LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND POLICY MAKING IN ISRAEL: 
THE CASE OF WELFARE

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The article focuses on the interaction between local-national relations and implementa-
tion of public policy in Israel. It studies the effects of administrative linkages between differ-
ten levels of governmental jurisdictions involved in the implementing policies of the Ministry of Welfare. It seeks to understand their impact on the original goals and programmes of the national ministry and on actual services provided at the local level. These linkages include the arrangements for provision, funding, employment, regulation and inspection. Without denying the importance of other explanations the paper emphasizes the significance of administrative linkages for understanding policy implementation.

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The persistence of widespread social deprivation in Israel in the face of the government's stated commitment to maximize equality of opportunity has contribut-

Without denying the significance of the above hypothesis this paper emphasizes an additional but overlooked factor to explain policy shortcomings in unitary political sys-
tems; that of vertical intergovernmental administrative linkages. It focusses on the effects of five vertical linkages between different levels of governmental jurisdictions involved in implementing policies and pro-
grammes of Israel's Ministry of Welfare. The five linkages—the arrangements for pro-
vision, funding, employment, regulation, and inspection — are analysed in terms of their impact on implementation of Ministry policy and programmes at the municipal level. Social welfare policies and programmes of other ministries are not studied.

In effect the paper challenges the common assumption that unitary political

I. In October 1977 the Begin government merged the Ministries of Welfare and Labour to form the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. This research is concerned only with the services of the former Welfare Ministry which as of October 1979 continues to retain its organizational and programmatic identity and autonomy within the new ministry. For matters of clarity the term the Ministry refers to the former Ministry of Welfare. There are only two levels of government, national and local.
systems have much less difficulty implementing domestic social welfare policies than their federal counterparts. With respect to Israel the paper argues that local governments and their agencies have a very significant influence on the welfare policies and programmes of the Ministry. The analysis evaluates the extent to which the administrative linkages enable the Ministry to implement its policies on the one hand and the local authorities to influence national policy and programmes on the other. It shows how the linkages serve to weaken the role of the Ministry and to prevent implementation of its policies resulting in very unequal services between different communities. Thus the same citizen, who is eligible to receive Ministry services, has access to very different services depending upon the municipality in which he lives.

The Study and Findings

The data for this article is based on research conducted during the summer of 1977 on welfare services then being provided by local agencies in five Israeli communities — Beersheva, Rechovot, Ramie, Kiryat Gat and Gedera. While the five are not a representative sample they are typical of various categories of Israeli communities in terms of population, size, demography and type.2

Using an approach influenced by Grodzin’s and Elazar’s studies of municipal services in American communities the author investigated the roles and functions of the municipality (elected and administrative personnel), the local welfare agency, national ministries (Welfare and others) and public and private bodies in the arrangements for provision, funding, employment, regulation and inspection of the services (Grodzins, 1966; Elazar, 1970). An open-ended questionnaire was used in extensive interviews with the mayors, agency heads and senior staff of the five communities.

The commitment by the government and Ministry to a more egalitarian society and the very centralized nature of the political system contribute to a reasonable expectation that the Ministry would provide fairly uniform services to eligible persons in local communities (Doron, 1976: 118; Neipris, 1978: 16). This is true only to an extent and only in the areas of financial assistance to the needy and to persons in special categories; in placement of eligible persons in institutions sponsored or supervised by the Ministry; and in those services delivered directly by the Ministry at the local level.

In contradiction to government policy the welfare system involving the Ministry, local municipalities and their agencies reveal a markedly inegalitarian system; services are neither uniform nor adjusted to need. While most extreme in 'community work' and 'youth in distress' services most social services for family, youth, elderly and retarded and rehabilitation programmes vary significantly in terms of provision, scale and quality among the five communities. The following two examples of the disparities in the provision of the same programme in different municipalities, one from 'youth in

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2. The Settlement Study Center of Rechovot, Israel sponsored the research. Ms. Tora Benin and Lili Abrahams assisted in the research.

Gedera (population 5,900) is representative of small towns whose residents are mostly oriented Jewish immigrants with a minority of more prosperous veteran settlers. Beersheva (101,000) has a municipal administration similar to those of the largest Israeli cities. Rechovot (57,600) a large medium size veteran city located in the center of the country, serves as a marketing and technological center. Ramie (37,900) a small medium size city and poorer than, neighbouring Rechovot, has mostly Oriental population with a 15 percent Arab minority. Finally, Kiryat Gat (22,400) is typical of the more than 30 'new towns' established as planned communities since 1950.
distress' and the second from 'elderly services' are illustrative.

The 'street corner' programme is a municipally-operated Ministry outreach programme aimed at groups of "marginal" young men. The worker seeks to counsel and to direct them to a work or study programme. At the time of the research all five communities offered the service. However, only Ramie and Beersheva had full time staff assigned exclusively to the programme. In Rechovot, a community worker assumed responsibility for the programme among his other duties in a particular neighbourhood, while in Gedera a college student worked on a half time basis. Finally, in Kiryat Gat two funded positions for the programme remained unfilled because the local agency was unable to attract applicants for the jobs.

The second example, 'center, clubs and vacation' services for the elderly shows clearly how disparate the same services are in the five municipalities. These programmes include ideally: (1) day centers with a variety of social, health, occupational and entertainment services and activities; (2) clubs catering to the social, health, or cultural needs of special categories of the elderly such as the blind or to members of a particular ethnic group or neighbourhood; (3) trips involving day outings to places of historical, cultural or recreational interest; and (4) summer camps including overnight or day camps at resorts or parks. In most communities these activities are not restricted to the elderly poor but open to all senior citizens. Beersheva operated 2 day centers, at least 15 clubs and conducted day trips. In addition to the usual services, the centers offered hot meals, a beauty saloon, a laundry and employment services. In sharp contrast, Rechovot had a single neighbourhood club with limited services and activities for the use of one homogeneous ethnic group. Ramie operated a major day center like Beersheva's with many of the same services and a free dental clinic, participated in a summer camp programme and sponsored day outings. Kiryat Gat had a comprehensive day center and two clubs. Gedera, after two failures was trying to maintain one neighbourhood club.

The differences in type, scale and quality of these and most other services, from town to town, reflect the social, economic, political and professional resources of the particular municipality. The poorer communities thus provide less and are least able to meet the needs of eligible clients (Caiden, 1970: 43; Heidenheimer et. al, 1975: 266; Murphy, 1971: 60; Pressman and Wilensky, 1973: 161; Sharkansky, 1977: 2; Derthick, 1968: 248-250). A partial but important explanation of why this is the case in a unitary political system like Israel is found in the administrative linkages between the different levels of government responsible for policy implementation. The following sections analyze how the various linkages affect national versus local prerogatives in implementation of Ministry welfare programmes.

**Provision**

The local welfare agencies, municipal officials, the Ministry and other governmental, public and voluntary bodies are involved in at least four different and complex arrangements for the delivery of municipal welfare services. In the first, Ministry personnel provide the services directly at the local level. This maximizes the Ministry's implementation role while

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3. These services include adoption, probation, rehabilitation institutions, residential care for the retarded and delinquents. They are not evaluated in this study.
minimizing local input and influence. In the second, the local agency administers Ministry financial and material assistance programmes and/or refers eligible persons to institutions or programmes operated or coordinated by the Ministry. In both cases, the local agency under Ministry supervision, processes the recipients and/or participants respectively at little local expense and under supervision by the Ministry. While in principle the Ministry makes policy, issues guidelines, and supervises implementation, the local agency influences, even within the context of its delineated role, the character and level of the particular service or programme.

In the third arrangement, the local agency operates the 'social services' programmes of the Ministry. The role of the latter is extensive; it funds most of the budget, issues guidelines and regulations, and inspects the local operation. The provision of these services is voluntary, however, thus giving the municipality final prerogative as to provision and scale of the service.

Finally, voluntary, private or other local or national bodies in cooperation with the local welfare agency and/or Ministry are the major parties providing certain services. This includes the local independent public corporation which meets the special needs of particular groups such as the elderly. Clearly, this arrangement gives the local voluntary organization or autonomous body influence over both policy and programme. Nevertheless, the local welfare agency, and to a lesser extent the Ministry, also have influence here. The Ministry both funds and regulates many of these bodies and their activities, and at the same time the refusal of the local agency to cooperate can significantly hinder the efforts of the voluntary body. Moreover, in the case of local public corporations for services for the elderly— which are tied into a national organization and to the Ministry—municipal officials exercise major if not controlling influence over policies and programmes. Again they can determine provision and scale of the particular service.

Funding

The Ministry funds 100 per cent of certain categories of financial assistance for the needy without limiting the number of eligible recipients to a particular community. Here the role of the local agency is technical; it determines eligibility and level of support according to Ministry guidelines and inspection. Its input is, therefore, inversely proportional to the quality and content of Ministry regulation and inspection. In other categories of financial and material assistance, the Ministry allocates a set sum to the local agency. Because the sum is usually insufficient to meet the needs of persons eligible according to the Ministry criteria, a supplement from the municipality is often required even for minimal provision. In either case, the local agency decides how to allocate the limited aid to those eligible persons.

A similar arrangement exists with respect to social services. Here the Ministry usually funds up to 75 per cent of the operating costs and the municipality is required to provide the balance in the form of matching funds (Doron, 1976: 115). While overall financial involvement of the Ministry might suggest increased influence at the municipal level, this is not the case.

In principle, this arrangement grants

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4. In 1969 American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) and the Ministry established the Association for Planning and Development of Services for the Aged. The Association thereafter initiated pilot programs establishing local associations ("Agudah") to plan, develop and coordinate communal services for the elderly.
locally elected councils and their administrative functionaries a veto over the provision of a particular welfare service or programme. Their refusal to provide matching funds may reflect either their inability to do so or their opposition to the particular programme. If the objection is financial, the Ministry can offer to fund 100 percent of the operating costs. If based on other grounds, however, pressure or promises of financial support are unlikely to sway the local agency which depends on municipal approval of its activities.

The funding arrangements also grant a potential veto over local services to the Ministry of the Interior, which is required by law to approve all municipal budgets in general and all additional positions in particular. In practice, municipalities have to justify budget and personnel increases to a representative of the Ministry of the Interior. In exchange for the cooperation the ministry representative could prevent an increase in welfare lines or funding in general or with respect to a particular programme.

Employment

Certain elements in the procedures for recruitment and employment of professional staff for the local agency suggest national standardization and common professional socialization. For example, the Ministry issues criteria and requirements for professional candidates, approves their hiring, sets pay scales and provides continuous training and educational programmes for new as well as experienced employees (Derthick, 1968 : 265-266). Factors other than the size and needs of the local population, however, determine the quantitative and qualitative inequality of local staff.

The root of the problem is that it is the responsibility of the municipality to recruit and hire its own professional staff. Certain municipalities lack the matching funds. Others may simply disagree with the need to hire as argued for either by the Ministry or by the local agency. In addition, it is difficult for some municipalities to attract qualified persons to fill funded and approved positions. A serious shortage of trained social workers and professionals in Israel is compounded by the reluctance of many to seek employment outside of major population centers in the less affluent and more socially problematic communities. As a consequence, certain poorer and more remote municipalities lack qualified personnel; positions remain vacant or are filled by unqualified persons, drastically reducing the quality and even provision of services. Overloading is common. The problem is not necessarily one of geographical location, however. Despite its proximity to both Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the city of Ramie has serious problems recruiting certified social workers and the problem is most acute in Gedera, which is also centrally located near Rechovot. For years prior to 1977 there had been no qualified applicants for tenders for positions in social work. Rechovot and Beersheva seem less plagued with Kiryat Gat somewhere in the middle.

Finally, the employment arrangements of the local agency director further reduce Ministry influence. While the appointment of a local director is subject to Ministry approval, the director is an employee of the municipality. Thus only with difficulty can the director be disciplined by the Ministry. At the same time, the director may turn to the Ministry for political leverage when problems arise with other munici-

5. Four Israeli universities offer a BA in Social Work and the Ministry operates a 3 year training programme to certify high school graduates as social workers. In addition the universities in cooperation with the Ministry offer a one year 'professional conversion' course in school work to college graduates.
pal employers. In effect, an adept director can manipulate both 'bosses' to enhance his or her own independence and influence on services provided (Doron and Kramer, 1976: 139, 143; Doron, 1976: 125; Derthick, 1968: 247, 251-260).

**Regulations**

Israeli law requires only that the government provide assistance for needy persons, but it does not grant the needy rights to welfare. The law further fails to specify or to define what constitutes "need," what services are to be provided, or what can be considered "adequate relief." Ministry administrative guidelines and regulations clarify broad statutes, but clearly defined laws are absent. This absence permits discretion by the social work bureaucracy, at all levels of government, in the administering of local services. This leeway is reinforced by the Israeli view that financial support and other services are a supplement to treatment by a social worker and subject to the worker's professional discretion (Neipris, 1978: 24; Derthick, 1968: 265). Thus it becomes important to determine whether the regulations grant greater discretion to Ministry or to local agency personnel.

In recent years, the Ministry has tried to standardize the provision of financial assistance through the issuance of regulations governing eligibility, need, and payments; the training of local personnel to administer the programmes; and the use of a central computer for payment to recipients. These regulations permit the municipal social worker only limited discretion, and deviation, in matters of eligibility and payment must be justified by the agency director in accordance with Ministry guidelines. In general, regulations in matters of financial assistance are more or less observed by the local agency.

In all other programme areas, including limited financial assistance, however, discretion by the local agency is the rule despite the existence of binding regulations. This may be unavoidable given the nature of eligibility and the services (Neipris, 1978: 28; Van Horn and Van Meter, 1976: 50). Also, while the Ministry may define eligibility, it is the local social worker or clerk who decides if the eligible person is or is not to receive a particular service or portion of limited financial resources. Actual provision is partially a function of discretionary decisions taken by local welfare agency employees. As Yaffe and others have pointed out, the social workers operate under conflicting values and pressures, including commitments to the clients, the profession, the local agency, the municipality and the Ministry (Jaffe, 1977: 174-179). Their decisions may therefore deviate from Ministry policies.

On the other hand, the common educational and training programmes of the Ministry may contribute to a more shared understanding and interpretation of Ministry guidelines among professional workers in diverse communities. Such agreement is dependent, of course, on a common professional socialization of the workers of the respective agencies and the level and quality of the Ministry supervisors. The discussion above indicates a probable absence of common socialization of staff at the local level. The quality of Ministry supervision is the subject of the following section.

**Inspection (Supervision)**

Ministry supervision is mostly instructional with little if any regulation of local activities. The findings here support the view that Ministry inspection practices favour the independence of the local agency rather than ensuring implementation of Ministry policies. It is the local agency, and not the Ministry, which exercises greater discretion in matters of programme.
The shortcomings of the Ministry's inspections system have several explanations. First, the Ministry regulations fail "to provide overseers with tools of influence and enforcement, since they [do not] set limits on the types of activities that are tolerable" (Van Horn and Van Meter, 1976: 50). Rather, they permit and even encourage discretion by the local agency. The role of the Ministry's supervisor, therefore, is to 'approve' violations rather than to enforce regulations. Secondly, even if a conflict were to develop as a result of a violation, the agency head is partially "protected" since he is a municipal employee, and responsible primarily to the municipality. Thirdly, the agency head may feel justified in rejecting the supervisor's view on grounds that he himself understands the field situation far better than does the supervisor, who spends most of his time elsewhere. The emphasis placed by the Ministry and its supervisors on the need to consider the unique factors and circumstances of individual communities strengthens this position. It also leads to Ministry acceptance of the local operation of a particular service in a way which may deviate from Ministry guidelines. Demanding compliance to those guidelines could lead to inaction by the local agency. Fourth, the absence of both administrative hierarchy within the Ministry and coordination between its various services strengthens the influence of the local agency head while weakening the position of the Ministry. The Ministry is composed of competing units, each committed to expanding its own service and having its own supervisor at the local level. Should a local agency decide to cut a programme against the wishes of a particular Ministry supervisor, it might find support among other Ministry supervisors who see an opportunity to expand their own service. Finally, each supervisor is so overloaded that, even should he want to regulate activities on the local level, he would find it most difficult to do so effectively.

**Conclusions**

The findings of this study question the ability of the Ministry to cope with the major needs of Israel's poor, beyond providing financial assistance and institutional referrals. In most other areas, despite its stated intentions and programmes, the Ministry is unable either to allocate or to deliver resources to achieve its policy objectives. Administrative linkages between different levels of governmental jurisdictions create or reinforce obstacles to implementation of Ministry objectives. Clearly, the relationship of formal policy-makers to implementors in Israel is not the Weberian one wherein "policies are made at the highest level... then carried out by lower participants whose discretion is acutely limited" (Van Horn and Van Meter, 1976: 44). The opposite is true; the policy-makers are dependent upon the implementors. This situation suggests probably cooperation of the Ministry by local authorities.

A major contributing factor is the administrative linkages which maximize local input and undermine the influence of the Ministry. Provision and funding arrangements allow local authorities to reject Ministry programmes and to determine the scale and content of those it provides. Professional staff is comprised of local employees responsible primarily to the municipality. The diversity in their training indicates a lack of standard professional socialization which works against more uniform implementation. Finally, the lack of exactitude in regulations, combined with the professional values of both implementors and Ministry supervisors, encourages local discretion, undercutting the Ministry system of inspection of local workers, and allowing the latter to become the crucial decision-makers in the implementation of
Ministry programmes and policy. In practice, the administrative linkages transfer policy making from the Ministry to local authorities. As Kalcheim notes, "the local authority (in Israel) is not just an agent to provide the service but a focus where decisions are made who should get what" (Kalcheim, 1978: XXXIII).

The inability of the Ministry to implement many of its own programmes contributes significantly to the failure of governmental efforts to overcome poverty and social deprivation in Israel by weakening the potential effect of national policy. This conclusion does not deny the importance of ethnic and cultural factors, that is, that many Jewish immigrants from non-western and traditional cultures arrived in Israel poorly equipped to cope, adjust and advance in a modern, western and technological society. Nor does it refute the school which blames Israeli socialization policies for stripping these same immigrants of their traditional values, leaving them helpless before a cultural onslaught of modernization or Israelization (Eisensztadt, 1967; Toledano, 1973: 333-348). The conclusion here also recognizes the need to improve coordination and direction of the government's overall welfare policy structure and formation process. But the emphasis here is for greater recognition of the decisive limits that the decentralized character of the present system involving the Ministry, municipalities and their agencies impose on the government's ability to use policies and programmes to deal with defined problems. For example, these decentralized elements would undermine the potential positive results of improved coordination and direction of policy between the various ministries concerned with the needs of the poor.

Finally, the findings confirm that unitary political systems may have significant difficult implementing domestic social welfare programmes. The operations of the Israeli Welfare Ministry system bears a closer resemblance to the federal than the unitary model. Heidenheimer, Heclo and Adams's description of European political systems, in which the "...local jurisdiction function less as independent policy making sites and more as agents of the national administration" is far from the mark (Heidenheimer et. al., 1975: 101, 265, 99). More appropriate to the policy predicament of the Israeli Ministry is their description of the American system:

National leaders who attempt to formulate policy for the local level must deal with an array of state and local units holding sufficient power to veto or at least offer firm resistance to national initiatives (Heidenheimer et. al, 1975: 101, 98).

This raises at least two issues which deserve further investigation: whether the federal character of the welfare system is unique within Israel and how it compares with welfare systems in other unitary and federal countries (Heidenheimer et. al, 1975: 99; Kalcheim, 1978: XXX; Elazar, 1977: 49; Sharkansky, 1977: 5). Relevant for such comparisons is an explanation for the particular federal character of the welfare system and the decentralized direction of the administrative linkages studies here.

Neipris argues that Jewish and Anglo-Saxon traditions (poor laws), the policies of the Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate and the semi-autonomous Jewish National Council during the Mandate, favoured the definition of welfare services and relief as a "local responsibility." With the establishment of the State, local government bodies sought to continue the operation of existing programmes and had the support of the labour unions (Histadrut), religious groups and political parties who opposed strong governmental actions in this area for fear that it would smother their own pro-
grammes. As a result, the subject of welfare and the national governmental institutions responsible for it failed to acquire high priority among governments and political parties. For example, the Minister of Welfare has always been a member of a minority party in the coalition, thus lessening the prestige and power of the Ministry vis-a-vis those with whom it deals. Indicative of its weak position is a decentralized operation lacking central control and planning (Caiden, 1970: 11, 12, 98; Doron and Kramer, 1976: 134, 146-148; Elazar, 1977: 52, 69; Neipris, 1978: 9-25; Heidenheimer et. al., 1975: 100). This explains the general effects of the administrative linkages in the implementation of Ministry policy and suggests that they reflect the relative lack of political importance of both the issue itself and the Ministry in Israel. They are dependent variables which reinforce other characteristics of political institutions, ideology and social and economic conditions of Israel. Were the political standing of the issue and ministry to change then most likely the content and direction of these linkages would shift accordingly. It would be interesting to determine if this is the case with other issues and in other governmental institutions in Israel. Regardless, the findings here reveal local governments having a significant impact on policies and programmes of the Ministry. Thus, local-national relations is a valid concern for students of public policy in Israel.

Prospect for Change

Proposals designed to improve the effectiveness of the Ministry in implementing its policies would have to overcome obstacles generated by the above cited political, ideological, and socio-economic factors which downgrade the importance of a politically strong and centralized welfare system. These factors also determine the content of the administrative linkages and their consequences for implementation. The following discussion illustrates how these factors would significantly influence the impact of proposals for change. There is little reason to expect an improvement of the status quo which prevents effective implementation of Ministry policy.

The Ministry's ability to implement might be strengthened if it could absorb local agencies and become the sole provider of welfare services. Local agencies and their staffs would then become local Ministry branches and employees. The Ministry would be independent of the municipalities and thus freer and more able to allocate resources. It would also be able to exert greater control, influence and coordination over its professional staff.

Were it politically feasible to make this change, problems would still remain. The allocation of resources would still reflect the socio-economic, political, and geographical character of local communities. As in most political systems, the stronger and better organized communities would probably demand and get more. Moreover, given a continued shortage of social workers and their preference for centrally located and socially stable environments, the less desirable and more problematic communities would continue to have staffing difficulties. The proposed national welfare services would have recruitment problems similar to those faced by the Ministry of Education in its search for teachers to work in certain local communities. The vast majority of social workers are women who, when they marry, frequently see their careers as secondary to that of their husband and to the needs of their family. This fact makes assignment and transfers difficult. The situation is exacerbated by the overall shortage of social workers in Israel, so that sufficient jobs are available in the center of the country and in preferred
communities. A possible partial solution might be to increase financial incentives. Such an approach was successfully used by the Ministry of Health to attract doctors to distant and economically depressed areas.

Under an alternative plan, the Ministry might fund 100 per cent of the municipality's operating costs including salaries of those services the Ministry deemed essential. Although the fragmentation of function might remain, such a plan would at least eliminate one factor which makes certain local governments unwilling to implement programmes and to provide services. Moreover, the Ministry could require as a precondition that certain services be provided.

The latter suggestions are problematic. The Ministry has never used financial sanctions to ensure compliance and is unlikely to do so in the future. On the practical side the costs of such arrangements would be prohibitive. The Ministry and the Government do not have the funds to provide the probable increase in financial assistance and social services that these proposed changes would bring about. Despite partial peace following the Camp David Accords, defence and development costs continue to grow, making funds less available and reducing a possible impetus for more egalitarian welfare policies (Wilensky, 1975: 72-73).

Finally, the tremendous rate of inflation and the high rate of taxes contribute to a welfare backlash. As a result of their sense of being overtaxed, the salaried sector of Israeli society may be expected increasingly to oppose expansion of programmes and services for the poor. As Wilensky argues, "the anti-welfare effect of affluence will be strengthened wherever the middle class perceives the financing and distribution of services as inequitable" (Wilensky, 1975: 65).

Perhaps what is needed is a national crisis that would move both citizens and politicians to accept the necessity for a welfare system that would better meet the needs of the poor and increase opportunities for equality. Even if such events would raise the political importance of the issue and enhance the political power and prestige of the relevant policy making body, implementation and change are another matter. In the past national crises focused on the plight of the disadvantaged have mobilized wide public and political concern, led to government-sponsored commissions, reports, and recommendations for new policies and administrative reorganization of government agencies, whose partial implementation failed significantly to alter the status quo.

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Local government grew, in England and Wales, from the administration of the Poor Laws. When local services for health, social assistance and education were established during the 19th century, someone had to be responsible for their delivery; the powers were given to the Poor Law guardians, and subsequently this became the core of a reformed local government system. The main power local government has is one of conservative resistance, usually in the form of a failure to put central government policies immediately into effect. Political scientists refer to this kind of institutional obstacle as 'veto points'. The Poor Law, the 1948 National Assistance Act, which abolished the Poor Law while making provision for welfare services. The elections in Israel are general, equal and secret. On the national level they are held at least once every four years, and on the municipal level at least once every five years. Israel has a system of proportional representation, and the whole state is considered a single constituency. Every party running for election presents a list of candidates, and the number of candidates entering the house of representatives is proportional to the percentage of support the list receives. The Committee is made up of the Speaker and eight Knesset members chosen by the House Committee. Public Committees: Established to deal with issues that are connected to the Knesset. The members of public committees may be experts in a particular field, public figures, or current or past Knesset members. The local governments of Israel, are the set of bodies charged with providing services such as urban planning, zoning, and the provision of drinking water and emergency services, as well as education and culture, as per guidelines of the Interior Ministry for communities of all sizes in the country. Almost all local governments take one of three forms: city councils, which governs a large municipality, local councils, which governs a small municipality, and regional councils, which governs a group of