as health, education, environment, energy, and labor (see Table 1 for the complete list of major topics). Each topic is divided into subtopics such as medical liability, elementary education, recycling, natural gas, and vocational training, resulting in 225 subtopic codes.[2] Each observation must be assigned to one (and only one) category so that the system is mutually exclusive and exhaustive. In addition, the system is backward compatible so when new issues enter the agenda and become visible, the entire coding system is adjusted to make it consistent across time. This enables comparison of policy activity within and between countries and fields, and across periods (John 2006; Jones 2015).

Because the project is interested in attention to issues and not ideological preferences, the CAP codebook is based on policy issues and not left-right ideological positions. In addition, the coding does not include directionality (for example, whether a bill on minimum wage increases or decreases the minimum wage) or information about the policy tools used. Lastly, the coding is based on the policy issue and not the target. For instance, a policy that provides tax incentives as a means to solve an economic crisis is still coded under taxes.

In order to facilitate comparative research, all country projects follow the CAP master codebook but make some adjustments in the definition

TABLE 1. Major Topics in CAP Codebook

Major Topic	Title
1	Domestic Macroeconomic Issues
2	Civil Rights, Minority Issues, and Civil Liberties
3	Health
4	Agriculture
5	Labor and Employment
6	Education
7	Environment
8	Energy
9	Immigration and Refugee Issues
10	Transportation
12	Law, Crime, and Family Issues
13	Social Welfare
14	Community Development and Housing Issues
15	Banking, Finance, and Domestic Commerce
16	Defense
17	Space, Science, Technology, and Communications
18	Foreign Trade
19	International Affairs and Foreign Aid
20	Government Operations
21	Public Lands, Water Management, and Territorial Issues
23	Cultural Policy Issues

or number of subtopics to better reflect their unique policy domains. For instance, in Belgium and France, additional subtopics were added to culture; and in the EU, additional subtopics were added to agriculture and to government affairs. Nonetheless, the number of subtopics added is relatively small because of a considerable effort by all projects to maintain the comparative nature of the project. Both the consistency and adaptability enhance the validity of the codebook and the project. CAP is a rare research project in public policy where data are collected and coded using the same method outside a specific country (John 2006).

In addition to the policy topic, each data series includes contextual information. For example, legislative bills series include the sponsor(s) of the bills, the majority party at the time of submission, the executive in power, and the type of legislation. Media series include the item's location and whether the article includes a picture (or footage). Data on manifestos include the party's seat share.

The data are easily accessible and publicly available. They are retrieved from archival, government, and media sources, and each observation includes the specific reference enabling the researcher to refer to the raw material. Because CAP collects all known observations in each series (rather than taking a sample), it is the best estimate for issues on the formal agenda of each participating entity during a specific period.

The data can be used to study policy dynamics. How specific policies evolve over time and in which venues. They also enable studying the size and the diversity of the policy agenda over time and between venues. For instance, Will Jennings and colleagues (2011) found that the attention to the core functions of government (defense, foreign affairs, economy, and law and order) constrains the diversity of the government agenda. In addition, the data provide an opportunity to study the agenda congruence between different institutional venues, diffusion of issues between venues and countries or venue shopping of political actors. Furthermore, the richness of the data in terms of time, country, venue, and stages in the policy process provides a unique opportunity to study specific policy areas such as health, education, and energy. Finally, CAP data can be used for qualitative case-oriented research both as a departure point for case selection and as a source for the materials needed for case description and analysis (Shpaizman 2019).

In addition to country-specific works, CAP promotes comparison, generalizability, and replicability between countries, fields, venues, and across time. Since its establishment, scholars using the CAP approach have published numerous comparative works to examine how findings from one country can be generalized to other countries (Baumgartner, Breunig et al. 2019; Green-Pedersen and Walgrave 2014). For instance, existing work using multiple countries reveals: the executive's agenda is constrained by the government's core functions (Jennings et al. 2011), changes in the executive's agenda result mostly from changes in reality (Mortensen et al. 2011), budgets in authoritative countries follow a different dynamic than those of democratic countries (Baumgartner, Carammia et al. 2017), and the media has a similar effect on the parliamentary agenda in many counties (Vliegenthart, Walgrave, Baumgartner et al. 2016).

The Israeli Policy Agendas Project

The CAP community is divided into a series of country projects, each project coding various series using a unified codebook with some adjustments to account for unique policy domains of each country. Projects also vary in their coding mechanisms—from hand-coding all observations to

relying on some level of machine-coding tools. In establishing the Israeli project, we had to adjust the codebook to the Israeli polity, decide on the time-frame of analysis, choose which series to collect and code, and adopt a coding mechanism. We detail below our decisions and the considerations in making them.

The Israeli Policy Agenda Codebook

The most crucial part in establishing a new country project is to create a codebook that is both comparable and unique. The Israeli codebook began as an endeavor of David Levi-Faur, who based it on a translation of the UK codebook with some adjustments to the Israeli polity (Kosti et al. 2019). When the Israeli Agendas Project formally began in 2018, we adjusted this translated codebook to the master codebook of the CAP community and considered if and where the Israeli project differs from the master codebook. Our goal was to maximize consistency with the master codebook yet allow sufficient adjustments to the Israeli policy environment.

In adapting the general comparative codebook to Israel, we had lengthy internal deliberations, numerous pilot coding of various political actors, and a fruitful exchange with CAP scholars in other countries (e.g., United States, United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands), along with specific policy experts in Israel, as well as with the current coordinator of the master codebook (see Bevan 2019).

At the outset, we faced two key dilemmas about handling two issues that stand at the heart of the Israeli political context: religion and state, and the Occupied Territories in the West Bank and Gaza (Shamir and Arian 1999). Despite the uniqueness of these issues, we decided not to add a major topic or a subtopic for these issues. In both instances, we found the issues to be broader than a single policy topic. But, given the importance of these issues, we added dichotomous codes to identify policies that relate to religion and state or the territories. In three other policy domains, we decided to break away from the general, master CAP codebook and add several subtopics to the Israeli codebook in three issue-areas:

1. Adding a subtopic of reserve forces under Defense (16) because, similar to the US project, we believe that policy issues that have to do with reserve forces substantially differ from those addressing soldiers serving their mandatory term.
2. We created two additional codes for two subtopics under Immigration (9) to distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants because immigration policy in Israel, as well as the discussion about it, are different for these two groups.

3. We added two codes for subtopics under Culture (23) to differentiate between two subtopics: Jewish identity because of the unique nature of Israel and its relations with the Jewish Diaspora, and Israeli identity because of the ongoing debate on Israeli identity in Israel since its establishment.

These changes resemble adaptations made in other countries, and as such, are easily cross-walked to the master codebook (Bevan 2019). Per CAP guidelines, in these issue areas, we code every item twice—using the Israeli codebook and, to ensure comparative work, using the general CAP codebook.

Israeli Policy Agenda Project Timeframe

We chose to collect data starting from 1981, after the elections to the 10th Knesset, to 2019, the end of the most recent full-term Knesset (2019). We chose 1981 because the study of policy attention dynamics is most meaningful in consolidated democracies with a pluralist polity. We followed the minimalist definition of a consolidated democracy: a democracy that has a free and fair election and that exercises peaceful transitions of power (Linz and Stepan 1996). By 1981, the ruling party since independence (Mapai/ Labor/Alignment) lost two elections, but democracy was maintained, and the ousted political power accepted the outcome peacefully (Rosenthal 2017). The year 2019 was selected because it marked the end of the most recent full-term Knesset (Knesset 19), which was followed by a series of frequent elections (two in 2019, one in 2020 and, as of May 2021, one in 2021) with no stable government. This timeframe provides nearly forty years of data spanning ten general elections (and one special election for the Prime Minister), establishing eleven Knessets and fifteen Cabinets. Due to data limitations and other considerations that are detailed below, several series have a shorter timeframe.

The Series in the Israeli Policy Agenda Project

In choosing the series to code and analyze, we took note of existing series in other countries and the relative relevance of these series to the Israeli political system and academic research. Our goal was to build a project that would be as comprehensive as possible so that it covers many types of agendas and venues and allows for longitudinal analysis. For comparative purposes, we also wanted to collect series that already exist in other country projects. We therefore decided to code series that reflect the policy agenda of the three branches of government and the Israeli

public. For the legislature, we chose to collect and code private-member bills because these bills provide essential information on the agenda of parties and individual members in parliament (Adler and Wilkerson 2012; Walgrave, Varone et al. 2006). For the executive, we collected and coded cabinet guidelines published once government is formed. This series corresponds to the "speech from the throne," which is commonly used to assess the declaratory executive agenda. In addition, to account for the executive agenda during the entire government cycle, we collected and coded the weekly cabinet decisions, budget objectives, and ministries' annual work plans because these represent the actual executive agenda. For the public agenda, we collected survey data asking the Most Important Problem (MIP) question (Green and Jennings 2017). Because all of Israel's governments are coalition governments, we also coded the coalition agreements (Timmermans 2006). Finally, to include the judiciary, we coded the decisions of the Israeli High Court of Justice on petitions against the prime minister, ministers, and deputy ministers. The Israeli High Court of Justice (HCJ) is an instance of Israel's Supreme Court, which serves as the first and last instance to review petitions against the government.

We coded all series for CAP policy as well as additional variables of interest. Table 2 describes the existing series, the number of observations, and some of the additional variables we coded in each series. In the next section, we provide more detail on each series and a summary of the data collected.

TABLE 2. Series Coded in the Israeli Policy Agendas Project

Data series	Time period	Number of observations	Additional information coded
Coalition agreements	1981–2020	5,034	Party, policy vs non-policy, specificity of the provision
Cabinet guidelines	1981–2020	1,808	
Cabinet decisions	1988–2019	15,050	Ministry, type of decision
Budget objectives	1981–2019	4,725	Ministry
Private members bills	1981–2019	34,524	Party, MK, status of the bill
Administrative Petitions (High Court of Justice)	1995–2017	2,805	Minister, junior minister, judge type of petitioner
"Most important problem" survey item	1981–2019	26,539	Individual demographics and political identifiers

1. Cabinet decisions prior to 1988 are not yet open to the public.
2. The data begin with the landmark case of *United Bank Hamizrahi Ltd v. Migdal, Cooperative Village* in 1995, in which the Supreme Court decided it can nullify primary laws if they contradict basic laws.

Data Collection and Coding

The CAP projects require coding of political outputs using the country-specific codebook. Our data are publicly available from various sources—either online or upon official request for data disclosure. Our first task was to collect the data and assess how comprehensive and conclusive they are. In collecting each series, we first maximized the additional information available from these sources—relevant dates, actors involved, and meta-data associated with each series. Given the unique nature of each series, we created series-specific guidelines for each. These guidelines provide a detailed explanation about the coding of each series for scholars using the data.

The series vary in the level of observation to match existing work in other CAP projects. We analyze several series at the item level (bills, decisions, Petitions to the High Court of Justice), other series at the quasi-sentence level (coalition agreements, cabinet guidelines), or sentence level (budget objectives). Finally, we rely on the Most Important Problem question in surveys to assess the public agenda and, therefore, analyze individual responses to each survey.

Based on the experience of other projects, and the added complexities in machine coding of Hebrew texts, we decided to rely on hand-coding of all series. For this task, we recruited students from our institutions. Each coder had to go through a training session to use the codebook and work with her respective series. We held weekly meetings with coders in each project to discuss coding questions and disagreements between coders.

According to the CAP method, each observation can be classified into one category, and the coder should try and find the most concrete code. In some cases, this was not straightforward. For instance, if a specific bill addresses tax exemptions for childcare services, the coder needs to decide whether should be coded as childcare policy or tax policy. The answer in this case is childcare because tax policy refers to general taxation issues and childcare is more concrete. Similarly, if a bill suggests adding more hours of training to teachers, the coder should decide whether the issue is vocational training or the school system (a topic that includes teachers). The answer here is the school system because vocation training is a more general category.

To test for intercoder reliability and allow continuous discussion of disagreements between coders, we assigned at least 10 percent of items in each series to multiple coders. Series were proofed after intercoder reliability passed the threshold of 90 percent agreement for major-topic and 85 percent agreement for minor-topic.

Description of CAP-IL Data

We detail below seven series of data we completed. For each series, we explain what the series is about, the data source and coding process, and additional data collected (and coded) for each observation. We then summarize each series using descriptive illustrations. In presenting the results we plot the most detailed illustration of the data to convey our dataset. But, in discussing the results we focus only on several takeaways rather than attending to the various issues the data reveal. We suggest that the data can be used in support of numerous studies in various disciplines and approaches.

Coalition Agreements

The dataset of coalition agreements collects the text of all coalition agreements between the coalition partners in Israel since the elections for the 10th Knesset (1981). Publishing coalition agreements in Israel is mandatory since a ruling by the Israeli High Court of Justice in 1990 that required all agreements to be deposited for public review.[3] Data from 1992, the first election following the 1990 decision, therefore, are complete and allow for longitudinal analysis. The full texts of the coalition agreements are freely available on the Knesset website.

Agreements were split into quasi-sentences and coded based on their major and minor policy topics. In addition, we coded information about the parties that signed each coalition agreement. This allows us to break down the coalition agreements by party interest. We also added information on the type of each provision, for instance, whether the suggested policy is specific or vague and whether it requires immediate action or not.

Figure 1 summarizes the issue agenda in coalition agreements from all coalition agreements following elections from 1992 forward. Attention is calculated as the percent of quasi-sentences referring to each major policy category from all quasi-sentences in all coalition agreements in each given year.

The figure demonstrates the increasing diversity of the issue agenda in coalition agreements—from eleven major topics in 1992 to twenty in 2020. In addition, the size and quantity of the issue categories demonstrate how real-world problems affect the agenda of the coalition partners after elections. For instance, we find an increase in the saliency of housing following the 2011 social protest (Government 33 forward), an increase in the attention to macro-economic issues following the 2000 economic crises (Government 29), and an increase in attention to welfare in 2006 after the 2003 economic reforms.

FIGURE 1. Issue Attention in Coalition Agreements
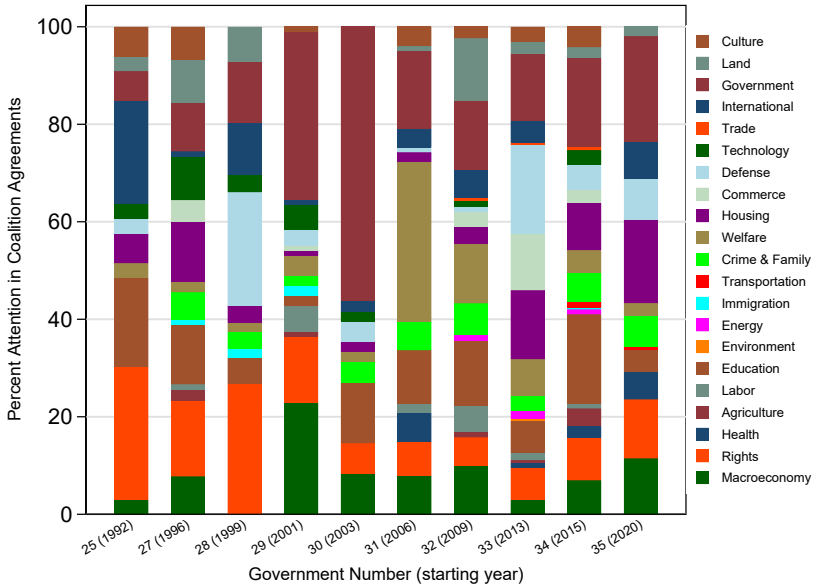
Note: Percent attention in coalition agreements calculated as the percent of quasi-sentences relating to each major topic from all quasi-sentences in all coalition agreements signed in a particular year.
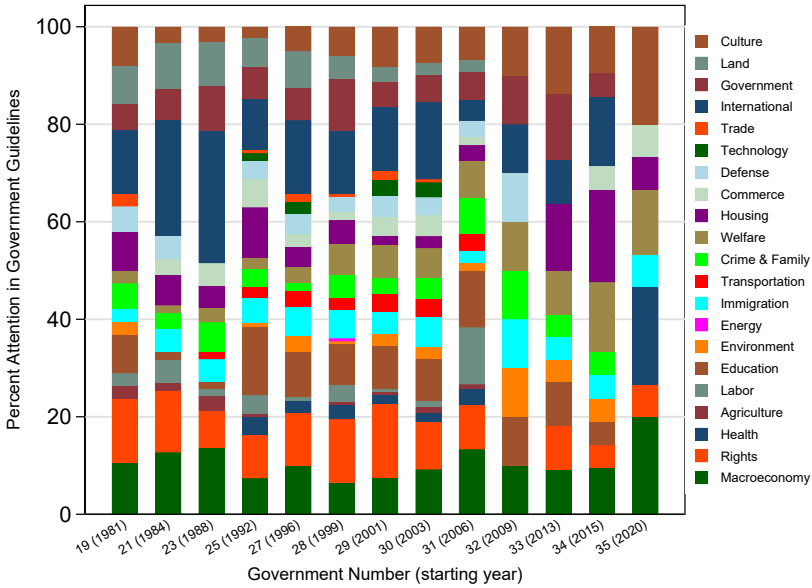
Government Guidelines

The dataset of government guidelines includes the text of all government guidelines in Israel since the 10th Knesset (1981). The government guidelines are presented to the Knesset when the government is formed. As such, they represent the executive agenda at the outset. The full text of government guidelines is freely available on the Knesset website. Guidelines are split into quasi-sentences and coded according to the CAP-IL codebook.

Figure 2 summarizes the attention to each major policy topic (out of the twenty-one major topics) in the government guidelines of each government following election from 1981 forward. Attention is calculated as the percent of quasi-sentences referring to each major policy category from all quasi-sentences in all government guidelines signed in each given year.

The figure reveals the variation in the issue agenda covered by the government guidelines. Comparative studies on the comparable Speech from the Throne in other countries find that a significant part of the attention is devoted to foreign affairs issues (Mortensen et al. 2011). Our data revealed that this was true until 2006 when attention to foreign affairs issues decreased, and attention to social economic issues (welfare, macroeconomy,

**FIGURE 2.** Issue Attention in Government Guidelines

Note: Percent attention in government guidelines calculated as the percent of quasi-sentences relating to each major topic from all quasi-sentences in all government guidelines signed in a particular year.

housing, commerce) increased. Consistent with conventional wisdom, we find increasing attention to cultural issues, which marks the current divide in Israeli politics.

Budget Objectives

The dataset of budget objectives collects the text of budget objectives of nineteen ministries specified in the annual/biannual budget from the 19th Government (1981) forward.[4] Each ministry lists its objectives separately. Budget objectives reflect the agenda of the minister and the ministry at a given period (Shpaizman 2021). Therefore, to analyze this agenda, it is useful to examine the minor policy topics addressed by each ministry. To illustrate the data, we present and discuss the agenda of two ministries: the Ministry of Communication and the Ministry of Education.

Figure 3a summarizes the agenda of the three most salient issues of the Ministry of Communication (defined by the number of objectives)—mail, telecommunication, and media. For each budget year, we calculated the percentage of objectives of the Ministry of Communication that relate to each of the minor topics mentioned.
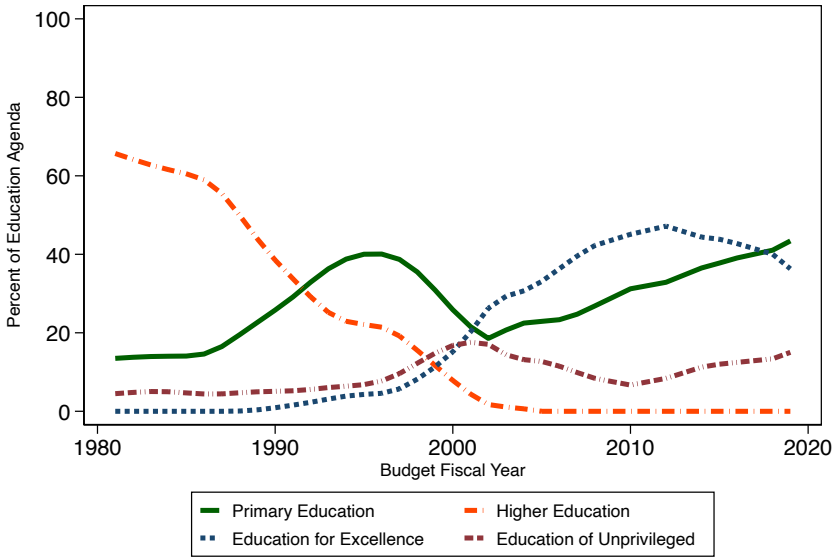
FIGURE 3A. Issue Attention in Budget Objectives of the Ministry of Communication
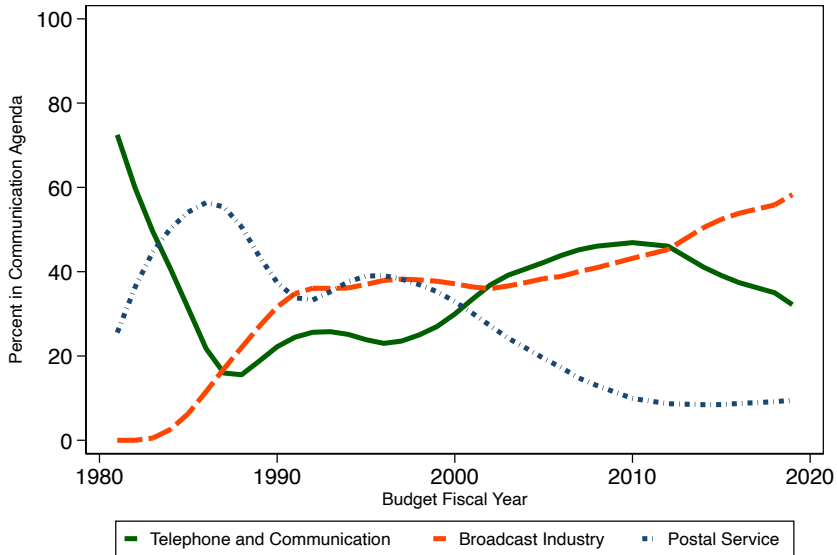
* Fiscal Years that include more than one calendar year are coded for the second year.

Note: Including the three most salient issue categories. Percent attention in budget objectives of the Ministry of Communication calculated as the percent of objectives relating to each minor topic from all objectives of the Ministry of Communication in a particular budget year. Lines represent a locally weighted mean with bandwidth of 0.4.

Over the years, attention to mail issues decreased until this issue disappeared from the ministry's agenda. The attention to telecommunication issues increased with the development of the internet and mobile communication. The attention to media issues increased as more players entered Israeli media (especially television). Finally, by 2019 media issues captured the entire agenda of the ministry. This can be explained by the fact that the minister was Benjamin Netanyahu, who has had interest in media regulations.

Figure 3b summarizes the agenda of the four most salient issues of the Ministry of Education (defined by the number of objectives)—primary education, higher education, education for excellence, and education of unprivileged. Until the mid-1990s, the issue of higher education occupied a significant part of the ministry's agenda. This also corresponds with the "college revolution" taking place in the 1990s. Since 2000 however, this issue is no longer on the ministry's agenda, which might demonstrate the independence of the Israeli higher education system. In addition, educational excellence became more prominent on the agenda from 2000. This corresponds with the growing importance of standardized international

FIGURE 3B. Issue Attention in Budget Objectives of the Ministry of Education

* Fiscal Years that include more than one calendar year are coded for the second year.

Note: Including the four most salient issue categories. Percent attention in budget objectives of the Ministry of Education calculated as the percent of objectives relating to each minor topic from all objectives of the Ministry of Education in a particular budget year. Lines represent a locally weighted mean with bandwidth of 0.4.

exams in the Israeli education discourse. Finally, we see that the prominent place of primary education is gradually replaced by a more specialized agenda addressing underprivileged children and excellence.

Cabinet Decisions

The dataset of cabinet decisions includes coding of the text of all cabinet decisions in Israel since the 22nd Government (1988). Cabinet decisions are the output of the weekly cabinet meetings. They range from formal decisions to approve travel for a certain minister to comprehensive programs intended to assist specific regions (e.g., the southmost region, Eylat) or populations (e.g., the largest minority group, Arabs). As such, they reflect the formal agenda of the cabinet and its evolution through government life. Note however, that this series does not include confidential decisions (mostly concerning defense issues). The full text of government decisions from 2002 are freely available from the Israeli government website. Earlier decisions were given to us by the Prime Minister's Office. Decisions prior to 1988 are not yet open to the public.

**FIGURE 4.** Issue Attention in Cabinet Decisions
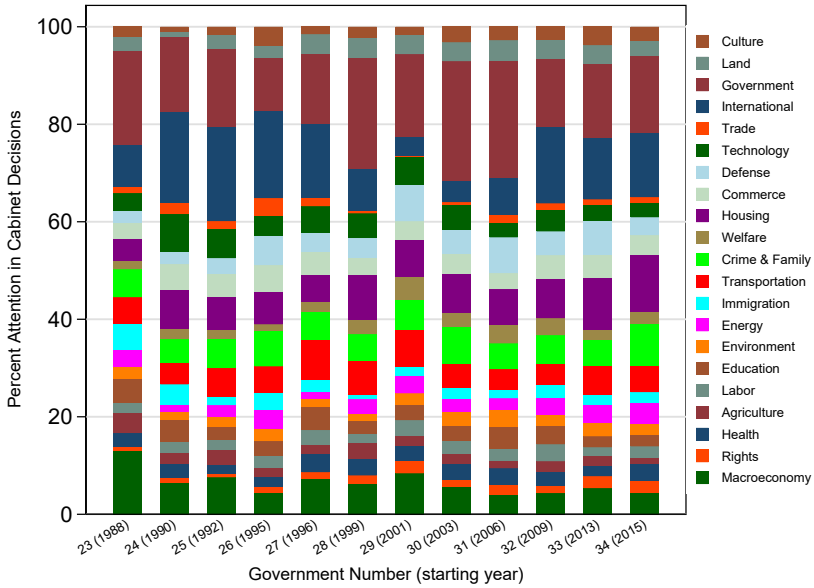
Note: Percent attention in cabinet decisions calculated as the percent of decisions relating to each major topic from all cabinet decisions of a particular cabinet.

Figure 4 summarizes the share of decisions referring to each major policy issue in each cabinet from the first full government we have data for (23) until the last full government (34). The figure reveals that cabinet decisions reflect real-world problems. For instance, the increase in the attention to immigration issues in the 23–24 Cabinets (1988–1992) during the large wave of immigrants coming from the Former Soviet Union (Shpaizman 2016) or increased attention to housing issues starting from Cabinet 32 following the 2011 social justice protests that heavily emphasized rising housing prices (Alon-Barkat and Gilad 2016).

Private Member Bills

Members of Israel's Knesset have been increasingly using the tool of private legislation in rates that surpass those of many other parliamentary democracies (Tuttnauer 2018). Because of their low enaction rates, these bills are usually considered vote-seeking and office-seeking tools used by individual members (Friedman and Friedberg 2021; Rahat and Sheafer 2007). Like in other country projects, the combined agenda of all bills provides an excellent overview of the legislative agenda of the Israeli parliament, the Knesset.

FIGURE 5. Issue Attention in Private Member Bills
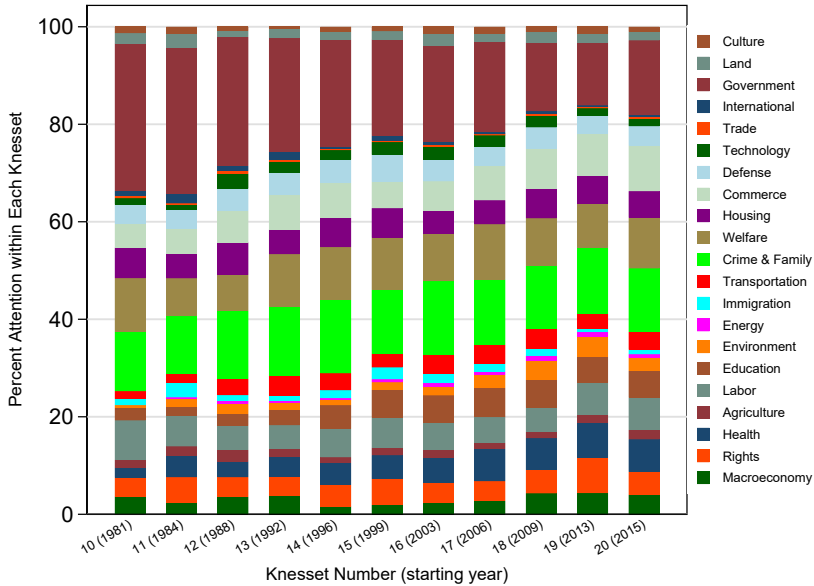
Note: Percent attention in member bills calculated as the percent of bills relating to each major topic from all bills submitted in a particular Knesset.

The Knesset bills dataset includes information on all private bills introduced in the Israeli parliament (Knesset) from the 10th Knesset (1981) to the 20th Knesset. Almost all data originates from querying the Knesset archive directly. All bills were coded into policy areas based on the title of each bill or the explanation attached to the bill. In rare cases where the explanation was not sufficient, coders examined the bill itself. The dataset includes additional information about the committee that each bill was referred to, the most current status of each bill, whether the Ministerial Committee on Legislation decided to support the bill, and the list of initiators of each bill. We also recorded the parties to which each initiator belonged to at the time of introduction.

Figure 5 summarizes the share (percent) of bills categorized to each of the twenty-one major categories in each Knesset (percentages are calculated for each Knesset separately).

Plotting the series, we can identify trends of attention. For example, the relative consistency in attention to civil rights compared to the rise of social related issues such as health and education. Most important, however, is how rich and diverse the agenda is. Members of the Israeli Knesset are attentive to various issues.

Israel's High Court of Justice

To account for the policy agenda of the judiciary, we collected and coded data on decisions of the High Court of Justice in Israel that deal with petitions seeking to receive certiorari from the Court regarding government decisions between 1995 to 2017. We used only the decisions that were not rejected by the judge on duty and the first panel of judges reviewing the case. Due to our interest in the court's policy attention, we included only decisions that were not discarded by the petitioners, did not become redundant due to government decisions, or were settled outside the Court. In comparison to the thousands of decisions the Israeli Supreme Court made in its capacity as HCJ (Weinshall and Epstein 2020), this dataset uses a relatively small number of decisions. However, its profiling of decisions coincides with other datasets and offers a set of decisions that receive significant attention and have a clear policy purpose.

Our data are based on an existing dataset of Israel's High Court of Justice decisions—the Rosenthal-Barzilai-Meydani (RBM) dataset (Rosenthal et al. 2021). The dataset begins in 1995 following the seminal *Bank Mizrahi* Supreme Court decision (*United Bank Hamizrahi LTD v. Migdal, Cooperative Village* 1995) that commonly marks the era of an active judiciary in Israel. This decision turned the court into an institutional veto player affecting all levels of the executive's policy design and implementation activities (Cohn 2019; Dotan 2014; Meydani 2014; Jacobsohn and Roznai 2020; Weill 2012). In terms of policy agendas, while the HCJ has been exposed to political controversies and pressures since the formation of the State of Israel (Meydani and Mizrahi 2010), the 1995 landmark decision has also been a point in which politicians have started fiercely debating the HCJ's powers and its involvement in core political issues (Hirschl 2009; Meydani and Mizrahi 2010). Because the HCJ rarely nullifies laws (Fuchs 2020), the friction between political elites in Israel and the judiciary mostly relates to the HCJ's decisions to block government decisions rather than laws (Dotan 2014). We therefore focus on the interaction HCJ-executive due to its centrality in Israeli governance and use the 1995 decision as a starting point.

Figure 6 shows the policy agenda of the judiciary as reflected by our dataset. This figure reveals three salient topics that take up most of the Court's agenda over the years: immigration (mainly concerning handling citizenship status of Palestinians), handling the government's operations, and issues relating to law and order. While these issues take quite a large share of the Court's agenda regarding actions of the cabinet (prime minister and ministers), they vary over time.

The trend reveals an institution that is willing to handle many core issues Israel's polity deals with and therefore could potentially contribute

FIGURE 6. Issue Attention in Administrative Petitions
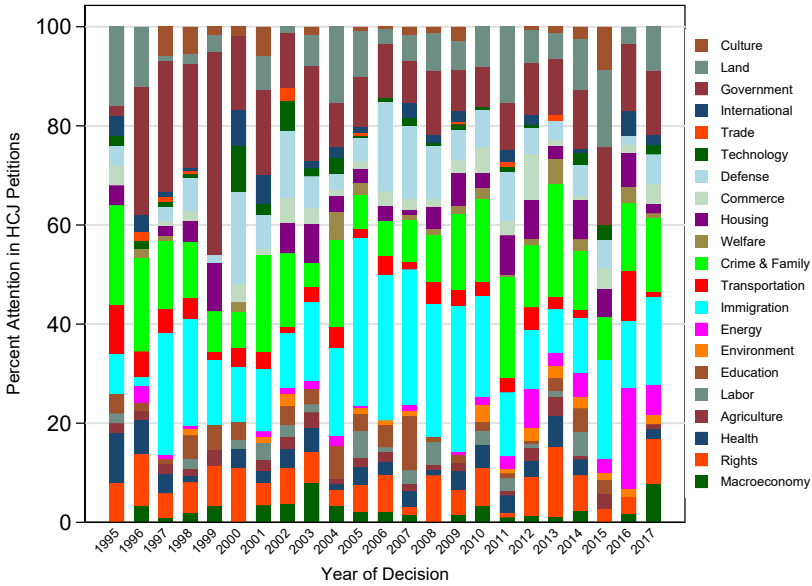
Note: Percent attention in HCJ petitions calculated as the percent of petitions relating to each major topic from all petitions in a particular year.

to the scholarly and public debate regarding the judicialization of politics and judicial activism in Israel (Cohn and Kremnitzer 2005; Dotan 2014; Dotan and Hofnung 2001; Hirschl 2009; Hofnung and Weinshall-Margel 2010). Specifically, the discussion about the judicialization of politics relates to the trend of judiciaries worldwide in handling the core functions of government (Hirschl 2008). Using CAP's scheme can show how the HCJ handles and relates to core functions of government in Israel.
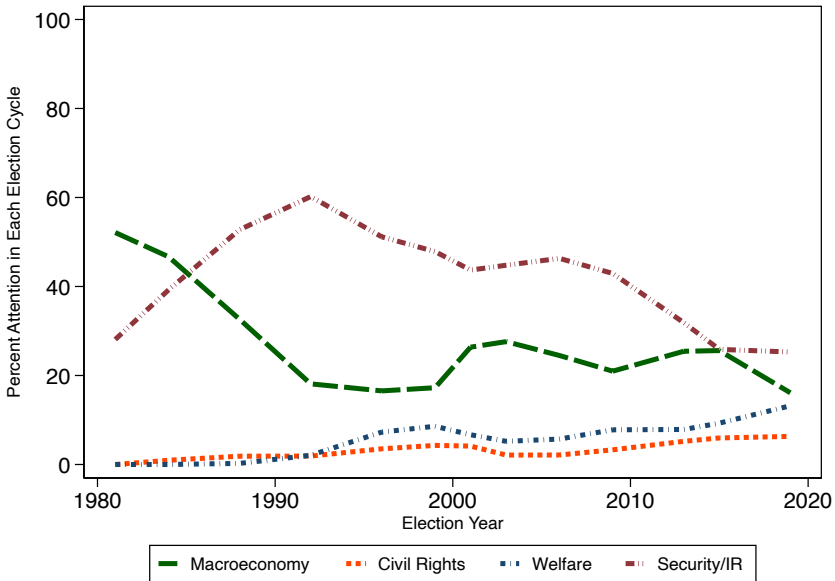
Public Opinion

To account for the public agenda—the policy priorities of the Israeli public—we used public opinion data from the Israel National Election Studies (INES). These studies are surveys of the Israeli population conducted before national elections for Knesset (and the prime minister) since 1981 (in a few cases, they were conducted also after the elections). Until 1992 the surveys were a random sample of the Jewish population in Israel. From 1996 forward, the surveys are representative of the entire Israeli population, including Arab citizens of Israel. Original data and documentation are freely available on the INES website.

We collected all survey data from INES that include a version of the MIP question—asking what the most important problem is that the government should take care of. Responses to the MIP question are coded into major categories of the Israeli policy agendas codebook (the lack of detail in responses does not allow coding for subtopics). In collecting the data, we also included available information about each respondent—mainly demographic and political variables asked in the pre- or post-election survey of each election cycle.

Figure 7 summarizes the attention (percent of respondents choosing a particular topic) to each topic in each election cycle from 1981 to 2019.[5] The series reveals an apparent change over time—a constant play between macroeconomy and defense and foreign policy focus, as well as a gradual increase in the number of topics Israelis are concerned about.[6] As in the other series, the relations between real-world problems and the agenda is evident. For instance, the public was more concerned about defense issues during the first and second Intifadas (1988, 2001) as well as during terror attacks (1996) and more concerned over macro-economic issues during economic crises (1977–1984, 2003).

**FIGURE 7.** Issue Attention in Public Opinion

Note: Percent attention in public opinion calculated as the percent of respondents choosing a particular major topic in the INES public opinion survey in each election cycle.

Religion and State and the Occupied Territories

The conventional wisdom regarding the Israeli political system is that religion and state and the occupied territories take up much of the policy agenda because of their importance and how polarizing these issues are. These are also two unique issues to Israel. The tension between religion and state is governed by a status quo agreement drafted as a political compromise in 1948 to gain support from religious parties to support Israel's governing institutions upon independence. The status of the occupied territories—the territories of Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza strip captured during the 1967 War—and their inhabitants (Palestinians and Israeli settlers in those territories) raise multiple questions within the Israeli legal and political system and in its international relationships.

As previously discussed, we account for these dominant issues in Israeli politics using two binary indicators in our coding—yes/no religion and state and yes/no territories. In Figure 8, we summarize the attention to these issues in the various venues. For each series, we calculated the percent of items that refer to religion and state and to territories among the total items included in the series.

FIGURE 8. Share of Attention to Religion and State and to Occupied Territories
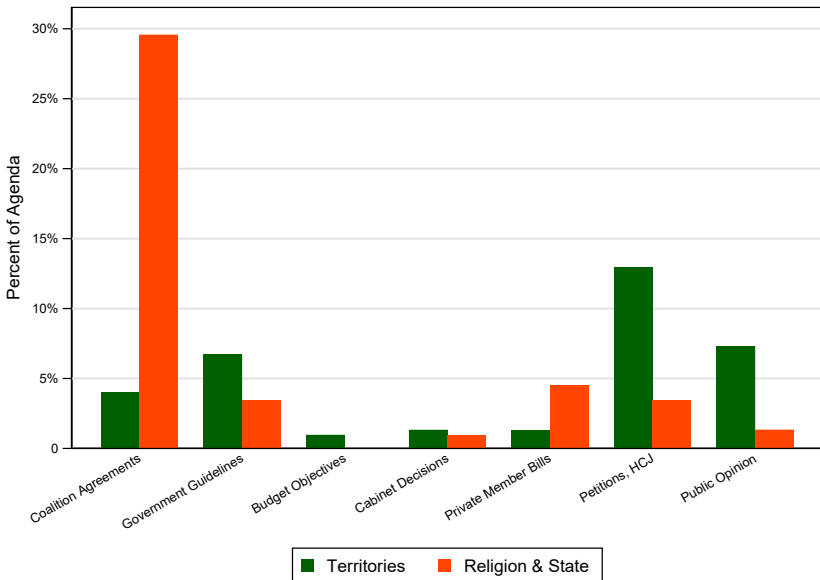
Note: Percent attention to territories and religion and state calculated as a percentage of items relating to the two topics of all items in each series.

Figure 8 shows a difference in the share of the agenda that the two controversial issues capture in each series. Religion and state issues capture a significant share in coalition agreements. This is an outcome of the political balance in Israel. Religious parties have been part of most governments in the last forty years. Because of the controversy over these issues and the importance of the status quo for these parties, coalition agreements often seek to settle the controversy and present the compromises before the government begins its term (Eichorst 2014).

The territories take a significant portion of HCJ petitions—a tool that actors can use on issues they cannot solve with legislation because they are too controversial (Frymer 2003). We were surprised to see how little attention the issue receives in public opinion because, according to conventional wisdom, this issue is one of the most salient issues in Israeli politics and one of the main factors affecting voting behavior (Arian and Shamir 2008; Shamir and Arian 1999).

The purpose of our indicators for territories and religion and state, however, goes beyond a description of the overall attention to these issues in each venue. Scholars interested in these issues can use the indicators to filter all observations that deal with either issue and then examine the policy areas that are handled, as well as their dynamics over time. For example, what issues concerning the territories are addressed by members of Knesset using private member bills, and how do these change over time? Or to compare attention to these issues in each policy area. For example, what is the distribution of attention to religion and state in different policy categories such as family or transportation?

An Illustration of the Use of the Data across Venues

The data from the Israeli project provides an opportunity to re-examine existing conventions on Israeli politics and policy. We illustrate this with two examples that illustrate the usefulness of the project's data and approach: childcare policy and decision making regarding macroeconomic issues.

Research on social policy in Israel suggests that the government invests relatively little in childcare, parental leave, or the protection of the rights of parents to be involved parents (Holler and Gal 2011). The popular explanations for this are ideational, focusing on policymakers' perception of parenthood, neoliberal ideas of personal responsibility, and others (Frenkel et al. 2011). Using CAP data, we can provide another explanation, focusing on the importance of attention for policy outcomes. By looking at the issue agenda across venues, we find that childcare and maternity

leave capture a tiny part of the agenda in all venues, even among the ministries responsible for these issues. The issue occupies only 1.6 percent of the agenda of the Ministry of Economy's agenda and 0.3 percent of the Ministry of Welfare's agenda. In the Cabinet, childcare and parental leave issues capture 0.3 percent of the agenda. The same is true for the Knesset, where only 1 percent of the private members' bills address this issue and only 0.5 percent of the agenda in coalition agreements. These findings suggest that the scarcity of resources is explained by the limited attention devoted to the issue. When there is no attention, there will be no policy (Jones and Baumgartner 2005).

Another example concerns the role (and effect) of the Ministry of Finance in Israel in decision-making about macroeconomics. Momi Dahan and Michel Strawczynski (2020) argue that the Ministry of Finance in Israel is extremely powerful, and the budget process is very centralized compared to other countries. Dahan and Strawczynski base their argument on their analysis of the formal and non-formal procedures in the budgetary process in all stages (preparation, legislation, and implementation). We test their argument using CAP data by looking at the share of the agenda about macroeconomics (which is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance) in different venues. When policymaking is centralized, most of the decisions occur in one venue (also termed a policy monopoly; see Baumgartner and Jones 2009). Correspondingly, if the Ministry of Finance is a centralized actor, we can expect that most policymaking will take place within the ministry. In that case, macroeconomics will capture relatively little agenda capacity in other venues where many actors are involved.

Our data supports this claim showing that macroeconomics occupies only 5 percent of the cabinet agenda (compared to, for example, 14 percent of the agenda occupied by housing issues). Because cabinet decisions are the outcome of the ministry and the minister's deliberation efforts to place issues on the agenda, this suggests that the Ministry of Finance does not wish to place macroeconomics on the cabinet agenda where a broad deliberation takes place. Similarly, only 3.5 percent of the private members' bills address macro-economic issues, suggesting that MKs are little involved in these issues, leaving it to the Ministry of Finance. This corresponds to Avi Ben-Bassat and Momi Dahan's (2006) findings that only 2 percent of the budget proposed by the Ministry of Finance changes during the legislative process.

In addition, being part of a comparative project offers us an opportunity to examine Israel from a comparative perspective. Although some issues make Israel unique—especially in issues relating to defense and state and religion issues—our analyses demonstrate that, for the most part, Israel

can be compared to other countries in the project. Collecting and coding data across venues and subjects reveals that the Israeli political system handles issues similar to other countries in the comparative project and that the distribution of attention across issues in different venues in Israel is comparable to other countries. For instance, as in other countries, much attention in Israeli cabinet meetings is allocated to core functions of government—government operations and economic issues (Jennings et al. 2011)—whereas private members' bills pay relatively little attention to these issues.

Conclusion

This article presents the policy agenda-setting approach to study Israeli politics and the data collected for this project. We suggest that there are many questions that the data can help answer. First, scholars interested in a specific policy topic can use these data to identify agenda dynamics over time across venues and between countries asking similar questions. For example, scholars interested in public health can examine why public health issues receive relatively little attention in the executive agenda and the public agenda or the place public health issues capture in the policy agenda. In addition, researchers studying specific venues such as the Knesset or the HCJ can use these data for in-depth analysis of the agenda in each venue. In doing so, they can examine why an institution focuses mostly on one issue or another and why that focus changes over time.

Second, CAP data enable researchers interested in the relations between venues and institutions to answer questions such as: To what extent and under which conditions does the parliamentary agenda overlap with the executive agenda? Can we identify changes in this pattern during the government term or the electoral cycle? How can the composition of the coalition or changes in the party system explain these trends? And much more.

Third, although CAP data do not address the policy target, the problem definition, or the policy tools used, researchers interested in these issues can use these data as a departure point and add another layer of coding based on their specific interests. For instance, researchers can use the CAP data relevant to them, add coding of policy tools used in a specific field, or examine target groups to assess in which venue and in which policy issues different groups receive more attention.

Finally, the project offers invaluable data to compare policy agenda and policymaking in Israel to other countries. Scholars using these data can compare variation in issue attention in Israel to issue attention in any of the other twenty countries in the CAP project. It also provides scholars

with the ability to examine variation in issue interest across venues in various countries. For example, which venue mobilizes attention to health policy, environmental policy or any other policy in various countries? Is it legislative attention, executive attention, or judicial intervention that mobilizes attention to a policy, and, potentially, promotes policy making? Likewise, scholars studying other countries can use data from Israel as part of their comparative agenda—adding another observation to their analysis to generalize about policy attention and policy making.

Moving forward, we intend to extend our data in time (going back to 1948 and updating the data forward over time) and add more series such as media (print, broadcast, and new social networks) and various series on executive, legislative and judicial activities. All updates are to generate a rich data-source to assess the Israeli policy agenda comparatively—across time, venue, and country.

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NOTES

1. Summary tables of the data used in this article are available on the project website at https://www.idc.ac.il/cap.
2. See the CAP website at www.comparativeagendas.net for the complete list of subtopics.
3. HCJ 1601/90 *Shalit vs. Peres et al.*
4. The ministries we examined are those that have their own budget, with jurisdictions that to a large extent do not overlap with other ministries and existed through most (if not all) of the examined period. These are: Defence, Economy, Public Safety, Agriculture, Communication, Tourism, Environment, Education, Health, Welfare, Immigration, Science, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Justice, Interior, Energy, Transportation, and Housing,
5. Included are only first responses to the most important problem.
6. See Amnon Cavari and Guy Freedman (2019) for a discussion of group differences in preferences between macroeconomy and defense issues.

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